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# Reflections on International Actors and the Making of Social Policy in Croatia

PAUL STUBBS\*

The Institute of Economics, Zagreb  
Zagreb, Croatia

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*Addressing the role of international actors in three pivotal moments in the development of social policy in post-independence Croatia, the article sees welfare reforms as complex interactive processes in which legacies and contexts matter. The mistrust created by an implicit social policy in the context of a new humanitarianism during the wars, compounded by the problems of externally driven reform projects, continue to limit changes in Croatia's social welfare policies and practices. However, a delayed yet emergent Europeanisation, expressed in the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion, opens up four dialogic zones and potential alignments between EU thinking and Croatian realities: statistical, participatory, governance, and policy commitments and practice.*

**Key words:** international actors, reform, Croatia, Europeanisation.

## A REFLEXIVE INTRODUCTION

This essay addresses the role of international actors in three pivotal moments in the development of social policy in post-independence Croatia: during the wars and the refugee and displaced persons crisis from 1991 to 1995; in the aftermath of the election of a reform-oriented, Social Democratic Party (SDP) led, coalition government in 2000; and in the context of the signing of the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion (henceforth JIM) in 2007 on the path to Croatia's eventual accession to the European Union. This periodisation builds on that provided by Vlado Puljiz (2005), in whose honour this essay is written, in which he discussed Croatian social policy post-independence in terms of three phases: war solidarity (1991-1995); post-war social claims

and contradictions (1995-1999); and stabilisation and social reforms (2000-2003). This essay does not confront centrally the period of 'social claims and contradictions', although aspects of this are discussed. Since Puljiz's periodisation ends in 2003, it is possible to see Croatia's 'delayed Europeanisation' (Stubbs and Zrinščak, 2007: 96-99) as a new phase following on from the others he addresses, beginning with Croatia's application for membership of the European Union in February 2003 and including social policy developments under the rule of the reformed Croatian Democratic Community (HDZ) forming coalition governments after election victories in November 2003 and November 2007.

In this, and in many other senses, this essay builds on the significant contribution,

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\* Paul Stubbs, The Institute of Economics, Zagreb, Trg J. F. Kennedy 7, 10 000 Zagreb, Croatia, pstubbs@eizg.hr

both analytically and in terms of policy advocacy, which Vlado Puljiz has brought to the study of social policy in Croatia. His understandings of the complex relationship between war, migration and social policy and the problems and possibilities of creating a 'new' social policy in the context of crisis and 'claims-making' frame the analysis of the first period presented here. In the second period, Puljiz himself played a pivotal role in steering the direction of broad social policy reform in Croatia in the aftermath of the election of an SDP-led coalition government in the Parliamentary elections on 3 January 2000, as lead author of the chapter on 'Pension Reform and Social Welfare' in the massive project 'Croatia in the 21st Century' which represented the development vision of intellectuals linked to the new Government. Even more concretely, with his colleague Nino Žganec, appointed as Assistant Minister in the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, Puljiz co-authored a text on 'Reform of the Social Assistance and Welfare System' (Puljiz and Žganec, 2001) which served as a blueprint for a Social Protection Project funded by a number of international development agencies, which brought teams of, mainly foreign, consultants, to work with local experts, including Puljiz, on the elaboration of reforms.

In terms of the third moment discussed here, Puljiz perhaps plays more of a background role, although his work has always sought to place Croatian social policy within a European social democratic tradition and he has long-standing links with the Council of Europe as a social policy expert. In a sense, the intellectual work on Croatia's JIM has involved much more centrally the second and, indeed, third generation of so-

cial policy scholars (Siniša Zrinščak, Zoran Šućur, Teo Matković) who are also, in many senses, a product of the expansion of social policy studies which Puljiz created. It is also worthy of note here that these scholars have ensured that the *Revija za socijalnu politiku* builds on Puljiz's legacy and continues to prosper as the journal of record of theory and practice in Croatian social policy, whilst regularly publishing both original texts on social policy in other countries and Croatian translations of key texts.

The essay is also framed in terms of reflecting on my own direct, if small, involvement in Croatian social policy theory and practice in the last fifteen years, working with refugees for a Croatian NGO, undertaking research as a Guest in the Department of Social Work under the mentorship of Professor Puljiz, being a member of the team on reform of social services in the Social Protection Project noted above and, lately as part of a European Union Network of Experts on Social Inclusion, tasked with providing the European Commission with independent advice on Croatia's progress in implementing the JIM and on broad trends in social protection and social inclusion in Croatia<sup>1</sup>.

The text, offered in the spirit of intellectual rigour and innovation which Vlado Puljiz's work represents, seeks to address Croatian social welfare reform at a number of levels, sensitive to the interactions between agents, structures, institutions and discourses (Moulaert and Jessop, 2006). Diverse social scientific methods and theoretical frameworks are utilised, and sometimes fused in ways which move beyond a conceptual and disciplinary purism towards a more open inter-disciplinary perspective which combines approaches to produce a

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<sup>1</sup> There are experts from each member state and from the three candidate countries: Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey. More about the work of the network can be seen on the website: <http://www.peer-review-social-inclusion.net/>

more complete account and even a post-disciplinary perspective which brings diverse tools to bear on a specific research question (cf. Jessop and Neilson, 2003), in this case the role of international actors in the making of Croatian social policy. International actors are neither all-powerful, riding roughshod over internal processes and settlements, nor are they powerless, as if social policy was still an inherently nationally-bounded endeavour. Emerging welfare settlements are not fully understandable in traditional political economy terms, as belonging to one of a small number of path-dependent 'welfare regimes' (Esping-Anderson, 1990). Studying 'transition' implies a study of a proliferation of international actors and a multiplicity of social policy discourses and policy frames, albeit in the context of legacies, contexts and forces which are the combined effects of existing institutions and processes (cf. Pierson and Skocpol, 2002). In other words, theorising in terms of 'welfare assemblages' allows us to consider »how a specific moment is shaped by multiple and potentially contradictory forces, pressures and tendencies« (Clarke, 2004: 25), with outcomes, in terms of new 'welfare settlements', much more shaky, unstable, unfinished, and complex than can ever be captured by 'welfare regime' studies. In Clarke's terms, context and conjunctures matter because »they embody (contested) imaginaries« (Clarke, 2004: 47). In Croatia, multiple and competing meanings of 'social policy', 'transition', 'reconstruction', 'development', and indeed 'European modernity', cannot be squeezed into a simplified notion of an emergent welfare regime but, rather, need to be addressed as complex, contradictory and contested, constructed in and through encounters within and between various actors, local, national, and trans-national.

The text also borrows from a tradition of anthropologically informed 'reflexive ethnography', which remains a highly mar-

iginal approach in the context of the objectivist realism of much of what passes for social policy studies in which the position of the observer/researcher is either never addressed or, at best, treated uncritically. Reflexivity is here conceived in terms of consciously breaking down some of the boundaries between the role of a researcher and other roles such as consultant, policy-maker, activist, and the like. Engaged in a »bending and blending« (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007: 183) of different positionalities and perspectives privileges a view of emergent 'policy' as »a constant move between the formal and the informal, the institutionalized and unofficial practices, the paperwork and 'the reality'« (ibid: 183). A commitment to reflexivity, notwithstanding justifiable critiques of its 'relativism', lack of conceptual clarity (Lynch, 2000), and indeed, possible self-indulgence involves, in Marcus' sense, »cognitive and intellectual identification between the investigator and his variously situated subjects in the emergent field of multi-sited research« such that the ethnographer is located »within the terrain that she is mapping« which serves to reconfigure any methodological discussion that pretends »a perspective from above or 'nowhere'« (Marcus, 1995).

The partiality of the text, deriving from the narrowly situated perspective of the author/participant/observer and, indeed, given the extremely narrow range »of things we can know first hand« (Gould, 2004: 283) is, therefore, unavoidable. If this text is read as »a layered and evocative ... presentation of located aspects« (Willis and Tondman, 2007: 7) of Croatian social policy, needing to be complemented by other accounts, from other positionalities, and from more 'objectivist' discussions of sites, contexts, levels, institutions and structures, then it will have served a double purpose: as a stimulus to further discussion of the meanings of the reforms referred to, and as a tribute to the personal and professional con-

tribution which Vlado Puljiz has made to the discipline and practice of social policy in Croatia.

**WAR AND THE NEW  
HUMANITARIANISM: A  
VIEW FROM SAVUDRIJA AND  
ZAGREB**

The refugee camp established in Savudrija in summer 1992 on the Istrian coast was home to some 2,000 refugees, mainly from central Bosnia and, later, to displaced persons from war-affected parts of Croatia. Its governance was a complex matter between the Croatian authorities, represented by the Centre for Social Work in Buje, Belgian peace-keeping troops, and the German NGO Malteser Hilfsdienste. The Croatian NGO *Suncokret* founded by a group of Croatian students including Nina Pečnik, already at that time an assistant in the School of Social Work at the University of Zagreb, and Dutch peace activist Wam Kat, gathered groups of Croatian and foreign volunteers to help camp residents organise various activities. Styled as 'grassroots relief work', *Suncokret* occupied an important place in the burgeoning war-related NGO scene, somewhere between anti-war and human rights groups, out of which it had grown, and more professionalised service oriented NGOs.

Wam Kat kept a diary which was posted on the newly burgeoning *ZaMir* computer-based bulletin board system which strove to connect peace and humanitarian groups throughout the post-Yugoslav countries and internationally (Stubbs, 2004). His posting for 12 June 1993 refers to the Savudrija camp. Indeed, in this case, I am one of the two *Suncokret* volunteers referred to at the end of this extract:

»There are now a little bit more than 2000 refugees in Savudrija, last week they closed down one of the hotels nearby in which most of the invalids were settled, they are brought to the camp and from the camp about 300 refugees are brought to Gasinci<sup>2</sup>. Most people really protested when they had to go, they rather would have liked to go back to BiH, even now, than to Gasinci, were they are ending up in tents again. The Suncokret volunteers had the nasty job to accompany the buses to Gasinci in order to keep the children busy during the long drive.« (Kat, 1993).

It has long been argued in social policy that war, as a shared contingency, evokes a collective, solidaristic response, with the consequences of war being »tolerable if – and only if – social inequalities are not tolerable« (Titmuss, 1963: 85), so that there is a sense of 'after warfare – welfare' (Hort, 2006). Whilst some aspects of a solidaristic response to the wars in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina can be discerned (Puljiz, 2005; 81), social rights in Croatia were reduced in the war years, in the name of the greater good of national freedom and independence. At the micro-level, the experience of refugees from a state at war, resident in another state at war which, indeed, from May 1993 was directly implicated in the so-called Croatian-Bosnian 'war within a war' in Bosnia-Herzegovina, is both more complex and more immediate. Above all, whilst not completely new, the intervention of a whole number of intermediating international organisations: UNHCR, International NGOs, International military forces, local NGOs, and others, in a war in Europe, represented a paradigm shift in the internationalisation of social policy.

<sup>2</sup> Gašinci was the largest refugee camp in Croatia, situated close to the front line and near a military training ground in Eastern Slavonia. Conditions were much worse in Gašinci, both in terms of shelter and facilities, than in Savudrija.

When Zagreb was the subject of missile attacks on 1 and 2 May 1995 by Croatian Serb forces in response to Operation Blitz (*Bljesak*) which reintegrated Western Slavonia under the control of the Croatian authorities, the International Council for Voluntary Agencies (ICVA) which had a Zagreb office co-ordinating the work of international NGOs, held a crisis meeting. It was attended by representatives of over 30 INGOs, often Croatian or Bosnian nationals, as the foreign or expatriate staff had already been evacuated. Zagreb was, at that time, a 'safe' base for work in Bosnia-Herzegovina just as, ironically, in 1991, Sarajevo had been considered a safe base from which to operate in Croatia. At the time, the ICVA directory listed some 90 INGOs involved in relief, humanitarian aid and psycho-social work in these two countries. By the time of the Kosovo crisis in 1999, INGO involvement in 'new wars' or 'complex political emergencies' had become crucial to the development of a new form of governance merging relief, development and security (cf. Duffield, 2001).

Hence, Croatia was rather more than just, as I had reflected in the immediate aftermath, "a case study in the problems of aid, familiar in the development studies literature, in a European setting" (Deacon, Hulse and Stubbs, 1997: 178). Development agencies and their staff faced real difficulties in understanding and dealing with their encounter with a war in a country with high levels of human development and a sophisticated and long-standing social welfare infrastructure. Stories of medical kits containing anti-malarial tablets and other unnecessary and unusable medicines, water purification systems, and so on, abounded. Rather more importantly, the 'humanitarian space', whilst professing to be technical, non-political, and oriented to immediate needs, was deeply political, substituting 'neutrality' for decisive intervention, rep-

resenting a kind of 'sovereign frontier' marked by a "'mutual assimilation' of donor and state power" (Harrison, 2001: 669) where the Croatian state was, in fact, considered no more legitimate than Serbian-controlled enclaves. Consider the example of the newly formed European Community Humanitarian Office (ECHO), which was resolute in not conferring any special status on the Croatian government, working instead with a network of (mainly European) INGOs and local NGO counterparts.

This apparatus seen as a kind of 'state of exception' (Agamben, 2005), or as a fusion of 'military-economic-humanitarian action' (Pandolfi, 2003: 370) is crucial in terms of the construction of a new 'implicit social policy' creating a kind of parallel set of humanitarian interventions using local institutions, including Centres for Social Work, if at all, only as distribution hubs for assistance. A 'welfare parallelism' emerged in which Croatian institutions such as the network of state Centres for Social Work and the Governmental Office for Displaced Persons and Refugees, sometimes allied with older Croatian NGOs such as Caritas and the Red Cross and newer nationally oriented NGOs, sought to provide cash and services in the context of massive resource constraints. On the other hand, ECHO, UNHCR, a network of INGOs and emerging new, often professionally-led, service oriented local NGOs offered a kind of parallel set of services, ignorant of, or distrustful of, state and pro-state bodies.

At the same time, the 'psycho-social shape', added a therapeutic dimension to this apparatus, albeit in complex ways over and above the "medicalisation of the consequences of war" (Pečnik and Stubbs, 1995: 38). In the long-term, it is less the inappropriateness of the importation of Western models of trauma and treatment which has impacted on Croatian social policy than the way in which the field reinforced tendencies

to over-professionalise, pathologise, and essentialise service provision which were already present in Croatian psychology and, to an extent, social work, before the war. In addition, the ways in which a psycho-social field brought together questions of gender, human rights, and civil society (cf. Stubbs, 2005: 58 - 59) is particularly important.

In a situation in which the Croatian state of the time can be seen in hindsight "as both 'weak' and 'strong', as having democratic legitimacy but with widespread authoritarian tendencies" (Stubbs and Zrinščak, 2007: 88), the struggle over NGOs as a kind of proxy for civil society, became crucial. Indeed, a belated recognition, in a period in which some intergovernmental organisations began to collaborate with what might be termed a 'technocratic' wing of the ruling HDZ in the late 1990s, of the possibility of NGOs taking on a service delivery role in social services, such as *Suncokret*, indeed managed to do later, is a little discussed legacy of the war and refugee crisis. The levels of distrust introduced into the system, between state and non-state actors, professionals and non-professionals, between supposedly 'cosmopolitan' and 'nationalistic' constructions are, in many ways, the long-lasting legacy of the crisis.

### **PROJECTISING REFORM: A VIEW FROM ZAGREB, LONDON AND WASHINGTON<sup>3</sup>**

Until the election of a Social Democratic Party-led coalition government in January 2000, less than a month after the death of President Tudjman, pension reform had been the only example of explicit influence by a major international agency on social policy reform in Croatia (cf. Stubbs and Zrinščak, 2007: 91 – 96). The window of opportunity afforded by the new Government, the election of which was seen

as a key moment in the consolidation of Croatian democracy, and, in particular, its explicit stance of openness to all forms of international co-operation, was quickly seized upon by the World Bank and others. In particular, the new Government supported the World Bank in undertaking a poverty survey, the first in post-independence Croatia, based on the 1998 Household Budget Survey data (World Bank, 2001).

At the last moment, in part, it appears, as a result of insistence by Vlado Puljiz, a section on pension reform in the document 'Croatia in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century' was expanded to include a text on 'Reform of the Social Assistance and Welfare System' noted above (Puljiz and Žganec, 2001). The text listed a total of seven measures grouped under two broad themes, 'System Efficiency', mainly focused on the training of social workers, increasing awareness of the European Social Charter, and the establishments of Institutes of Social Policy and of Social Work; and a more ambitious 'System Modernisation' encompassing poverty measurement, criteria for social assistance, decentralization, de-institutionalisation, 'de-nationalisation' (i.e. privatization and development of the NGO sector) and a more active social policy in terms of integration into the labour market and workfare programmes. With the exception of the last measure, slated to be completed by 2008, the document envisaged all reforms to be completed by 2005.

At the same time, the World Bank, together with the UK Government's Department for International Development (DFID) and the Government of Japan, worked with the Government on the negotiation of a Technical Assistance Credit, to be followed by a significant World Bank loan, to support the Government in developing a coher-

<sup>3</sup> Much of this section is based on part of Stubbs & Zrinščak, 2006.

ent and complete Social Welfare Reform Strategy. The credit documents were finally signed in late December 2001 and all the teams of consultants recruited met with the Ministry, donors and other key stakeholders in Zagreb on 15 April 2002. The time lag is significant here since the possibility of completing even the initial stages of reform in the lifetime of the coalition government, itself dogged by internal crises, was already nigh on impossible.

As perhaps one of the more dramatic examples of the problems of sub-contracting and the role of consultancy companies (cf. de la Porte and Deacon, 2002; Stubbs, 2003), no less than eight consultancy teams or companies were contracted to work on the reforms, all but one based on competitive tendering<sup>4</sup>, covering social assistance; social services; labour and employment; fiscal issues and decentralization; administrative strengthening, IT and database issues; poverty monitoring; as well as an overall team leader and a local resources team. The relations of power within the project, between the consultancy teams, the client (the Government of Croatia) and the donors were complex and highly charged. Not unusually in external assistance projects of the time, whilst formal authority and steering is vested in the client, the construction of consultancy teams shows a clear favouring of 'international' over 'local' actors and, in this case, a marked preference for UK and US consultants which appeared to be a combination of the real market for consultancies and the particular preferences of both DFID and the World Bank.

Over the year of the work of the teams, levels of shared understanding of the task, and, indeed, trust between the parties, became quite low. Teams tended to pursue their own agendas which whilst, perhaps,

loosely based on the Žganec and Puljiz overview, relied rather more on 'keywords' which the consultants brought from other reforms: 'one-stop shops', 'vouchers', and 'minimum guaranteed income', for example. In the end, after a number of dismissals of teams including the team leader, itself showing the power of resistance held by the Ministry as client, the synthesis report was written by the Fiscal and Decentralisation team which was more experienced in working on USAID fiscal programmes questions in Central and Eastern Europe than on social welfare reform. This team was, overall, the most prone to use the language of marketisation in its work and to share the view of the Croatian Ministry of Finance that, in the context of an IMF stand-by arrangement, less not more needed to be spent in the sector. The team mobilised its strong links with the Ministry of Finance, and capitalised upon the involvement of a key US - Croatian intermediary. At times, the ability to produce well designed power point presentations seemed to triumph over the nature of the reforms being proposed. Hence, in the context of a social democratic reform document, the 'technicised clientelism' of the project led to a rather more marketised reform model being proposed.

In retrospect, problems emerged in the absence of clear internal 'drivers of change'. Even before the first meeting of the teams, the idea of piloting innovations in a number of locations was blocked by the Ministry of Finance. Later, parts of a separate study on de-institutionalisation, commissioned by the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare, were shared with the press prior to its completion and its full contents were subsequently buried in the wake of the opposition from trade unions representing staff in institutional care facilities.

<sup>4</sup> The social services team was directly recruited by DFID, consisting of myself and John Warwick, who had previously worked on DFID-funded social welfare reform projects in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Serbia.



In the context of staff changes, the World Bank did not provide leadership either and the Assistant Minister, initially celebrated in World Bank parlance as ‘the progressive change agent’, found himself subject to pressures from Ministry civil servants, tending to want to limit the ‘radicalism’ of change, and from political appointees, tending to wonder why change was so slow in the context of the precedent of a three pillar, World Bank influenced, pension reform judged as ‘successful’ in part because of a clear technical consensus, notwithstanding problems noted by Vlado Puljiz at the time (Puljiz, 1998).

In the context of the election of a new HDZ government in November 2003, retaining for a time Nino Žganec as State Secretary, the World Bank, under internal criticism for the time spent from initial credit to loan signature, put in place a number of new consultants, and supported a number of consultative seminars before, finally, a loan agreement was signed with support from the Swedish Government. The revamped project represents some continuity although, interestingly, it re-introduces the notion of pilots in three counties, all HDZ controlled, notwithstanding the fact that counties have, until now, played a very limited role in social welfare in Croatia. There is some attention to transformation of institutions, to innovation and to the establishment of new reference or referral centres although all remain somewhat vague and subject to diverse interpretations.

In general terms, then, the case study illustrates the limited effect of external actors when there are no particular drivers of change. Indeed, the World Bank’s commitment to constrain social assistance spending stands in some contrast to its more ‘neutral’ or *laissez-faire* stance on social services reform. Crucially, the pinning of hopes for reform on an individual ‘change agent’ can be seen, in this case, to have had unintended

consequences and may, even, have sharpened some resistance to change. The case study is also relevant for the way in which, in the absence of external ideological drivers, in the end national political objectives allied quite well with external technical imperatives. Overall, the fact that social protection reform was not seen as crucial created a space in which national and international experts were as likely, if not more likely, to be economists and lawyers as social workers and social welfare experts. The Anglo-US domination of consultants also tended to exclude the influence of an, arguably more appropriate, continental European perspective given the Bismarckian nature of Croatia’s social policy legacy and given the greater support in countries such as Holland, Belgium and Germany for European approaches to social policy. Above all, the complete absence of the European Union perspective in the reform project was a major problem. Whilst participatory workshops and other consultations did take place, there was no real structure to allow for workers on the ground to contribute to policy reform and above all, the voice of service users themselves was never heard.

### **EUROPEANISING WELFARE: A VIEW FROM ZAGREB AND BRUSSELS**

Europeanisation has been seen as “a process where ‘national social policy’ frameworks are reconfigured, reframed and re-coupled” (Lendvai, 2007: 31). In Croatia’s case, whilst much delayed, a focus on ‘social inclusion’ through the preparation, signing, and implementation of the Joint Memorandum on Social Inclusion (EC/Government of Croatia, 2007) (henceforth JIM) is an ideal case study of the simultaneous stability and transformation of “social policy meanings, discourses, ideas, policy tools and objectives” (ibid: 32). Whilst, of course, in the process of ac-

cession the EU exerts diverse, sometimes contradictory, and even competing, pressures on policy makers, with economic and financial restructuring not always compatible with commitments to social cohesion, it is possible to see the JIM process in terms of mutual learning and adaptation with broad steering in terms of European values, combined with genuine local ownership and a sense of realism in social policy. At the same time, the JIM process highlights the problems of horizontal and vertical co-ordination, subsumed under the technical notion of 'capacity', which has served to slow down the accession process in a context in which the EU asserts itself as an, albeit often rather 'soft', disciplinary force.

The Commission has entered, therefore, into a dialogue with the Croatian Government and broad stakeholders which learns lessons from the previous set of JIMs with the New Member States which were very time limited. The fact that, even in the most optimistic scenario, the time from JIM signing, on 5 March 2007, to Croatia's EU accession in 2011, is significantly long, allows for a continued monitoring of how far the commitments are implemented. The process can be understood in terms of four dialogues and potential alignments between EU thinking and Croatian realities: statistical, participatory, governance, and policy commitments and practice. Taking each in turn, a rather complex picture emerges of the problems and possibilities brought up in these multiple processes.

Within the DFID/World Bank project noted above, one of the more successful interventions was on 'poverty monitoring', with mainly local experts promoting Household Budget Survey poverty monitoring by the Croatian Bureau of Statistics. In this context, from 2004 CBS began to issue data on poverty using some, but by no means all, the first generation of Laeken indicators utilised by the European Union in the fight

against social exclusion (cf. Atkinson et al. 2002). The clash between a World Bank understanding of absolute poverty and an EU standard in terms of relative poverty is important here, not least since a generation of social statisticians were trained in the World Bank's approach in Croatia, an illustration of the way in which it operates as a 'transnational expertised institution', generating both producers and consumers of its knowledge claims (St. Clair, 2006: 59). The EU, through the JIM, appears to be operating differently, supporting studies on jointly identified problems such as vulnerable youth and indebtedness.

In terms of participation, compared to many other strategic documents, the JIM process in Croatia has been marked by a high degree of openness in terms of dialogue with, and participation of, key stakeholders from the opening meeting in September 2005. Throughout the process of drawing up the JIM, formal consultative conferences held in March, June and October 2006 attracted large interest from a wide range of stakeholders who were provided with full, accurate and timely information. In addition, a broader consultative session, held in May 2006, facilitated by UNDP, allowed for a wider input of civil society and social services providers into the process. Throughout, suggestions from stakeholders were discussed thoroughly and changes were made. The first and second JIM follow-up conferences, held either side of parliamentary elections, in July 2007 and March 2008, continued to follow this pattern. It will be interesting to note progress on the suggestion from the European Commission, borrowing from our own feedback, regarding the importance of opening JIM dedicated web pages by the Ministry of Health and Social Welfare, as a key indicator of the transparency of the process. However, welfare users, not well organised in Croatia at this point, and not sufficiently integrated into European networks, do seem

still to be absent from the process. The issue of 'representation' of user groups is, of course, a complex one, not least in the context of very different styles of, for example, disability organisations in Croatia. Nevertheless, the absence of users' voices, unmediated by professionals and non-user activists, which is being addressed at the European level (cf. Woodward, 2007), remains a problem in the consultation process in Croatia.

In terms of governance issues, the leadership provided by the former and current State Secretary Dorica Nikolić has been important. Crucially, however, this appears to have spread to the civil servants in the Ministry with a dedicated team working on JIM and related EU issues. A division of labour has been created between a core 'Task Force' of Ministry Civil Servants and social policy scholars, with a large Monitoring Committee representing diverse stakeholder interests. Co-ordination with, and ownership by, other Ministries and agencies is, however, a more complex issue. Whilst progress has been made, commitments of civil servants do not always transfer to Ministers, as the last minute concern over sections of the JIM prior to signing, by the Minister of Family, Veterans and Inter-generational Affairs, showed. As reported by the Croatian European Movement under the heading 'Circus in Government'<sup>5</sup>, the Minister objected to the lack of full inclusion of measures to stimulate demographic renewal, which had not been in place when the draft was approved and which were not particularly relevant to the documents substance. Two related problems compound each other – the continued low status of 'social' issues and the marginalisation of the social welfare division within a health dominated Ministry, and the rather proprietorial approach to information and knowledge within

some Ministries. The significant role of key Croatian scholars of social policy, noted in the Introduction, should not be understated although the added value of scholarly inputs is probably close to its limit, with the need for multi-sectoral teams to take forward the specific policy commitments.

The more complicated, uncertain, and, of course, longer-term issue concerns the policy changes that JIM may, or may not contribute to. Certainly, the JIM document itself and the initial Implementation Plan, represent the clearest statements of a wide range of commitments to challenge social exclusion in Croatia ever gathered together in one place. Some crucial commitments, particularly those relating to deinstitutionalisation, where a ten year time line is outlined, would not have been highlighted had it not been for the way in which EU commitments reinforced domestic pressures. From a technical point of view, there is much to learn in terms of the presentation of strategic objectives: many commitments are simply cut and pasted from other strategic documents; many indicators are vague and/or self-referential; and clear costs have not been produced. However, the JIM Implementation Plan represents a kind of the least harmful consensus of what should and could be done to tackle elements of social exclusion in Croatia.

Whether the JIM is able, in the context of the visibility of the EU accession process, to take on an importance over and above other strategies that have, at best, been partially carried out in a very formalistic fashion, remains to be seen. The challenges of linking decentralisation, diversification and deinstitutionalisation (cf. Bošnjak and Stubbs, 2007) will be complex and controversial, not least since the decentralisation part of the JIM Follow Up appears to be reliant on wider decentralisation processes,

<sup>5</sup> Web: <http://www.europe.hr/index.php?newsid=782&language=0> (accessed 16 May 2008)

and recent work suggests that funding at regional and city levels for NGOs providing community-based social services is still quite limited and over-reliant on time limited, project-based, external funding (Japac and Škrbić, 2008). Precisely because of its more dialogic or 'soft' governance approach, there may be a new synthesis between funding, co-ordination and learning in the context of EU accession although, of course, the EU also works through external sub-contracted consultants which may, ultimately, threaten the genuine dialogue which has emerged in terms of translating broad EU objectives into a Croatian context.

### INTERIM CONCLUSIONS

These three 'moments' in the complex encounter between Croatian social policy and international actors are telling. The first, in terms of war and crisis, establishes little more than a 'contact zone' in which subjects previously separated come together in a situation of 'radically asymmetrical relations of power' (Pratt, 1992: 6-7) and radically different understandings. More heat than enlightenment, and more misunderstandings and mistrust than understanding and trust are produced. Nevertheless, the legacy of a parallelism between state and NGO-driven social policies endures. In the second, the World Bank appears to offer technical solutions to political questions, in the context of a new Government keen to open up international relations. The sheer complexity, multiplicity and, again radically asymmetrical power relations between parties to a project both limit real progress, but also confer the need to re-frame interventions as in some ways 'successful'. It is the liminal, even the ephemeral nature of the time-limited 'project', which renders it non-hegemonic and, itself, highly resisted by local actors who have 'time on their side' (Lendvai and Stubbs, 2007). The third moment, whilst too early for a judgement,

shows a complex dialogic practice and open learning at work within new frames of governance, participation, and strategic planning. The complex, fraught relationship between technical and political practices remains, in the context of broadly social democratic progressive inputs in a rather anti-social meta-political environment. The processes and content of reform of Croatian social policy are radically unfinished. The contribution of reflexive research to these is under-developed. However, and thanks largely to the legacy left to us by Professor Vlado Puljiz, whose formal retirement from his post is unlikely to limit unduly his engagement in the public sphere, the possibilities of mapping the terrain, discussing policy and political alternatives, advocating for change, and identifying social ills wherever they occur, has been expanded considerably and irrevocably in Croatia.

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**Sažetak**

**PROMIŠLJANJA O MEĐUNARODNIM AKTERIMA I STVARANJU  
SOCIJALNE POLITIKE U HRVATSKOJ**

**Paul Stubbs**

*Ekonomski institut, Zagreb  
Zagreb, Hrvatska*

*Baveći se ulogom međunarodnih aktera u tri ključna trenutka u razvoju socijalne politike u Hrvatskoj poslije stjecanja neovisnosti, ovaj članak poima socijalne reforme kao složene interaktivne procese u kojima su naslijeđa i konteksti bitni. Nepovjerenje koje je rezultat implicitne socijalne politike u kontekstu novog ratovima uvjetovanog humanitarizma tijekom ratova, još više produbljeno zbog problema vezanih uz projekte reforme kojima se upravlja izvana, i dalje ograničava promjene u hrvatskoj socijalnoj politici i praksi. Ipak, odgođena, ali sve više djelujuća europeizacija, izražena u Zajedničkom memorandumu o socijalnom uključivanju, otvara četiri područja dijaloga i moguće usklađivanje ideja Europske unije i hrvatske stvarnosti: statistika, participacija, vladavina, predanost politici i praksa.*

**Ključne riječi:** međunarodni akteri, reforma, Hrvatska, europeizacija.