

Piotr Mirocha

Institute of Slavonic Studies

Jagiellonian University in Krakow

[piotr.mirocha@uj.edu.pl](mailto:piotr.mirocha@uj.edu.pl) / [pamirocha@gmail.com](mailto:pamirocha@gmail.com)

--Paper Presented at the 2021 ASN World Convention, 5-8 May 2021

--Do No Cite Without the Permission of the Author(s).

## **Discourses of a new Croatian Euroscepticism and representations of Europe in the mainstream media after 2007**

Since the 2020 parliamentary election campaign, far-right Eurosceptical forces gained a new platform in Croatia to manifest their ideas: a Homeland Movement (*Domovinski pokret*), led by a folk singer and right-wing politician Miroslav Škoro. The new movement united already known far-right parties and politicians, such as Croatian Sovereignists (*Hrvatski suverenisti*) or Zlatko Hasanbegović, as well as a number of right-of-centre celebrities and activists. Movement's political agenda was focused on conservative Christian biopolitics, anti-immigration policies, anti-Serbian sentiments and stopping Serbia's European integration, as well as general scepticism towards real or alleged EU's federalist tendencies. Eventually, it won 10.89% of the votes, short of entering the government coalition, but sufficient to disseminate Eurosceptical and ethnonationalist discourses.

They stay in contrast with a general positive image of the European Union, shared by both liberal (*Novi list*) and conservative (*Večernji list*) mainstream press outlets. This very tension between the mainstream and Eurosceptical representation of Europe constitutes the research object of the paper, studied with the help of linguistic corpus-based discourse analysis, as well as more semiotically-oriented approach to discourse studies. As a result, the central research task will consist of reconstructing topoi used in the Eurosceptical argumentation and their comparison to the commonplaces of the representations of Europe in the mainstream media.

### **Background**

The history of the Croatian far-right cannot be here discussed in length. Indeed, there existed some links between the Ustaša emigration and certain fractions of the Croatian Democratic Union (Croat. *Hrvatska demokratska zajednica, HDZ*), founded in 1989 before the first multi-party elections in the Socialist Republic of Croatia. However, despite the consequently nationalist character of the

Franjo Tuđman regime, neo-Ustaša elements were marginalised, probably due to his Partisan credentials (cf. Šedo 2010: 78).

To the right of the HDZ, in 1990, there emerged Croatian Party of Rights (Croat. *Hrvatska stranka prava, HSP*), evoking the late 19<sup>th</sup> century nationalist tradition of Ante Starčević, but also the right-wing legacy that gave rise to Ustaša movement. Like the HSP of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it went through numerous splits, most of them producing factions without any real political significance (cf. Šedo 2010: 79-80). However, the 2009 split into Croatian Party of Rights “Dr. Ante Starčević” (Croat. *Hrvatska stranka prava Dr. Ante Starčević, HSP-AS*) is worth noting, as it was led by one of the most active characters of the Croatian far-right scene, Ruža Tomašić (*Croatia – political parties*, n.d.). In 2014 Tomašić left her previous organisation and founded Croatian Conservative Party (Croat. *Hrvatska konzervativna stranka, HKS*).

The mainstream right-wing party, HDZ, was also capable of attracting certain more radical elements, which – depending on the current course of the organisation – sometimes seceded into smaller political groupings. Here one should mention Croatian Democratic Union of Slavonia and Baranja (Croat. *Hrvatski demokratski savez Slavonije i Baranje, HDSSB*), founded in 2006 by Branimir Glavaš, a 1990s war veteran (cf. Šedo 2010: 81-82). Another longer-lived HDZ splinter group was founded in 2017, after Tomislav Karamarko lost leadership in the party and its nationalist rhetoric was liberalised. At that point Zlatko Hasanbegović with some other hardliners founded a block called Independents for Croatia (Croat. *Nezavisni za Hrvatsku, NzH*) (Mamić 2017).

Certain elements on the traditionally fragmented Croatian far-right do not originate in the party politics, but rather in conservative Catholic activism focused on biopolitical questions. This current can be exemplified by the political party Hrast, founded in 2012 i.a. by Željka Markić, the latter being anti-abortion activist since 2015 and the person behind the In the Name of the Family (Croat. *U ime obitelji*) movement (*Predstavljen...* 2010).

In the beginning of the 2010s these far-right and Eurosceptical movements were divided and rather weak, which at least to some point could be attributed to the line of the mainstream right-wing HDZ, between 2012 and 2016 led by Tomislav Karamarko (Jović 2015). This was also the case during the parliamentary elections in 2016, when to the right of the Andrej Plenković’s HDZ, on the voting ballot one could find three electoral coalitions and two other minor parties. However, the situation changed since the 2019 elections to the European Parliament. Croatian Sovereignists – a new coalition of HKS, Hrast, HSP-AS and other minor far-right organisations – succeeded to gather 8.52% of votes, although it resulted only in one seat (Državno izborno povjerenstvo 2019a). As it has been already mentioned, the right-wing scene consolidated around the 2019 presidential candidate Miroslav Škoro, who in the first round attracted 24.45% of votes (Državno izborno

povjerenstvo 2019b). He used this political capital in the 2020 parliamentary elections, when his coalition – called now Homeland Movement (Croat. *Domovinski pokret, DP*) and including i.a. also Zlatko Hasanbegović – managed to win 10.89% of the votes (Državno izborno povjerenstvo 2020). While it did not enter government coalition of the right-wing HDZ and the Serbian minority, it uses its position to disseminate Eurosceptical and ethnonationalist discourses, which will be analysed in more detail in this paper<sup>1</sup>.

Given this brief background presented above, the faction of Croatian Eurosceptics discussed in this paper originates exclusively in the far right. Discourses of left-wing and hybrid scepticism towards the EU, thus, outside of the scope of this paper. Interestingly, as for the label ‘sovereignists’, it first emerged in Croatian political discourse as an academic term, used e.g. by Dejan Jović to denote proponents of Croatian independence from HDZ, ruling throughout the 1990s (cf. Jović 2007, 2011). Although the notion of ‘sovereignty’ may be particularly attractive for right-wing voters because of the experience of the 1990s, nonetheless, its re-emergence in the late 2010s should be rather put down to its French and Italian far-right predecessors.

## Corpus

The paper compares findings originating from two different sources. The first one is a large corpus of Croatian quality daily newspapers, representing mainstream conservative (*Večernji list*) and liberal-left (*Novi list*) discourses between 2007 and 2017<sup>2</sup>. It consisted of ca. 20,000 articles, equally distributed over the years and the two newspapers, lemmatised and stored in the NoSketchEngine corpus manager (Rychlý 2007).

Analysis of the so-called ‘quality’ press excluded tabloids and was restricted to media displaying more modest graphic design, higher degree of language complexity and a tendency to present “its information as objective facts selected from an empiricist reality wherein lies a ‘truth’ that is accessible by good objective investigation” (Fiske 1992: 47). It was further noticed that in ‘quality press’ “tone is serious, official, impersonal and is aimed at producing understanding and belief.” (Fiske 1992: 47) This would be journalism supported by “institutions such as government, politics, industry, the media, the educational system, the law, and so on” (Fiske 1992: 45). ‘Quality’ of such press can be demystified as authority (Bignell 2002: 88-92). This authority may be the very

---

1 Current situation of the Croatian radical right scene is presented in brief in the 2021 Hope not Hate report (Mulhall / Khan-Ruf 2021: 70).

2 The corpus was constructed in the scope of the broader project concerned with tracing the change in discursive representation of Europe given the impact of multiple crises between 2007 and 2017. The data gathered in the corpus underwent secondary analysis with the special focus on keywords emerging from the Eurosceptical discourses discussed in this paper.

reason why its analysis may give a valuable insight into construction of power discourses – as it was already noticed in previous studies (e.g. on Brexit: Müller 2018).

Another criterion was the representativeness of the analysed media outlets. On the one hand, it was assumed that diverse ideological profiles should be represented; on the other that the most widely read newspapers representing given worldviews should be selected. In result, Croatian conservative *Večernji list* and left-liberal *Novi list* were included in the corpus. While the first one, depending on a year, used to be most widely read broadsheet daily, the latter is the fourth most popular daily print medium, limited mostly to the Istria and Rijeka region (Vozab 2014). However, it was its pronounced liberal stance and its reputation as an independent media outlet that decided about its inclusion in the studied corpus.

A big data approach is indeed suitable for reconstruction of mainstream ideologies; this cannot be said for fringe or under-represented views, which is the case of Eurosceptical or sovereignist discourses in Croatia. While they make use of common nationalist clichés, such stances are rather absent from the press and cannot be grasped quantitatively. Instead, findings from the corpus-assisted discourse analysis of the mainstream press was contrasted with a semiotic-oriented qualitative analysis of signs, topoi, and codes recurring in the selected articles from these very media presenting the views of Croatian sovereignists. This small collection of articles was additionally complemented by programmes of Croatian Sovereignists (HS) from 2019 and Homeland Movement (DP) from 2020. Such a data selection should ensure possibility of answering main research questions – i.e. one of relation between mainstream and Eurosceptical discourses, their differences, but also, more importantly, of their commonplaces.

## **Methods**

The research methods were in part inspired by a theoretical framework and practical tools elaborated in a so-called corpus-driven discourse analysis (cf. McEnery / Gabrielatos 2006). In accordance with its name, it makes use of large collections of texts – corpora. The goal of such studies is, however, not an abstract, uncontextualised analysis of linguistic structures, but rather to reveal orders of discourses understood not only as groups of signs, but also “as practices that systematically form the objects of which they speak” (Foucault 1972: 49).

Among the advantages of a corpus-driven discourse analysis, obtaining a number of results otherwise unavailable is worth noting. This, together with statistical, strictly defined algorithms, contributes to significant reduction of bias (Baker 2006: 10-12). Moreover, large number of texts and results produces an incremental effect, offering a high probability that it would be possible to generalise the findings. Therefore, results concerning recurrent discursive structures in

representative corpora can give an insight in certain cultural or ideological trends occurring in a given society or group (cf. e.g. Stubbs 2001, 215; applied to mental geographies in the Croatian and Serbian press: cf. Mirocha 2020).

The set of particular tools employed in this paper consisted of keyword, collocation, and concordance analysis. Collocation analysis was focused on „cooccurrence relationship[s] between two words”, occurring when “one [word] is more likely to occur in the presence of the other than elsewhere” (McEnery / Hardie 2012: 240). They are normally determined with the use of various statistical measures. In this paper the most popular method was used – log-likelihood ratio, which allows to avoid very untypical collocations<sup>3</sup>. An implication of the collocation phenomenon particularly significant for this research is that they are not merely a statistical fact; on the contrary, they can be interpreted on numerous levels: syntactical or grammatical, but also semantic and discursive – using a concept named semantic prosody, which “accounts for ‘connotation’: the sense that a word carries a meaning in addition to its ‘real’ meaning. The connotation is usually one of evaluation, that is, the semantic prosody is usually negative or, less frequently, positive” (Hunston 2002: 142).

A more qualitative interpretation of the data gathered in a corpus is obtained via concordance, i.e. “list of all of the occurrences of a particular search term in a corpus, presented within the context that they occur in; usually a few words to the left and right of the search term” (Baker 2006: 71). On such lists contexts of the analysed keywords can be interpreted in more detail, including reconstructions of their contextually determined meanings. Although in large corpora – such as the one used in this paper – resulting concordances may be too large to be analysed by a single researcher, this problem can be, however, easily solved by generating random samples.

Recurring collocates and keywords in context are used to detect common discourse patterns, frequent collocations connected to Europe, Europeanness and mental geography of European regions, as well as common topoi used to address European issues. Similar topoi or recurrent patterns can be also discovered with the help of semiotic discourse analysis in smaller sets of texts (cf. Czerwiński 2016; Gravells 2017). For instance, in this paper such an approach is applied to analyse media statements by members of the Sovereignists and the Homeland Movement, as well as political programmes of the respective groups.

---

3 Mathematical foundations behind the log-likelihood algorithm provided by the corpus manager NoSketchEngine are outside of the scope of this paper, but they are explained in detail by the team of researchers from Brighton and Brno (Kilgariff et al. 2004).

## Findings

Media presentations of Croatian Sovereignists in the mainstream press tended to include quotations from party's politicians. These statements were loaded with keywords, because, as it can be expected, the party leaders used the opportunity to summarise the agenda of the organisation:

»Plenkovićev HDZ je skrenuo oštro ulijevo i Hrvatska je pod tim vodstvom postala jedan od najposlušnijih zemalja koje slijede globalističke ideje koje su vrlo često u suprotnosti s hrvatskim nacionalnim interesima, hrvatskim ponosom i vrijednostima koje hrvatski narod temeljno određuju kroz stoljeća«, ustvrdio je Ilčić [Vladislav, predsjednik Hrasta]. (*Predstavljena...* 2019)

“Plenković's HDZ made a sharp left-turn and under this leadership Croatia became one of the most obedient countries following globalist ideas, which are very often in contradiction with Croatian national interests, Croatian pride, and values that are fundamentally defining the Croatian nation throughout the centuries”, said [V.] Ilčić[, the leader of Hrast party]<sup>4</sup>.

As it is apparent, no concrete policy moves are mentioned; instead, a number of syntagms that have strong ideological connotations are mentioned: “national interest”, “Croatian pride”, and “Croatian values”. They all are starkly contrasted with “globalist ideas”, which can – in the context of 2019 European parliamentary elections – be identified with “European values”.

It may be tempting to verify what is understood by such values in the mainstream press. This was done by studying textual surroundings of all occurrences of the phrase *europski vrijednosti* ‘European values’ in the daily newspapers. In both dailies catalogue of contexts is quite similar: either they name the categories of values (as *fundamental, common, civilisatory*), relation to them (*comply, share, defend, etc.*), their components (*human, rights, freedom*), and the actors relating to the values (*Croatia, Europe*). Interestingly, a similar study of the Serbian press shows recurrence of the value set known from Copenhagen Criteria: democracy, rule of law, human rights and minority rights. It is absence of the latter in the mainstream press, which may be symptomatic for a post-accession period.

The aforementioned density of identity-building phrasing is also very characteristic for other appearances of the Croatian Sovereignists in the printed media, e.g.:

Zastupnik Hrasta u Hrvatskom saboru Hrvoje Zekanović, ustvrdio je kako hrvatski suverenist znači biti protiv Istanbulske konvencije koju nam nameće EU, protiv Marakeškog sporazuma jer je on loš za Hrvatsku, za blokadu Srbije na putu u EU, kako bi se konačno priznala agresija na Hrvatsku i platila ratna odšteta, kao i za obranu prava na život te obranu hrvatskog naroda u BiH i dijaspori. (*Predstavljena...* 2019)

‘Hrast’s MP in Croatian parliament Hrvoje Zekanović stated that to be a Croatian sovereignist means to be against Istanbul Convention forced upon us by the EU, against the Marrakesh Agreement as it is bad for Croatia, to be for a blockage of Serbia on its way towards the EU in order finally to recognise aggression against Croatia and obtain war reparations, as well as for defence of the right to live and defence of the Croatian nation in Bosnia & Herzegovina and the diaspora.’

---

4 Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s.

Quite visibly, this short utterance contains positioning against a number of issues: social issues, migration, relations with Serbia, women's reproductive rights, and situation of the Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Their mainstream presence has to be discussed in more detail one by one.

In fact, question of conservative Catholic approach to social issues and biopolitics is also one of the few points found in the Sovereignist's programme:

‘Instituciju obitelji branit ćemo svim sredstvima u Europskom parlamentu kao što smo branili kršćanske vrijednosti kada smo se prije godinu dana suprotstavili uvođenju Istanbulske konvencije.’ (*Hrvatski suverenisti...* 2019)

‘The institution of family will be defended by all means in the European Parliament, just as we defended Christian values when a year ago we opposed to introduction of Istanbul Convention.’

Discursive construction of European values in the mainstream press was already commented on. The question of religion was left out until now, nevertheless, the adjective *kršćanski* ‘Christian’ and the noun *islam* ‘islam’ appear among the 100 most common collocations of the keyword ‘Europe’ in the conservative *Večernji list*. This media outlet sporadically published reflections on “Christian roots of Europe” and their “(in)compatibility of islam” in its news section, especially after intensification of the refugee crisis in 2015. On the other hand, a significant deal of occurrences of the collocate ‘islam’ appears in the texts written by Croatian Muslims. This ambiguity of religious identity of Europe constructed by the mainstream conservative press differs from the exclusively Catholic focus of the far right, with its interest in biopolitics and social issues. Nonetheless, the very presence of the topic in *Večernji list* may prepare the audience for this kind of discourse.

The Sovereignists' stance on migration also resonates well with the discourse of the mainstream conservative press, although, similarly as in the last case, the stances of the media are much more moderate. In fact, both *Večernji list* and *Novi list* are similar in terms of their discourse on migration and Europe in their oppulent use of natural catastrophe metaphors (*refugee wave, flux, pressure*) and dehumanisation via numbers (refugees and migrants are often quantified with large figures). Moreover, with the lapse of time both dailies increasingly prefer label *migranti* ‘migrants’ over *izbjeglice* ‘refugees’ (Fig. 1).

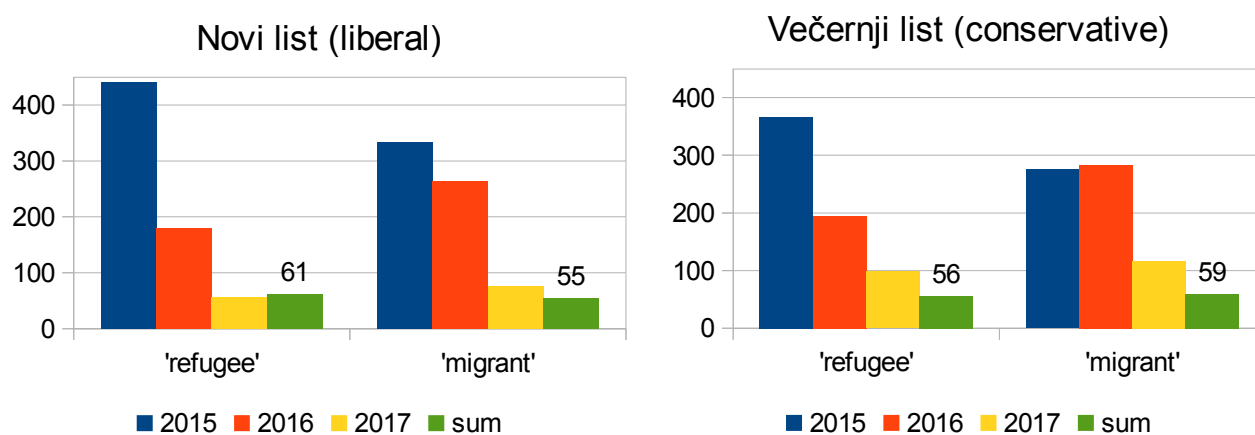


Fig. 1. Relative cooccurrences of keywords *Europa* ‘Europe’ and respectively *izbjeglica* ‘refugee’ or *migrant* ‘migrant’ in annual subcorpora of the Croatian liberal and conservative daily newspapers

One of the main differences follows from the fact that the conservative daily more often provides space for statements by far-right politicians (e.g. Ruža Tomašić appears 1.23 times more often in *Večernji list* than in *Novi list*). They tend to introduce geopolitical perspective, putting blame for the situation on other countries such as Turkey, Greece, or Serbia – by that, putting Croatia in a more European light – but also on the European Union, presenting its handling of the crisis as unfair towards the Adriatic country<sup>5</sup>. The latter is consistent with their concept of positive and negative actors put forward in the party’s programme:

[Protivimo se vladi koja je usvojila] Marakeški sporazum koji pokušava izbrisati jasno definiranu razliku između emigracije i imigracije. Isto tako brišu se i jasne razlike između legalne i ilegalne imigracije kako bi se zadovoljile potrebe određenih europskih lidera koji imaju veliku potražnju za jeftinom radnom snagom. (*Hrvatski suverenisti...* 2019)

‘[We oppose the government that accepted] Marrakesh Agreement, which tries to erase a clearly defined distinction between emigration and immigration. In the same way clear distinction between legal and illegal immigration is erased in order to satisfy needs of certain European leaders that have a huge demand for cheap labour’

European Union and “certain European leaders” are, therefore, not only presented as doing harm to Croatia, but also as hypocritical and pushing forward their own economic agendas. What is meant in the cited fragments by “clear distinctions” must stay outside of the scope of this research, it seems, however, that it belongs to the conservative topoi employed in various domains of discourse.

The question of Serbia appeared both in the explicit statement about programmatic stances of the Sovereignists, but also in articles on migration. In fact, the argument that Serbia cannot become a member-state of the European Union, because it allegedly did not answer for the war crimes from the 1990s appears in extenso in programmatic documents of this party:

<sup>5</sup> For a discussion on a long tradition of discourses othering neighbour countries in Southeastern European nationalist discourses cf. Bakić-Hayden (1995), or, more recently, Luketić (2013).



Beskompromisno će [Suverenisti] blokirati ulazak Srbije u Europsku uniju “sve dok Srbija ne Isplati ratnu odštetu za srbočetničku agresiju na Republiku Hrvatsku i ne prizna tu istu agresiju dok ne odgovore kakva je sudbina snašla sve nestale tijekom Domovinskog rata i dok ne ukinu samopozvanu srpsku univerzalnu jurisdikciju za procesuiranje ratnih zločina”. (*Hrvatski suverenisti...* 2019)

‘ They [i.e. Sovereignists] will uncompromisingly block Serbia’s entry to the European Union „until Serbia will pay war remittances for Serbo-Chetnik aggression on the Republic of Croatia and recognise this aggression, until it responds what was the fate of all the missing persons during the Homeland War and until it will not resign from usurpatory Serbian universal jurisdiction over war crime proceedings”.’

The conditions are most probably impossible to be fulfilled; anyways, the theme-rheme structure of the utterance, putting *blockage* at the beginning of the sentence, clearly indicates that it is preventing Serbia from the EU membership what is really at the stake. Perpetuation of the very clear-cut victimhood narrative with xenophobic overtones makes also an abundant use of positive and negative epithets, such as *domovinski* ‘homeland’ (present also in mainstream discourses) or *srbočetnički* ‘Serbo-Chetnik’. The latter is more specific to a far-right domain, which tends to recombine elements ‘Serbo-’, ‘Yugo-’, ‘-Chetnik’, and ‘-Communist’ in quite productive word building practices, signifying synonymous treatment of all these components.

Relations with Serbia are also a commonplace topic in the Croatian mainstream press, not only by itself, but in the context of the relations with the EU, too. This is especially visible in the topic model analysis of the Europe-related mainstream press article corpus, where the issue of Serbia occurred among the 15 most common topics generated by an automated LDA algorithm (Fig. 2).

0	EU integration
1	Slovenia
2	education
3	economy
4	EU funds
5	diplomatic crises
6	history
7	(frequent vocabulary)
<b>8</b>	<b>Serbia</b>
	<i>Srbija</i> 'Serbia', <i>srpski</i> 'Serb', <i>Kosovo</i> 'Kosovo', <i>Beograd</i> 'Belgrade', <i>srbijanski</i> 'Serbian', <i>Vučić</i> 'Vučić', <i>Vukovar</i> 'Vukovar', <i>Srbin</i> 'Serb', <i>ratni</i> 'war'
<b>9</b>	<b>regional diplomacy</b>
	<i>BiH</i> 'Bosnia and Herzegovina', <i>suradnja</i> 'cooperation', <i>odnos</i> 'relation', <i>predsjednica</i> 'Mrs. President', <i>regija</i> 'region', <i>istaknuti</i> 'stress', <i>republika</i> 'republic', <i>politika</i> 'politics', <i>važan</i> 'important', <i>gospodarski</i> 'economic', <i>vanjski</i> 'external, foreign', <i>Josipović</i> , <i>Hrvat</i> 'Croat', <i>Plenković</i>
10	rule of law
11	social policy
12	migrations
13	economy
14	elections

Fig. 2. 15 most common topics in the Croatian mainstream press articles related to European issues and keywords characterising the topic of Serbia

The topic was found out to be characterised by keywords, which well demonstrate the fact that Serbia is still very often commented by the mainstream press in connection with the history of the 1990s war crimes.

Further observations can be made by looking for the most common collocations of the keyword 'Serbia'<sup>6</sup>. It seems that the results can be grouped into quite similar categories, however, this grouping simultaneously reveals subtle differences in perspectives (Fig. 3).

<sup>6</sup> 50 most common collocations in each of the newspapers were taken into consideration, among which only autosemantic vocabulary was further interpreted.

<b><i>Večernji list</i></b>	<b><i>Novi list</i></b>
<b>regional cooperation and tensions</b> <i>Hrvatska</i> ‘Croatia’, <i>Bosnia i Hercegovina</i> ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina’, <i>Crna Gora</i> ‘Montenegro’, <i>Slovenija</i> ‘Slovenia’, <i>Makedonija</i> ‘Macedonia’, <i>protiv</i> ‘against’, <i>odnos</i> ‘relation’	<b>regional cooperation</b> <i>Hrvatska</i> ‘Croatia’, <i>Bosnia i Hercegovina</i> ‘Bosnia and Herzegovina’, <i>Mađarska</i> ‘Hungary’, <i>Slovenija</i> ‘Slovenia’, <i>odnos</i> ‘relation’
<b>European integration and its obstacles</b> <i>htjeti</i> ‘will/want’, <i>EU</i> , <i>pregovori</i> ‘negotiations’, <i>put</i> ‘way’	<b>European integration and its obstacles</b> <i>europski</i> ‘European’, <i>blokada</i> ‘blockage’, <i>poglavlje</i> ‘chapter’
<b>border regime</b> <i>granica</i> ‘border’	<b>border regime</b> <i>granica</i> ‘border’, <i>izbjeglica</i> ‘refugee’, <i>granični prolaz</i> ‘border crossing’, <i>blokada</i> ‘blockage’
<b>differences in interpretations of political and historical facts by media</b> <i>mediji</i> ‘media’	

Fig. 3. Categories of the most common collocates of the keyword Serbia in the Croatian mainstream press articles related to Europe

Namely, topic of border regime in the liberal press is connected to reporting the events on the so-called Balkan route during the 2015 refugee crisis and the role of the keyword ‘Serbia’ is here purely technical. More significant divergence originates from differing representation of Serbia’s European integration: conservative press reports it using more frequent modal forms (‘will/want’) and metaphors (‘way’), distancing itself from Serbian aspirations towards the EU. It also seems to be typical for the *Večernji list* to comment on controversial headlines from Serbian press, which is often done in a sensationalising way:

Ultra nacionalistička nasilnička skupina Dveri najavila je za danas u 15 sati prosvjed protiv Haaškog tribunala koji je jučer oslobodio hrvatske generale Gotovinu i Markača i Europske unije, ispred sjedišta EU na Novom Beogradu, javljaju jutros mediji u Srbiji. (Flego 2012)  
‘Ultra-nationalist aggressor group Dveri announced that today at 3 p.m. in front of the EU headquarters at New Belgrade district it will demonstrate against the Haag tribunal [ICTY], which yesterday set Croatian generals Gotovina and Markač free, and against the European Union, today morning informed Serbian media.’

As in the cited fragment, it happens quite often that instead of the particular title, a general syntagm “Serbian media” is used throughout such articles.

Last point in the already cited statement of Zekanović cited before from *Novi list* referred to a Croatian minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina, or, as he put it, “defence of the Croatian nation in Bosnia & Herzegovina and the diaspora”. This ethnonational perspective on Bosnia can be

contrasted with the way the issue is addressed in the mainstream press, as it is suggested by the topic model – namely, it occurs only in a more general framework of regional diplomatic relations (although the national perspective on the Croatian minority is not altogether absent). It can be clearly said on the basis of the keywords associated with this topic by the algorithm (Fig. 2). Moreover, keywords ‘Mrs. President’, ‘Josipović’, or ‘Plenković’ demonstrate that such framing of the topic is used by the analysed dailies when they report visits in Bosnia, paid by Croatian politicians of various ideological options.

It would be also interesting to see, what arguments Sovereignists use in the discursive construction of the relation between Croatia and European political institutions. True to their name, they put particular stress on “sovereignty” and “nation-states”:

Zekanović je rekao da EU može biti jaka samo ako je sazdana od jakih suverenih nacionalnih država dok je Tomašić pozvala građane da glasuju za one kandidate koji su pokazali da štite nacionalne interese. (Črnc 2019)

‘Zekanović said that the EU can only be strong if its built of strong, sovereign nation-states, while Tomašić appealed to the citizens to vote for those candidates who demonstrated that they protect national interests.’

As it can be expected, future relation between sovereign nation-state and supranational organisms is not elucidated, neither in press comments, nor in programmatic statements like the following:

Treća točka programa je borba [za] Europu kao zajednicu suverenih država članica i borba “protiv centralističke, federalne, birokratske i nadnacionalne Europske unije koju zagovaraju Plenkovićevi i Vučićevi pučani sa svojim koalicijskim partnerima socijalistima”. (*Hrvatski suverenisti...* 2019)

‘The third point in the programme is fight [for] Europe as a community of sovereign member-states and fight „against centralist, federal, bureaucratic and supranational European Union, supported by the People’s Party of Plenković and Vučić with their socialist coalition partners.’

While it can be clearly understood as opposition against “ever closer union” and deeper integration of the EU states, the very wording and choice of personage seem to be of a greater importance. Namely, adjectives “centralist” and “federal” are frequently used in political and historical discourses of Croatia with regard to currents inside Yugoslav socialist federation closer to Serbian domination. In this context, it is not that surprising that this short fragment features Serbian president Aleksandar Vučić and European socialists. Connotative values of the employed words contribute to an implied metaphor of the EU as socialist Yugoslavia, obviously, the latter bearing negative connotations among the target audience.

*Topoi koinon* of such discourses include not only a conviction about strongly bureaucratic character of the Union, but also about a deep asymmetry of the relation between the EU and Croatia – common regulations are, therefore, said to be *forced* upon Croatia by the EU, as in the already

cited examples: “Istanbulsk[a] konvencij[a] koju nam nameće EU” (*Predstavljena...* 2019) ‘Istanbul Convention forced upon us by the EU’.

The perspective of the mainstream press is more nuanced. Analysis of verbs constructing relations between Europe and Croatia<sup>7</sup> used in news reports demonstrates that, indeed, the word *tražiti* ‘demand’ is among the 20 most common verbs co-occurring with the word *Europa*. On the other hand, modal verbs denoting what Europe *should* or *have to* do are even more frequent. It is verbs collocating with the keyword ‘Croatia’ that denote efforts and demands that had to be fulfilled by Croatia during the EU integration process (*trebati* ‘have to’, *ispuniti/isunjavati* ‘fulfill’, *poduzeti* ‘undertake’ etc.). In fact, only in the collocations of the syntagm ‘European Commission’ clearly asymmetric relations are visible in the analysed corpus of the mainstream press, especially in the sample from the period after the EU accession. Among the most typical verbal collocations, one can find *tražiti* ‘demand’, *procijenjavati* ‘estimate’, *prihvatiti* ‘accept’, *očekivati* ‘expect’, *donijeti* ‘pass (a law), make (a decision)’, *usvojiti* ‘adopt (a law)’<sup>8</sup>. Briefly speaking, asymmetric representations of the EU-Croatia relations is definitely present in the mainstream press, but to a way lesser extent than in far-right discourses; moreover, its evaluation is most often neutral.

Interestingly, a larger degree of similarity between the Sovereignist and mainstream discourse can be seen in the domain of economy. Namely, while in another statement, this time for *Večernji list*, one of the party members criticised previous and current Croatian administrations, it was done in a way implicitly accepting European policy of structural subsidies:

Nažalost, Hrvatska je povukla oko 175 puta manje [europskih] sredstava od Poljske, a sad govorimo i o uvođenju eura iako nećemo time prosperirati – rekao je Zekanović. (Romić 2019)  
‘Unfortunately, Croatia obtained ca. 175 times less [EU] funds than Poland and now we are talking about introduction of euro, although this will not make us prosper’, said Zekanović.’

Despite critical stance towards the plans for introduction of the common currency, necessity to make use of European structural funds is never put into question. In fact, this is the same perspective on the economic or financial aspect of European integration as represented in the mainstream press. The latter focuses mostly either on the presence of Croatian products or companies on the common market, or on the very question of European funds<sup>9</sup>. An insight into how European funding is framed in the press discourses can be gained i.a. through analysis of collocates of the phrase *europski fond* ‘European fund’.

---

7 Technically speaking, analysis included verbs occurring up to three lexemes to the right from the lexeme *Europa* ‘Europe’.

8 In this topic, reporting of the Croatian media is strongly dependent on the discourse of European Commission about the Western Balkan countries; for a detailed discussion of the latter cf. Sekulić 2020.

9 A proof to it can be even found in general corpora of contemporary Croatian language – among all the collocates of the lexeme *europski* ‘European’, *tržište* ‘market’ is ranked as the 11<sup>th</sup> and *fond* ‘fund’ as the 13<sup>th</sup>.

<b>europski fond ‘European fund’</b>
<i>fond</i> ‘fund’, <i>unija</i> ‘union’, <i>sredstvo</i> ‘mean’, <i>razvoj</i> ‘development’, <i>regionalan</i> ‘regional’, <i>novac</i> ‘money’, <i>socijalan</i> ‘social’, <i>korištenje</i> ‘use’, <i>strukturni</i> ‘structural’, <i>monetaran</i> ‘monetary’, <i>financirati</i> ‘finance’, <i>euro</i> ‘euro’, <i>milijun</i> ‘million’, <i>investicijski</i> ‘investment’, <i>povlačenje</i> ‘obtaining’

Fig. 4. Collocates of the phrase ‘European fund(s)’ in the Croatian mainstream press articles related to European issues

Among the collocates listed at Fig. 4 *korištenje* ‘use’ and *povlačenje* ‘obtaining’ denote relations with the funds; simultaneously these relations are discursively constructed in a way focusing on their efficiency (understood quantitatively, and not e.g. with regard to their social utility). At this point, focus on efficient use of funds is visible from the collocates *korištenje* and *povlačenje*, which are the most common words denoting relations to these subsidies. In fact, number of concordances containing the phrase *povlačenje europskih fondova* ‘obtaining European funds’ also include an adverb *uspješno* ‘successful’, which clearly demonstrate the stance shared by the mainstream press and – as previous observation demonstrates – the far-right alike.

The discourse topoi used by the Croatian Sovereignists during their 2019 campaign to the European Parliament were next year re-used by Miroslav Škoro, presidential candidate and later, during the parliamentary campaign, leader of the list uniting various right-wing and far-right groupings:

– Radeći na zajedničkim ciljevima i interesima, istovremeno moramo sačuvati identitet svake europske nacije, ma koliko mala ona bila. Trebali bismo doista postati, kako službeni slogan EU-a kaže, „ujedinjeni u raznolikosti“. Nažalost, forsiranjem više Europe i sve bliže Unije kojom se upravlja iz Bruxellesa, postali smo čista suprotnost tome – razjedinjeni u jednoličnosti, rekao je Škoro. (*Škoro u EP-u* 2019)

“Working on common goals and interests, simultaneously we have to protect identity of each European nation, however small it would be. We should really become, as the official motto of the EU says, «united in diversity». Unfortunately, by pushing through even more Europe and even closer Union managed from Brussels, we became a complete opposite of that – disunited in homogeneity”, said Škoro.’

While the tone is more moderate, it is the same topos of Europe of (sovereign) nations, as used by the Sovereignists. Moreover, in the article Škoro refers to “Christian values” and blames “European elite that made a decision for all of us” for a “migration chaos”. His discursive stances on religious identity, relations between the EU and Croatia, and approach to migration are essentially same as the previously analysed pieces of far-right Sovereignist discourse. In fact, the 2020 election manifesto of Škoro’s Homeland Movement did not contain too many references to the EU, but the two extant ones seem to be closely related with the discourse analysed before:

Zalažemo se za Europsku uniju kao konfederalnu zajednicu suverenih država, a ne kao nadnacionalnu, federalnu i u perspektivi unitarnu državu.

[...] [Zalažemo se] za posebnu brigu o dostojanstvu hrvatskih branitelja, te za rješavanje pitanja nestalih, plaćanja odšteta zarobljenicima srpskih koncentracijskih logora, te jasne uvjete Srbiji glede ulaska u Europsku uniju, povratku opljačkanih kulturnih dobara i arhivske građe i rješavanju spornih graničnih problema; (*Domovinski pokret...* 2020)

‘ We stay for the European Union as a confederative community of sovereign states, and not as a supranational, federal and, in perspective, unitary state.

[...] [We stay] for a special care for dignity of Croatian defenders [i.e. war veterans], and for solving the question of the missing persons, for paying compensations to the prisoners of Serbian concentration camps, and clear conditions for Serbia, when it comes to the accession to the European Union, to the return of the stolen culture goods and archive material and to solving of the contentious border issues;’

Wording about confederation of sovereign states returns; while there is no mention of blockage of the potential Serbian EU accession, this point is made clear by the context where “clear conditions for Serbia” occur.

All in all, analysed statements and programmatic manifestos of the Croatian right-wing Euroceptics demonstrate that they tend to make an extensive use of symbolical issues and phrases, such as “Europe of sovereign nations”, “Istanbul Convention”, or “Marrakech Agreement”. A significant part of the rhetoric is constituted by a strong anti-Serbian sentiment, which is employed also in the discourses on the EU.

On the other hand, such a choice of issues and such framing of these issues can be only possible (or, effective) given their representations in the mainstream press. While appeals to religion are rather infrequent, conservative press sometimes made references to religious identity of Europe. What is more significant is that representations of Serbia in European contexts were very often sensational and focusing the most scandalous examples of nationalist discourse, sometimes published by Belgrade media. Moreover, since 2015 mainstream media – especially those representing conservative ideological profile – increasingly contributed to dehumanised image of migrants and refugees. The short analysis performed in this paper demonstrates that stances of the moderate media outlets were at least one of the factors responsible for shaping of the more radical right-wing discourses in Croatia, represented by Euroceptics such as 2019 Croatian Sovereignists or 2020 Homeland Movement.

## **Conclusions**

With the help of semiotics-informed discourse analysis, the paper elucidated discursive strategies used by Croatian Euroceptics to contest typical representational strategies of European policies concerning the future integration (closer co-operation and Serbia’s accession), freedom of movement (migration policies embodied by the Marrakesh Treaty), or human rights and fighting discrimination (gender equality symbolised by the Istanbul Convention), and to put forward

conservative, nationalist ideas. Euroscepticism is mixed with a frequent use of such phrases as “national interests”, “pride”, “values”, “identity”, and – most frequently – “nation-states”. However, there are no calls to disband the EU as such: instead, an old, vague concept of “Europe of nations” is called for, this time with a recurrent keyword “sovereignty”.

Analyses of the discourses used by the new Eurosceptical movements in Southeastern Europe are even more significant (cf. Blanuša 2011 for the previous developments), as they constitute part of a broader European tendency. In every such movement, residues of local ethnonationalist commonplaces seem to co-exist with new developments, such as reemerging “sovereignism”, “populism”, or “nationalism” (cf. Baldassari et al. 2020). Moreover, the Croatian example also demonstrates that these movements have a strong tendency to use mainstream discourses and normalised nationalist bias to put forward more radical concepts. In this context, discourse studies of newsworthiness of banal nationalisms, banal xenophobia, or banal orientalisms in new media environments seem to be a necessity for the future.

## Literature

P. Baker (2006) *Using Corpora in Discourse Analysis*. London: Continuum.

M. Baldassari, E. Castelli, M. Trufelli, G. Vezzani (eds.) (2020) *Anti-Europeanism: Critical Perspectives Towards the European Union*. Cham: Springer.

J. Bignell (2002) *Media Semiotics. An Introduction*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

N. Blanuša (2011) *Euroskepticizam u Hrvatskoj*, [in:] I. Šiber (ed.) *Hrvatska i Europa – strahovi i nade*. Zagreb: Fakultet političkih znanosti.

Croatia – Political parties (n.d.) “Norsk Senter for Forskningsdata” [https://o.nsd.no/european\\_election\\_database/country/croatia/parties.html](https://o.nsd.no/european_election_database/country/croatia/parties.html) [15 Apr 2021]

M. Czerwiński (2016) *Semiotyczna analiza dyskursu*, [in:] W. Czachur, A. Kulczyńska, Ł. Kumiega (eds.) *Jak analizować dyskurs? Perspektywy dydaktyczne*. Kraków: Universitas.

Z. Črnec (2019) *MARIJAN PAVLIČEK Hrvatska mora ići u Bruxelles sa svojim mišljenjem, a ne po mišljenje u Bruxelles*, “Novi list” 9 Feb, <https://www.novolist.hr/novosti/hrvatska/marijan-pavlicek-hrvatska-mora-ici-u-bruxelles-sa-svojim-misljenjem-a-ne-po-misljenje-u-bruxelles/> [15 Apr 2021].

*Domovinski pokret...* (2020) *Domovinski pokret. Parlamentarni izbori 2020*. (ključne točke programa), [https://www.domovinskipokret.hr/pdf/Kljucne\\_tocke\\_programa\\_Domovinski\\_pokret\\_Izbori\\_2020.pdf](https://www.domovinskipokret.hr/pdf/Kljucne_tocke_programa_Domovinski_pokret_Izbori_2020.pdf) [15 Apr 2021].



- Državno izborno povjerenstvo RH (2019a) *Rezultate izbora članova u Europski parlament iz Republike Hrvatske provedenih 26. svibnja 2019. godine*. Zagreb. [https://www.izbori.hr/site/UserDocsImages/2019/Izbori\\_clanova\\_u\\_EU\\_parlament\\_iz\\_RH/Rezultati/rjesenje.pdf](https://www.izbori.hr/site/UserDocsImages/2019/Izbori_clanova_u_EU_parlament_iz_RH/Rezultati/rjesenje.pdf) [15 Apr 2021].
- Državno izborno povjerenstvo RH (2019b) *Izbori za predsjednika Republike Hrvatske (22.12.2019.)* <https://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/index.html#/app/predsjednik-2019> [15 Apr 2021].
- Državno izborno povjerenstvo RH (2020) *Izbori za zastupnike u Hrvatski sabor (05.07.2020.)* <https://www.izbori.hr/arhiva-izbora/index.html#/app/parlament-2020> [15 Apr 2021].
- J. Fiske (1992) *Popularity and the politics of information*, [in:] P. Dahlgren, C. Sparks (eds.) *Journalism and Popular Culture*. London: Sage, 45-63.
- M. Flego (2012) *Srpski mediji: Policija čuva hrvatsko veleposlanstvo*, “Večernji list”, 17th Nov, <https://m.vecernji.hr/vijesti/srpski-mediji-policija-cuva-hrvatsko-veleposlanstvo-476377> [15 Apr 2021]
- M. Foucault (1972) *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. Trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith. New York: Pantheon Books.
- J. Gravells (2017) *Semiotics and Verbal Texts. How the News Media Construct a Crisis*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.
- M. Bakić-Hayden (1995) Nesting Orientalisms: The Case of Former Yugoslavia, “Slavic Review” 54(4), 917-931.
- Hrvatski suverenisti...* (2019) *Hrvatski suverenisti predstavili kandidate i program za europarlamentarne izbore*, “Hrvatska konzervativna stranka” 7 Apr, <https://konzervativci.hr/2019/04/07/hrvatski-suverenisti-predstavili-kandidate-i-program-za-europarlamentarne-izbore/> [15 Apr 2021].
- S. Hunston (2002) *Corpora in Applied Linguistics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- D. Jović (2007) *The Slovenian-Croatian Confederal Proposal: A Tactical Move or an Ultimate Solution?* [in:] L.J. Cohen, J. Dragović-Soso J (eds.) *State Collapse in South-Eastern Europe: New Perspectives on Yugoslavia's Disintegration. Central European Studies*. West Lafayette, Indiana: Purdue University Press, 249-280.
- D. Jović (2011) Hrvatska vanjska politika pred izazovima članstva u Europskoj Uniji, “Politička misao: časopis za politologiju”, 48(2), 7-36.
- D. Jović (2015) *First „return to Europe“, then to the 1990s*, “BiEPAG BLOG”, <https://biepag.eu/first-return-to-europe-then-to-the-1990s/> [15 Apr 2021].
- A. Kilgarriff, V. Baisa, J. Bušta, M. Jakubiček, V. Kovář, J. Michelfeit, P. Rychlý, V. Suchomel (2014) *The Sketch Engine: ten years on*, “Lexicography” 1(1): 7–36.

- K. Luketić (2013) *Balkan: od geografije do fantazije*. Zagreb: Algoritam.
- T. Mamić (2017) *BRUNA ESIH REGISTRIRALA STRANKU U podulji naziv stavila svoje i Hasanbegovićevo ime, evo kako će stranka biti ustrojena, tko će imati koju funkciju...*, “Jutarnji list” 7 Jun, <https://www.jutarnji.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/bruna-esih-registrirala-stranku-u-podulji-naziv-stavila-svoje-i-hasanbegovicevo-ime-evo-kako-ce-stranka-bitu-ustrojena-tko-ce-imati-koju-funkciju-6203431> [15 Apr 2021].
- T. McEnery, C. Gabrielatos (2006) *English Corpus Linguistics*, [in:] B. Aarts, A. McMahon, *The Handbook of English Linguistics*. Blackwell: Malden.
- P. Mirocha (2020) *Discursive categorisation of European subregions in the Croatian and Serbian press after 2007*, “Socjolingwistyka” 34, 313-326.
- J. Mulhall, S. Khan-Ruf (2021) *State of Hate. Far-right Extremism in Europe*. London: Hope Not Hate <https://www.amadeu-antonio-stiftung.de/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/ESOH-LOCKED-FINAL.pdf> [15 Apr 2021].
- K. P. Müller (2018) *The 2016 EU referendum stories in Austrian, German, and Swiss media: catastrophes, characterizations, challenges*, [in:] A. Ridge-Newman, F. León-Solís, H. O’Donnell, *Reporting the Road to Brexit*. Palgrave Macmillan: Cham, 169-188..
- Predstavljena...* (2019) *Predstavljena nova politička platforma – Hrvatski suverenisti*, “Novi list” 9 Feb, <https://www.novolist.hr/vijesti/hrvatska/predstavljena-nova-politicka-platforma-hrvatski-suverenisti/> [15 Apr 2021].
- Predstavljen...* (2010) *Predstavljen politički pokret Hrvatski rast – Hrast*, “HRsvijet.net” 10 Dec, [http://www.hrsvijet.net/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=10121:predstavljen-politiki-pokret-hrvatski-rast-hrast&catid=7:parlamentarni-izbori-2011&Itemid=75](http://www.hrsvijet.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=10121:predstavljen-politiki-pokret-hrvatski-rast-hrast&catid=7:parlamentarni-izbori-2011&Itemid=75) [15 Apr 2021].
- T. Romić (2019) *'Na dnu smo po povlačenju EU sredstava, i dalje se skupljaju podobni, nema sposobnih'*, “Večernji list” 8 May, <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/na-dnu-smo-po-povlacenju-eu-sredstava-i-dalje-se-skupljaju-podobni-nema-sposobnih-1317948> [15 Apr 2021].
- P. Rychlý (2007) *Manatee/Bonito – a modular corpus manager*, [in:] P. Sojka, A. Horák (eds.) *RASLAN 2007: Recent Advances in Slavonic Natural Language Processing*. Brno: Masaryk University, 65-70.
- T. Sekulić (2020) *The European Union and the Paradox of Enlargement. The Complex Accession of the Western Balkans*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- M. Stubbs (2001) *Words and Phrases: Corpus Studies of Lexical Semantics*. London: Blackwell.
- J. Šedo (2010) *The party system of Croatia*, [in:] V. Stojarová, P. Emerson (eds.) *Party Politics in the Western Balkans*. London: Routledge, 73-84.

Škoro u EP-u... (2019) Škoro u EP-u: Moramo zaustaviti migracijski kaos, “Večernji list” 24 Oct, <https://www.vecernji.hr/vijesti/skoro-u-ep-u-moramo-zaustaviti-migracijski-kaos-1354717> [15 Apr 2021].

D. Vozab (2014) *Tisak u krizi: Analiza trendova u Hrvatskoj od 2008. do 2013.*, “Medijske studije” 5(10): 139-147.