

# THE POPULIST LEFT AND THE POPULIST RIGHT IN THE CONTEMPORARY POST-YUGOSLAV SPACE: SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROGRAMMES OF MAINSTREAM PARTIES IN SERBIA AND CROATIA<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

The lack of a clear economic policy and profiling is the common denominator of many populist options in Europe. Populists use economic deliberations in their “combat” against the “corrupt elite” and therefore little room is left for a deeper and wider analysis of socio-economic measures and the policies for which they stand. This aspect of populism is an interesting meeting point of right- and left-wing populists who are becoming ever more alike. The authors have examined this hypothesis about the homogenising potential of populism by analysing the main legal documents of four parties in Serbia and Croatia. The authors’ aim is to examine whether the hypotheses constructed for Western European countries can be heuristically applied to former socialist countries.

*Keywords: Yugoslavia, the Balkans, Serbia, Croatia, populism, socio-economic programmes, left wing, right wing, populist left, populist right*

## Introduction

One of the main theoretical assumptions regarding the definition of populism is that the majority of parties, either left-wing or right-wing, have relatively similar economic programmes, which have been developed so as to be attractive to the entire population of voters — to “balance” between the indisputability of free-mar-

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ket principles and social rights protection and to advocate that all population categories and all economic sectors are equally developed. Unlike populism in other parts of the world (e.g. Latin America), the European experience has shown that the differences between right-wing and left-wing populism are evident in some dimensions but not in the economic one. In this paper, we have constructed a hypothesis that we have decided to test through the example of four parties in Croatia and Serbia — two parties from the left and two parties from the right of the ideological spectrum.

In accordance with a specific historical context and a relatively recent transition to a market economy and party pluralism in the two ex-Yugoslav countries, we will also examine whether some other populist approaches and narrative strategies are used in the economic programmes of the said parties. We primarily refer to the discourse tactic of “blaming” political opponents for oversights, instead of providing realistic and sustainable solutions. We expect this to be one of the findings of this research and, at the same time, hope to contribute to the theories of populism.

The aim of this research is to compare the economic programmes of right- and left-wing parties in Serbia and Croatia to see whether and to which extent their economic visions and messages fit into the definition of catch-all populist parties in Europe. Therefore, the main question this paper poses is whether the economic programmes of the said parties in Serbia and Croatia correspond to the definition of populist parties that aim at “covering” the broadest possible scope of the needs of a wider social strata and economic branches, based on allegedly being the representatives of the “common people”. The method we will use is an analysis of the parties’ programmes, however this is the initial, basic level of analysis and other methods need to be included to reach more comprehensive conclusions. Certainly, we should immediately emphasise that this paper analyses only four parties (the Serbian Radical Party, the Socialist Party of Serbia, the Croatian Democratic Union, and the Social Democratic Party of Croatia), which is insufficient to draw general conclusions on the entire political scene in Croatia and (particularly) Serbia. Nevertheless, these parties nominally declare as ideologically left-wing and ideologically right-wing and, as such, they have served to test the aforementioned theoretical hypotheses. In addition, it should be noted that we decided to analyse parliamentary political parties and that our analysis would be significantly different if we had also included non-parliamentary parties and especially social movements that have right-wing or left-wing agendas. In other words, this research is explorative and represents an initial step for further (and broader) research concerning this topic.

## Theoretical and methodological framework: Analysis of socio-economic political party programmes as indicators of populism

The statement that there is no consensus on a unique definition of populism has become almost a commonplace that no longer requires particular emphasis in contemporary social science. Some authors regard populism as a discursive strategy, while others define it as a “thin ideology”. On the other hand, some believe that populism is an indicator of deeper social conjunctions and that it is not imposed exclusively “from above”. The authors’ views differ according to whether they believe that populism is related only to the right or they consider populism to be a strategy of left-wing political actors as well. In addition, there is no consensus on whether populism is bad for democratic institutions or whether it acts as their corrective, and there is no unique view on whether it is a new phenomenon or whether it has existed before. In this paper, we will not delve into further discussion about the theoretical definition of populism. Instead, we will focus on an aspect that will serve as a starting point for our further empirical examination within the context of the contemporary political scene in Croatia and Serbia.

In this paper, we will follow the thread of J. W. Müller’s and Cas Mudde’s argumentations, which highlight several significant aspects of the definition of populism. Müller believes that populists take a criticising approach towards the elite, that they have a negative attitude towards party pluralism and that they represent the idea that they are the sole, authentic voice of the people (Müller 2016, 20-22). Mudde extends this definition and highlights the Manichean worldview characteristic of populists, which enables the entire political and social fields to be viewed as a struggle between the “corrupt elite” and the “common people”, where populists are representatives of the latter social group (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2010, 8). In their constant struggle with “enemies”, as populists most commonly present and name their political rivals and opponents, not much room is left for a detailed and precise elaboration of different policies and, therefore, attention is focused on the perpetual “defence” from the said “enemies”. The policies that do not leave much room for elaboration are socio-economic plans and measures. Socio-economic programmes mostly remain rudimentary and are filled with attractive empty phrases, while the economies of individual countries flow in accordance with the requirements of the global market. This fact, pointed out by Wolfgang Merkel (2014), among other authors, draws significant implications, which we will further discuss below.

Populists also reduce economic policy to a struggle between the “corrupt economic elites” and “honest working people”. Their most common promise to all so-

cial groups is prosperity, while, on the other hand, the rich should supposedly be penalised in various ways for the accumulation of capital — which is typically presented as dishonourable and dishonest. According to the authors, populism is most often not conditioned by class and the audience that populist leaders and parties aim towards is not distinguished by class. Populists aim at quite heterogeneous social groups, while the potential for a so-called class struggle is drawn only from their call to fight against the ruling elites, which undoubtedly encompasses economic elites too (Müller 2016, 40).

This class unfoundedness of populism is not that surprising if we take into consideration that the phenomenon or concept of class voting, widespread up until the 1960s, has lost its explanatory and analytical power in contemporary societies. In other words, it is becoming more difficult, or almost impossible, to establish a rule regarding which class votes for which political option (this primarily relates to the European context and multi-party, not two-party, systems) compared to the first half of the 20th century, when a correlation between lower classes and left wing, and upper classes and right wing parties could be identified. As Wolfgang Merkel claims, with the growth of economic inequalities (Piketty 2014) grows a disinterest for political activism, leading to a decline in general election participation. At the same time, trust in various institutions also declines, especially liberal democratic institutions. Voters believe that a change of political actors does not necessarily imply a change in their socio-economic positions and, therefore, other topics take over the spotlight in election campaigns and political addresses outside election cycles, such as topics related to preserving national borders, security, migration, the environment, etc. (Merkel 2014). Considering that class voting practically does not exist, it is logical that the inherently universalising populist rhetoric focuses on different classes. A *vice-versa* process is also taking place — class stratification and alienation from liberal democracy institutions certainly constitutes fertile ground for the development of populism.

The fact that populism is heterogeneous class-wise stems from the fact that, almost as a rule, populists do not have a clear economic programme. Therefore, there is no clear and precisely defined economic platform which could be linked to populism (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2010, 2). On the contrary, populists mostly do not attach much significance to economic programmes and they are predominantly based on a set of arbitrary, volatile measures, mostly constituting a mix of liberal (market) principles and attractive messages about social protection and social rights. This is, among others, one of the main meeting points of left- and right-wing parties, which, due to their populist patterns, are becoming ever more similar to each other and ever more resembling the so-called *catch-all* (Kirchheimer 1966) parties. Even though left-wing and right-wing populism have different characteristics — especial-

ly if we consider Latin America — it is interesting to note that economic programmes are in fact the meeting point of left- and right-wing parties — especially in Europe (Mudde & Kaltwasser 2010, 2) — and not their main differentiator, as was the case with the traditional interpretation of the left and right.

At this point, we will not delve into the development history of the left and the right from the French Revolution until today, nor will we elaborate on their shift from political to economic (from the 1960s) and cultural distinction axes. Instead, we will only explore some of the segments relevant to our research subject. As a rule, the right has a negative stance on liberalism, as they do not accept the idea of liberty unless it is realised in a homogeneous social group. Nevertheless, it can co-exist with a parliamentary system and be entirely based on economic liberalism (Bakić 2017, 36). The left, on the other hand, is based on anti-capitalist ideas and an inherent criticism of the free market (Bakić 2017, 38). Of course, this list of contemporary aspects of the right and the left is certainly not exhaustive, but it is essential for this paper to underline these elements.

To sum up, the part of the populist narrative directed at socio-economic matters mostly serves as a means for “combating” the “corrupt elites”, while, on the other hand, the measures and social policies they suggest are not thoroughly thought out, strategically oriented nor sustainable — instead, they are usually *ad hoc* solutions produced in accordance with current needs, both economic and political. Even though there are differences between left- and right-wing populism, it is interesting that one of the major differences between the opposite ends of the ideological spectrum is that their view on the economy has lost significance.

Bearing in mind the above assumptions, we have decided to examine whether the said hypotheses also apply to parliamentary left- and right-wing political parties in Croatia and Serbia. The theoretical model of populism is based on the development of populist tendencies in Western Europe. This model has later on been applied in its redefined form to the countries of Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe. It is usually said that there are specificities related to the socialist heritage that still define populism in these countries in an entirely different manner (Shafir 2008, 425), but we will not analyse these specificities this time. We will instead focus on examining the theoretical hypothesis claiming that the lack of clear economic programmes is one of the more important aspects of both left- and right-wing populism. In other words, it is our aim to show that, despite the fact that the parties self-proclaim as left-wing or right-wing, they are in fact catch-all parties incorporating various similar ideological messages and positions, and covering a wide range of ideas regarding socio-economic programmes that are attractive to contemporary voters in Serbia and Croatia, and that stem from the left- and right-wing corpora of ideas. Taking into account the specific context of democracy development

in the former Yugoslav space and the frailty of the young democratic institutions in Serbia and Croatia, our starting hypothesis is that the similarity between the left and the right in their economic programmes will be high and that we will be able to characterise both left- and right-wing party programmes as populist.

To re-emphasise, this paper will analyse only one piece of the populist mosaic, and those are the socio-economic party programmes in Croatia and Serbia. In order to come to more comprehensive and precise conclusions regarding the development of populism in these countries, a more extensive analysis of all differing aspects of the definition of populism would be required, which certainly exceeds the scope of this paper. Therefore, we will focus on one aspect of the definition of populism, and on several parties in these two countries. The conclusions reached in this paper cannot be generalised and applied to the entire political arena of Croatia and Serbia, but the findings of this research can serve as an explorative introduction for future, more extensive studies. It should be noted that we have decided to analyse parliamentary parties which self-proclaim as left- or right-wing, while, for a deeper and broader analysis, social movements sharing these ideological positions should also be taken into consideration. The authors of this paper believe that different results would have been gained from this, however, the research in this paper does not focus on the left and the right in the former Yugoslav space, but rather on the development of populist ideas and narratives among political parties self-declaring as ideologically profiled.

In this paper, we have decided to apply a method that analyses programme documents of four different political parties in Serbia and Croatia: a left- and a right-wing party from each country. We will analyse the latest programmes of these parties and we will compare them in accordance with the theoretical hypotheses we have introduced. This analysis method has already been applied by the authors of this paper in the form of an analysis of legal documents of political parties from various aspects (Jovanović Ajzenhamer & Dajč 2020). This research method has been extended in this paper to include a comparison of various documents. We regard this methodology as an introduction to a more detailed study which would require an analysis of practices — specific economic measures taken while a party was in power — and discourses in election campaigns, public addresses, and media appearances. In addition, a more holistic analysis could include interviews with the leaders of these parties. Nevertheless, despite all their limitations, the programmes constitute a solid starting point for analysis as they represent the principles to which each party is nominally committed. Therefore, we believe that this research is useful primarily as a basic insight into the researched topic.

## Serbian and Croatian historical context: 1980s—2010s

Populist parties in the former Yugoslav space share a similar concept: the idea of a people's party and a leader representing the voice of the "common people". It is important to understand the historical context in Serbia and Croatia that has made it possible for mainstream political parties to retain their populist characteristics. The territories of Serbia and Croatia, within the states they were part of since the second half of 19th century, proved to be a very fertile soil for populism. Both territories/countries were also predominantly rural until the mid-20th century. This factor is significant as it caused populism to develop in a specific way and made it possible for populism to survive the entire period from the multi-party system in the Kingdom of Serbia and the Austro-Hungarian Empire, through the kingdoms of Serbs Croats and Slovenes/Yugoslavia and the single-party system within socialist Yugoslavia until the end of 20st century. The foundations for populism in Serbia were laid in the 19th century by one of the most prominent Serbian political leaders, Nikola Pašić, and the party he founded — *Narodna radikalna stranka* (National Radical Party). This party developed under the very strong influence of the Russian Narodniks and the egalitarian traditions of Svetozar Marković's socialist doctrine (Perović 2019).<sup>4</sup> The party could be considered a catch-all party, which combined both left-wing and right-wing populist ideas: a model of state economy that would provide egalitarianism, crucial for its rural supporters, was combined with nationalism and the need for a strong leader — the only interpreter of the "will" of the people. The monopoly of the single-party system in post-1945 Yugoslavia did not find much challenge as the Communist Party had found a fertile ground for its economic and social egalitarianism (Samardžić 2011, 62-71).

In the case of Croatia, populist ideas became much stronger during the inter-war period as a result of the popularity of *Hrvatska pučka seljačka stranka* (the Croatian Peasant Party), led by Antun and Stjepan Radić. It also combined left- and right-wing populist ideas, insisting on a special cultural and historical context in which the Croatian nation developed through social and economic egalitarianism (Petrić 2015, 540-544). The high popularity of this party also contributed to the acceptance of the new post-1945 ideology.

The end and breakup of Yugoslavia started as a result of the so-called anti-bureaucratic revolution led by Slobodan Milošević, a new hope of the Serbian communists. His position in Belgrade helped the ascent of Franjo Tuđman, a former

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<sup>4</sup> Perović L. Srpski socijalisti 19. veka ['Serbian socialists of the 19th century'], (Beograd: No-lit, 1985), 1-2; Bešlin M. Ideja moderne Srbije u socijalističkoj Jugoslaviji [Ideas of Modern Serbia in the Socialist Yugoslavia], (Beograd — Novi Sad: IFDT i Akademska knjiga, 2019), 7-15.

communist and unsuccessful historian, who became the most influential politician in Croatia. The two of them became key protagonists in the further development of populist parties.

The post-Yugoslav space of the 1990s was marked by a transition to a market economy and multi-party system, overshadowed by a state of war that lasted for several years. In Croatia, this transformation went more smoothly and had a more linear path compared to Serbia, where the governing structure (headed by the SPS) used its position for economic manipulations. After democratic changes in autumn 2000, Serbia began with the process of democratic consolidation and an accelerated adjustment of the economic system to free-market principles. Today, in both countries, all large (parliamentary) parties generally advocate a capitalist economy and democracy; nonetheless, the dominant global trend of populism has not bypassed Serbia and Croatia. In the following paragraphs, we will explain why we have chosen these four parties to analyse (even though they are not young parties), but it was necessary to make this brief historical overview in order to clarify their current position (Jovanović Ajzenhamer & Dajč 2020).

Slobodan Milošević, the elected party president, renamed the League of Communists of Serbia to *Socijalistička partija Srbije* (Socialist Party of Serbia — SPS) in July 1990. In December 1990 he won 65.34% of voters' support for the position of the President of Republic of Serbia (Jovanović Ajzenhamer & Dajč 2020). This party continuously led Serbia through four lost wars, one of the largest hyperinflations in the world, a refugee crisis and economic decline. It is interesting that, after just several years in opposition between 2000—2008, the SPS made a comeback and has remained a part of all governing coalitions until today (excluding a short period when it supported the minority government in 2004—2007). Such success requires exceptional political skills, and the populist character of the party contributed to the success. The SPS underwent a major leadership and programmatic transformation after regime change at the beginning of the 21st century in Serbia. The SPS is today a mainstream party that has maintained its nominally left ideological orientation.

Another party from Serbia that will be analysed in this paper is *Srpska radikalna stranka* (Serbian Radical Party — SRS). This party was founded in early 1991 and its choice of name reflects its desire to continue the tradition of the most significant Serbian political party before WWII. The party is a far right-wing party and, besides its nationalist rhetoric, it declaratively advocates social and economic justice typical of left-wing parties. The founder and sole president of the SRS is Vojislav Šešelj, the perfect example of a populist politician who has marked his party with his role of a dominant leader (Dajč & Pantelić 2019, 79-81). The SRS supported the wars that Milošević waged in the 1990s and was included in the government towards the end of the last decade of the 20th century. After the democratic chan-



ges in late 2000, it became the most prominent opposition party until 2008, when its division resulted in the forming of *Srpska napredna stranka* (Serbian Progressive Party — SNS). The SRS has remained on the political scene and, as of 2016, is among the strongest parliamentary opposition parties.

In Croatia, political parties are more ideologically profiled and thus we can easily identify the right-wing populist party *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica* (Croatian Democratic Union — HDZ) and the left-wing *Socijaldemokratska partija* (Social Democratic Party — SDP), which have been the two most prominent political parties since Croatia gained independence. The Croatian political system has been dominated by these two parties, and all the ruling coalitions in Croatia have been formed around one of them.

The SDP was created in a similar way to the SPS in Serbia in late 1990 — out of the League of Communists of Croatia. The first president and founder was Ivica Račan, who was also the leader of the Croatian communists until the founding of the SDP. This party has had quite a different path from its fellow socialist party in Serbia, the SPS — it was part of the opposition for over 10 years and its founder Ivica Račan became the first left-wing prime minister of Croatia in 2000, which also helped the democratisation of Croatia. The SDP also marked the beginning of its second decade as the ruling party between 2011—2015, the period when the country joined the EU in 2013.

The HDZ, founded by former communist general and historian, Franjo Tuđman, led Croatia through the first 10 years of independence. It was among the first non-socialist parties within the Eastern Bloc that won the first elections in a still socialist country. Its founder and first president, Franjo Tuđman, had a similar career to his Serbian colleague Slobodan Milošević. He died early and therefore did not face the consequences for some of his policies during the 1990s wars in former Yugoslavia. He established a right-wing party that, in the early stages of its history, was a far right-wing party that later on shifted to the centre-right. Unlike the parties in Serbia, the HDZ in Croatia has a somewhat more consistent, nationalist-oriented ideological agenda. The HDZ also defines itself as a “state-building” party, appealing to emotions of the Croatian War for Independence. The party is the dominant centre-right party in Croatian political life, haunted by its nationalist stances and ambivalent positions towards the revisionism of history (Wróblewska-Trochimiuk 2017, 62-67).

## Empirical level of analysis

The part of the Socialist Party of Serbia’s (SPS) programme referring to economic development and economic policy includes many socialist ideas. Nonetheless, there are certain diversions from traditional socialist principles. In their programme, the

SPS states that they advocate “democratic socialism” that implies “greater social welfare, better and fairer working conditions, and higher employment rate and salaries” (Socialist Party of Serbia Programme 2010, 26). The programme explicitly states that the SPS is a party committed to preventing the unscrupulous race for profit that enables individuals to lead luxurious lives, and is against the exploitation of disenfranchised workers. Furthermore, the first paragraph of the part referring to economic policy incorporates references to the legislation of most developed European countries, and this reference to positive examples of EU countries “runs through” this entire part of the programme (Socialist Party of Serbia Programme 2010, 26). What is particularly important for this paper is that nowhere in the programme do we see alternatives to capitalism, or the promotion of social and economic systems that do not include the free market.

The SPS calls itself the “authentic party of the left” (Socialist Party of Serbia Programme 2010, 26) that insists on representing the interests of those who live from their work, thus advocating the democratisation of education, security of full employment, and the development of trade unions, which certainly corresponds to a leftist ideological repertoire. On the other hand, the SPS does not bring into question either the market or capitalism as a system. The role of the state is strong, but it is clear that, according to them, it should not intervene in all spheres. It must ensure an initial meritocracy, but nowhere in the SPS programme do we find explicit criticism of capitalism or the liberal market. The criticism is in fact directed at abuse, manipulations, monopolies and exploitation of workers, not at market principles as such. The programme states, “To put it simply, the state must create equal conditions for education and training for entering the labour market to all citizens. Knowledge as a private good should be efficiently protected as intellectual property, so as to be a comparative market advantage and to enable those who possess it to make profit” (Socialist Party of Serbia Programme 2010, 26). Another quotation confirms the aforementioned, “All participants who enter the market competition with a concrete product or service, who have clearly defined prices, who bring profit and pay taxes, must not have limitations regarding their activity and development” (Socialist Party of Serbia Programme 2010, 29).

The SPS also supports the concept of private property — “Private property has historically and civilisationally demonstrated its economic and social sustainability and efficiency. Therefore, socialists support the privatisation process as one of the preconditions for the existence of a market economy” (Socialist Party of Serbia Programme 2010, 29). Although the SPS believes that privatisation is a favourable process for Serbian society and economy, and that private property is preferable, they oppose abuse in the privatisation process: “However, we are aware that neither private nor public property in the economy guarantee neither economic efficiency nor

social justice. That is why the socialists will decisively fight against all forms of privatisation abuse. We will demand the annulment of privatisations that were carried out in an unlawful way, through capital acquired through criminal activities, and in cases where not all the conditions from the contract were met with regard to workers and the state” (Socialist Party of Serbia Programme 2010, 29).

A similar discourse is found in another crucial (programme) document called the “Vision of Serbia 2020 — Programme Declaration Proposal”. This document offers the same views regarding economic policy as in the programme: The SPS advocates labour protection, the development of trade unions, full employment, to fight against labour discrimination, a reduction of the unemployment rate, investment in domestic production, the development of environmental policies, the prevention of market manipulation and creation of monopolies, stable and high pensions, democratisation of education, investment in modern technologies, investment in youth, etc. In other words, all business activities and all generations will be protected and invested into. The SPS supports cooperation with all countries, while the economic segment of the programme emphasises cooperation with the EU. On the other hand, this programme document also does not bring into question capitalism, moreover, it is presented as an economic and social system that has no alternative (Vision of Serbia 2020 — Programme Declaration Proposal 2010). Given that we are analysing and comparing the programmes of four political parties, we will not get into a further analysis of the document “Vision of Serbia 2020 — Programme Declaration Proposal”. In any case, the principles defined in the SPS programme are reiterated (and elaborated on in some segments) in the said programme document.

The economic part of the Serbian Radical Party’s (SRS) programme covers almost the same topics discussed in the SPS programme and, if we compare these two documents, we will notice similarities as well as some differences. In general, the SRS also advocates labour protection, pension security, reduction of unemployment, visibility and presence of trade unions, regional development, etc. However, a great difference compared to the SPS programme lies in its insisting on preventing the inflow of foreign capital and focus on the development of the domestic economy. The SRS advocates the introduction of customs duties on goods from the EU and promotes a permanent campaign titled “Let’s Buy Domestic” (*Kupujmo domaće*) (Serbian Radical Party Programme 2019, 45). According to the SRS, foreign economic cooperation should be exclusively directed towards the East: “We believe that the future of Serbian trade lies in tighter connections with the East, the accession to the Eurasian Economic Union — the customs union of Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan and in forming a single market, where Serbian products will be placed without any limitations. The government of Serbian radicals will reintroduce customs duties to goods from the European Union, given that our country pays export

duties that bring domestic producers into an unequal position” (Serbian Radical Party Programme 2019, 43).

For the SRS, liberal market and private property are indisputable principles on which the Serbian economy should function: “There must be no imposition of limitations to free trade and verification of the monopoly position carried out as a pretext to introduce temporary measures due to disturbances on the market, because a serious state, almost as a rule, has economic policy mechanisms through which it must and should resolve those disturbances. Such limitations always deny the chance for work and create the conditions for monopoly and corruption” (Serbian Radical Party Programme 2019, 45). The following quotation confirms the aforementioned, “The Serbian Radical Party believes that the right to property, which, according to classical individualistic and liberalistic concepts of natural position, is considered as one of the most fundamental autonomous rights, as well as a necessary precondition for exercising all other rights and freedoms, must be guaranteed by the highest legal acts of our country. Property rights and the priority of private property rights must not be limited by any legal act” (Serbian Radical Party Programme 2019, 26).

Given that it advocates free market and private property, the SRS also advocates the privatisation process, but its focus is on manipulations that, according to them, took place during the privatisation process in Serbia: “We advocate privatisation, believing that an efficient economic system must be based on the principles of efficiency, competition and private property. According to the Serbian radicals, the main goal of privatisation is to define ownership rights and introduce a market system based on competition that promotes general economic efficiency and a faster resolution of the crisis. Unfortunately, following the 5th of October uprising, the government was formed by dishonest and unprofessional politicians, who carried out the privatisation process solely led by their intention to gain as many material benefits as possible. The failure of the process of privatisation is measured not only in billions of dollars hidden abroad and in luxurious properties owned by DOS-affiliated politicians and tycoons close to them, but also in hundreds of destroyed companies and hundreds of thousands of workers who were left unemployed” (Serbian Radical Party Programme 2019, 32).

Therefore, the authors of the programme claim that the SRS’s economic policy completely corresponds to the concept of market policy: “Free agreement on the conditions of exchange enables a maximum market position to all actors in a given exchange, while the prices of goods and services are formed based on unhindered forces of the economic laws of supply and demand. In that case, any intervention by the government regarding price formation is forced and irregular. The state’s interventionism and influence come down to defining price levels through

the mechanism of taxation, the customs protection system, and the creating of conditions for investment into areas the policy defines as a priority” (Serbian Radical Party Programme 2019, 31).

In addition to explicit calls for freedom and self-regulation of the market, the SRS notes that the poor, pensioners, the unemployed and other vulnerable persons will be protected, and that state intervention, besides in the said protective activity, will also be necessary to shift the course of foreign trade completely to the East: “When the Serbian radicals come into power, they will improve the economic and social situation in the country, and reduce the grey economy and undeclared employment. We will establish a system where employers will be obliged to pay all taxes and contributions. We will secure funds for a significant increase in salaries and pensions by destroying the import lobby, which is the richest in Serbia, and which contributed to the crisis the most. We will reintroduce customs duties to goods from the European Union, and thus protect domestic production, primarily agriculture and food production” (Serbian Radical Party Programme 2019, 33). In other words, the economic part of the SRS’s programme is based on the model of the free market and marginalisation of the state from the free market but it also incorporates ideas concerning the protection of labour rights, socio-economic benefits for the vulnerable, care for pensioners, etc., and on state intervention regarding foreign trade relations.

The Croatian *Socijaldemokratska partija* (SDP) declares itself to be a part of the European social democrats, a party that is “optimistic, positive and oriented towards strengthening all, but especially marginalised and discriminated social groups” (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 3). The economic part of its programme is divided into several segments, with the central part devoted to increasing salaries, reducing social inequality and solving the problems of youth, or more specifically, their emigration. However, the economic part of the programme does not offer any alternatives to the capitalist system, and neither does it advocate a socio-economic system that would not imply a free market. The SDP’s explanation of the problems the Croatian economy is facing is very simplified, and it focuses on the two previous governments formed by the HDZ, their largest political opponent. In its programme, the SDP states that EU membership contributed to economic development but not nearly to the extent it could have were it not for the incompetent HDZ’s policy: “retrograde processes, the weakening of democracy and the rule of law, the flourishing of corruption and political and economic scandals under the direction of the current government” (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 4).

The SDP considers the loss of the middle class to be one of the most dangerous aspects of the transition of the Croatian society and economy under the direction of the HDZ (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 6). Despite the fact that

in most of the programme's chapters, economic measures and policies, the SDP mentions EU legislation, policies and standards, it shows that it is a left-wing party fearing globalisation with statements like, "Workers and middle-class people are paying the price of globalisation, both in Croatia and the entire European Union" or, "Croatia and the European Union must change and start acting in such a manner that workers and members of the middle class can finally feel the benefits of globalisation" (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 6). Within its plan to increase competitiveness and the strength of the Croatian economy, the main position of the SDP is its criticism towards the HDZ, which proved incompetent and which endangered the economy with its party/client behaviour (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 10). The programme claims that one of the reasons for the problems in the economy is the impossibility to reform public administration, which is used for party employment of HDZ members and sympathisers (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 11). The SDP proposes an increase in minimal guaranteed wages, while, in order to have a fairer distribution of funding public services, "those who have more must pay more" (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 11). Not once does the SDP challenge the capitalist system as an economic and social system. However, to ideologically justify its affiliation to the left wing, the part of the programme referring to economic development concludes with a populist manifesto, "The social democratic success of many European countries in shifting the neoliberal paradigm from punishing and abolishing towards encouraging and strengthening, justifies our claim that social democracy will achieve its goal in Croatia as well" (Social democratic Party Programme 2019, 11).

A common statement of the neighbouring SPS and SDP are the accusations directed towards political opponents regarding failure in the privatisation of public enterprises — the SDP even calls it criminal (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 10). The SDP has expressed its concern that the state might not manage to keep strategic companies (INA Refinery, 3. Maj, Uljanik), and that the state will give them over to the market, possibly even bring them to bankruptcy (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 10). Despite warning of the dangers of the neoliberal economic model, the SDP does not offer any alternative. Rather, it offers a visionary conclusion stating what is necessary, "Instead of temporary and subordinate employment relations between employers and employees, it is necessary to develop cooperative and partner relations" (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 13). How to develop them and through which incentives, remains a mystery. The SDP has devoted a significant share of its programme to agriculture, the majority of which analyses the catastrophic measures and incompetence of its political opponents (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 15-16). The programme observes that the HDZ enabled foreigners to buy the most fertile soil and that they gave one

of the largest agricultural companies to Russian banks (Social Democratic Party Programme 2019, 16). In this part, the SDP reminds us of the SRS with its fear of foreigners and capital not related to EU incentives entering the country.

The Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) ruled for the first decade of Croatian independence from 1991 to 2000, while, since the beginning of the 21st century, it has alternated with the SDP as the ruling party. The HDZ's economic programme corresponds to its declaration as a centre-right party. However, in order to compete with the SDP and other political opponents, the HDZ does not abandon the idea of a social state. It does not express this attitude directly but through its activities, proposals, solutions and plans, the HDZ covers all citizens of Croatia, including those who live abroad. Although we are deep in the 21st century, the HDZ has not managed to move away from 19th-century nationalism, which can be seen already at the beginning of its programme, which states that "the HDZ has spearheaded the achievement of the most important strategic national goals at crucial historical moments since 1989 — the creation of the multi-party democratic system, the gaining of independence and international recognition, victory in the defensive War of Independence, with countless victims and an immeasurable contribution of Croatian defenders, institutional building and Croatia's accession to NATO and the European Union" (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 3) Despite the fact that these claims are true, although not entirely measurable, it remains unknown why they are relevant for the programme that refers to economic growth, the creation of new jobs and social justice. In the same spirit, in 2016, the HDZ recognised that there were areas still affected by the war (more than 20 years after the war finished), which would receive particular financial benefits and be revitalised through financial instruments that would increase economic growth (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 14).

The HDZ intends to affirm the private sector as the key sector of the state's economic development, while the largest part of its moves is aimed at relieving the economy from various levies and facilitating business activities through the reform of public administration and the tax system. However, the HDZ does not really state how it will reform the public administration, except that it will establish new bodies and that it expects that e-government and digitisation will solve all challenges micro, small, and medium entrepreneurs face (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 11-13). Still, the HDZ has kept some elements from older economic systems, where it believes that populist measures relating to the police — in a certain sense, Orwellian in nature, such as the establishment of a unique inspection body/a state inspectorate that would prevent the spread of the grey economy and undeclared employment, protect consumers, protect all forms of ownership, enable food quality control, protect the environment, regulate the appropriate implemen-

tation of public procurement contracts — would become the main tasks of state control (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 12).

What is characteristic of the HDZ's plan is that it very precisely envisages the number of new jobs they will create once they form a government, which is contrary to their declaratively liberal economic approach (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 51). In the part of the programme related to agriculture and reindustrialisation, the proposed economic measures are typical of left-wing parties. In this way, the programme demonstrates its catch-all populist nature. The plan for agriculture is to create better living conditions in rural areas and increase agricultural production through the joint work of farmers, scientists, and experts, with state and local incentives. However, the programme does not elaborate on the kind of alchemy that would enable all that. The conclusion is quite populist: "The results of our activities will be measurable and visible, while Croatian villages and agriculture will finally have their place at the top of Croatian society and economy, which they deserve" (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 31). The programme also includes some aspects of the populists' favourite mercantilist policy: "We will protect domestic production by introducing stricter controls of low-quality imported products and by actively applying the anti-dumping policy. Adhering to the European regulatory framework, our government will fully promote Croatian producers" (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 46). By the end of its term, the HDZ intends to open 180,000 new jobs (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 51), while they guarantee permanent employment to everyone younger than 35, regardless of their professional qualifications (The Croatian Democratic Union Programme 2016, 54).

## Conclusion

The economic part of the SPS's programme was developed in accordance with principles adhering to social justice, the protection of labour rights and the right to form trade unions, the prevention of labour abuse, commitment to meritocracy and other principles that certainly belong to the corpus of left-wing ideas. However, the SPS programme presents capitalism as a system that has no alternative and, accordingly, a position that Serbia should cooperate with other (capitalist) European countries. Just like the SPS, the SRS's programme covers a wide variety of economic policies. Therefore, this right-oriented party also advocates the prevention of labour abuse, development of trade unions, reduction of unemployment, etc. According to the scopes of their economic programmes, both parties can be identified as catch-all parties because they are not clearly profiled when it comes to their priorities — all areas of social and economic life, all generations and all branches of economy are their priority. Certainly, this comprehensiveness goes to the expense of preci-



sion, while such a wide scope of protection refers to everyone who is a potential voter. In fact, in both programmes, there is nobody who will not be taken care of, even though one programme is left-oriented and the other is right-oriented, and despite the fact that the SRS believes that the market should be unhindered — without significant state interventions. Such economic programmes, which are structured in a way that every age, class and professional group can count on their help, protection and welfare, represent a good populist mechanism that lacks criticism, focus and objectivity.

Another interesting contribution to the development of populist rhetoric in the economic programmes of the SRS and the SPS is their virtually identical view on privatisation in Serbia. Privatisation is one of the most common topics in Serbia's public discourse and, as a rule, it is regarded as a process that instigated the widening of the class gap, making one part of the population poor and accumulating wealth in the hands of the economic elite. Those that gained wealth in the privatisation process are accused of manipulation and theft, while on the other side there are workers who are dubbed “transition losers” as they belong to the group of people in Serbia who can barely make ends meet. This context is important to understand why so much room in both the SPS and SRS programmes was dedicated to privatisation through the prism of binary populist divisions between the “corrupt elite” and the “common people”. Those who carried out the privatisation process (primarily the governments that came to power after the 5th of October 2000 when neither the SPS nor the SRS were in power) can be defined as the “corrupt elite”, while on the opposite side there are honest options that represent the entire “common people”. Given that we have previously observed that all social subgroups are represented in the economic programmes of both the SPS and SRS, we may conclude that they aspire to be representatives of the entire “common people”. Both parties, regardless of their ideological differences, promise to tackle the consequences of irregular privatisation, to punish those who caused it and prevent further similar abuses of political monopoly in the economy.

An important difference between the SPS and the SRS programmes regarding the economy is the SRS's advocacy for cooperation solely with countries of the East, while the SPS remains open to cooperation worldwide, focusing particularly on the EU. In that sense, the SRS programme is more ideologically consistent — they promote a market economy, focus on domestic production and cooperation with countries from the East (having an extremely negative attitude towards the democratic and liberal or, as they would call it, “imperialistic” West). On the other hand, the SPS's programme covers a wide variety of topics and incorporates various ideological messages (from private property protection and the free market to the fight for labour rights). It is important to emphasise that, to understand the social context in

Serbia, it should be taken into account that anti-European sentiment is a crucial segment of the amalgam of the right-wing ideological repertoire (Bakić 2007, 36), which is why the economic attitudes of the SRS are not surprising.

Differences between the two programmes certainly exist. The SRS's programme is clearly right-oriented, while the SPS programme has some "leftist" colours in it. However there are numerous overlaps and common denominators, therefore, it is safe to say that, with regard to Serbia, our hypothesis that right-wing and left-wing populist parties have similar and/or identical economic programmes that are not extensively ideologically conditioned has been confirmed, even though it cannot be entirely confirmed because these are not identical programmes and certain ideological differences are evident. The SRS's programme deviates from our hypothesis to a greater extent because, although it fosters populist rhetoric, it also incorporates explicitly right-wing narratives, while the SPS programme confirms our hypothesis and supports the claim that the economic programme also contains populist messages with certain deviations from the nominal ideological profile.

We see similar findings in analysing the Croatian parties. The economic programmes of both parties analysed (HDZ and SDP) belong to the scope of catch-all parties. The economic programmes of both parties will allegedly "take care" of a wide spectre of the population, primarily focusing on youth and the issue of emigration (which is a huge problem that Croatia has been facing since joining the EU), but also including other age and professional categories. Therefore, these are populist programmes that are defined in such a way to attract all groups of voters, regardless of their nominally left- or right-wing ideological position. In other words, in the Croatian parties we have analysed, economic programs are designed to lead readers to think that these parties are the representatives of the "common people".

As in the case of the Serbian parties (SPS and SRS), we can identify some elements of a clear ideological profile. In accordance with a nominally left-wing position, the SDP criticises the process of globalisation and a bad (precarious) position of the labour force in Croatia. Unlike the SPS, the SDP's (leftist) criticism targets the unequal global distribution of resources. Nevertheless, the SDP also does not bring into question either capitalism or the free market or private property. It is interesting to note that the SDP insists on protecting the middle class far more than the working class, which represents a deviation from the traditional left-wing repertoire. However, given that they place emphasis on global mobility and (in)equality, it is logical that their focus is the middle class. On the other hand, just as the SRS, the HDZ has a more (right-wing) profiled economic programme, because they focus on the historical dimension — the Croatian War of Independence and the protection of war veterans. Nationalism also permeates the economic part of the programme, just as in the case of the SRS. However, unlike the SRS, the HDZ advocates open-

ness to the world (EU, NATO, etc.) despite focusing on the development of domestic production. Nonetheless, this is also an expected finding since Croatia is an EU member state and that is a dominant course of their parties. Furthermore, the HDZ's programme promises social protection to almost all social strata in Croatia, although they too do not criticise capitalism but only its negative effects, such as the grey and black economy, class inequality, monopolies, etc.

Another similarity between the Serbian and Croatian parties is evident in their criticising of political opponents. This is particularly the case with the SDP that permanently "blames" the HDZ for its poor economic policy and oversights, for politically-driven employment and for its inability to carry out appropriate public sector reform. Such discourse corresponds to the populist matrix of permanently "blaming" political opponents for oversights, instead of actually advocating concrete, realisable and sustainable measures. In Serbia's case, the main motive for criticism is privatisation, while in Croatia the scope of criticism is wider and includes various measures and dimensions. Nevertheless, a significant part of the SDP's economic programme is dedicated to criticising the HDZ. Unlike the SDP, the SPS and the SRS, HDZ's economic programme does not level considerable criticism at other options, except sometimes at the SDP, because they were in power for a long time (unlike the other three parties); therefore, this finding is quite expected.

To summarise: we started with the hypothesis that there should be no major discrepancies between the economic programmes of left-wing and the right-wing parliamentary parties in Serbia and Croatia and that the results of our analysis will show that these are in fact catch-all parties covering a wide range of topics, measures and the population, without clearly ideologically-profiled socio-economic strategies. Our hypothesis has largely been confirmed: All four parties can be defined as catch-all parties with an expressed populist approach to their voters, as well as to their political opponents, which they present as the "corrupt elite". However, despite major similarities, there are certain differences, particularly with regard to the HDZ and SRS that have stronger ideological profiles compared to the left-wing parties. As we have noted, differences do exist, and the nominally left-wing or right-wing affiliation is not completely "invisible" in their economic programmes but these are predominantly catch-all parties. However, we would like to reiterate that these claims only refer to the socio-economic elements of the programmes, given that other dimensions have not been analysed in this paper.

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