

[Ivor Sokolić](#)

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## Sources of Information on Transitional Justice in Croatia

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IVOR SOKOLIĆ

School of Slavonic and East European Studies, University College London

### *Summary*

This paper investigates perceptions of sources of information on the transitional justice process in Croatia, dealing with the 1991-1995 conflict. This provides an insight into the broader nation-building process in Croatia by analysing where the predominant war narrative is reproduced and contested. It is based on focus group, dyad and interview research conducted in 2014 and 2015 with teachers, members of war veterans' associations and pensioners. Respondents trusted few sources in an atmosphere of general distrust and pessimism towards institutions. Participants in the conflict and images from television were, on the other hand, highly trusted. This paved the way for everyday narratives to have more of an influence than narratives presented from above by institutions, indicating that individuals and organisations concerned with the historical study of the war in Croatia are perceived to be more reliable if they also appeal to these criteria of participation and imagery, regardless of the academic merit of their investigations.

*Keywords:* Transitional Justice, Croatia, International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY), War Narrative, Nation-Building

### **1. Introduction**

In Croatia there is a pervasive feeling, nearly universal among ethnic Croats, that Croatia was the victim of Serbian aggression during the 1991-1995 conflict in the country. According to this narrative, Croatia led a war of self-defence, with the aim of not only saving the Croatian state, but also preventing the destruction of the Croatian nation (Pavlaković, 2014: 19). This narrative was central to nation-building discourses in the state and, as such, it provides an insight into the Croatian nation-building process (*ibid.*: 31). This article examines sources where the war narrative is reproduced and contested, in particular by justice narratives associated with the process of transitional justice. It looks at how much certain segments of the Croa-

tian public trust sources related to these narratives and why. The study is, however, only illustrative and not representative of the whole Croatian public. Instead, it shows how a small group of respondents (from specific backgrounds) view sources of information.

The discourses that compose the Croatian war narrative are commonly reproduced in the media, at sporting events, in music and film, as well as by elites (Baker, 2010; Brentin, 2013; Pavlaković, 2014). The sources of this narrative and of information on transitional justice have been both imposed from the top-down by elites, institutions and predominantly vertical (or mainstream) media and from the bottom-up, through everyday interactions among the public and horizontal (or niche and special interest) media (McCombs et al., 2014: 793-794). This article explores what sources of information on the war narrative or the transitional justice process as a whole are available to the Croatian public. It compares how the public views elite, top-down sources compared to 'everyday' bottom-up sources.

Transitional justice in this paper is defined as the on-going process of institutional response to the political changes and human rights abuses that were the result of state policy or were committed by members of the Croatian government, army and associated military or paramilitary units in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina between 1991 and 1995. The analysis does not concern itself with activity that may have continued past this point elsewhere in the region, such as for example Kosovo, nor does it analyse cases where crimes were committed by any other army or military organisation. It includes activity in legal and non-legal spheres, both restorative and retributive, together with a range of other extra-legal and truth-seeking elements. The analysis is, therefore, concerned with a variety of mechanisms related to the process, including the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY), the domestic judiciary and civil society efforts.

Political institutions and elites in Croatia are distrusted both in general and specifically as a source of information. 'Everyday' discourses, such as for example stories about the war from individuals who participated in the conflict, resonated much more strongly with participants in this study. Despite this inherent distrust, elite discourses do seem to have contributed to the building of narratives in two ways. First, the Declaration on the Homeland War<sup>1</sup>, adopted by the Croatian parliament in 2000, is seen as fact and its claims are rarely, if ever, questioned. It presents the war as a fundamental value on which the Croatian state is founded and it outlines

<sup>1</sup> The Homeland War, or *Domovinski Rat*, was the name given to the 1991-1995 conflict in Croatia by the Tudmanist narrative of the 1990s (Jović, 2009). The term can be interpreted as loaded and only representing the Croat side of the conflict, but it has come to be accepted across most of Croatian society since the 1990s. Today it is commonly used in Croatian politics, culture, education and media.

key aspects of the war narrative (Banjeglav, 2012; Koren, 2011). In this sense, it has set the parameters for the discussion of the conflict. Second, while the government is highly distrusted, so are institutions of transitional justice, which means that the public is faced with two highly distrusted sources of information with regard to the war narrative and the justice narrative. Generally, the Croatian public tends to see the ICTY as the greatest threat to the official war narrative and, therefore, to the legitimacy of the Croatian state itself (Pavlaković, 2014: 40). This seems to be the case today, despite the fact that the only case involving Croatian officers at the ICTY ended with an acquittal (the fieldwork was conducted after the ICTY acquittals of Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač).<sup>2</sup>

The analysis focuses on how elite, media and 'everyday' sources are perceived as sources of production and reproduction of the war narrative, which forms an essential part of the nation-building process. The theoretical framework developed by Fox and Miller-Idriss (2008) is employed for this purpose, whereby the nation as a discursive construct is shaped through everyday conversation, choice, performance and consumption (*ibid.*: 538). Elites often 'perform the nation', for example through the use of national symbols and rituals to generate national solidarity (*ibid.*: 546). The message this conveys is mixed since it depends on individuals' interpretations, which vary (Kolstø, 2006). In other words, people do not simply consume the meaning of national symbols; they simultaneously produce their meaning (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 546). The media, on the other hand, often fall into the realm of 'choosing the nation'; people 'choose' the nation from a set of options defined in national terms (*ibid.*: 542). This can be defined by choice of newspaper (if a choice exists), of school for one's children or by the group one chooses to socialise in (*ibid.*: 546). The result of these two nation- and narrative-building processes is that top-down messages are interpreted by the public, who construct their own meaning, which may not always be the one intended by elites. Additionally, such narratives have a certain taken-for-granted status in society (Billig, 1995: 37; Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 544).

The article is based on focus groups (dyads and interviews when it was not possible to organise a focus group) with teachers, members of war veterans' asso-

<sup>2</sup> Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač were the Croatian generals in charge of the controversial Operation Storm. Ante Gotovina, in particular, has inspired the strongest public reactions in Croatia and also led to the most serious tensions with the ICTY. More than any other case or individual, this one has been emblematic of the nexus of politics, symbols, rituals and collective memory in Croatia (Pavlaković, 2010). After a 2001 indictment by the ICTY, he spent four years in hiding, before being captured. In 2011 he was convicted of committing crimes against humanity and sentenced to 24 years' imprisonment, but in 2012 he was acquitted on appeal and immediately released.

ciations and pensioners conducted in 2014 and 2015 in Zagreb, Sisak, Zadar and several rural locations. Focus groups were chosen since they can best analyse the complex interactional dynamics that lead individuals to share some truths, withhold others, and build alternate versions of reality in a group (Hollander, 2004). They do not 'force' opinions on individuals (as surveys may do) and they strongly reflect the independence of human opinion by further removing the interviewer from the study (compared to individual interviews) and by focusing on social context, where opinions tend to be created, thereby increasing their external validity (Albrecht et al., 1993; Söderström, 2010: 4). These perspectives may exist independently outside of the group setting, but they are more likely to be revealed through the social gathering and interaction that is inherent to the focus group (Gibbs, 1997).

Much of the scholarship on narratives has focused on the level of elites, thereby missing how ordinary people build and negotiate their concept of identity and the nation. These are taken-for-granted and implicit understandings, which can be made explicit through the use of focus groups and in-depth interviews (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 540). Wodak et al. (1999), for example, used focus groups and interviews to explore how ordinary Austrians constructed their national understanding. The method is particularly well-suited to exploring everyday narratives that are reproduced in the micro setting (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 542). The approach is, however, limited by its lack of representativeness and the conclusions in this paper cannot be applied to the general public as a whole. That is why this article is only illustrative of general sentiment, unless specific conclusions are supported by longitudinal evidence from other studies, when available and relevant.

Zagreb was used as it is the largest city in Croatia and it remains the political and cultural centre of the country. Sisak and Zadar provided locations that were close to the front-line of the war, and the non-urban locations were determined based on where it was possible to find participants. Middle school and high school history teachers were chosen because they teach young people about narratives. Pensioners were interesting because they had lived through several regimes and represented a highly politicised grouping in society. Finally, members of war veterans' associations represented an influential part of society that is keenly concerned with the transitional justice process and the war narrative.

The theory and empirical data point to the conclusion that, even in a state that has witnessed and continues to witness polarising nationalist politics, the ordinary public is often indifferent to the messages it receives from elites or the media (Brubaker, 2006; Fenton, 2007). This means that political messages (often nationalist ones) do not resonate evenly in everyday life, which is not to say that they do not somehow shape the public opinion. At the bare minimum, although elites and the media as a source may be highly distrusted, they do together set the parameters

within which narratives are produced and reproduced, thereby possibly limiting the discursive space available in everyday life. In Croatia, both rarely questioned the predominant war narrative and most sources operated within this framework. As Pavlaković (2014: 39) points out, the use of loaded terms such as Homeland War, *branitelji* (or ‘defenders’, the name given to Croatian war veterans in Croatia) and Greater Serbian aggression remain prevalent across Croatian society. An alternative theoretical interpretation leads to similar conclusions: although the media may not be successful in promoting particular messages, they do establish the boundaries of what kinds of interpretations are acceptable. In other words, the media provide the public with the symbolic and normative environment through which it interprets the world around it (Gerbner, 1973).

While the distrusted elites and media may set the parameters within which participants discuss the war narrative, it is unlikely they are the sole source of production and reproduction of the war narrative. The war narrative becomes far more meaningful in everyday life by people talking about it (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 538). In Croatia and among respondents, this micro-level narrative production is also far more trusted than any other source. It is at this level of ordinary people talking between themselves and often about themselves and their surroundings, that the war narrative and associated worldview are reinforced (Fox, 2004).<sup>3</sup> Actors wishing to promote their messages to the public, for example as part of transitional justice efforts or nation-building projects, function within this complex interactive process.

## 2. The (Generally) Distrusted Media

The written press in Croatia are not trusted, especially in comparison to the rest of Europe. According to the Eurobarometer (2014) media trust index, Croatia scored the lowest in Europe for media trust (52% of the public had ‘low or zero trust’). The focus group data highlight why this is so: respondents did not see the media as independent, serious or useful, although this was not necessarily something only attributed to the Croatian press. As a teacher in Zadar remarked, ‘I think the media generally in all of these countries are at a very low level, especially in Serbia and Bosnia’ (focus group with Zadar teachers). Teachers across the board agreed with this view, that the media were unreliable and that they had no ‘vocational training, but rather it is just listening to someone’s story, which may or may not be correct’ or that ‘they are no embodiment of morality or objectivity. They frequently complain about the lack of media freedom, but they only have themselves to blame for this’ (dyad with non-urban teachers). Moreover, the media were seen as selective and editorialised,

<sup>3</sup> Moreover, in nation-building, the public also ‘consumes the nation’, for example through museum displays, state media, state school curricula or consumer products (Fox and Miller-Idriss, 2008: 551).

‘As far as the media are concerned, this is selective information release. The media are not at all relevant in creating a picture about it [the Homeland War]. The trend is to cover up the picture of it and to present a different one’ (focus group with Sisak teachers). This can have the effect that individuals do not even try to stay informed, if the sources are not trusted:

ZG.T.4 – I have the impression that unfortunately we do not have any newspapers that are serious, where you can with certainty read something smart. We listen to everything, but with suspicion. In some way I feel that I cannot even remember it all. And then this happens, I hear but I also do not listen. If you do not believe in them, then you do not even try to remember what they say (interview with Zagreb teacher).

There was a feeling across all of the groups that the media were biased, often against Croatia, Croats and the predominant war narrative, in that they were trying to equalise crimes, something the ICTY is often accused of doing, ‘As time passes, [the media] provide less information on the Homeland War... They are aimed at ultimately creating a balance between the warring parties. And this has been done constantly. Our media, if they talk about it, they are generally subjective and they always have the goal of equalising one side and the other’ (focus group with Zadar pensioners). The reasons given for this were varied, but ultimately all related to some kind of corruption. As a Sisak pensioner remarked, ‘Corruption in Croatia is well-known. I think that journalism is very corrupt, we just do not know about it’ (focus group with Sisak pensioners). In this sense, the corruption in this specific industry is simply connected to the widespread corruption present in Croatian business and society. Respondents agreed that the motivations for this were a combination of politics and profit, although politics seemed to be the perceived prime culprit:

NU.P.4 – In the beginning it was all realistic.

NU.P.1 – Yes, while the war was going on. But now every government, every department, has its journalist to write about it like this or like that.

NU.P.3 – In the beginning they wrote the truth, but later this all changed.

NU.P.1 – Sanader<sup>4</sup> had his journalists and they were not allowed to say anything else (focus group with non-urban pensioners).

Throughout the group discussions it became clear that the views of the media were also closely tied to views about party politics in Croatia, where the left side

<sup>4</sup> Ivo Sanader served as Prime Minister of Croatia from 2003 until 2009 under the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union). In 2010 he was indicted, and later sentenced, in a high-profile corruption case.

of the political spectrum (in power during the focus groups) is often referred to as ‘Communist’:

ZA.P.1 – This [the media] is all under the strong influence of the Bolshevik, Communist government (focus group with Zadar pensioners).

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ZG.P.1 – Today the information depends on who is in power. Right now the Communists are in power (follow-up interview with Zagreb pensioner).

The war veterans’ groups not only felt that the media were biased, but also that they aimed to create a split in the Croatian public, often between the veterans and the rest of the population. The Zadar war veterans called the media the ‘creators of chaos’ and generally the media in this case were seen to be ignoring the plight of the veterans and to be excluding them from the public scene (by not allowing them to have a voice):

NU.V.4 – The demonstration on Savska<sup>5</sup> has lasted for 60 days. In the news it gets a minute or not even a minute.

NU.V.5 – What minute?

NU.V.3 – This is already old news, it does not exist anymore.

NU.V.4 – They are once again trying to create a barrier between the civilian victims and the *branitelji* (focus group with non-urban war veterans in Banovina).

Despite distrust of the overall media, there is a disjunction in Croatia between the written press and television. Survey results show that television is far more trusted in terms of reporting on transitional justice issues than any other form of media. When asked which source respondents trusted most on ICTY reporting, two of the three national television broadcasters scored highest by a fair margin (*TV Nova* 39%; *HRT* 25%; and *RTL* 5%) compared to the main dailies (*Jutarnji List* 3%; *Večernji List* 3%; *24 Sata* 2%; *Novi List* 2%; and *Slobodna Dalmacija* 1%), although it is significant that a whole 20% of respondents claimed to trust none of the sources listed (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2011). *Eurobarometer 82* (2014) showed that while 67% of the public read newspapers at least once a week (which is significant in and of itself, given potential agenda-setting and priming effects), 87% watched television. This is not surprising considering the global predominance of television, but the focus group discussions indicated that television and pictures, in particular, are considered as far more reliable than the written press.

<sup>5</sup> The demonstrations on *Savska Road*, in front of the Croatian Ministry of Veterans’ Affairs, lasted from October 2014 until April 2016. They involved a number of war veterans’ associations asking for the resignation of the Minister of Veterans’ Affairs.



In this sense, videos were seen as evidence of Croatian innocence before the ICTY. Most of the groups mentioned the videos of Knin after Croatian forces retook it, and Gotovina's speech to his soldiers before the start of Operation Storm as proof that the ICTY's indictment was misguided:

SI.T.3 – The trial of Gotovina, when they discussed the excessive shelling of Knin, was one of the most important points. But you have a huge amount of videos of the army entering Knin, not only in archives, but on YouTube.

All agree.

SI.T.1 – No one cared to watch that.

SI.T.3 – They watched it for sure, it is just, (pause) well you can see that the city is not destroyed (focus group with Sisak teachers).

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ZG.P.3 – Gotovina was always threatening 'Do not do this!' He is clean.

ZG.P.2 – He is a soldier, a professional.

ZG.P.1 – You have that video, where he organised a meeting before the start of Operation Storm. To act honestly, not to be savages, not to steal or to rob, and he even shouted at them (focus group with Zagreb pensioners).

Equally videos were seen as proof of Croatia's victimhood and they helped construct such a narrative. Whereas most sources on the war and the transitional justice process were seen as unreliable or poor, personal experience, hearsay and pictures or videos were seen as the most reliable. This gives television a huge potential to shape attitudes and opinions. Ultimately some information may only be available or easily accessible through the media. The *Eurobarometer 82* (2014) results discussed above are indicative of the fact that the media, including the written press, remain in widespread use. With regard to transitional justice, this is also a consequence of the perceived lack of information given out by transitional justice instruments, namely the ICTY and the Croatian judiciary. A war veteran in Sisak summed it up well when he said, 'You receive information from journalists, not courts. What you read, you read in newspapers' (focus group with Sisak war veterans). This perception that courts, and specifically the ICTY, do not publish information is incorrect. The ICTY publishes information through a variety of means: including streamed broadcasts of hearings, publishing of transcripts, production of easy-to-digest case summaries, making court documents and press releases generally available, as well as other Outreach Programme activities.

### 3. Highly Distrusted Elites: Courts, the Government and Political Parties

Survey data show that 73% of the public think that the ICTY is not prominent enough in the media for them to be acquainted with its work (Belgrade Centre for Human Rights, 2011). Focus group participants across the board felt that this was because the ICTY and domestic courts did not publish information actively, if at all. Publishing information was not seen as the job of the courts, be they domestic or international, and information about their work was considered to only be available through the media:

SI.V.1 – Courts cannot give information.

SI.V.2 – There is none.

SI.V.3 – They can protect citizens, if they even do that (focus group with Sisak war veterans).

These discussions often alluded to an inherent lack of transparency that this resulted in. Respondents, therefore, frequently discussed how the work of the courts is unclear, murky or conducted in secret (also helping feed conspiracy theories):

ZG.P.1 – [The ICTY] did not give us information.

ZG.P.2 – We do not really know how much information they even have.

ZG.P.4 – It is hard to say. Does America know what happened here?

Moderator – What about domestic courts as a source of information on the war?

ZG.P.2 – I do not really understand the question, because courts are not the ones who give information.

ZG.P.1 – The newspapers would report. Today is the trial of so and so. He has been sentenced to this amount of years. That was in the newspapers. But how the court works, who or what it calls up, the functioning of the court, no one wrote about that (focus group with Zagreb pensioners).

The statements outlined above in combination with previous survey data show that the media, including the written press, do continue to play a role in how the Croatian public forms attitudes about political and societal issues. Moreover, they show that information on transitional justice is for the most part gained from the media, rather than directly from the Tribunal or courts. This means that what the media discuss and how they frame issues has the potential to have a great impact on how the public perceives war crimes trials and the transitional justice process as a whole. The media play a central role in the dissemination of information about war crimes trials and the Homeland War in general, despite being distrusted as a source. Courts, international or domestic, continue to provide information on their work, but the public do not see them as a source of information. It can also be argued that

they should not be sources of information since this is not their primary role, but this does limit their potential to help audiences come to better understand the past (if that is an aim they aspire for). It is, therefore, the media that ‘set the record straight’ when they report on the work of courts, not the courts themselves.

Much like the judiciary, the government in Croatia is not seen as particularly efficient or reliable. This general disenchantment with its work seems to extend across all parties, in that people find the whole system to be broken. Again, much like with the judiciary, the more extreme ends of the spectrum see the government as manipulative and infiltrated by undesirable elements. This is seen as being a consequence of the Communist legacy of Croatia, but more specifically, as an effect of the lack of lustration in the country.

The reasons given in the focus groups for why the government is considered to be inefficient or useless range from the poor climate it has to work in, to more pessimistic notions of it not even having an interest in helping people. As a consequence, it is not considered a reliable source of information. It is seen as sharing the same problems as the judiciary, those of staffing and an unfavourable working environment:

SI.P.4 – Plants can only grow in an appropriate climate. Same here. Just like with the trials.

All agree.

SI.P.4 – It is not that the judiciary did not do well; no element did well. There are no oases.

SI.P.3 – The judiciary is a reflection of the whole situation (focus group with Sisak pensioners).

Many respondents found that the government was not doing its job or, as a non-urban war veteran put it, ‘My own state, government and system, in my country, do not function’ (focus group with non-urban war veterans in Banovina). Many groups were more pessimistic, believing that the government was not willing to help ‘ordinary people’, and victims of the war felt that they were being ignored:

NU.P.1 – And those who are [in parliament], they are reading the newspaper, playing on their smart phones. They paid millions of euros for the voting system so that they do not have to raise their hands. This is disgraceful. They gave nothing to people, ordinary people, who pay them, who they are there for.

NU.P.2 – They give nothing to the tax payer (focus group with non-urban pensioners).

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NU.V.5 – I love this country, but we cannot take any steps forward until we clear up some things. It hurts me horribly. We are all sick of injustice, I dare say this. We

are sick of being brainwashed. When someone persistently tells you that you are not a victim and that everything is good, to forget, to continue (focus group with non-urban war veterans in Banovina).

As a source of information the government was generally not trusted, since it was expected to only release what suits it at the time. History teachers, for example, did not find this to be a specificity of the Croatian government's attitude or to this time period. All of the groups viewed the government, and all parties in general, as opportunistic and willing to 'sell out' in order to win elections. Once again, the idea that the public was being manipulated was often present:

SI.T.1 – No government will say everything it knows. Only what suits them.

SI.T.2 – Yes. And this is normal for every government. In the future they will not release any more information.

SI.T.3 – Throughout history it has always been like that. It has never changed, from Rome until now.

All laugh and agree (focus group with Sisak teachers).

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Moderator – What about the government, current or previous, as a source of information?

ZG.T.1 – (laughs) Each in their own way. Whatever suited them, what they could use, they used.

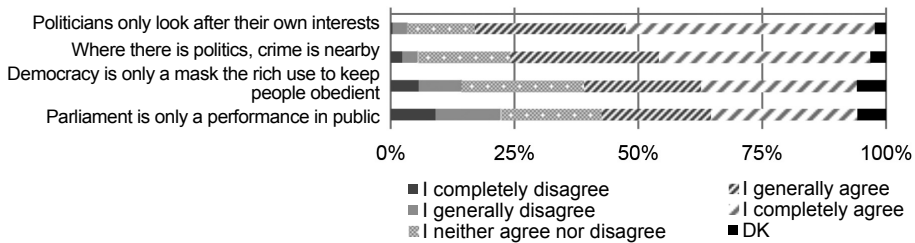
ZG.T.2 – If I were to compare it to how the American government justified the invasion of Iraq, then I would not trust any government (dyad with Zagreb teachers).

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NU.T.2 – Our government is such that our Prime Minister or any minister is ready to announce on the anniversary of the SDSS<sup>6</sup> that the Serbs are whatever they need to be, to gain votes, that they are also the ones who helped lead to victory. And in the afternoon they will, if need be, say something else. Our government is definitely not good at telling the truth about the war, since ultimately, they are also responsible that all of the criminals who are still free and receiving pensions have not been indicted and sentenced. Not only on the side of the Croatian Army, but also on the side of the rebels (interview with non-urban teacher).

The end of this last passage is particularly interesting. Not only does it hint at the general disenchantment with Croatian party politics, but it also blames the government for not doing more to tackle the problem of war criminals, be it on the

<sup>6</sup> The Independent Democratic Serb Party (*Samostalna demokratska srpska stranka* – SDSS) is one of the Croatian political parties that represents the Serb minority in the country.

**Figure 1.** How Much Do You Agree with the Following Statements?

Source: Ipsos Puls (2012)

Croat or Serb (or as the respondent calls it, ‘rebel’) side of the conflict. The government is seen as failing both ‘sides’ of the conflict and, particularly among teachers, is not seen as having any ethnic bias. As further passages below will show, other participants disagree with this, since they see the Croatian government as being infiltrated by anti-Croat elements. Again, survey data supports the perception that the government only works for its own self-interest. In the Ipsos Puls (2012) survey, respondents generally agreed that politicians only look after their own interests; that wherever there was politics, criminals were nearby; that democracy is only a mask the rich use to keep people obedient; and, that parliament is only a performance for the public, that the real decisions are made elsewhere (Figure 1).

Certain individuals were opposed to the ruling coalition at the time and expressed such opinions, to varying degrees. For the most part, however, group discussions revolved around general disappointment with all parties and governments, which led to poor information on the war:

Moderator – And the government as a source of information on the war?

ZA.V.2 – Well they block! Not just this one, but previous ones as well (focus group with Zadar war veterans).

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ZG.V.3 – Not a single one dealt with serious issues, the economy, and the war least of all. They were all governments only for themselves, separate from the people. I do not defend the HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union) or the SDP (Social Democratic Party of Croatia) (focus group with Zagreb war veterans).

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ZA.T.2 – The statute of the city of Vukovar, in which the use of Cyrillic is included, was brought in by the HDZ, who have now of course changed their minds. As we said earlier, politics in opposition and in power is different (focus group with Zadar teachers).

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 NU.P.5 – We have the same problem in this country, during the time of the SDP and during the time of the HDZ. We once again have no money (focus group with non-urban pensioners).

The evidence suggests that the general preoccupation of political parties to win elections has led to a broken political system. In this sense, the government is mistrusted because political parties and their intentions are hugely distrusted. Moreover, some of the more extreme opinions saw the government as using information in order to split and manipulate the public, much like some participants saw the Croatian judiciary:

SI.P.1 – The biggest problem is that everyone, governments and others, they all talk about half-truths and half-lies. No one says the whole truth and everyone makes things sound nicer (focus group with Sisak pensioners).

Numerous groups and individuals also distrusted the government since it was seen as being run by Europe or that it had been infiltrated by “unwanted elements” (Serb, Orthodox, *UDBA*<sup>7</sup> or security service, Communist, Yugonostalgic, etc.). This is not all too surprising given the prevalence of conspiracy theories in the Balkans (Obradović-Wochnik, 2013: 198). There was a general impression that the lack of lustration in Croatia and the legacy of Communism had led to this state of affairs:

SI.V.3 – Politics is decided by France or England or Germany.

SI.V.2 – I will tell you now, that our politics is run how Europe says. Europe moves a little finger, your Englishman David Cameron strikes the table with his fist in Parliament and says that Great Britain wants something. And as the big brothers say, so small Croatia does (focus group with Sisak war veterans).

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 NU2.V.1 – Greater Serbs, Yugonostalgics, persecutors of the Croatian national spirit throughout history, *UDBA* members. Today they have completely infiltrated all the pores of Croatian economic, political and daily life (dyad with non-urban war veterans in Slavonia).

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 ZA.P.3 – I personally am only waiting for the day when we will free ourselves from this *UDBA* and Communist mentality. Because this is something horrific. An ideology crafted in hell. Truly (focus group with Zadar pensioners).

<sup>7</sup> *UDBA* (*Uprava državne bezbednosti*) is the name commonly used to refer to the various Yugoslav state security services. It was the successor to *OZNA* (*Odeljenje za zaštitu naroda*) in 1946 and was in 1966 reorganised into the *SDS* (*Služba državne sigurnosti*) in Croatia and the *SDB* (*Služba državne bezbednosti*) in Serbia. The term, however, remains in common use today.

While war veterans strongly expressed such concerns throughout all of the groups, other respondents either did not believe in this or focused on the lack of lustration following the disintegration of Yugoslavia, more than the infiltration of UDBA, Communist or Yugonostalgic elements in Croatia (although a minority of pensioners shared the same opinion as the war veterans). The topic was capable of causing heated debate and in one group even led to a walkout, indicative of how much importance is attached to the legacy of Communism in Croatia, but it also shows how damaging being branded a ‘Communist’ can be:

ZG.P.1 – Today the information depends on who is in power. Today the Communists are in power.

ZG.P.3 (shouts) – But there are no Communists!

ZG.P.4 – You cannot talk about Communists! There are no Communists!

ZG.P.1 – How are there not? What is the SDP?

ZG.P.4 – There are no Communists.

ZG.P.3 – Objectively speaking, there are more Communists in the HDZ.

ZG.P.4 (shouts) – All of the HDZ are Communists!

ZG.P.1 – And what is the SDP, is it not the successor to the Party?

ZG.P.4 (shouts) – The social democrat party!

ZG.P.1 (shouts) – Ah! And where did it come from! It is the successor to the Party!

ZG.P.3 (shouts) – And where did the HDZ come from? (focus group with Zagreb pensioners).

The issue of lustration following the Homeland War remains a dividing line in Croatian politics and society. War veterans and some pensioners strongly expressed a desire for it and the concept featured in many of the focus groups. The theme was more broadly connected to discussions over Second World War Ustasha/Communist divisions, especially with older participants.

#### **4. Trusted Everyday Sources: Participants and Historians**

Whereas the sources discussed above were for the most part distrusted, the ones discussed below are all considered more reliable, beginning with the Church. Discussions about the Church in Croatia, which was often taken to mean the Roman Catholic one, were often awkward. The topic was frequently ignored or laughed off, although the Church was relatively more trusted than most other institutions in the Croatia. This is to be expected given the central role the Roman Catholic Church plays in Croatian society and in the nation-building project of the state (Pavlaković, 2014: 29). It was often referred to as educational and reliable (especially compared to the state):

Moderator – Do you think you have a good understanding of the Homeland War?  
SI.P.4 – I believe so on the basis of my upbringing, and in terms of upbringing I mean what I learned from my wider family, in Church, in school from elementary school to university. These were all of my educators. And in society, and later when I worked, these were all educational measures that influenced me. On the basis of these criteria, which developed over time in me, I believe I understand [the Homeland War] (follow-up dyad with Sisak pensioners).

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NU.T.1 – With regard to any question connected to the Homeland War or trials, the opinion of the Church is very important to me. More so than the domestic media. It really means a lot to me, for one single reason. The Church has been with our Nation for 13 centuries. The only such institution. I have been convinced by many, maybe unimportant and tiny examples, how the Church is better than the state because it is monolithic. It has existed with us Croats for 1300 years, while governments and states change (interview with non-urban teacher).

The above statement of the non-urban teacher is, however, slightly extreme and most groups ignored the topic or laughed it off. Teachers in particular responded with laughter: in Zagreb, Zadar and Sisak the question about the Church as a source of information was immediately followed by laughter. Respondents otherwise generally agreed that the Church only has a spiritual role in society and not a political one:

SI.V.1 – The Church takes care of souls. It does not care about this [the Homeland War].

SI.V.3 – Very little.

SI.V.2 – The Church preaches about the Lord. And to have faith in the Lord. Not in Milanović. In him I have no faith at all. But in the one up there I have faith. That is what the Church says (focus group with Sisak war veterans).

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SI.T.1 – The Church is concerned with spiritual work, not political.

SI.T.2 – And charitable work.

All laugh (focus group with Sisak teachers).

The topic of the Church seemed to be generally ignored through these two methods: laughter or insisting it only has a spiritual role. The role of the Church in Croatian society remains large, although its role as a source of information on the Homeland War is ultimately limited. It is not an active publisher of information in the same way that historians, participants or courts might be. Moreover, it does receive criticism from certain segments of society, which was obvious in a number of



discussions with teachers, who found it to be biased and political, though not universally so:

NU.T.4 – It misinforms.

NU.T.3 – I would never use it as a source on the war. It is clearly tainted with some ideology.

NU.T.4 – It is propaganda (dyad with non-urban teachers).

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ZA.T.2 – In my opinion all three religions in this region are very biased in representing anything (focus group with Zadar teachers).

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ZG.T.4 – More than anything I have the impression that there is not enough education in this institution or an honest attitude towards information, instead they push for an interpretation that has nothing to do with facts. Unfortunately. And their influence is big (interview with Zagreb teacher).

Across all target segments and locations, it was clear that participants in the war, predominantly former combatants but also victims, were consistently considered to be the most reliable source of information on the Homeland War. As might be expected, war veterans in particular felt that this was the case:

ZA.V.6 – The most reliable source for people who did not live through the war are the ordinary small people and the types of interview that you [the moderator] are doing (focus group with Zadar war veterans).

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Moderator – What do you think is the most reliable source of information on the war?

NU2.V.2 – We, who are the participants of the times, witnesses, who can say what happened.

NU2.V.1 agrees.

NU2.V.2 – No one waged war here other than Croats and Serbs. We were attacked here on our territory of the state of Croatia by Serbian citizens from what at the time was the Republic of Serbia, and their fellow nationals who lived with us. We know exactly what happened here. Why should someone from England, France, Germany, the EU, the USA, Canada, Australia, wherever, talk about the Homeland War? We waged the war, not them (dyad with non-urban war veterans in Slavonia).

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SI.V.2 – The most reliable source are those who were in the war, those who were on the front-line and who experienced and saw all kinds of things (focus group Sisak war veterans).

This sentiment was shared across all of the other groups, which often also involved individuals who had participated in the war, as combatants or as victims. For example, in the non-urban pensioners group, individuals commented more than once that it is difficult to talk about ‘if you were not there’ (focus group with non-urban pensioners). This is not overly surprising given how much of the population witnessed violence directly (55% according to a 2001 survey; Caritas Croatia and the Franciscan Institute for Culture, 2001). Other respondents, who did not partake in the war, also referred to participants of the conflict as the most reliable source and even cited hearsay from participants as highly trustworthy:

ZG.P.1 – I have a lot of information and this theme is close to me. I went around to many areas hit by the war as a humanitarian aid worker... So I have first-hand information (follow-up interview with Zagreb pensioner).

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ZG.T.2 – What I remember is the most reliable. I know that I experienced something, saw it on television. People who I spoke to, and who I know well.

ZG.T.1 – Yes, and not so much books, because books can also be manipulated.

ZG.T.2 – They are not even necessary in this instance (dyad with Zagreb teachers).

The discussion between the two Zagreb teachers is particularly meaningful. The teachers not only find participants (and television pictures) to be the most reliable source, but they directly compare it to books, since books can be manipulated. Participants and television in this case are seen as making books redundant. Some groups specified that certain types of participants were more useful in this sense than others, for example both the non-urban pensioners and the non-urban teachers commented that commanders and their diaries would be particularly useful, compared to soldiers who may have ‘quite a narrow picture of a specific location’ (interview with non-urban teacher). A number of respondents, much to the agreement of their groups, also pointed out that participants were only a reliable source inasmuch as both sides of the conflict were referred to:

NU2.V.1 – The most honest and fairest account about everything will be given by the very participants in these events, including members of the Croatian Army, and of the other army, on the other side, civilians who lived in the areas where it happened, and least of all career politicians (dyad with non-urban war veterans in Slavonia).

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ZA.T.2 – When we consider war veterans, including the ones from the other side, they can help serious, objective historians to create quality scientific and expert works, books and monographs (focus group with Zadar teachers).

These statements not only allude to the potential openness to hearing other views (although it is debatable how agreeable they would find those views), but also indicate that reliability is considered to include multiple perspectives. This is, however, based on the understanding that the war could have only been defensive in nature and only the details of this defence are up for debate, not the defence itself. Moreover, participants were seen as an ideal source for objective historical works, ones that hold the most potential to be trusted. Oral history, a possible avenue for this, was mentioned across several groups as a useful method to capture the experiences of participants in specific locations. In fact, many of the war veterans' associations had produced such works, some brought them to the focus groups and all of them readily spoke about the works. A respondent in Zadar, for example, said that the 'people who lived through these horrors and who this happened to, that is the source. For example, our group has already published two books. Let it stay written down' (focus group with Zadar war veterans). War veterans referred to these oral histories as their duty; to record what had occurred and in some ways to continue the defence of Croatia, by legitimising its defence and foundation.

Despite participants of the Homeland War being highly trusted as a source of information, war veterans' associations were not trusted at all. Even all of the war veterans' groups interviewed found the general grouping of war veterans' associations to be a highly unreliable source of information on the war. Across the board they were considered to be too numerous, fragmented and unclear in expressing their aims, mainly because they are perceived to only have their own monetary or political interests in mind. In addition to this, there is a sense that every person looking to swindle a bit of money could create an association, which is what led to such a great number being created. This perception provides an interesting juxtaposition with the notion that participants, on the other hand, were highly trusted. Whilst they rank highly, possibly the highest, as a source of information, war veterans' associations were placed at the opposite end of the spectrum. This was made all the starker since war veterans themselves find the groups to be poor sources of information.

As several of the above passages have hinted at, objective historical works are sought after, but their reliability seems to be based on the need to involve participants and to present sources from both sides. Currently it seems that works by historians are, with one exception, considered to be poor. For example, the Sisak war veterans claimed that what 'hurt' them was what Croatian historians wrote about Croatia, while the Zadar war veterans were worried that the books of Carla del Ponte or Florence Hartmann were writing the history of Croatia. So while war veterans were unhappy with historical works for these reasons, history teachers saw the works as limited due to the short timespan since the war ended and the fact that

participants, discussed above, can be biased. A Zagreb teacher commented: ‘The advantage and the disadvantage is that we all survived that time, me included, so that this picture was also built through personal experience. No one can run away from that’ (interview with Zagreb teacher). What all groups agreed on was that both sides had to be heard or seen for a source to be reliable:

NU.T.4 – Purely historically, there cannot only be one source.

NU.T.3 – There have to be more historical sources.

NU.T.4 – Yes, there always have to be multiple historical sources. You have to listen to one side and the other. For example, when I teach about the Homeland War, I always start by asking how do you think they talk about it in Sarajevo or Belgrade? (dyad with non-urban teachers).

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Moderator – What do you think is the most reliable source of information on the war?

NU.V.5 – Documents that our boys captured when they came to Petrinja. Those are documents that say exactly what happened among the Serbs.

NU.V.3 – So, Serb documents (focus group with non-urban war veterans in Banovina).

The preoccupation with collecting documents or hearing from both sides and the trust in participants as sources of information opens up the space for a historical source that can tap into both. Historian Ante Nazor, the Director of the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Centre for the Homeland War (the individual and the institution were referred to interchangeably throughout all of the discussions), meets all of these requirements: he was a participant in the war as a conscript and he actively, as well as openly, collects documents from both sides of the conflict.<sup>8</sup> War veterans’ groups found him to be highly reliable and referred to him as the best source on the war, apart from participants; pensioners for the most part shared this sentiment; whilst teachers at times aired some doubts, but were also generally positive. This has the potential to build a historical narrative based on participants’

<sup>8</sup> Ante Nazor is a Croatian historian who also runs the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Centre for the Homeland War. The aims of the Centre are the collection and investigation of documentation and materials related to the Homeland War. Ante Nazor has been seen as politically aligned to the right side of the spectrum in Croatia and much of his work features the use of loaded terms, for example one of his books is titled ‘The Greater Serbian Aggression Against Croatia in the Nineties’. This study does not judge the value, quality or credibility of Ante Nazor or the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Centre for the Homeland War based on academic merit. Instead, it tries to show how the Croatian public views them and the potential they hold as source of information on the Homeland War.

accounts from both sides, but it can also give a source heightened credibility simply because they were a participant and because they collected information from both sides. It does not take into account the importance of the interpretations being imposed on the data, which were rarely mentioned in discussions. The non-urban war veterans group quoted above went on to say:

NU.V.5 – [The Serb documents] are now with Nazor in the Memorial and Documentation Centre.

All agree.

NU.V.3 – This is a very good thing.

NU.V.5 – These are reliable sources. You should turn to them.

NU.V.1 – They needed trucks since there was so much documentation.

NU.V.5 – And in there it is written exactly what happened, who killed who, all of the information (focus group with non-urban war veterans in Banovina).

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ZA.P.3 – Facts. He only publishes facts.

ZA.P.1 – We have listened to him, we have read his work.

ZA.P.3 – This is what makes Ante Nazor great, so rare in Croatia. He has a doctorate in history, he will not even discuss things without the facts. He has the facts.

ZA.P.2 – Everything with documents.

ZA.P.1 – All documents.

ZA.P.3 – All with documents. And this is his greatness (focus group with Zadar pensioners).

These exchanges highlight the potential pitfall of this type of endeavour: where ‘facts’ are not disputed because data collection is seen as being good. In the case of the non-urban war veterans this gesture is particularly strong, as they witnessed the collection of literal truckloads of documents. In other words, the reliability of the source is judged based on the volume of documents collected from a certain location. Moreover, Nazor is seen as collecting documents from both sides of the conflict, giving him added reliability:

NU.T.1 – I consider [the Memorial Centre] reliable based on what I have heard and followed, because I deeply believe that they are trying to show, as historians, the real truth. And that certainly involves the basic principle: not only one source and one side, instead they have definitely collected information from the opposing side. These include the captured documents and videos of Krajina, as well as more recently statements from Serb rebels. I believe they have also, if I recently heard correctly, involved some Serbs into the work of centre, so that they can also give their contribution to the real truth (interview with non-urban teacher).

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SI.T.3 – That is how the Memorial Centre for the Homeland War works. To listen to one side and the other (focus group with Sisak teachers).

Teachers generally had a positive outlook on the work of the Centre and of Nazor, but they were the only group that also sometimes expressed doubts about the project. Many actually had direct contact with Ante Nazor himself, either through their studies (for example, if he was their supervisor) or through lectures that the Centre organised in their school (something Nazor is actively involved in). When they occurred, criticisms were levelled at Nazor's political leaning, the danger of an official historical narrative and the fact that it is still too early to conduct serious historical analyses:

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NU.T.3 – He is distinctly politically oriented toward the right and he presents exclusively those sources that help the Croatian side. He will rarely present sources that can blemish the Croats in the Homeland War. So these sources are not good to me (dyad with non-urban teachers).

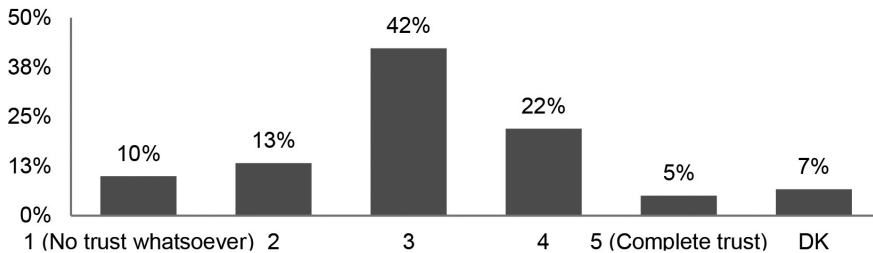
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ZG.T.3 – I think that as an idea, as a centralised place to store documents, which will ease the investigation of the period, certainly yes. But not as a place that could provide an official version of history and that period that everyone should adhere to, anyone in the country, and especially historians who primarily work with this. I would not dare say if they are moving in that direction, but they should certainly avoid it (interview with Zagreb teacher).

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ZG.T.4 – I know what they are doing. But they are only just collecting information and material. He is primarily concerned with giving lectures, he has a mission to say something about what he has collected. This is some kind of start (interview with Zagreb teacher).

What is particularly striking here is that the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Centre for the Homeland War is not the only organisation in Croatia that aims to collect documentation relating to the war, the NGO *Documenta* also serves this purpose, but it did not hold the same central place in participants' view on sources of information. It is difficult to ascertain why this is so. NGOs in Croatia generally struggle to attract positive opinion. Most of the public seem to have a neutral opinion of NGOs in general (Figure 2 on the next page).<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> War veterans' associations technically fall under this, but many in Croatia may see them as a separate entity. War veterans' associations were not included in the survey as a separate category or question.

**Figure 2.** Please Rate on a Scale from 1 to 5 the Level of Trust in the Following Political and Social Institutions: Non-governmental Organisations



Source: Ipsos Puls (2012)

It is possible that individuals are simply not aware of *Documenta* or of the role such organisations can play in society, whereas Nator's background as a historian gives him added credibility. War veterans' groups, in particular, felt that human rights NGOs were dysfunctional and sought to divide Croatian society. This is a common notion in Croatia and also in Serbia, especially with the right wing press. Despite the proportionately small size of human rights NGOs in both countries, they have often been seen in a negative light, particularly due to their relative success in attracting Western funding, which war veterans' associations have not been able to do. The constant theme in this narrative was that someone or some kind of entity, working in the background, was attempting to divide civil society and war veterans' associations, as well as to equalise guilt or portray the war as a civil war. Some attributed this to an unknown entity, others to infiltration of associations by "unwanted elements", and still others to influence by the international community that was attempting to equalise crimes:

NU.V.4 – It obviously suits someone that they are all separated and act alone. Because if they were united, then they would be too strong. I think that if *Documenta* and the war veterans' associations and the civilian associations, and other associations that exist, were to unite and to start working on collective questions, then everything would be solved quickly. But obviously this does not suit someone. There is a constant need to interfere and to instil some kind of hatred. There was a war. It is a fact that the *JNA* and the Serbs wanted to occupy Croatia, but the Croats rose up and did not allow it.

NU.V.3 agrees.

NU.V.4 – It was not a civil war, it was a war, there was aggression. Aggression by one state against another.

All agree (focus group with non-urban war veterans in Banovina).

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ZG.V.3 – You will most likely speak to various non-governmental organisations, maybe you already have. I wanted to say what I think would be good. When you are speaking to me or to them. You should consider who comes from where. In terms of family. Not ethnicity. You can then get a complete picture on who is telling the truth (focus group with Zagreb war veterans).

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NU2.V.1 – The international community protects certain so-called non-governmental organisations, world famous ones. The proof of this is *Documenta*, which as an international institution conducts certain investigations and their aim is the absolute, so-called, equalisation of guilt (dyad with non-urban war veterans in Slavonia).

Members of war veterans' associations felt that they and NGOs such as *Documenta*, the Centre for Peace, Nonviolence and Human Rights, the Civic Committee for Human Rights and the Centre for Peace Studies had a basic disagreement over the war narrative and the notion of a defensive war. This meant that NGOs were seen as trying to criminalise the Homeland War, which reduced their credibility:

ZG.V.1 – With their story and their relativisation of the beginning of the war, and everything that leads on from there, they are trying to relativise things that cannot be relativised because we then have to relativise our complete history. Not the Croatian one, not the Serbian one, but the global one. We need to change our understanding of what war is. According to their theory, every war is illegal. Defensive and otherwise. According to their theory, Croatia is at fault because it accepted war. Croatia did not have to accept war. Serbia and Yugoslavia gave us an ultimatum: forget your sovereign wish of the Nation expressed in a referendum, replace the leadership you chose, install a new set of political laws and abide by our demands. And if we really did this, there would not have been war (focus group with Zagreb war veterans).

The Zagreb group, in particular, also felt that these human rights NGOs actively prevented other groups, specifically war veterans' associations, from participating in the activities they undertook, thereby creating a monopoly in the sector. There is not much support for this in the survey research. The notion that *Documenta* may be equalising guilt or portraying the conflict as a civil war may help explain why it struggles to connect with the broader public, since these facets of the dominant war narrative are so strongly embedded in mainstream society.

Other target segments, however, generally did not comment on this topic. Only the Zadar pensioners strongly agreed with the war veterans. They shared their opi-



nion that NGOs had been infiltrated (specifically by the *UDBA*) and that they were aiming to write a false history. War veterans expressed a range of other opinions about civil society more broadly. Some believed that at the very least some human rights NGOs and especially *Documenta* had a similar aim to war veterans' associations in attempting to record an oral history of events. Others believed that the fight for monopoly in the sector was due to funding and that human rights NGOs were much better at attracting the significant international funding available, giving them an advantage. The non-urban war veterans in Banovina, for example, felt that although they disagreed with *Documenta*'s views, they agreed that they also had the right to participate in the debate and provide their own perspective.

Other target segments did not comment on *Documenta* nearly as much, nor were they asked as many questions on the topic, which limits the scope of these conclusions. In fact, the inclusion of war veterans in the study will heavily bias results, since they hold such a negative opinion of the organisation. The one general thread that was common is that they believed that civil society groups, both war veterans' associations and human rights NGOs, do not communicate effectively despite having the same aims:

ZA.T.2 – I think both sides do a good job, but the problem is more in communication than in the actual work. Both are trying to help people who have suffered and are trying to get to the truth about the war (focus group with Zadar teachers).

This teacher went on to say that lack of communication was also the problem with RECOM.<sup>10</sup> In a follow-up interview he elaborated that he felt RECOM suffered from horrible leadership, despite being an initially sound idea. He felt that the far right in Croatia had, therefore, managed to convince the public that RECOM is an attempt to falsify the truth. This does highlight the two-sided nature of the project, which identifies with and involves many human rights groups that war veterans are highly critical of, such as *Documenta*, while also including war veterans' associations in the coalition. This novelty makes it both remarkable and confusing to outsiders. Overall, however, this was the only mention of RECOM throughout the fieldwork.

Ante Nator and the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Centre for the Homeland War tap into several factors of reliability in the eyes of those interviewed here, while *Documenta* does not seem to be able to do the same. It focuses on participants in the conflict; a participant runs it; it makes a highly publicised effort at

<sup>10</sup> The initiative for RECOM is a regional attempt to establish a commission for the establishment of facts about human rights violations committed in the former Yugoslavia from 1991 to 2001. It is a regional coalition formed of various human rights NGOs, war veterans' associations and victims' associations.

collecting source material; and, it collects material from ‘both sides’ of the conflict. Ante Nazor also receives a high degree of media publicity, especially in contrast with other historians who may not so strongly identify with a political current. Despite the Centre still only being in its formative stages, it holds the potential to become the most trusted source on the Homeland War and one that dictates the official narrative of the conflict. In this sense, it also represents a danger, since it gains its credibility from its data collection methods, rather than its lack of bias or its objective and systematic interpretations of the data. While *Documenta* exhibits many of the same goals and focus on data collection, its work at times comes into conflict with the dominant Croatian war narrative of defence and victimhood, which puts it at odds with certain segments of society. Moreover, since they are associated with the NGO sector in Croatia, which is often regarded with suspicion, and lack Nazor’s direct connection with the war, they do not hold a key position as a source of information. More research is, however, required to gain a better understanding of what makes Nazor so trusted and *Documenta* ignored.

## 5. Conclusion

The data show that the media in Croatia are distrusted and, specifically with regard to reporting on the ICTY, they are not seen as objective. Moreover, of the different forms of media, the press is the least trusted. The reason for this distrust is that they are seen as corrupt and biased, which has led to them reporting in a selective and editorialised fashion. Respondents believed that this corruption was fuelled primarily by politics, but also by the search for further monetary profit. Television, however, is trusted far more than the written press or other forms of media. Often what was seen on television was considered to be fact, giving the medium some form of infallibility. Despite all of the above, surveys show that the public still uses the media to form political opinions and that newspapers still form a major element of this. Moreover, there was a general impression in discussions that some information is only available through the media, because courts, including the ICTY, are not considered to be sources of information, since this is not their job. The media in Croatia, therefore, remain important in the formation of public opinion, much like elsewhere in the world, despite the generally poor opinion of them in the country.

Respondents and the Croatian public seem to trust few sources, which further helps explain the need for the media. The government is considered useless and inefficient, which reflects upon its reliability as a source of information. Respondents had similar complaints about the judiciary as they had about the government: that it was trying to manipulate people and that it was working in an unfavourable environment. The more extreme view, expressed across all of the war veterans’ groups and with some pensioners, was that “unwanted”, anti-Croat agents had infiltrated

the government. Overall, however, the biggest complaint shared by all respondents was that the government was only concerned with itself due to party politics, which are seen as having created a broken system. Political parties are, therefore, trusted even less. Paradoxically, war veterans' associations are also highly distrusted, despite participants being the most trusted source of information. They were seen as overabundant, fragmented and unclear in their aims.

The Church generally seemed to be trusted by participants, although the topic was most often ignored or laughed off in discussions. Given its central position in Croatian society, it is not surprising that it was seen as reliable (as one teacher said, it has been with the Croatian people for over 1300 years) or that respondents were unwilling to question its role. Teachers, however, frequently also expressed doubts about its political connections and the roles all of the churches played in the wars. Ultimately its role as a source of information remains limited, although it is seen as relatively reliable.

Participants were highlighted as the most reliable source across all target segments. So much so that they were seen as superior to books and hearsay was considered to be trustworthy, if from the right sources. In particular, respondents stressed that it was important to listen to participants from both sides. These criteria were also used to judge the reliability of historians, who were seen as more reliable if they spoke to participants and collected documents or testimonies from both sides. This opens up the space for a project like the Croatian Memorial and Documentation Centre for the Homeland War and Ante Nazor, which are seen as being preoccupied with both. This can be dangerous since the quality and value of interpretations are not questioned, because such an effort can make a publicised effort for data collection. Only teachers questioned this project on this basis, highlighting that Nazor was known for a particularly political representation of the past.

Teachers stand out from the other two segments since they are the only group to consistently question all of the more reliable sources (the Church, participants and Nazor). This may be because teachers are younger than the other two target segments, they are the only segment that contained no participants in the war (although some grew up in areas that were on the front-line), they are generally better educated than the rest, socio-economically they may be faring better and, as trained historians, they may be more aware of the need to question sources. Nevertheless, none of these factors singularly help explain why they stand out in their inquisitiveness.

Elites and media are distrusted, but by performing and choosing the narrative, they set the parameters of it. Everyday interactions and discussions by the public lead to talking about the narrative; this is where the narrative is debated, contested or affirmed. It is at this level that the most trusted source of information on transitional justice and the war narrative – participants – is to be found. Where superimposed

elite or media narratives meet constantly evolving everyday interaction and talk is where moments of contradiction occur. These narratives, coming from above or below, can be in support or against transitional justice, but they are all equally subjected to this complex process of interaction. It is here that personal ties prove to be more trusted than impositions from above and where attempts by transitional justice institutions to change narratives in a society can hit significant obstacles to diffusion.

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*Mailing Address:* **Ivor Sokolić**, UCL, School of Slavonic and East European Studies, 16 Taviton Street, London, WC1H 0BW, United Kingdom.

*E-mail:* [ivor.sokolic.11@ucl.ac.uk](mailto:ivor.sokolic.11@ucl.ac.uk)