European Union Accession and the Future of Croatian Language Policy

THESIS

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Abstract

This paper examines the past and present of Croatian language policy and advances expectations for the future of said policy. I first provide background on the present state of language policy in Croatia, namely how Croatian language policy has been formulated with the intention of widening the cultural difference between Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia. Croatian language policy has also been in response to perceived Serbian linguistic hegemony during the Yugoslav years. Despite the nationalist character of the new Croatian standard language, ethnic minorities in Croatia have been willing to assimilate linguistically because of the perceived advantages Croatia has over the other former Yugoslav states. Croatia has moved more quickly through the European Union accession process, which is seen as the result of Croatia's economic, political and cultural advantages as a European rather than Balkan state. Despite the evidence that Croatia is better off as part of Europe, the European Union expects Croatia to play a strong role in helping the rest of the Balkans move forward. Additionally, the Croatian people heavily support E.U. accession for the rest of the Balkans. The future qualities of the Croatian language will be largely influenced by the tensions between the current policy, rooted in strong nationalism, and expectations of future regional cooperation.
Dedication

I dedicate this document to my lovely wife Maryam. Her consistent patience with and support to me during stressful periods of writing was invaluable. I am also grateful for the inspiration of her persistent and diligent work to complete her extensive thesis work, which encouraged me to continue with my own.
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Introduction

While language policy in Croatia has historically diverged from the other Western Balkan languages on several occasions, it was in the years immediately following the collapse of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) that Croatian took on its most nationalistic characteristics. Much of the Serbian and Bosniak populations in Croatia left following the war, but those who remained had to deal with prejudice both socially and linguistically. My goal is to explore how and why Croatian language policy has impacted minority Serbs and Bosniaks in Croatia.

To that end, it is important to first understand the linguistic situation in Croatia from the state perspective, and the reasons behinds its formulation of a nationalistic policy. I also wish to discuss the disconnect between Croatia’s language policies and the de facto status of the language among the Croatian population. This disconnect is not a new one, as both in Yugoslavia and independent Croatia we find few linguistic differences along exclusively ethnic lines. Among the minority population, in part because of this similarity between languages, and in part because of fear of discrimination, Serbs and Bosniaks have started to identify their own speech as "Croatian," weakening their self-identification. The reasons for this willingness to assimilate are further illustrated by the perceived economic, political and cultural benefits of being Croatian, which I discuss in detail. Croatia has worked since independence to carve out a strong European identity for itself; this, in part, has been because of the greater successes achieved by Slovenia and Croatia in contrast with the “more Balkan”
states, Serbia and Bosnia. Politicians have not been alone in moving away from the Balkans, as members of minority ethnicities have also come to see success being somehow "non-Balkan." After examining the differences between the Former Yugoslav Republics (FYR), I discuss how the diversion of too much political capital to appeasing E.U. negotiators has papered over the ethnic tensions still present in Croatia. Time alone will tell how the Croatian language will adapt to meet the changing regional and international needs of the E.U.’s soon-to-be newest member.

Croatian Language Policy Since Independence

Since the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and indeed since Yugoslavia’s social collapse with the death of Josip Broz Tito in 1980, a significant proportion of linguists and politicians in Croatia have refused to fully commit to the idea or practice of linguistic unity with Bosnia and Serbia. The inability of all the ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia to combine their efforts in any sustained promotion of a single dialect proved fatal to any movement for linguistic unity. This problem had existed in some form or another since the debates surrounding the 1850 Vienna Agreement, which established, albeit on paper only, a common Serbo-Croatian language. In the 20th century, nationalistic language policy manifested itself in the Nazi puppet state during World War II before being subdued again until Croatia gained independence from Yugoslavia. At this time, arguments in favor of Croatian linguistic independence became stronger and more popular.
The Croatian state has constitutionally declared Croatian to be its official state language and established government-sanctioned linguistic organizations charged with the task of maintaining linguistic “purity.” This process of establishing official norms for language development is known as codification, which involves several steps depending on the degree of language standardization that has already been achieved. Codification can include the development of a writing system, rules for grammar, orthography and syntax, and standards for pronunciation and vocabulary. Where previously acceptable variants exist for any of these elements, the state-sponsored linguistic organizations must make decisions on an acceptable standard.

State-sponsored language planning, as outlined by Einar Haugen in his seminal 1966 book *Language Conflict and Language Planning* is a multi-step process (Haugen 1966). The first step is the selection of a language, which is followed by the process of codification explained above. Once codification is complete, the language must be successfully implemented in society, at which point the vocabulary evolves to meet any necessary new functions. This last step is particularly important in terminology dealing with new technologies. The extent to which language planning is successful, then, is almost entirely based on the population and the linguistic influences surrounding a speech community. If the population does not accept and begin to regularly use the standardized language, language planners have failed in the practical implementation of their goals. If the linguistic influences at play are external, any new terminology will be impacted. Inasmuch as Croatia has not yet reached the last two steps of Haugen's process, Croatia's
changing political and social landscape will strongly impact how successful Standard Croatian will be.

The Croatian standard language, that which has been endorsed by both the government and its bodies of linguistic scholarship, has changed with the political developments of the state to which it belongs. With Yugoslavia’s collapse, codification of the standard language became extensively occupied with the exclusion of grammatical constructions and lexical items more typically associated with Serbs and Bosniaks. These exclusions have especially reflected a special interest in moving away from features typical of Serbian speech. In addition, Croatian language planners have devoted a great deal of attention to discouraging the use of internationalisms, replacing these words with constructed replacements derived from older Slavonic roots.

Croatia's extensive efforts to alter the lexicon and grammar of the Croatian language have been at odds with the speech patterns of much of its population, particularly when we take into account the minority Serb and Bosniak population of the state. Like most of the world's countries, Croatia is not a monistic nation-state, where the borders of the state and the territory of one nationality end simultaneously. Because of this, it is forced to manage the differences between different speech communities. This process is rarely a simple one, and was especially complex and emotionally and politically charged in the years during and immediately following Croatia’s war for independence. William R. Beer and James E. Jacob explain that ideally, language policy on the part of the state is to become "the social glue through which - by confrontation, accommodation or benign neglect - governments seek to bond these human fissures into a
stable political and social whole" (Beer and Jacob 1985, 1). Beer and Jacob argue there are two divergent ideologies in language policy and planning, and that governments have a choice between pursuing either an assimilationist or accommodationist path in their dealings with minority language groups.

While these options are both theoretically possible for any modern nation-state, the ideal outcome, that of a language policy serving as "social glue," is more likely to be achieved if the correct choice is made. For Croatia, the linguistic situation in the state is complex because of the extensive similarities between the Croatia, Serbian and Bosnian languages. The idea of having to pursue an assimilationist or accommodationist path in dealing with mutually intelligible languages is a strange one indeed. Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks alike speak using linguistic features typically associated with other Balkan ethnic groups, while others speak exactly as they would be “expected” to as representatives of their respective ethnicities. That is to say, Croats can and do "sound like" Serbs and vice versa. The difficulty in untangling this complex web of crisscrossing would-be ethnolects is illustrated by Bosnian scholar Ranko Bugarski. While his recollections are of pre-war Sarajevo, the observations he makes are pertinent to a discussion of language in any of the former Yugoslav republics.

In his "Language and Ethnicity in Sarajevo: Some Recollections and Observations," Bugarski discusses how despite ethnic differences, the people of Sarajevo, Serbs, Croats and Bosniaks alike, spoke the same language, and did so even after the war had started in earnest in Bosnia. Bugarski notes that, despite the nationalistic arguments to the contrary that have been espoused surrounding the division of Serbo-Croatian, any
differences in the speech patterns of the inhabitants of Sarajevo were "individual differences in vocabulary range, style of expression, and level of language culture related to education, social status, [or] profession" (Bugarski 2003, 73). He further drives home his point, namely that "there existed no recognizable 'ethnolects' to cut across such differences; the belief that local urban Serbs, Croats and Moslems spoke and wrote differently depending on ethnonational affiliation is a myth" (Bugarski 2003, 73).

Bugarski's observations regarding the populace of Sarajevo were and are applicable to other cities and regions of the former Yugoslavia, because its population was and is a highly integrated mixture of all of the ethnic groups of the former Yugoslavia. While there are certain words (kruh "bread" or vlak "train" for a Croat, in contrast with the Serbian equivalents hleb and voz, for example) that would be associated with one ethnicity, the fact remains that consistent, general differences in speech patterns do not follow ethnic lines. In addition, lexical variation between the Serbo-Croatian successor languages is three to seven percent (Sito-Sucic 1996, 13). These similarities made the idea of accepting aggressive puristic language discourse unreasonable.

Despite these languages being called "Serbian" or "Bosnian" by virtue of their general association with their respective ethnic groups, they are simultaneously dialects of Croatian. For example, the Serbian language is almost entirely equal to the štokavian ekavian dialect of the Croatian language, one spoken by a significant percentage of Croats. Indeed, the speech patterns typical of the Serbian and Bosnian languages are arguably more similar to the standardized štokavian ijkavian Croatian than are such
Croatian dialects as the čakavian ikavian of Dalmatia or the kajkavian of the Zagreb region.

In the Western Balkans we find several isoglosses, or geographical borders of specific language features. These borders can apply to any linguistic feature, such as a certain pronunciation or a grammatical rule. The borders between isoglosses in the Balkans do not correspond exactly, or in some cases very closely at all, to the borders between the region’s states. Of particular interest is the isogloss between the ekavski pronunciation generally associated with Serbian and the ijekavski pronunciation of Standard Croatian; the division actually falls inside Croatian territory. Ethnic Croats and Serbs both use this “Serbian” pronunciation and other language characteristics like it, thus making the Serbian language simultaneously a southern and western Croatian dialect.

Bosnian likewise shares features with the Croatian language as it is spoken in some parts of Croatia. The only feature of Bosnian not found very prevalently in Croatia is the regular use of Turkish loan words, as historically the invading forces of the Ottoman Empire were much more intensely concentrated in present-day Bosnia. Bosnia’s significant Muslim population evidences the relative strength of this cultural influence. Turkish loan words aside, the Croatian and Bosnian languages are exceptionally similar.

Despite the linguistic similarities, language planners have taken an assimilationist view of the place of ethnic minorities and ethnolects in the Croatian state. This view is a reflection of the government’s larger goal of becoming distinctly European, as opposed to
being characterized as Balkan. As part of this process, "language reform [was] seen as a desirable and necessary step in the disentanglement of the ties that bound the former Yugoslavia together" (Langston 1999, 180). For current E.U. member-states, it is not always enough that a candidate state fulfills the negotiation conditions to the letter. Sometimes, "an applicant may need to make an extra effort to prove its 'Europeanness' just to please individual E.U. members" (Sabic 2002, 93). For Croatia, this "Europeanness" has correlated in part to "non-Balkanness," and in order for members of its minority ethnicities to be successful, this may mean playing along.

Canadian sociologist John Porter contended that in order for ethnic minorities to attain social mobility and achievement in a modern nation-state, they need "a commitment to the values of modernism and a movement away from the [minority] ethnic community with each succeeding generation…Opportunity will go to those individuals who are future oriented in an increasingly universalistic culture. Those oriented to the past are likely to lose out" (Porter 1975, 302-304). Croatian politicians have come to the conclusion that in order to be successful, the state must be oriented to the future as part of Europe, or said another way, away from the past as part of the Balkans. Any cultural elements that could potentially harm a successful economic, political and cultural union with Europe are at odds with this goal.

National identity consists of several qualities, including territory, common institutions and laws, common history, ethnicity or common origin, culture, language and religion. Language standardization in Yugoslavia was aimed at constructing an "overarching political and national identity," which was seen by many Croats as being
directed instead at the elimination of traditional Croatian linguistic features, "as part of a systematic policy to suppress Croatian national identity." In response, Croatian language policy in the years following independence was formed in "defense of a separate Croatian identity and Croatian political autonomy" (Langston and Peti-Stantic 2011, 345). While efforts by Croatian scholars to establish Croatian linguistic independence predate Yugoslavia, the additional fervor of Croatia’s post-independence promotion of linguistic purity is rooted in a reaction to Serbian linguistic hegemony during the Yugoslav years.

It is for this reason that Croatia has pursued a language policy that, though it is generally not explicitly stated, works so actively to separate Croatian from the language of the other former Yugoslav states. According to Slavicist Robert Greenberg, the changes that have been made to the Croatian language, particularly the purging of Orthodox Slavic (Russian and Serbian) as well as Oriental and Islamic (Turkish) loan words, have been made for the exclusive purpose of "underscoring the place of the Croatian language within a Central European context, with the hope of giving their national image a more European identity" (Greenberg 2004, 124). In this way, Croatia is trying to escape the past in the name of moving forward. Language policy seems to reflect a belief that there is something to be gained from linguistic isolation and from the distance generated by “anti-Balkan” linguistic tendencies.

The conflict between the official state language and the colloquial language of the people is not a new one. In response to a 1941 proposal from Croatian language authorities that pieces of literature written in a non-standard dialect be clearly marked "in a prominent place" as such, one Croat scholar wondered in response:
Why would it be necessary 'to clearly mark in a prominent place' that Krlež's ballad 'Petrica i gaženjaki' is written in the kajkavian dialect, or that Ujević's sonnet 'Oprošta' is čakavian? What does this profit us? Whom would we protect by so doing? The 'original and distinct language of the Croatian nation?'

(Samardzija 1993, 43).

Looking at the present linguistic situation in Croatia, similar questions can be posed about the necessity of aggressively articulating rules about small distinctions between dialects. Because these rules are generally made to the detriment of Serbian or Bosnian linguistic features, we are led to wonder what Croatian gains from pursuing language purism. One interpretation of such a requirement is that language planners, whether for political or linguistic reasons, hold a belief that the general populace would be “susceptible” to adoption of non-standard grammatical features and lexical items. The only way to combat this, in their eyes, is to clearly note that variance from the norm is entirely unacceptable linguistically. Of course, the variances continue, suggesting that successful completion of Haugen’s social implementation of a standardized language is impossible. In a state with so many well-established language variants, language planners are fighting a losing battle. The type of planning Croatia has undertaken deals in part with the relative status of the state's dialects and ethnolects. In the interest of promoting a standard, other variants must necessarily be portrayed as inferior. The formation of a standardized, “pure” Croatian language has, despite the linguistic variety still present in Croatia, impacted public opinion. A 2004 study found that the state-planned Croatian standard language was viewed as the most prestigious and most likely to correlate to success (Simicic and Sujoldzic 2004). Such views of non-standard speech as inferior have shifted the linguistic self-identification of Croatia’s ethnic minorities.
The Impact of Croatian Language Policy on National Minorities

With the drafting of its new constitution following independence, Croatia immediately set about changing the linguistic status quo in the country by recognizing Croatian alone as the official language of the state. As one scholar points out, "by protecting minority languages, [legal documents] contribute to the maintenance of minority identity" (Trifinovska 2001, 157). Conversely, when minority languages are not acknowledged, the identities to which they belong are weakened. Croatia’s refusal to recognize minority languages in its constitution weakens the linguistic aspect of ethnic identity. The linguistic component of identity is ultimately rooted in the more general human needs of recognition and identity, which are entirely understandable in the context of newly independent states.

The extension of this need for recognition and identity into linguistics is a long-standing issue. Slovene scholar Primoz Trubar, who in 1550 wrote the first two books in Slovenian, Catechismus and Abecedarium, was the first scholar to use the term Slovenci, or Slovenes. His use of this term was a reference to and directed toward those individuals who spoke the Slovenian language. His work was paralleled that which had been done in German and Czech, in that "the early reformers, such as Martin Luther [in German] and Jan Hus [in Czech], held the idea that an individual 'belonged' to a linguistic community" (Dimnik 1984, 148). Scholars then and now recognize the importance of common language in conceptualization of identity, and just as this concept was politically useful in the past, so it is now. Indeed, as Beer and Jacob explain, "the dilemma…of ethnic mobilization lies in disentangling language as an end, from the use of language as
an instrument in the post-industrial era for the assertion of broader political and economic demands against the state." If Croatia plans to move into the future having decided that its best interests are served by a state devoted to the interests and cultural integrity of Croats, this is the role we may well expect language to play for the Serb and Bosniak minorities.

I wish to pause here for a moment to acknowledge the fact that identification on the basis of language is a complex idea, the conditions of which have hardly been agreed upon. Apparent in scholarship on the subject is the problem with assuming that the collective identity of a linguistic minority group is a given and that the individual aims of the collective minority group are uniform. That is to say, specific to the question of the Croatian state, that the opinions of individuals and groups within the collective Serbian or Bosniak minority group will naturally differ and contradict each other. One Serb may desire complete differentiation between Croatian and Serbian, want his children to be educated in Serbian and view the loss of his favorite Serbian colloquialisms as a betrayal of his heritage. Another may feel the two languages aren't that entirely different, think his children will understand Croat teachers as well as they would a Serb, and see the benefits of “blending in.” As one scholar points out, we cannot even assume that all members of any group "are (or will even want to be)...identifiable by their language" (May 2008, 108).
Figure 1. Croatia's Ethnic Groups and Their Linguistic Identification

Data gathered in the 2011 Croatian census on language use speaks to this point. As shown in Figure 1, the number of Croatian citizens who speak “Serbian” or “Bosnian” are both lower than the number of citizens who identified themselves as Serbs or Bosniaks. This suggests that both Serbs and Bosniaks have changed their linguistic self-identification. Despite the importance of language in identity, both seem to have placed greater importance on the benefits of assimilation than on holding on to the linguistic
aspect of their ethnic identity. I wish to examine some of these perceived benefits here and in the next chapter. The first benefit is avoidance of discrimination by speaking Croatian.

One example of the kind of discrimination faced by Serbs and Bosniaks in independent Croatia was the new Citizenship Law passed in 1991. The law permitted any ethnic Croat living abroad to apply for citizenship, even if they did not intend to live in Croatia; this allowed Herzegovinian Croats to vote. In contrast, non-ethnic Croats were required to "have been resident in Croatia for five years immediately prior to their application" and "prove that they [were proficient] in the Croatian language" (Bartlett 2003, 36). In addition, the new constitution changed its classification of the Serb population from "constituent nation" to "national minority" (Hrvatski sabor 1991).

Croatian politics after during the HDZ's time in power were marked by repeated redesigns for electoral law which would translate narrow majorities of votes into larger majorities in the Croatian Sabor. This, in turn, allowed the HDZ to maintain their discriminatory practices against Serbs and Bosniaks for the duration of the nineties.

In the Balkans, as elsewhere in Europe, it is possible to see the discriminatory consequences of the politics of narrow constructions of identity, which “privileges the single common denominator of etatist 'ethnicity' over region, religion, human rights, shared histories, and even shared languages" (Carmichael 2000, 239). The place of minority groups in post-war Croatia mirrored the place of the minority ethnicities in the Hapsburg Monarchy, the Russian Empire, and the Kingdom of Prussia in the 19th century, where "with industrialization, democratization, the abolition of serfdom, and
growing mobility...linguistic differences became a barrier to social emancipation" (Tornquist-Plewa 2000, 215). In order to compete in Croatia's newly liberated market on equal footing with ethnic Croats, minority Serbs and Bosniaks had a choice between linguistic assimilation and assertion of their differences. Following the war, both the United States and the European Commission were concerned with how Croatia would protect its minority population, particularly in the face of Franjo Tudman's extreme nationalism. The easier choice for those who remained in Croatia was assimilation.

Fear of discrimination was understandable under the rule of Tudman’s HDZ party, but the reasons behind linguistic assimilation in Croatia have evolved in the 21st century. In the following section, I compare a few of the former Yugoslav states to suggest a basis for such the belief that there is something inherently “non-Balkan” about Croatia's successes in completing the E.U. accession process. The point is a salient one because of the cultural differences that broke Yugoslavia into the north and south. Within Yugoslavia, Slovenia and Croatia were always the most successful economically, which contributed to views of the other Yugoslav states as being backwards and somehow inferior. When Slovenia and Croatia walked out of the last Congress of League of Communists of Yugoslavia, one Serbian delegate gave voice to these tensions when she suggested that "[the Slovenes and Croats] should just leave us 'barbarians' to organize the Party the best way we know how" (Paukovic 2008, 28). I wish to examine the basis upon which this framing of the Balkan “other” as inferior is constructed, with the goal of better understanding how the exclusionary tendencies of Croatian language policy are economically and politically based.
The Benefits of Being “European” and Not “Balkan”

Possible reasons for a Croatian view of other Balkan states as “backwards” or as a potential hindrance are evident in comparing the economies, political legacies and cultural orientations of Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia. I have included in my analysis Slovenia, which will serve to further clarify points about comparative rates of success in the Balkans following the breakup of Yugoslavia. This analysis will illustrate how Croatia has performed better economically than Serbia and Bosnia and why this has encouraged it to orient itself away from the Balkans. I also examine how Croatia’s democratic transition compares favorably to the other Balkan states. Finally, I discuss how Croatia has always been more Western-oriented than the southern Balkan states and how this has impacted it culturally and linguistically. These economic, political and cultural elements have all contributed to Croatia moving through the process of European Union accession negotiations more quickly, which has encouraged the maintenance of linguistic policies which have distanced Croatia from its less successful neighbors. In turn, members of the Croatia’s ethnic minorities have been influenced by the same trends, recognizing that individual economic success may be best achieved in linguistic acceptance of a Croatian identity.

For Croatian politicians and linguistic authorities, an economic comparison of the former Yugoslav states may well contribute to the idea that a Croatian state firmly committed to a system of exclusively Croatian or European ideals will work better and achieve greater success than a state firmly situated in the Balkans. The data provided in the following analysis of these countries show a sharp contrast between the state of
economic and democratic affairs in the northern “more European” states (Slovenia and Croatia) and the southern, “more Balkan” states. Croatia naturally wishes to ensure for itself the best possible future financially and politically, and must therefore examine those post-socialist states that have successfully transitioned to democracy and full activity within the European Union. In an attempt to understand why exactly Croatian political and linguistic authorities have attempted to protect the Croatian identity with their policies, it is useful to compare the relative rates of progress of the former Yugoslav states since the collapse of communism. I do this in the interest of exploring which features of Croatia's favorable rate of progress in comparison to Serbia and Bosnia can be attributed to the state's being “non-Balkan.” To this end I have selected four states at very different points in the E.U. accession process: Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia. The most successful example of democratic transition in the Balkans, Slovenia has been a member of the European Union since its expansion in 2004 and a member of the eurozone since January 2007. The transition to the Euro went about as well as could have been expected. In 2008, Slovenia became the first of the newly-transitioned E.U. member states in Eastern Europe to hold the rotating presidency of the European Union, a major step forward demonstrating Slovenia's successful transition into the greater European community and their evolving political unity with the rest of Europe. Slovenia has been seen as a poster child of sorts for post-socialist transition, while Croatia has lagged slightly behind and Serbia and Bosnia have compared negatively with their neighbors to the north.

Croatia experienced a delay of several years behind Slovenia in their accession to
the European Union, but the last few years have seen major progress. While their bid for E.U. membership has been through its share of difficulties, including a border dispute with Slovenia that caused a freeze on Croatia's bid, the European Parliament accepted the Croatian treaty of accession to the European Union on 1 December 2011. By handing over to The Hague the last of its citizens who had been charged with war crimes, Croatia was able to bring an end to an arduous period of negotiations. They will, barring any problems in the ratification process, become the 28th E.U. member-state on 1 July 2013.

Serbia has seen the greatest number of roadblocks and delays to its accession negotiations and was only granted official candidate status by the European Commission in March 2012. Bosnia is furthest away from accession, as it has not yet been granted candidate status and ranks the lowest such measurements of democratic progress as Freedom House’s “Nations in Transit” project.

The Commission's official statements on the criteria for accession to the European Union offer the clearest picture of what these countries have been working toward and what changes the greater European community expects. As stated at the 1993 summit of the European Union in Copenhagen, candidate states must achieve three main goals. First, they must have "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities." Second, there must be "the existence of a functioning market economy as well as the capacity to cope with competitive pressure and market forces within the Union." Finally, these states must demonstrate "the ability to take on the obligations of membership including adherence to the aims of political, economic & monetary union" (Council of the European Union
The 1995 Madrid European Council further clarified the priorities of the European Union for its new member-states. Per that year's council conclusions, candidate countries are required to have created conditions in which the rules and procedures of the European Union can be implemented in all areas. The expectation is that any E.U. legislation will implemented and enforced by the appropriate administrative structures on the national and regional levels (Council of the European Union 1995). In reviewing these requirements it is clear that full commitment to political, and more importantly economic, union with Europe is of the greatest importance to the European Commission.

Where the changes seen in many European transitional democracies following the collapse of communism have been beneficial in some ways to the individual states and the region, other areas have seen very little progress. What determines which of the necessary changes receives the most attention? In examining the data provided by Freedom House’s 2011 data from their “Nations in Transit” project, it seems the standards for E.U. accession established by the European Commission are as good an answer as any. It could be argued that any or all of the improvements seen in these Balkan states, both politically and economically, would have occurred independently without the incentive of future E.U. membership, but this argument breaks down when we examine which areas have improved and which have regressed or remained the same. The greatest improvements are seen in areas that are extensively addressed in the European Union acqui, whereas those areas which are not official priorities of the E.U.
are given less attention and consequently fail to improve. Where there have been improvements in some of the areas evaluated, there have been regressions in others; in examining which criteria fall into each category, it becomes clear that these states have emphasized improvement in those categories in which improvements would bring the state closer to E.U. accession (Habdank-Koloczowska and Walker 2011).

While the first goal for member-states does call for the protection of human rights, rule of law and minority protection within E.U. borders, these factors have generally received less attention in comparison with the economic and political provisions given in the latter two goals. Alina Mungiu contends that "the European Commission pays less attention to these issues than to the institutional integration of the acquis communautaire, which forms the core of negotiations. Some subjects, such as the [independence of] media, fall out entirely from the EU negotiation agenda" (Mungiu 2007, 14). Mungiu is correct in her assessment that some subjects are left out of the accession agenda due to greater focus on those factors tied to economics and political structuring. The example she gives of independent media is excellent. Of the 35 chapters of the acquis, only one deals with preserving fair and independent media; thus the regression seen in media independence is not surprising. Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia, despite their different places on the path to full European integration, all earned worse scores in 2011 than they did in 2002. Because the issue is not given a great deal of attention by the European Commission, it has not received much attention from the current (Slovenia), imminent (Croatia) or hopeful (Serbia) E.U. members.

The demands of the European Union have served as an effective determinant of
the sociopolitical and economic policy of the former Yugoslav republics, and the benefits of membership have also impacted the attitudes of minority Serbs and Bosniaks in Croatia. While the criteria set by the European Commission for E.U. accession are lofty for many a struggling post-communist nation-state, and while E.U. membership may not be positive in all areas, so far the E.U. has been able to expect a great deal of compliance from its prospective members. This is largely due to the economic benefits of membership, which have influenced Croatia’s choices regarding cultural orientation.

*The Economic Benefits of Europeanization*

In a press release from the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the European Union in June 2011, Croatia’s Prime Minister Jadranka Kosor expressed her commitment to any reforms Croatia had undertaken in an effort join the EU. She said that “the changes Croatia has launched in the interests of the accession are irreversible…we will continue to work hard not only until the point of accession, but afterwards as well,” particularly focusing on reforms Croatia had undertaken to fight corruption and reform the judicial system. She stressed that accession is important not just for Croatia but also for the other countries in the Balkans because Croatia's advancement helps their integration efforts. Kosor further stated that “European integration is the only solution, which guarantees permanent peace and prosperity” (Hungarian Presidency 2011).

To what extent is Kosor's expectation of prosperity realistic? The prospects are actually quite good economically. In reviewing the economic growth of the western Balkans, we find that both E.U. membership (for Slovenia) and the effort to acquire it
(for all three states) have led to economic gains. Figure 2 shows the gross domestic product per capita in terms of purchasing power parity for Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia from 1997 to 2011, while Figure 3 shows the Human Development Index (HDI) values from 2005 to 2012. In both cases, Slovenia has improved at a faster rate than its Balkan counterparts. In reviewing the acquis, economic factors are frequently mentioned and are of great importance to the European Commission. Has this emphasis on economic progress, however, yielded the desired results? In the case of the Western Balkans, it seems it has.

![Figure 2. GDP per Capita (PPP) by Year](image-url)

In the case of the Western Balkans, it seems it has.
Slovenia had always been the strongest economically of the Yugoslav states, and had a higher GDP per capita than both Croatia and Serbia from the moment it first broke away. While Slovenia's starting point may be higher, the conclusion that Slovenia has seen greater economic growth by virtue of its higher GDP per capita figure is still valid. This is because what we can gather from the data available is that the percentage of Slovenia's GDP per capita achieved by Croatia and Serbia since the collapse of Yugoslavia has fallen. In other words, while each economy has grown, Slovenia has still placed greater distance between itself and its Balkan neighbors, indicating the advantage of European Union membership. Figures 2 and 3 show that while Slovenia always had the highest GRP per capita and HDI in Yugoslavia, the amount by which these values exceed those of the other states has grown.
The picture clears more when we take into account the data from the year Yugoslavia collapsed and each of these countries went their own way. The year 1991 saw Slovenia with a GDP per capita of 16,309 dollars, Croatia with 12,692 and Serbia with 10,510. At that point, Serbia's GDP per capita was 64.4 percent of Slovenia's and 82.8 percent of Croatia's values. The difference between the three countries was at that time markedly less pronounced, and Slovenia's advantage was not as great as it is presently. But while all three economies have grown, by 2009 Serbia's share had fallen to 40.2 percent of Slovenia's value and 61 percent of Croatia's value.

Croatia has performed better than Serbia in comparison to Slovenia, even given
the latter's rapid economic growth throughout the 2000's, but its value fell from 77.8 percent of Slovenia's in 1991 to 65.9 percent in 2009. This is likely due to a combination of factors; part of the equation is a Slovene workforce that is presently more organized than its southern counterparts, but another, more important factor is the greater trade and funding access Slovenia has as part of the European Union. Arjan Lejour, Andrea Mervar and Gerard Verweij explored in 2009 the impact of Croatia's European Union accession efforts on its economy, and speculated about the potential differences between Croatia's economy if it were to fail to join the E.U. and if it were successful. They projected that by 2025, with E.U. accession imports would increase in Croatia by 13.9 percent and exports would increase by another 15.9 percent (Lejour, Mervar and Verweij 2009). They are careful to point out that these are fairly conservative figures, and that the actual benefits of European Union membership may be greater. In addition to these increases, the profits from trade within the E.U. would increase with the reduction in tariffs and other regulations that would occur with accession. Such data as these emphasize the potential benefits of E.U. accession and certainly contribute to the view of E.U. membership as a reward.

With a wealth of data supporting the idea that E.U. accession brings some measure of economic benefit to the new member-state, what could reduce the attractiveness of this particular carrot? While the economic benefits of E.U. accession are certainly appealing, the Eurozone crisis notwithstanding, prospective member-states do stand to lose in other ways, particularly in terms of cultural and sociopolitical autonomy. When Prime Minister Kosor spoke in no uncertain terms of her commitment to the
changes Croatia had made in fighting corruption, she did not mention the betrayal felt by
many Croats when, in an effort to appease the European Council, several notable Croats
were turned over to the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in the
Hague. Examples include Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markac, whose respective
sentences of twenty-four and eighteen years were recently overturned due to a lack of
evidence. Both returned home to a hero’s welcome in Croatia, which begs the question:
how does the average Croat feel about some of the European Commission’s demands?

Still other Croats are fearful that European Union membership will require too
many concessions for minority populations in Croatia and wonder what this will mean for
the Croatian language, particularly following the extensive state-sponsored planning
following the breakup of Yugoslavia. The Croatian government and scholars alike have
gone to great lengths to separate the Croatian standard language from any linguistic
tendencies from Serbian and Bosnian. The European Commission, in the interest of
upholding the rights of minority populations throughout Europe, does not look favorably
on preferential treatment of a particular language at the expense of others. What, then,
will E.U. accession mean for the evolution of the Croatian language? These and other
questions may take away some of the appeal. But accession is still seen by a significant
majority of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes as being a reward. In addition to the perceived
economic benefits of E.U. membership, the positive impacts of developing a more
European political model also contribute to Croatia’s desire to move away from the
Balkans.
The Importance of Rapid Authoritarian Decline

Much as the former Yugoslav states have progressed at different rates economically, they have transitioned to consolidated democracies at vastly differing paces. Slovenia has been the most successful both politically and economically since the fall of Yugoslavia, followed by Croatia, Serbia, and Bosnia, in that order. I examine here how well these states have moved away from negative elements of the political past, examples of which include authoritarianism and domination from one political party. Croatian leaders are able to look at Slovenia as an example to be emulated and at Serbia and Bosnia as examples of social and political elements that should be avoided. I wish to frame this comparison as an additional reason for Croatia to pursue policies that divide it from the lagging southern states in the Balkans.

One example of political departure from the past is successfully balancing powers between legislative and executive authorities. Characteristic of much of Europe, and of all states in our present discussion except Bosnia, is a semipresidential system of democracy. While this system may be shared, the differences between those governments with very strong presidents versus those with very strong prime ministers are profound. Robert Elgie explains the benefits of a government which is a semipresidential one in which a figurehead president and strong prime minister serve together. This does not act as a hindrance to democracy because the real political power is in the hands of the prime minister, who is accountable to the legislature as their elected representative and head of the government. Elgie states that in this regard, the most interesting case "is Slovenia, where the choice of the semipresidential system in 1991 was a compromise" (Elgie 2005, 27)
At the time of Slovenia's constitutional debate, popular support for a directly elected presidency was largely due to the popularity of Milan Kučan, who was at the time head of the presidency of the Socialist Republic of Slovenia. Opposition parties knew that Kučan was likely to win a direct election but would not have done so if the legislature determined the leader, so they called for the latter. The resulting compromise was a semipresidential system with a directly elected but largely ceremonial president; this was also consistent with the historical legacy of assembly-centered politics in Slovenia. The important point here is that while there has been some debate about the exact function of the president in Slovene government, Kučan at the beginning did nothing to push the limits of his power, setting a precedent for political action in the country today.

Part of Slovenia's successes, then, is rooted in the transition from the leaders in power during the days of communist Yugoslavia to leaders who had both reformed and no longer espoused communist politics or who had openly opposed the political structures of communism. Both of the first two prime ministers, Lojze Peterle from 1990 to 1992 and Janez Drnovšek from 1992 to 2000, had been strongly opposed to a continuation of communist political power in Slovenia. Both were part of the Democratic Opposition of Slovenia party (DEMOS), which was created as a coalition of smaller parties immediately following the allowance of a multi-party system in Slovene government, and which opposed communist rule. As explained by Slovene scholar Anton Bebler, the first elections in independent Slovenia firmly moved power away from any communist sympathizers:
The main house of the Assembly was dominated by the DEMOS coalition...on the other hand, a reformed communist leader, Milan Kučan, soundly defeated the DEMOS candidate Jože Pučnik to become the first freely elected president...Slovenia’s voters had thus created a rough overall balance between the parties rooted in the old communist regime and their DEMOS opponents, whose strongest common bond was a desire to drive the Communists from office (Bebler 2002, 132).

In this way, Slovenia was able to move forward in a way that was democratically oriented and new, but not too radical so as to contribute to greater instability.

Power has shifted often in the short history of independent Slovenia from one party to another, stability being maintained through coalitions in the National Assembly. This series of coalitions is essential to the effectiveness of democracy. Jack Bielasiak points out that "a large number of contenders undermines effectiveness by disbursing preferences among numerous parties" and that "too many contending parties present difficulties in building coalitions and policy consensus and render more problematic strategic coordination at the ballot and in the legislature" (Bielasiak 2005, 332). This is certainly something to be guarded against, but so far Slovenia's strength has been in its demonstrated ability to form coalitions and strike compromises.

Slovenia seems to be functioning quite well in terms of political entities being held accountable to the people, as demonstrated by the votes of no confidence in the governments of Prime Ministers Borut Pahor and Janez Jansa in 2011 and 2013. Pahor's demise was the failure on his watch of two key referendums dealing with pensions for the elderly and student work, which were intended as austerity measures in response to the financial crisis. The people wanted little to do with reduced wages and an increased retirement age, and the referendums failed. Following the vote of no confidence, early
elections took place in December 2011 to replace Pahor. One of the major candidates was Zoran Janković, the current mayor of Ljubljana, who graduated in economics and served as chairman of Slovenia’s largest retailer prior to becoming involved in politics. His career began so recently that he had no ties to the political happenings surrounding Slovene independence of the communist political past. Seeing such individuals involved in politics at the highest level is an encouraging sign that the past is not a limiting factor in Slovene political life. This level of turnover is a sign of a healthily functioning, full-consolidated democracy in which one party does not have so strong a hold on the national political system so as to take away from the integrity of the popular elections.

We contrast this political landscape with that of Croatia, whose leaders both immediately before and after independence were aligned with the Hrvatska demokratska zajednica (HDZ), or Croatian Democratic Union. While these leaders were opposed to communist rule, the highest offices in Croatian government have been occupied almost exclusively by members of one party. The party itself was formed by the radical Franjo Tudman and was therefore vehemently opposed to the communist authorities of the nineties. Stjepan Mesić, Josip Manolić, Franjo Gregurić, all serving as Croatia's Prime Minister at some point between 1990 and 1992, were each tied to the Croatian Democratic union and therefore to Tudman himself, as he was the party chief. When Tudman died in 1999, the constitution was reformed, transferring much of the presidential powers to Parliament and the Prime Minister. Only at this point was Croatia able to begin moving forward.

While the highest elected leaders of both Slovenia demonstrated marked and
fairly rapid political differences from the communist past, Serbia struggled in this regard. All of its Prime Ministers from 1991 to 2001 were members of the Socialist Party of Serbia. With Slobodan Milošević entrenched in power until 2000, and giving up very little real power to his parliament and prime minister while he was in power, any attempts Serbia might have made to leave its own communist past behind were silenced. Milošević himself was not influenced by the new idealism of the leaders in Slovenia and Croatia, and Serbia's progress suffered for it.

In his book entitled "Slobodan Milošević and the Destruction of Yugoslavia," former Foreign Service diplomat Louis Sell contends that Milošević was a political opportunist, and that he was motivated before anything else by a desire for power. Mr. Sell states that many of Milošević's acquaintances and former employees support this idea, some even going so far as to claim that he wished to be a "second Tito." For these reasons, he "exploited nationalism to use as a tool to seize power in Serbia, while not holding any particular commitment to it" (Sell 2002, 170). He further contends that Milošević's early career was not marked by nationalist tendencies, but that when it was necessary for his own political gain, this changed.

In examining the political histories of Slovenia, Croatia, and Serbia leading up to and following the breakup of Yugoslavia, we clearly see a difference in the composition of political power and how it shifted. In the case of Slovenia, its transition was marked by marginalization of former Communist leaders, reform of the Communist party itself, embracing of democratic ideals and relatively dynamic turnover in the parties in power. Croatia also departed from the communist past immediately, placing in power members
of a party opposed to communist rule. While this step did much to move Croatia forward, the same party has been in power almost without exception since the collapse of Yugoslavia.

Finally, in Serbia, where the processes democratic transition and E.U accession have taken the longest, the political landscape immediately following Yugoslavia's demise was dominated by Slobodan Milošević. The Prime Ministers of Serbia during Milošević's presidency, particularly Mirko Marjanovic from 1994 to 2000, were seen as puppets, and Serbia's problem was the consolidation of too much power in one individual. Milošević's nationalistic and authoritarian tendencies prevented extensive progress on the democratic front, because the legislature and Prime Minister held comparatively little power. As Robert Elgie explains, "there are...plenty of balanced semipresidential countries that are consolidated democracies ranked as Free by Freedom House. The evidence suggests that, especially as compared with highly presidentialized semipresidentialism, balanced semipresidentialism should be classed as a relatively wise constitutional choice. Certainly it appears to enjoy a better-than-average chance of success" (Elgie 2005, 109). In the case of Slovenia, the first president, Milan Kučan, set a precedent by giving up powers to the legislature and Prime Minister, which has contributed to the country's success. Croatia's success was hindered early by the Tuđman's insistent hold on power. Serbia, of course, dealt with an even more insistent autocrat in Milošević.

Bosnia is unique in that the 1995 Dayton Accord externally created its present
political structure. The agreement maintained the geographical boundaries of Bosnia, which was seen as a victory. As the primary concern at the time was resolution of ethnic conflict, the government was set up in a way that allowed each ethnic group some degree of autonomy. Unfortunately, this was all accomplished at the expense of the state's governmental efficacy. Bosnia is governed by a three-member presidency that rotates among three members, who each represent one of Bosnia’s three major ethnic groups (Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks). The presidency is elected for four years, with each member serving two terms of eight months during that time. Bosnia’s legislative body, the Parliamentary Assembly, is divided into two bodies. The House of Peoples is made up of five members of each ethnic group. The delegates of the House of Representatives are broken up into thirds: two thirds for the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (FBiH) and one third for Republika Srpska.

The entire structure of the government was aimed at allowing Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks to share power, allowing them to work together and overcome past differences; this has not been the outcome. A 2011 study by Eiki Berg and Mihkel Solvak concluded that “although power-sharing and the idea of ‘three constituent peoples’ have been institutionalized at the entity and state level, it has not given expected results and made Bosnia and Herzegovina a more legitimate whole” (Berg and Solvak 2011, 475). They cite several studies that have demonstrated a trust deficit in the country, particularly in ethnically heterogeneous areas. This is particularly true in the Serb-controlled Republika Srpska, Bosniak and Croat representatives make up two thirds of the government. In their own study, Berg and Solvak found that some 85 percent of Bosniaks and 74 percent
of Serbs are against the idea of integrating Republika Srpska into the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a unified state. Clearly, these two entities have little interest in working more closely together, and much of the population is in favor of separating Bosnia and Herzegovina into fully independent states for the different ethnic groups.

Opinions in favor of the division of Bosnia are especially strong amongst those who (i) are religious and (ii) have a strong ethnic identity. Literature on religion generally has noted that religious communities are more in-group oriented, a conclusion that is supported by public opinion data in Bosnia. O’Loughlin and Toal’s 2009 survey of separatist sentiments in the country found clear support for the contributions of strong religious and ethnic identity to separatism (O’Loughlin and Toal 2009). In the survey comparing opinions by religiosity, religious persons were defined as those who attended a place of worship regularly throughout the year. For comparisons based on strength of ethnic identity, participants were asked to identify how proud they were to be members of their respective ethnic groups. The survey found that 85 percent of religious Bosnian Croats supported separatism, while only 15 percent of non-religious Bosnian Croats were in favor; large gaps were also found between religious and non-religious Serbs and Bosniaks.

The survey yielded similar results in comparing respondents by strength of ethnic identity. Individuals who were proud members of their ethnic group favored separatism at rates 60 to 70 percent higher than those without a strong ethnic identity. Both the Berg and Solvak and the O’Loughlin and Toal surveys find that most Bosnian citizens believe that separatism will contribute to better relations between ethnic groups by allowing each
to govern itself independently.

The connections between avoidance of autocracy or single-party politics and prosperity have helped create in Croatia the view that the only way upward is away from the communist past. In Slovenia and Croatia, where politics moved more quickly away from politicians and ideologies rooted in the past, democratic transition has come more quickly. In Serbia and Bosnia, where the departure from the past has been slow, progress has been difficult to attain. This trend of success being based on moving away from the past does not apply to politics alone. Each of these states has been impacted by differences in cultural orientation as well.

*Croatia's European Cultural Orientation*

In addition to recognizing the clear importance of political factors in democratic transition, several scholars have contended that the extent to which a post-socialist state has been able to develop a consolidated democracy and functioning market economy is proportionate to how well that state has done in culturally breaking away from the past and orienting itself toward the West. In Croatia, the use of language policy as a means of changing cultural orientation is directly rooted in this idea. Cultural, political and social factors are all at work here, and the former Yugoslav states offer an excellent set of contrasting examples to compare. M. Steven Fish offers up a pertinent discussion of the importance of accounting for those cultural factors that may contribute to different rates of reform in post-socialist states (Fish 1998). This approach is a useful one, as the different cultural attitudes across the Balkans necessarily have an impact on which
ideologies will be advanced and which politicians will be given power.

One of the cultural factors Fish takes into account is religion, exploring the effect religious culture has on a given society, and in turn how that translates into changes in political and economic approaches. Cultural factors may be as important as political ones in predicting the stability and performance of democracies. Fish's data show that "once freed from...the command economy, countries in which...'Western Christian' traditions prevail are most likely to reform their economies" (Fish 1998, 40). He did not show any conclusive differences between states whose faith tradition was decidedly Orthodox Christian and those that were non-Christian (generally Muslim), but did note a sizable difference between both of those groups and states whose faith tradition was a Western variation of Christianity, namely Roman Catholicism or Protestantism.

The comparison here of Slovenia, Croatia, Serbia and Bosnia supports this conclusion; both Slovenia and Croatia are predominantly Roman Catholic, while Serbia is generally Orthodox and the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina are overwhelmingly proponents of Islam or Orthodoxy. The latter two states have progressed toward consolidated democracy and European Union accession at a slower rate than their northern neighbors. The cultural differences between these states may be a factor in comparing propensity for political and economic reform. In the case at hand, the benefit of Roman Catholic orientation in Slovenia in Croatia may be that the strong ties to a religion with its center in the West prepared these states to align themselves in other ways with the West.

Figure 4 below breaks down the Croat, Serb and Bosniak populations in Croatia
by religious affiliation. The data shown are taken from the 2011 Croatian census. Each group very clearly aligns itself with one faith tradition: Catholicism for the Croats, Orthodoxy for the Serbs and Islam for the Bosniaks. Of particular interest is the fact that members of each group are more likely to be non-religious or atheist than they are to be proponents of either of the other ethnic groups’ traditional religions. These data, then, indicate that there is still a strong level of self-identification by ethnic group in Croatia.

![Figure 4. Croatian Ethnic Groups by Religious Affiliation](image)

The religious element of culture, while interesting by itself, is but one indication of a much broader set of historically-based cultural differences across the Balkans.
Croatia spent the better part of the 19th century as part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and was exposed to the ideals of romantic nationalism. The idea that a state should be composed of one nation speaking one language impacted Croatia early, and influenced the efforts of 19th century Croatian linguists. Both its place in a European empire and its early aspirations for a modern nation-state oriented Croatia culturally toward the West.

In contrast, Serbia was supported in its relative autonomy throughout the 19th century by Russia; its most important enemy was the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Serbia was therefore oriented towards Russia and away from Europe, which influenced its later development. Finally, Bosnia was under the control of the Ottoman Empire for centuries until being taken by the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1878. Its cultural orientation toward the Middle East and Islam is evident in the religious composition of the area and in the lexicon of the Bosnian language.

Each of these countries, despite their common desire to move forward and achieve economic and political union with the whole of Europe, has experienced different challenges on the way. Upon reviewing the individual cases of Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia, differences in political approaches to democratization and efforts to the end of integration into the European Union are apparent. The extent to which these countries have been successful has been dependent on several factors, the most important of which are diversity and regular change in political parties, checks to the powers of the president, and cultural factors that enable easier integration into the Western European ideals prevalent in the European Union as a whole. The path has been easier for Slovenia as a Roman Catholic nation whose power is concentrated in the legislature than it has been for
Serbia, an Orthodox nation whose power is only now being divided up in a way that allows for real political discourse and progress.

The Impact of Croatian E.U. Accession on Ethnic Identity in Croatia

In Croatia, the economic, political and cultural differences between the former Yugoslav states I have discussed lend support to the Croatian view of its comparative successes as being "non-Balkan." For ethnic minorities, this encourages a strengthening of self-identification first by Croatian nationality as opposed to by ethnicity. Since the collapse of Yugoslavia until now, there has never been a time when Croatia was worse off than Serbia or Croatia economically. Politically, while its transition to democracy has included several bumps in the road, Croatia has done more than Bosnia and Serbia to break away from the negative aspects of its political legacy. The fear of ethnic minorities in Croatia can be summarized as apprehension that Croatia will take a liberal view of pluralistic discourse within the state. Liberal pluralism, as summarized by Stephen May, is characterized by "the absence, even prohibition, of any ethnic-, religious, or national-minority group possessing separate standing before the law or government" (May 2008, 93-94). Offering clarification as to the specific contentions of liberal pluralism is Brian Bullivant, who argues:

Certain common institutions essential for the well-being and smooth functioning of the nation-state as a whole must be maintained: common language, common political system, common economic market system and so on. Cultural pluralism can operate at the level of the private, rather than public...But, the idea that maintaining these aspects of ethnic life and encouraging the maintenance of ethnic groups almost in the sense of ethnic enclaves will assist their ability to cope with the political realities
of the nation-state is manifestly absurd. (Bullivant 1981, 232)

Ultimately, it seems that Croatia has taken such a view. It has, because of the perceived economic, political and cultural shortcomings of the southern Balkans, elected to promote a uniformly Croatian national consciousness centered firmly situated in a European sphere. The tensions created by failing to acknowledge Croatia’s full ethnic diversity and its shared past with the other former Yugoslav states may increase further as the region moves forward together into the European Union. The disconnect between the E.U.’s expectations of regional cooperation and Croatia’s complex attitudes towards the other Balkan states stand to impact the region’s future significantly. How, then, will this impact the Croatian language?

Future Expectations for Croatian Language Policy

Croatia's language policy to date has been characterized by purification and cultural exceptionalism in the interest of distancing Croatia from Serbia and Bosnia. In reviewing both the laws which impact minority language policy and the opinions of the ethnic groups in Croatia, it appears that these efforts to “protect” the Croatian language are largely unnecessary on a practical linguistic basis, and that the status quo will likely remain unchanged long term. In reviewing the laws relating to minority rights generally and minority language rights specifically, it becomes clear that on the basis of the existing laws, minority groups in Croatia may not be able to demand much special treatment at all linguistically. In addition, because of the perceived benefits of strengthening a uniformly Croatian national identity, we can hardly expect Croatia to
change course now. At any rate, only a few laws deal with minority language rights, and those that do appear to hurt rather than help the case of minority groups in Croatia.

Fernand de Varennes reminds us that some actions, though they may be seen as entirely morally, socially and politically positive, are not always legally required. He explains further:

> Moral or political principles, even if they are sometimes described as "human rights," are not necessarily part of international law. They are things that governments "should" do, if they are "nice," not something they "must" do. Being nice is not a very convincing argument and is less persuasive than rights and freedoms that have the weight of the law behind them (De Varennes 1999, 117).

In reviewing the laws that do exist, it becomes clear that no clear obligation on Croatia's part can be found regarding the extension of special protections to the Serbian and Bosnian languages.

The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, adopted on 22 June 1992, was the first major legal document aimed at protecting minorities. The Charter, to which Croatia is signatory, states that "the right to use a regional or minority language in private and public life is an inalienable right." The Charter was written with the realization "that the protection and promotion of regional or minority languages in...Europe represent an important contribution to the building of a Europe based on the principles of democracy and cultural diversity within the framework of national sovereignty and territorial integrity." The difficulty arises in reviewing the criteria the Charter established for regional and minority languages. First, the language must be traditionally used within a state by nationals of said state "who form a group numerically
smaller than the rest of the state's population." Both the Serbs and Bosniaks in Croatia fit this description, but it is the second criterion that makes the situation in Croatia complex. This second criterion is that the language must be "different from the official language(s) of that state; it does not include either dialects of the official language(s) of the state or the languages of migrants" (emphasis mine). In Croatia, this definition is problematic, because on a purely linguistic basis, the ethnolects spoken by the Serb and Bosnian minorities of the Croatian state are dialects of the official state language. Without the recognition of Serbian and Bosnian as distinct and individual languages, the unique identities to which ethnic Serbs and Bosniaks belong are not as distinct from the identity of the majority Croats. The laws currently on the books do little to prevent such unfortunate practices as hiring discrimination on an ethno-linguistic basis.

If the social mobility and educational opportunities of the Serb and Bosniak minorities are not demonstrably limited by the Croatian state pursuing a policy of language standardization, then there are no real legal grounds for these minority groups to seek changes in education or legal policy. Croatia’s minority groups always have the option of using language as a political tool, but they seem unlikely to do so and the likelihood of any real challenge to Croatian national unity on a linguistic basis alone is small.

There were two possible outcomes for language policy in Croatia following the breakup of Yugoslavia, and neither one truly allowed the parties involved to appropriately deal with the divisions and wounds of the past. The first option, one that Croatia elected not to promote, is to provide the minority Serb and Bosniak groups within its borders
with education and other services in their native tongue, legitimizing the linguistic division but dividing Croatia along linguistic lines. This was, of course, always unlikely, as these languages are exceptionally similar to that which is being promoted as the Croatian language. This solution would stand to contribute to negative relations between Croats and their minority neighbors, as some Croats might well have seen the situation as giving Serbs special privileges and encroaching upon the workings of their independent, very much Croatian state; this would of course remind any Croat with a sense of historical parallelism of Serbian hegemony in Yugoslavia. In addition, for minority students to receive an education in their "own" language, they would likely be taught exclusively by members of their respective minority ethnic groups. This would, in turn, contribute to a stronger sense of ethnic identity to an isolationist extent; minority identity would be strengthened at the expense of Bullivant's greater "whole." What is more, this would go against the linguistic tendencies of the minority groups themselves, many of whom say that they speak "Croatian" and such a solution would be largely pointless. Many of these individuals see a much wider definition of Croatian than does the government.

The second possible outcome for ethnic relations it the maintenance of the linguistic status quo, which encourages the assimilation of Serb and Bosniak groups into a larger Croatian identity. While typical religious affiliations and other aspects of ethnically-based identity seem to be preserved, the tensions created by the prestige granted to Standard Croatian stand as a threat to the ethnic identification of individual members of minority groups.
Neither one of these outcomes does much at all to alleviate the ethnic tensions in Croatia. This is because, as was discussed earlier, the first long-term political goal of most post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe was and is union with the rest of Europe via E.U. accession. Too much focus on this goal has forced very real state-level issues to be seen as ancillary problems and secondary concerns. In order for democracy and a sense of real identity for all peoples within Croatia to become a de facto reality instead of nominal, superficial qualities of the state, Croats, Serbs and Bosniaks alike must deal with ethnic tension on their own terms, instead of politicizing the issue for possible gain in the European sphere.

Based on European law and the attitudes of the ethnic groups involved towards the Croatian language, we can anticipate that the status quo will be maintained in Croatia. European Union accession, despite its likely economic benefits to Croatia, will force a lessened focus on national and local issues. Consequently, the political capital Croatia once directed toward pursuing an aggressively nationalist linguistic policy will no longer be available. All of these factors will contribute to ensure that the Croatian Standard Language is not successfully implemented in non-formal capacities. This linguistic situation is certainly nothing new, as Slovenia, Germany and the Czech Republic all have linguistic policies which call for an official variant of the language to be used on formal occasions and in the media while allowing a great deal of dialectal variance elsewhere.

Robert Greenberg, as cited earlier, points out that Croatian language policy to this point has been aimed at placing the state in a European space. While I agree with his description of language policy in Croatia, Greenberg does not consider how entirely
fruitless such a movement may prove when the whole Western Balkan region moves into a "more European" context, as accession to the European Union is the clearly equivocated goal of each of the former Yugoslav states. In fact, former Serbian President Boris Tadic said that there is no alternative to E.U. integration, calling it "an epochal issue in the Western Balkans" (BBC Monitoring 2010).

Croatian scholar Radoslav Katicic is among those who wholeheartedly disagree with Greenberg's contention. In a review of Greenberg's 2004 book, Katicic argues that literary agreements regarding Serbo-Croatian were of no real significance to the language actually spoken by the peoples of Yugoslavia. These agreements were merely proof that the language was a "project supported by important champions, but not a linguistic reality" (Katicic 2008, 32). He opines further: "In [Greenberg's] book, linguistic reality is consequently disregarded as a factor in itself and considered in the light of normative regulations and legal acts...which they were subsumed under" (Katicic 2008, 33). I mention Katicic here to underscore the fact that language in the Balkans changed only nominally throughout the existence of Yugoslavia and following its dissolution. To him and many other native speakers, the language of the Western Balkans has always been a mixture complex enough that its external identity was always stronger than its internal identity. To many, Serbo-Croatian never fully existed in any way but nominally and politically. All the “creation” of a Croatian standard has done is introduce tensions into a Croatian society that will always have linguistic variation. The regional differences between dialects still exist, but the prestige afforded to the standard, as discussed earlier, may contribute to discrimination.
As the Western Balkans move forward with the goal of Europeanization, the social and political focus on building separation from the past is being replaced by a focus on future European Union accession. The E.U.'s own Institute for Security Studies shared in a 2011 report their opinion that "the 'Balkan question' remains more than ever a 'European question.'" They clarify further that "the overall thrust of the E.U.'s Balkans policy has moved from an agenda dominated by security issues related to the war and its legacies to an agenda focused on the perspective of the Western Balkan states' accession to the European Union" (EUISS 2011). The present focus on regional cooperation may also impact the Croatian language, as there are potential economic benefits to the preservation of a regional *lingua franca* not rooted too heavily in any one of the Serbo-Croatian successor languages.

The leaders of all Yugoslav successor states seem to be intent on working together to ensure that the entire region undergoes a successful democratic transition and achieves full integration with Western and Central Europe. Then-President Ivo Josipović of Croatia expressed his thoughts on this subject following a 2010 meeting with Presidents Boris Tadić of Serbia and Filip Vujanović of Montenegro, together with the Chairman of the Presidency of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Haris Silajdžić. Said Josipović: "It is in our interest that the three other countries join the EU as soon as possible and we will do all we can to help them on that road. Everyone wants to have a good neighbour. It's a matter of pragmatism and state interest, as well as of mutual respect and confidence building" (BBC 2010). Josipović’s comments are supported by the Croatian populace. In a 2010 series of polls conducted by the European Commission, over sixty percent of Croats
supported the accession of all former Yugoslav states. None of the states included in the poll (Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo) received over 35% support from those surveyed in the 27 current E.U. member-states (European Commission 2010). These results suggest that a level of regionally-based self-identification still exists in Croatia.

We can expect Croatian language policy to mirror the changing regional politics and become less concerned with separation from Serbia and Bosnia. The status and purity of the language will prove to be less vital to the Croatian state than the practicality and potential economic benefits of mutual intelligibility. While "pure" standard Croatian will continue to exist and be spoken in certain settings and by some groups, colloquial speech will continue to be influenced by larger, non-standard speech communities within and outside of Croatia.

One difficulty in predicting exactly how language policy in Croatia will change in the coming years is the lack of historical parallels. A potential modern parallel is the status of the Irish language in the United Kingdom. Despite state sponsorship of the Irish language, it is economically and practically beneficial for the Irish people to speak English in most of their day-to-day interactions, and Irish has declined rapidly in recent years. Similarly, we can expect the colloquial language of Croatia, because it allows for greater mutual intelligibility, to remain vibrant. This will, in turn, prevent the spread of the Croatian standard language in non-formal settings. Croatia cannot hope to pursue a course of linguistic isolationism while simultaneously contributing to the incorporation of the rest of the Balkans into the European Union. It cannot truly run from a shared Balkan
heritage while working for a common future for the Balkans as part of greater Europe.

Another factor potentially contributing the future maintenance of the linguistic status quo in Croatia is the attitude of some E.U. officials concerning the use of Croatian as an official E.U. language. While Croatian was accepted as an official language in 2010, diplomats and members of parliament suggested "it would be logical [to use a hybrid of Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian and Montenegrin] if so many people speak the same language under different names" (Palokaj 2010). One official stated that while Croatian is an official language "for the time being," this may not be the case with the accession of the other FYR "because millions of euros (sic) are spent for the translation of documents and interpretation in...meetings." The International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague has similarly used a hybrid known as Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (BCS).

Because the process of European Union accession has pushed Croatia so persistently to leave behind the past and enter a post-socialist, “more European” space, the ability of Croatia’s ethnic groups to come to terms with the past and move forward on their own terms has been negatively impacted. In the case at hand here, native Croats and their Serb and Bosnian neighbors within the Croatian state have not been given time nor will they be afforded the political capital to deal with the ethnic questions which still exist in relation to the wars they all experienced in the nineties.

Jan Zielonka, in his analysis of the impacts of the European Union on democracies in new member-states, explains that while consolidating more power in a European center theoretically has the potential of creating greater transparency, new
member-states fear that "an all-powerful center in Brussels would have homogenizing tendencies and that it would ignore or even negate various local concerns and priorities" (Zielonka 2007, 170). The preoccupation of the Balkan states with meeting the requirements of the E.U. certainly stands to reduce their ability to properly deal with issues specific to the region or state alone. The future of the region is still uncertain, but the relationship between state policy, the linguistic situation on the ground and the changes E.U. accession could bring to Croatia will combine to preserve linguistic tensions. Whether or not these tensions will be resolved remains to be seen.

References


