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## DEPOLITICISATION VIA EUROPEANISATION? THE CASE OF CROATIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE\*\*

**Abstract.** *The Croatian security intelligence system's historical development was shaped significantly by politicisation, which has laid the foundations for many of the intelligence community's current issues. In order to corroborate this assertion, different political impacts as well as politicised security intelligence practices are presented in the article using a historical-institutional approach, where both determined the periods before and after the 1990s, the key demarcation point being the attainment of independence in 1991. Over a decade after joining the European Union (EU), it is argued that the multidimensional Europeanisation process is one of the central factors in the depoliticisation of national security intelligence in Croatia.*

**Keywords:** *Politicisation, Croatia, security, intelligence, Europeanisation.*

### INTRODUCTION

The politicisation of intelligence is a problematic phenomenon as old as intelligence itself. In Sherman Kent's ("classical") understanding, intelligence includes the organisations forming an intelligence community, the processes represented by the intelligence cycle, and the resulting intelligence assessments (Scott and Jackson 2004; Aldritch 2013). Politicisation may thus at first connote a specific structural design flaw, an activity problem or an intelligence error, caused by political interferences and predispositions, respectively.

Although it has become a custom in the intelligence practice, as well as it being a notorious term in public discourse, intelligence politicisation is obviously a complex phenomenon that when reduced to its "best-known" form, or "pathology", namely decision-makers' "overt or subtle pressure on intelligence

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analysts and managers to produce intelligence estimates that support current political preferences or policies” (Wirtz 2006, 139), does not do it justice. Instead, following Jackson (2010), along with acknowledging the importance of Kent’s previously mentioned three-dimensional definition of intelligence, analytically the most fruitful way of conceptualising the politicisation of intelligence seems to be to divide it into systemic, top-down and bottom-up types.<sup>1</sup>

Systemic politicisation refers to ideological biases that determine the coordinates of the ideational framework within which policymakers and analysts alike operate. Top-down intelligence politicisation may be conceptualised as comprising both the mentioned ‘pathology’ of policymakers actively, and more or less forcefully, trying to shape the intelligence process and its products according to certain political or policy preferences (the overt kind), and the influence of bureaucratic or personal incentives on the estimates of analysts (the subtle kind) (Wirtz 2006, 144). Yet, the two types need to be more differentiated in terms of the direction of influence (top-down vs. bottom-up). In that way, the autonomy of intelligence analysts would be appropriately acknowledged; members of the intelligence community do not lack individual agency and are not mere instruments of political power. Another reason for the proposed bottom-up/top-down division refers to the fact that top-down politicisation may include the “use of intelligence to implement, rather than guide, policy” (Jackson 2010, 460), the most (in)famous practices being covert actions of various kinds. Finally, overt as well as subtle intelligence politicisation subtypes may equally refer to systemic, top-down and bottom-up types. By applying this typology, a more nuanced picture of intelligence politicisation can be presented.

Since no intelligence system or community is exempt from politicisation given its fundamental importance for national security politics and policymaking, qualitative differences between various types of intelligence politicisation become evident when comparing a certain state’s historical periods marked by different political systems (Hague et al. 2019, 3) and/or policy regimes (Wilson 2000). However, without belittling the so-called “Gates model” of “actionable intelligence” (Wirtz 2006, 140) named after former CIA director Robert Gates, which implies that intelligence analysts must be aware of policymakers’ needs as well as the importance of useful intelligence to consumers that analysts are required to provide, the Kentian approach to the politicisation of intelligence as an undesirable phenomenon guides the considerations in this article.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Since the politicisation of bureaucratic intelligence, namely the “intrusion of bureaucratic politics in the intelligence process” most commonly “produced by competition between ministries or departments for political influence, for greater resources” is extremely hard to measure due to the lack of relevant data and reliable information on inter-community rivalries, it is also possible to account for various instances of bureaucratic distortions as manifestations of bottom-up politicisation and it will therefore not be considered separately (see Jackson 2010, 459).

<sup>2</sup> The actionable intelligence model may thus be seen as self-evident because of the political nature of intelligence use and the inseparability of intelligence and national security policy.

The historical development of the Croatian security intelligence system was significantly shaped by politicisation. Politicised development has also provided the grounds for many of the nation's intelligence community's problems today. These facts serve as timely reminders of the need to modernise security intelligence based on (a) superior intelligence culture(s). The Croatian case is in many respects similar to cases of other post-socialist European countries like Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Poland and (the then) Czechoslovakia which had similar security intelligence problems linked to a totalitarian past and fashioned long-term reforms of their intelligence systems on West European and allied (international) examples (Martin 2007; Watts 2004). The Croatian case may therefore be seen as a relevant case for reviewing the potential of security intelligence modernisation by way of (soft) Europeanisation.

The goal of this article is to list examples of well-known politicisation practices, analyse them comparatively with regard to a proposed typology of intelligence politicisation, and suggest the logics of a possible change towards a desirable, European-like institutional design. To that end, we present an explorative account of the multi-decade security intelligence evolution based on a historical-institutional approach (Steinmo 2008) due to its 'real-world' empirical and historical orientation as well as the idea that institutions, including political ones, shape actors' behaviours and outcomes but are also shaped in return. A historical-institutional-inspired intelligence culture path dependence model is acknowledged as particularly useful for basic explanatory purposes. Secondary sources are mainly used.

### **"THE SWORD AND THE SHIELD OF THE PARTY" (1944–1990)**

The history of security intelligence in Croatia, at least if its rudimentary forms connected to monarchist law enforcement and military intelligence from the Austro-Hungarian (Maksimović 2019) and royalist Yugoslav (Janković 1988) periods – as well as the extreme nationalist/fascist one during the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) (Kovačić 2009) – are left to one side, started in 1944 with the formation of the first Yugoslav, and therefore Croatian, security intelligence agency OZN (Department of Public Protection – *Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda*) (Klinger 2014). The agency originated from the people's village and partisan guards initially established for the purpose of performing intelligence and counterintelligence work for the national liberation (partisan) movement led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia (CPY). During the war and up until 1952, it operated under the military before transitioning to a nominally civilian Secretariat (ministry) of Internal Affairs. Its name changed from OZN (May 1944) to the State Security Administration (*Uprava državne bezbednosti* – UDB) (March 1946). Since 1946, it has been part of the Yugoslav Ministry of Internal Affairs – except for one department that remained within the jurisdiction of the Ministry of People's Defence, thereby becoming a specialised military security (counter-intelligence) service – and in 1966 was again renamed the State Security Service

(*Služba državne sigurnosti* – SDS). Beginning in 1967, its status was changed. The once federal provenance service took on multi-republican features. It nevertheless dealt primarily with the tasks of protecting the CPY through the collection of data and other information for the purpose of discovering organised and secret activities aimed at undermining or overthrowing the political order. Notorious not only for its methods of information gathering, which ignored basic human rights, such as making threats and blackmailing citizens to become security intelligence informers and collaborators (Akmađža 2021), the service also carried out assassinations of the regime's enemies abroad. Nationalist political emigrants, mostly Croatian, were seen as especially dangerous because the Yugoslav authorities recognised them as remnants of the CPY's defeated enemies ('fascist collaborators') from the Second World War or as their post-war successors (Nielsen 2020).

The Yugoslav security and intelligence services were divided by federal, shared federal-republican, and republican jurisdictions, and accordingly attached to foreign, interior and defence ministries, as well as in other nominally separate instances to bodies such as Yugoslav National Army General Staff. The military intelligence service (Second Directorate of the Yugoslav People's Army General Staff) and the aforementioned military security service were established in 1947 whereas the 'civil' foreign intelligence, the Service for Informing and Documentation (*Služba za istraživanje i dokumentaciju* – SID) under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs came into being soon after that. The shared federal-republican jurisdiction was related to internal security intelligence services (republican SDSs), while jurisdiction over all the republics was reserved for domestic law enforcement/police forces, except for the federal Ministry of Internal Affairs (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 33–41). Democratic intelligence oversight did not exist by default due to the regime not being democratic while responsibility for the intelligence community's coordination and its political oversight was reserved for members of the Party's upper echelons acting through the Council for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Savjet za zaštitu ustavnog poretka*).

Systemic ideological bias greatly politicised intelligence conduct and was present in an overt way in the strict code of conduct, which corresponded to the ideas of the original Cheka-style vigilance that formed a foundation for the Yugoslav "counterintelligence state" (Dziak 1988). Systemic politicisation in terms of ideology as well as top-down politicisation visible in ways of leadership and bottom-up politicisation reserved for methods used in intelligence work predated the Second World War, but were 'imported' more seriously from the USSR in 1944. Categories of "internal enemies" ("old class structures" and various groups: "clerical", "nationalist", "Informburo", "liberal", "anarcho-liberal", "bureaucratic-dogmatic") and "political emigration" according to different nationalities and political goals established the dominant framework informing the actions of the intelligence community (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 43–44).

Given that traditional categories of national security risks were not fully integrated into the systemic rules of intelligence conduct, the subtle kind of politicisation pertained to security intelligence officers' absolute allegiance to and identification with the Communist Party's ideas, who thus acted as the "sword and the shield of the Party" (Akrap 2010). The most indicative example of the fusion of Party and state is that top communist politicians as well as intelligence officers held identical views, chiefly due to the nature of the communist constitutional order, about the "special war(fare)" of certain hostile groups being waged against Yugoslavia at all times (Šušar 1988, 130; Vilić and Ateljević 1983, 214–15).

The lines between the overt and subtle kinds of top-down politicisation were quite blurred because the total obedience of SDS to the Party's interests led to the former executing orders and delivering to the latter information impaired by the need for their strict adherence to the ideologically crafted lists of probable and possible threats to the regime. Overtly, politicians often meddled in the intelligence apparatus, especially as regards targeted assassinations, but subtly the intelligence officers were directed to hire criminals to carry out covert actions not stipulated by law, e.g., the murder of the Croatian immigrant Stjepan Đureković (Nielsen 2020; Nikolić and Petrović 2022).

Bottom-up politicisation was usually entwined with the top-down type since the field agents and analysts of SDS were party members; with Lenin's original dictum of a "good Communist" being also a "good Chekist" (cited in: Leggett 1981, 351) losing none of its original importance. The overt kind of bottom-up intelligence politicisation entailed intelligence officers pampering politicians and policymakers with intelligence input in order to execute orders in a straight-forward way and therefore continuously prove their loyalty to the Party and the regime. One of the most (in)famous examples of this was when the director of Croatian SDS delivered information, court witnesses and confidential documents to the state prosecutor's office concerning the war-crime-related trial of former NDH minister Andrija Artuković in 1986 (Babić 2005, 103). Being aware of other (sub)types of politicisation during socialist times, one may still presume this meant analysts and intelligence field officers providing subtle cues on preferences on certain operational aspects of task execution. For example, preferring information hailing from informers as opposed to wiretapping since the former would provide more damaging information on subjects of interest (e.g., dissidents) on purpose than compared to acquiring relatively unbiased information via wiretapping. Intelligence officers sometimes even made information up so as to conform with the (un)stated expectations of their superiors.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See dossiers and information stored in the Croatian State Archive: HR-HDA 1561 – SDS RSUP SRH.

## **NATION-BUILDING AND THE POST-COMMUNIST TRANSITION (1990–1999)**

During the war-stricken post-communist transition, the intelligence community of the new independent Croatian state (Republic of Croatia) acted as a trusty tool of nation-building and statecraft. Security intelligence cadres of the communist *ancien regime*, including the future ministers of interior and directors of intelligence agencies, as well as politicised organisational structures stayed in place, albeit under a new insignia (Miškulin 2017, 203–204). Faced with a violent Serbian internal insurgency after the summer of 1990 as well as an insurgency combined with Yugoslav external military aggression after the autumn of 1991, along with factional struggles within the new ruling party, the Croatian intelligence community was formed inadequately, that is, “unsystematically” and “partly outside of the institutional design”, especially since separate Croatian military intelligence and foreign affairs intelligence departments did not then exist (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 31, 52). Throughout the 1990s, a new form of politically inspired conspiracy logic of internal and external enemies acting united against the new ‘national’ constitutional order, which may be labelled ‘post-Bolshevik’, quickly became a staple of state politics. It therefore greatly influenced intelligence matters and national security policy in a negative way (Udovičić 2006, 650, 654, 659, 675–676).

Some authors managed to list a total of 12 acting security and intelligence services or departments existing at one point during the decade (Hatzadony 2002). The Croatian SDS retained its name until mid-1991 when it was restructured to become the Service for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Služba za zaštitu ustavnog poretka* – SZUP). Although nominally under the Ministry of the Interior, it reported directly to the Office of the President. Its duties gradually changed from being an all-encompassing intelligence, counterintelligence and security service to having a strictly internal security focus. The civilian intelligence service (*Hrvatska izvještajna služba* – HIS) with a precisely defined foreign intelligence function and some coordination tasks was established in 1993. Croatian military intelligence services slowly formed given that the new Croatian army was also in a rudimentary stage of development at the time of the regime change. Established just prior to the start of the Croatian war of independence in 1991, the military security agency (*Sigurnosno-informativna služba* – SIS) under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Defence worked alongside a military intelligence service named the Directorate of Intelligence Affairs (*Obavještajna uprava* – ObU) of the Croatian Army Headquarters (Akrap and Tuđman 2016). The Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs also maintained departments linked to security for consular posts and gathered intelligence through diplomatic corps abroad. Coordination of the intelligence community was first a matter for the presidential Office for the Protection of the Constitutional Order (*Ured za zaštitu ustavnog poretka* – UZUP) established in 1991, and after that its successor institution the National Security Office (*Ured za nacionalnu sigurnost* – UNS)



established in March 1993. The latter was reformed 2 years later following legislative amendments to become the Croatian government's executive body with a mandate not simply to coordinate, but also to direct and control the work of the security intelligence services (Hatzadony 2002).

Members of the political opposition along with oppositional journalists and other actors such as lawyers, social scientists, and civil society organisations persisted in documenting and publishing examples of the politicisation of security intelligence throughout the 1990s and sometime thereafter. Despite being well publicised, these findings should not be taken at face value, principally because alternative accounts do not exist, and not least since the sources of the journalist involved come from individuals linked to Croatian politics and the intelligence community. Possible future studies in this respect should systematically explore collected primary data, e.g., based on the study of parliamentary transcripts, indictments, declassified documents, and other sources.

Overt systemic politicisation was again seen in ideological bias, which shifted from communist to national(ist). Protection of the new 'constitutional order' hailing from the first democratic constitutional changes in 1990 became the norm of the day. The new constitution was the outcome of politicians and experts closely connected to the ruling party, while even though SZUP was filled with politically loyal cadres it did not transform into a political police force. Hence, by safeguarding the constitutional order, SZUP also *de facto* safeguarded the political regime embodied in the ruling party that previously had opted for the state's independence. The subtle kind may be seen in the 'strategic' reorientation toward new threats (Serbian, Montenegrin and Yugoslav at first, Bosniak Muslim afterwards). Further, the presence of certain ethnic and religious groups, especially Serbs and other non-Croat populations, within the services was tacitly labelled as unwelcome due to being politically suspicious and thus dangerous. Following the creation of the intelligence community, the Croatian political leadership "recommended" that new employees should be "young people loyal to the new democracy, those who did not have a communist past, the Homeland war-proven patriots, and those who were ready to learn and to share their knowledge and experience with future generations" (Akrap and Tudman 2016, 72).

Overt top-down politicisation was most apparent in the 'political privatisation' of the intelligence community and the national security system. In the words of one intelligence service director, "the effect of the [ruling] party [HDZ] on the authority and cadre policy of the services" was "clear", the "mechanisms of administration, coordination, and oversight of the work of the services" were "under the direct leadership of individuals from the HDZ, without any effective parliamentary control", while the "Committee for Internal Politics and National Security of the House of Representatives of the Croatian State Assembly" acted as an "ineffective body" serving "only to satisfy form" (cited in: Lefebvre 2012, 116). Moreover, the ruling party even had loyal field informers. This practice represented overt top-down politicisation at its worst since parallelism bred inefficiency.

Combined with politically guided intelligence leaks to chauvinistic and sensationalist newspapers and press figures as well as intra-community rivalries, the new Croatian intelligence community faced detrimental development problems to do with professionalism, adherence to the law, respect for human rights, and others (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 53–54; Lefebvre 2012, 115–16). In a move that harkens back to rudimentary forms of political corruption, the president's own son, even though a successful information science professor with professional knowledge of intelligence studies and a 2-year career stint in intelligence affairs, became the head of the new foreign intelligence service (HIS) in 1993. He later described the intelligence community in the 5-year period when he was director of HIS as “successful” (Tuđman 2000, 48), which it definitely was with respect to the achieved wartime goals, but not a single account of intelligence politicisation was put identified.

Subtle top-down politicisation was mainly manifested in cadre selection of varying professional value; favouritism of friends and family members seen as politically reliable and loyal individuals further broadened the scope of the initial cadre politicisation (Udovičić 2006, 677). ‘New’ democratic actors with a nationalist and thus an anti-communist orientation initially had to cooperate with the former communist SDS employees who possessed the skills necessary for ‘doing intelligence’. The political balance was initiated by directives from the state authorities. After the Croatian war of independence ended in 1995, the former communist cadres were sacked or retired.

Overt bottom-up politicisation was visible in allegiance to the party and obedience to political figures. In time, it became a significant trait of success in the intelligence profession. While things were certainly much less rigid in comparison with the socialist period, the ‘post-Bolshevik’ intelligence model operated logically in the same vein as its predecessor. This was mostly apparent in practices by which the old (‘communist’) cadres tried to gain the loyalty of the new (‘nationalist’) decision-makers and the new (‘emigrant’ and domestic) cadres struggled to prove themselves in action. From the harassment of those in political opposition and journalists to participation in intra-party conflicts, the intelligence and security services supported the push towards unprofessional conduct for political reasons.

SZUP abused power both institutionally and individually: the unauthorised use of methods and means limiting the fundamental laws and liberties of citizens, cover-ups of criminal acts, the stealing and unauthorised use of documents, use of the service for political struggles with dissenters, kidnappings and physical abuse of those kidnaped and arrested (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 76–87). SIS even had greater freedom to act than SZUP. It often acted unconstitutionally and unlawfully akin to a political police force (Žunec and Domišljanović 2000, 93). With its military counterintelligence focus, SIS did much more than was expected of it: in 1994, SIS allegedly used flats, money and positions to turn members of the Croatian Parliament away from voting against the ruling



party and thus leadership of the state; allegedly falsified dossiers, hailing from communist times, on opponents of the ruling party; supplied arms and money to Bosnian Croat forces during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina; participated in faction struggles within the ruling party; spied on opposition parties' members and 'disloyal' journalists; and interfered in the parliamentary elections in 1999, among others (Kuljiš 2005, 72, 285; Lefebvre 2012).

The subtle bottom-up subtype concerned the unwritten, silent rules of 'choosing sides' early on in one's career and basically not 'speaking truth to power'. For example, after the imprisonment and severe beating of a commander of Vukovar's defence, Mile Dedaković, by SIS and the military police due to the city's fall to the combined Yugoslav-Serbian attack in December 1991, namely, after having been accused of treason (Babić 2005, 90), politicisation via human rights violations was tolerated as a means to achieve national security. Finally, by stealing intelligence service transcripts, dossiers and wiretapping equipment, intelligence officers subtly sided with their political patrons instead of serving national security (Udovičić 2006, 655–57).

### **DEMOCRATIC CONSOLIDATION AND INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION (2000–2024)**

Following President Franjo Tuđman's death, the 2000 Croatian parliamentary and presidential elections brought an oppositional coalition to power as well as a new president hailing from one of the coalition parties. With reforms geared toward EU and NATO membership, including cooperation with the ICTY, security intelligence became a focal area for modernisation. Depoliticisation by way of the "reorientation of intelligence preoccupations toward non-political domestic and external threats" as well as through the "development of effective control and oversight mechanisms that would prevent abuses of authority from occurring" (Lefebvre 2012, 117) was underway.

In 2002, for the first time Croatia statutorily regulated its national security notion and in a special law the intelligence system's functioning (Bilandžić 2019, 240). The new law on security services and the new national security strategy envisioned Croatia as having three services (a foreign intelligence service – *Obavještajna agencija* – OA; a security/counterintelligence service – *Protuobavještajna agencija* – POA; and a military security service – *Vojna sigurnosna agencija* – VSA) while a new national security office (National Security Council – *Vijeće za nacionalnu sigurnost* – VNS) would be set up to replace UNS. Criminal involvement in the process of privatising publicly-owned companies as well as in the economic system came under scrutiny, the search for intelligence related to war crimes was in full force while the investigation of individuals capable of conducting terrorist actions in Croatia for ethnic or social motives also became a standard practice (Lefebvre 2012). Coordination and oversight bodies were modernised, particularly with the forming of the Council for the Coordination of the Security and Intelligence Services (*Savjet za koordinaciju*

*sigurnosno-obavještajnih agencija* – SKSOA) and the Office of the National Security Council (*Ured Vijeća za nacionalnu sigurnost* – UVNS). Still, critics stressed that the change in the services' names and almost complete loss of coordination within the intelligence community made it less efficient after this reform (Akrap and Tuđman 2016).

In 2006, the security intelligence system was reformed and structured by a new law. This led to a model that was out of harmony with the Council of Europe's recommendations since the security and intelligence agencies had merged, creating a system in which only one civilian (*Sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija* – SOA) and one military (*Vojna sigurnosno-obavještajna agencija* – VSOA) security intelligence agency existed. Even though intelligence system regulation and oversight were nominally improved, future malpractices were inevitable given that the creators of the mentioned law were the security intelligence services themselves (Margaletić 2014).

Systemic politicisation in this period started to loosen its grip on the intelligence system overtly and subtly in the absence of a strict communist or nationalist ideological framework. Further, a split between national and post-national identities (NATO and EU) caused a depoliticised stalemate. This meant that both the overt and the subtle effects of the systematic bias in this period became somewhat absent as this was a time of the national-international dilemma of Croatia's security intelligence with the national orientation being confronted with a more fluid, 'shared' and unifying ideology (Petrović 2015).

Examples of overt top-down politicisation made the headlines with the start of community infighting and questionable appointments at the helm of the services in the 2000s (Lefebvre 2012). Although definitely to a smaller extent than before, the overt and subtle top-down subtypes were marked by political corruption and an unacceptable pace of cadre professionalisation. For instance, the international search for wartime Croatian generals after the ICTY warrants for their arrests had been made public became another example of the politicisation of security intelligence as the generals suspected of war crimes presented no real threat to Croatian national security and were not labelled as such by the Croatian security intelligence services themselves. The action was instead a political imperative due to the need to conform to a specific EU accession requirement: cooperation with the ICTY. Subtle top-down politicisation continued in cadre selection but on a lower scale than before due to the increased institutional oversight scrutiny characteristic of the pre-EU accession times.

Dysfunctional intelligence community governance in this period was a shared responsibility of policymakers and intelligence officers. Still, the former, as always, should be seen as more to blame due to the powers they wield. Namely, a crucial aspect of politicisation is corruption. Even though it has been listed as a challenge to national security since SOA's first public report was published in 2014, the intelligence agencies did not view systemic political corruption (Grubiša 2009) as a threat or risk to national security. The inability to detect threats

to national security outside the dominant political discourse became a serious example of the politicisation of intelligence. Politicised abuses of power and corrupt practices in intelligence persisted, although they were fewer in number compared to the previous period.

Bottom-up overt and subtle subtypes were not as apparent as before since no strict ideological or political allegiance was needed, and analysts continued to address threats to national security in liaison with the government. From abuses in interior politics at the time of the 2005 Croatian presidential campaign and the police treatment of the heads of the intelligence agencies for suspicion of an alleged connection with criminal circles in 2012 to criminal prosecution of the head of VSOA for an abuse of position and jurisdiction with regard to the embezzling of state funds in 2013 (Udovičić 2013, 126–28; Akrap and Tuđman 2016; Bilandžić 2019, 240), politicisation remained the intelligence system's *modus operandi*, albeit less than ever before. Present-day politicisation troubles with cadre selection, doctrinal orientation, the education of future professionals, and others generally stem from the clashes between opposing actors of state executive power, the President and the prime minister, yet never to the point of a systemic stalemate. Certain politicisation practices may be listed and compared by historical periods and (sub)types of intelligence politicisation (see Table 1 in the Appendix). The criteria used for deeming these episodes the most infamous, and therefore the most illustrative, are their significance, the availability of evidence, and publicity.

### THE EUROPEANISATION OF SECURITY INTELLIGENCE

Numerous definitions of Europeanisation have emerged to date, from it simply meaning European integration (Siger 2014), to it being “a process reorienting the direction and form of the national politic order so that the economic and political dynamics of the Community becomes a component of the organisational logic of the national politics and policy-making” (Ladrech 1994, 69) through to it representing a “process by which important areas of national policies become moreover subject of the European decision-making process” (Börzel 1999, 574).

Europeanisation can drive changes across subareas of national security intelligence, and hence a closer look at potential supranational influences is necessary. Some authors propose a ‘soft’ causality of indirect European influence, which may be used as a useful conceptual tool when security intelligence changes are concerned. Knill and Lehmkuhl (1999) speak of European integration that occurs through the mechanism of changing the beliefs held by domestic actors by cognitive “framing”, whereby adaptation is measured by the degree of mobilisation of support for domestic reforms without the direct involvement of supranational actors in the domestic institutional order. Following David Dolowitz and David Marsh, Pasquier (2005, 296) endorses cognitive Europeanisation as an “interactive policy transfer process” in which “knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc. in one time and/or place is used

in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place” without directly implementing EU legislation. Finally, Guillén and Álvarez (2004, 286) define cognitive Europeanisation with respect to social policy as the “shaping and reshaping of the perceptions of and attitudes towards social problems and the way to tackle them”, which is applicable to intelligence affairs if “social problems” are simply replaced by “threats to national security”. These definitions unambiguously underline the explanatory potential of soft variables inducing change from within but without acknowledging the wider framework of institutional evolution: culture.

The term culture remains useful while discussing ‘soft’ policy traits and transfers. By defining intelligence culture as “ideas, responses and behaviours acquired by intelligence communities and conditioned by history and geography” (Pythian 2014, 34), one can account for eventual future changes to the Croatian security intelligence system and policies arising from European influence through ‘soft’, cognitive, that is, cultural, means. Therefore, the broadly imagined European intelligence culture may serve as an indirect, but by no means a weak, factor of the depoliticisation of domestic intelligence. If Europeanisation is to be understood as a modernisation mechanism for security intelligence depoliticisation in Croatia, it has to address the different types of politicisation according to its ideal-typically constructed dimensions. These may be listed as follows: orientation towards common European security goals and threats; supranational intelligence coordination and cooperation; effective democratic oversight; respect for human rights; and a professional ethos encompassing neutrality and objectivity. A combination of these features, and possibly others, presents an antidote of sorts to the politicisation of intelligence in Croatia.

Even though Croatia has managed to synchronise its intelligence community with European standards in a systemic sense, the top-down and bottom-up types of intelligence politicisation may yet prove to be resolvable ‘softly’ by the real-life application of systemic depoliticisation. Policymakers and decision-makers, as well as intelligence officers, are expected to adapt to the supranational conditions in which the threats, national interests, and security issues are common, which makes politicised domestic intelligence generally become costly and unwelcome. More specifically, top-down modernisation would mean gradually raising awareness of the need to eliminate the political influence of decision-makers and policymakers on intelligence officers, which makes doing intelligence more costly in terms of the expected returns. Bottom-up modernisation would represent intelligence officers acting not only with regard to the systemic framework of ‘how things are done’ but also bearing in mind that politicised practices oriented to decision-makers will not prove beneficial in the context of the cooperation-based Europeanised intelligence architecture.

Notwithstanding that the soft, cognitive, cultural or ideational drivers of change do not entail material sanctions or benefits intended for a certain type of security intelligence behaviour, it is possible to present the need for change

in a utilitarian way. Namely, the common European intelligence culture may act as a catalyst for depoliticisation if the benefits exceed the costs of adopting new ways of thinking and talking about intelligence, which hopefully, over time, would translate into ‘doing intelligence’ more rationally. Even though European countries share threats as well as values (Lledo-Ferrerand and Dietrich 2020), in the absence of a pan-European ideology, and its unity-in-difference approach, the common European intelligence culture may be interpreted as being based on mutual benefit achieved through cooperation. The issue of national security intelligence autarchy vs. security intelligence cooperation based on an interest-defined common security intelligence culture somewhat resembles the classical reiterating Prisoner’s dilemma of European actors: rational choice connected with security intelligence non-cooperation leads to suboptimal outcomes for all actors involved (Elster 2007, 317–31).

Several soft, cognitive examples of intelligence depoliticization through cooperation stand out which point to the utility of Börzel and Risse’s (2003, 61, 73–74) “goodness of fit” Europeanization model emphasising the adaptational pressure exerted by the European level on the domestic level with regards to the degree of compatibility between European and domestic processes, policies and institutions, as well as Vink and Graziano’s (2008, 7–8) “venue of change” model by which broadly envisioned Europeanization is not restricted to EU adaptation but is rather simply understood as “domestic adaptation to European regional integration”. Since its inception in 2019 and initial academic validation in 2020, the Intelligence College of Europe (ICE) may be legitimately thought of as a definitive case of supranational intelligence convergence in Europe by way of culture (Puyvelde 2020) because it “generates professional and academic views on a wide range of intelligence-related topics and disseminates those in order to contribute to the development of a strategic intelligence culture in Europe, without being prescriptive” (ICE 2025). Acting as a kind of a “community of practice” (Bicchi 2011, 1115), namely a group that communicates regularly and aims at “developing and sharing practical knowledge” through collective learning, it represents a chance for the supranational integration of national security systems. This is especially true due to the significance and effectiveness of the informal multilateral and bilateral cooperation formats existing outside of institutionalised structures. Dover (2010, 256) thus rightfully claims that “the development of bilateral relationships and coordination across police forces and intelligence agencies has been positive in as much as an informal Europeanization is developing in these areas”. Countering Islamic terrorism and organised crime are good examples of this, while “more exchange on practices of, studying issues related to, and training in intelligence analysis at EU loci like INTCEN [European Union Intelligence and Situation Centre]” serve as reminders of how things might be done (Lutsch 2020, 501; Cross 2013). The Counter Terrorism Group represents not only a good example of cooperation but of depoliticisation since the services related to it are “supportive of the principle of national

oversight and supportive of oversight bodies working together to increase the effectiveness of their oversight techniques” (Labasque 2020, 495). In fact, the EU has become a major counter-terrorism actor in the two decades since 9/11 although European cooperation of this kind, which includes intelligence issues, dates back to the 1970s (Kaunert et al. 2022). Besides it being a “hard” influence, the activity of the European Court of Justice indicates that the intelligence services of each member state of the EU will most probably have to “adhere to the regulations of European law more closely and thus even increase their cooperation” in the future, and thereby implies the latent development of a European legal culture concerning intelligence in the ‘soft’ sense (Lledo-Ferrerand and Dietrich 2020, 444). Since there is a long way to go before mutually beneficial cultural uniformity is established through cooperation, the European security intelligence landscape will most definitely remain a battleground of conflicting ideas and influences for the time being.

## CONCLUSION

It was once said that “the word politicization may not be felicitous, especially off the tongue, but it is an indispensable word to any faithful account of the present age” (Nisbet 1989, 73). The history of Croatian intelligence, denoted by systemic, top-down and bottom-up political influences, underscores ‘politicisation’ as a defining characteristic. This conclusion points to the idea that the institutional path dependence of intelligence in Croatia represents a significant explanation that may be subsumed under the term “intelligence culture”. Given that no administrative reform concerning particular aspects of the politicisation of the intelligence system may induce positive changes in the long run due to the cultural determinants that stubbornly ‘lurk’ behind its formal structure and development pathway, a fairly reasonable prospect is the gradual replacement of the current national culture of intelligence politicisation with corresponding, quite depoliticised features of an ideal-typical European intelligence culture. The emerging EU-wide professional regulatory framework is without doubt a construct that can serve as a role model to be emulated by countries arising from the post-socialist transition and lacking in international cooperation, democratic oversight, respect for human rights and professionalism due to the politicisation of intelligence.

By being “fundamentally a political activity”, intelligence politicisation “cannot be eradicated” as that would require “either producers or consumers to step outside their individual ideological perspectives”, meaning they would have to “approach intelligence without the frame of reference required to comprehend it” (Jackson 2010, 461). However, even though it cannot be eliminated, it still can and should be reduced since “intelligence becomes better to the extent that it becomes less politicized” (Pillar 2010, 483). This Kantian imperative is best understood not as a call for security intelligence autarchy but as signifying the need to eliminate the politically shaped cultural traits, namely, the



aforementioned “ideas, responses and behaviours” that have proven detrimental to the intelligence system’s success in dealing with threats to national security. The Kentian model of “political and policy detachment” may indeed act as a barrier to politicisation and might produce other problems such as “organisational pathologies” (Wirtz 2006, 141–42). Yet, for Croatia, it in any case presents a much better alternative to a politicised intelligence culture. After the authoritarian or totalitarian and transitional periods, the shift of European post-socialist countries, including Croatia, towards liberal-democratic organisational traits and practices associated with EU accession represents a reduction in the influence of both systemic-ideological politicisation and politicised intelligence practices. The very existence of a common supranational, and thus a softly unifying, intelligence culture backed by past arrangements of allegiance to security alliances and support for professionalism, presents a valuable opportunity for intelligence modernisation by way of depoliticisation. These changes are yet to be seen and warrant further scholarly research. To that end, a more detailed exploration of data for the 2000–2024 period and beyond will be needed in future research, such as by considering internal regulations, transcripts of oversight committees, records of participation in the ICE, and others.

Alternative explanations of Croatia’s move towards depoliticised security intelligence are not within the scope of this article, but deserve consideration. They possibly include domestic party competition by which the influence of a political monopoly on security intelligence diminishes with the rise of pluralism, defence capacity-building by NATO as a globalised military role model, the unifying presence of Europol, as well as anti-corruption campaigns linked to international developmental organisations like the IMF and the World Bank.

Finally, seen in realist terms: does Europeanisation present a genuine opportunity for intelligence depoliticisation or is it an ideological concept itself supported empirically by rare examples of a common security practice that seeks to use security intelligence to serve EU power at the expense of national self-sufficiencies, under the guise of common threats and dangers such as the rise of authoritarian tendencies in Central and East Europe as well as echoes of the Russo–Ukrainian War? This also remains to be seen and could possibly become a research subject of its own.

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APPENDIX

Table 1: THE MOST (IN)FAMOUS EXAMPLES OF POLITICISATION OF THE SECURITY INTELLIGENCE IN CROATIA, 1944–2024

Period / (sub) types of politicisation	Systemic		Top-down		Bottom-up	
	Overt	Subtle	Overt	Subtle	Overt	Subtle
<b>Socialism/ Communism (1944–1990)</b>	Ideological enemy categories (Bolshevik-inspired)	State-party fusion (“special warfare”)	Ordering unlawful targeted killings (emigrants)	Tacit support for hiring criminals (covert actions)	Pampering state officials and party members with intelligence input (Artuković trial)	Making up damaging information (HUMINT vs. TECHINT)
<b>Nation-building and the post-communist transition (1990–1999)</b>	Ideological bias shift (communist to nationalist)	Threat re-orientation and cadre selection signalling bias	‘Political privatisation’	Favouritism according to personal ties and political loyalty	‘Post-Bolshevik’ intelligence model (new insignia, old methods)	Culture of silence with respect to human rights violations
<b>Democratic consolidation and international cooperation (2000–2024)</b>	Dilemmas of allegiance (national vs. international)	Adaptation and adherence to the new realities of international cooperation	Community infighting and questionable appointments	Dysfunctional intelligence community governance	Involvement in criminal and politically corruptive practices	Non-recognition of systemic political corruption

Source: the authors.

## **DEPOLITIZACIJA Z EVROPEIZACIJO? PRIMER HRVAŠKIH VARNOSTNIH OBVEŠČEVALNIH SLUŽB**

**Povzetek.** *Zgodovinski razvoj hrvaškega varnostno-obveščevalnega sistema je pomembno zaznamovala politizacija, ki je sprožila in odprla številna aktualna vprašanja obveščevalne skupnosti. Da bi to trditev potrdil, članek predstavlja različne politične vplive in politizirane prakse varnostno-obveščevalnih dejavnosti z uporabo zgodovinsko-institucionalnega pristopa, ki je določal obdobja pred devetdesetimi leti prejšnjega stoletja in po njih, pri čemer je bila ključna razmejitvena točka doseganje neodvisnosti leta 1991. Več kot desetletje po vstopu v Evropsko unijo (EU) naj bi bil večdimenzionalni proces evropeizacije med ključnimi dejavniki za depolitizacijo obveščevalnih dejavnosti nacionalne varnosti na Hrvaškem.*

**Ključni pojmi:** *politizacija, Hrvaška, varnost, obveščevalne dejavnosti, evropeizacija.*