

CROATIA: Happy 30th May (1990) – the Day Democracy Turned Forward

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Inaugural assembly of the Croatian Parliament speech

Zagreb, May 30th, 1990

Honorable representatives, esteemed guests and all who are present at this historical assembly of the Croatian Parliament!

First of all, on behalf of the Presidency of Croatia and in my own name I wish to thank you for the confidence you showed in us by electing us to this honorable and responsible office. Moreover, I dare say the most responsible office, because it requires the guarding and the representation, the strengthening and the assurance of full sovereignty of the Croatian nation and the inviolable freedoms and civil rights of all citizens of Croatia. Given that this is the first Croatian parliament ever to be elected by free and secret ballot, with the participation of all social classes, but also with the continuance of its historical survival at the fence of its independence, allow me to briefly remind you of the glorious traditions and historical adversities, as well as of the main mission before which we all stand, members of and representatives in the Croatian parliament together with the whole of the Croatian nation.

Honorable House of Representatives!

In carrying out our duties we need to always keep in mind the fact that in almost fourteen centuries of written history about Croats there has never been in any other institution of Croatian national life such outstanding declaration for survival, independence and self-determination as in the continued perpetuity and performance of the Croatian parliament.

The Croatian State parliament has, in relation to the other national and state communities, been the custodian of sovereignty of the Croatian people during all those long centuries (with the exception of the period from 1918 to 1941) and our burdensome history. The Croatian parliament had been the bearer of jurisprudential order, and with dependence on social circumstances of its time it had served as assurance of freedoms and citizens' rights as well as of general advancement of civilization.

In the history of Croatian statehood the Parliament protects the interests of the majority ("political") of people or classes against princes, that is, kings of self-sufficiency and tyranny. All of the most important happenings in political, cultural and religious life, from medieval to modern Croatia, take place in the Parliament. Byzantine poet Procopius (6th Century) notes

that Slavs and Croats “live in democracy from ancient times,” solving general business “at joint gatherings.” At the assembly in Rizana (804) the Istrian Croats demanded that the new Frankish authorities respect their native rights in relation to newcomers. At the field of Duvno “all of the common people of the land” were present for the coronation of King Tomislav (925). King Dmitar Zvonimir was solemnly crowned in Solin basilica (October 1075) after the people and the clergy had “in agreement, elected him as King of Croatia and Dalmatia” at the assembly in Solin. Further, Petar Kresimir IV at the assembly in Sibenik (1066), and Dmitar Zvonimir at the assembly in Knin (1087), endowed with royal freedom Zadar’s Benedictine abbey, that seat of spirituality, culture and education of the Croatian medieval era. At Bilino field (near Zenica) state church assembly (April 8th, 1203), in the presence of governor Kulin, Papal legate and numerous people settled the conflict around the phenomenon of Bosnian heterodox Christians. Even after the Croatian Kingdom was tied to Hungary in a personal union (1102 - 1526), then with the Habsburg crown (1527 - 1918), the Croatian Parliament and the Croatian Governor were the bearers of national sovereignty and defenders of statehood of the Triple Kingdom of Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia, even when they were territorially disconnected.

Debates at the highest levels of European civilization occurred in Croatian parliament...

Historical sources note the sitting of the Slavonian parliament (*Congregatio regni Slavoniae*) 1273, which represented the interests of the Croatian North, while the Croatian parliament (*Congregatio regni Croatiae*) held in 1351, in Podbrizani within Lika county, spoke about the interests of the Croatian area south from Gvozd. Both parliaments assembled together in 1533, and from 1557 the Parliament operated as a unified Croatian Slavonian Dalmatian Parliament. The Parliament was a class-based assembly (representatives of Aristocracy and Church) until 1848 and, hence, until 1918 it was a representative body of the people, albeit with electoral limitations.

Opposing the constant tendencies from Vienna and Budapest to turn the personal union of Croatia with Hungary and Austria into reality, i.e., that the ties to the joint crown were being abused with the aim of imposing German and Hungarian supremacy and dominance, the Croatian parliament and the Governor held onto the well-known principle: Kingdom does not impose laws upon Kingdom (*Regnum regno non praescribit leges*). Certainly, this initial viewpoint never lost its capability to defend the Croatian state sovereignty. Its effectiveness, though, in the past and present, has depended upon general circumstances, but also upon the wisdom and determination of the men who sat at the head of Croatia. The Croatian Parliament had been the highest legislative and administrative body during the time of the union with Hungarian and Austrian countries. The Croatian Governor, whose position was equal to that of viceroy in other countries, convened the Parliament. The Parliament passed laws independently and autonomously; confirmed Croatian citizenship; prescribed taxes and managed all financial affairs, customs, trade and traffic; and attended to administration of justice, teaching and education; but also it took care of territorial integrity and defense of the Croatian homeland by calling for recruitment into the army and appointing commanders of the Croatian army.

The fact that until 1845, and partly until 1847, Latin was spoken in the Croatian Parliament indicates that Latin, as the universal language of educated Europe, was a barrier to the hegemonistic attempts to impose German and Hungarian as official languages in Croatia, and that debates in Croatian parliament were held at the highest of levels of European civilization.

When on October 29th, 1918, Croatian Parliament severed “all former public law relations and ties between the Kingdom of Croatia, Dalmatia and Slavonia on the one hand, and the Kingdom of Hungary and the Austrian Empire on the other,” at the same time it transferred the executive but not the legislative power to the National Assembly of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. And given that the Croatian Parliament never ratified the act of unification of this state and the Kingdom of Serbia, from December 1st, 1918, into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, this act was considered as unconstitutional by all pro-Croatian state parties and as calculated to destroy the historical Croatian state sovereignty. The total history of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (1918 - 1928) and Yugoslavia (1929 - 1941) occurred in the shadows of the Vidovdan centralistic constitution, passed in the Belgrade Congress in 1920 against the will of the Croatian people, and the constitution about the Republic of Croatia that was brought down by the elected presidency of the Croatian people, headed by Radic, at a party meeting as the Croatian Parliament had been dissolved. Hegemonic forces that caused increasingly deeper political crises by insisting on centralistic Unitarian order in Yugoslavia (*Kingdom of*), were forced to give into the same just before World War II. However, agreement between Macek’s leadership and Prince Pavle and Cvetkovic about the creation of Banovina Croatia (*Croatian Dominion*) and the restoration of the Croatian Parliament not only came too late, but it was not accepted by the majority of the Serbian political parties who could not come to terms with the idea of the federalization of Yugoslavia. The consequences were in all that had happened during occupation and revolution.

The Croatian Parliament restored during Pavelic’s NDH (*Independent State of Croatia*), which followed and shared the destiny of the Axis fascist powers and Hitler’s European order, could not – of course, fulfill the task as the bearer and guardian of the Croatian state sovereignty. That historical role, in World War II circumstances, was taken over by ZAVNOH (*The National Anti-Fascist Council of the People's Liberation of Croatia*), as revolutionary Parliament, establishing the Federative State of Croatia, within the framework of AVNOJ (*Anti-Fascist Council of the People’s Liberation of Yugoslavia*) principles pertaining to the right of every nation, including Croatian, to self-determination and secession.

With the establishment of the Federative State of Croatia during the anti-fascist war, Croatian people found themselves on the side of the victorious democratic forces of U.S.A., Great Britain and U.S.S.R. There cannot be any doubt that this was a precondition for the international recognition of ZAVNOH and AVNOJ decisions to join Istria, Rijeka, Zadar and the islands to the Croatian homeland, likewise for the post-war constitutional regulation of the sovereignty of the Croatian Parliament.

Likewise, there can be no doubt that the one-party Communist system was the main barrier for true recognition of the Croatian and every other people’s right to self-determination and secession, the right which was proclaimed in all post-war constitutions of SFRJ (*Socialist Federative Republic of Yugoslavia*). There can also be no doubt that such constitutionally guaranteed, in reality denied, and internationally recognized right, offers a legal starting point for the realization of full state sovereignty of Croatia. And, on the basis of total historical experience, that of the earlier history and all that occurred from 1918 as well as from 1945 to the most recent in 1974 alike, the latter can only be realized on confederative foundations, as an alliance between free and sovereign states. We refer all those who cannot find a model for such a confederation to the modern example of creating the European Union.

Calling upon the ultimate prudence and deliberation...

Honorable representatives!

With democracy's magnificent victory, which enabled the assembly of the composition of Croatian Parliament such as this one, a spiritual climate almost requiring big solemn words has been created.

However, the conditions under which we live, the circumstances which surround us, especially the tasks that are before us, do not permit glittering triumphalism nor big and easily given promises. Nevertheless, calling upon ultimate prudence and deliberation we are far from every despair and pessimistic despondence. Although we have walked only a short part of the road to parliamentary democracy, it was crucially important, the first step in the return of the Croatian people and their state to the civilized, political, cultural and economic tradition of Europe.

We need to acknowledge all the participants in the recently conducted free elections, as well as those in the current government, all in opposition who will replace those in government, or stay in opposition, for the peaceful and dignified – we could indeed say enviable – way in which the elections had proceeded. Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ) has won the majority of votes in all three houses of parliament and also the majority in more than two-thirds of local district assemblies. This, in itself, means that along with victorious glory, the honor to carry the heaviest part of the burden in the clearing of the impervious, thickety state of crisis left to us by the one-party system is bestowed upon HDZ. But, the remaining parties that have, as a result of the electoral competition, secured the “more comfortable” seats in the parliamentary opposition cannot avoid their part of responsibility, either. That is, rules and traditions of parliamentary democracy do not give the winner all the rights of a victor, nor do they classify the defeated into powerless losers, as it used to be during the one-party autocracy.

The results of Croatian elections are as remarkable as they are binding. With the free will of the people that was expressed in the most democratic way known to the modern world: at direct, secret, multi-party elections, the legislative power (and the right to appoint executive authorities) has been bestowed upon the party which has, on its program banners, emphasized the centuries-old aspirations of the Croatian people: to be free and to be his/her own self on his/her own land. That, in the spirit of generally accepted principles of modern humanity, the people have unimpeded right to national independence and an inviolate right to self-determination, which includes the right to a modern, independent state and to secession from other nations and state formations or to association with others in accordance with their life's interests. On this occasion, and in this place, it's important to emphasize that the fundamental aspirations for achieving democratic rights of all citizens and the sovereignty of Croatian people were present in the program demands of almost every party participating in the elections. Also, it needs to be mentioned that the world, which due to ignorance or wrong judgments of circumstance, but with deep curiosity, observed the elections in Croatia, was quickly convinced that the elections manifested a political maturity and wisdom of all participants, as well as the resolve of all the citizens and the whole of the Croatian nation to secure human rights for all citizens and national and state sovereignty of the Republic of Croatia through democratic elections. Moreover, not only the impartial but also the biased

observers came to the realization that the elections in Croatia marked one of the shiniest victories of democracy within the frame of removing the existing Socialist one-party system.

Meanwhile, now that elections are behind us, it's time that we turn all our vision and thoughts toward today, tomorrow and the future. If we had in our democratic goals proclaimed radical changes in all spheres of spiritual and material life, that does not mean that we are for disintegration, or even less for the destruction of that which has its justification in a democratic system, or that which can be turned through adjustments into general benefit. We have not received much goodness in the total inheritance from the previous government, but that does not mean that everything they leave us is without any value. That follows from the mere fact that the period of the old government was long lasting. All three generations had suffered, worked and created under its wings. Along with all the failures, it also has to leave positive consequences and trails, which cannot and must not be exposed to entire eradication.

The problems facing the new government are many, complex and tangled, from local communities and municipal councils, to the Parliament, the Government and the Presidency. Within a short period, they will parallelly need to solve many problems of life's importance which other European and Western countries solved half a century ago, or even half a millennium ago. Let's mention only the important ones: proprietary relationships and economic life; constitutional order of pluralistic civil society with the appropriate government system modeled on countries of the free world; modernization and revalorization of public services, especially science and culture, teaching and education, health and social welfare, administrative services and public activities (information, journalism, Radio and TV), etc.

Numerous very complex problems have accumulated in all of these areas, and without solving them in their reciprocity there can be no exit from the crisis, or real progress. And a great deal of talent and knowledge will be needed, determination and deliberation, but before everything and above all we would rather direct our efforts toward correct paths and lasting solutions. Personally, I am an optimist. I begin with a strong realization that in the public and among us who are taking up the burden of this enormous responsibility, the conviction that we need not start reinventing the wheel is prevalent. When we search for solutions to our developmental problems we need to utilize worldly experiences, especially those of the countries of the free world, always as guiding thought and stimulating core, and very often as an unmistakable ideal for quite definite solutions.

All changes must be implemented with consistent respect of principles of the rule of law government system ...

Respected Assembly!

We live in an exciting and turbulent time. In a time that is filled with many openly present threats and insidious dangers. Many contemporaries were, and some still are, possessed by the nightmare of all kinds of hazards preying upon us along all our roads toward democracy and national sovereignty. Instead of tragic faintheartedness and passive feelings of impasse, I have personally always been more inclined to discovery and noticing those big chances that hid in that dramatic time and in the breaking point of a historical period. History has already given us the answer, which says that we were in the right when we did not want to reconcile with the prospect of continuing as an object of foreign politics and when we consciously took the risk in becoming the recognized subject and creator of our own destiny.

Although the generation I belong to is used to dangers and challenges of our time, only a small number could follow the spirit of today's time. The same applies to the post-war generations who lived in peace but in limited freedoms and restricted incentives for creativity due to the terror of the Bolshevik totalitarianism. Those are the reasons why today we are once again, so to speak, at an historical beginning. Finding ourselves at this crossroads and burdened by the load of the past, we are, nevertheless, also richer for many experiences – albeit mostly negative – of life's importance, such as political and economic and all other experiences.

According to my personal persuasion, the first and the most important task of the new democratic government in Croatia should be the creation of all spiritual, material and legal preconditions for the sense of legal civil and national security of all its citizens, for peace and trust among them. Not only the big scriptwriters from the opposing and especially hegemonic Unitarian and dogmatic camps, but also all those people who are tied to the past and who are confused by democratic movements and traditions to which they are not accustomed, do and will do everything in order to obstruct the realization of our goals, to inhibit and compromise the introduction of the rule of law system, order, work and morality. Luckily for us, and them as well, they must quickly come to understand the general internal and international circumstances, especially the omnipresent unavoidable collapse of the real Socialist system that will render their scenarios as futile historic anachronisms. That, of course, does not mean that we can afford to underestimate the dangers from different forms of threats, blackmail and even provocation which come our way almost daily from anti-Croatian and anti-democratic lairs and headquarters. On the contrary, that has to motivate us even more to jointly, all of us, and each individually, do everything so that reason, freedom and progress conquer passions, the rage of darkness and backwardness.

Respected ladies and gentlemen!

New circumstances, especially significant social and political changes, always confuse and even bewilder people. In their minds, enthusiastic hopes and ominous anxieties entangle and conflict. Our initial tasks, through mindful steps and decisions of legislative, executive and judicial authorities, must be to ensure that all citizens and residents have normal conditions for free enterprise and creativity, legal and civic security, work, savings and free life in the civilized system modeled upon democratic countries of the modern world.

We cannot, nor do we want to, guarantee to anyone some absolute equality or general social prosperity regardless of his or her abilities and work results. We just want to create equal preconditions for all, without discrimination, but to also ask for equal responsibility from all in the fulfilling of their legal obligations and in the respect of the rule of law system. With that in mind, I would like to emphasize that we should not count on any political "solidarity," but, on the contrary, on creative, principle critique, from the benches of the parliamentary opposition and also from the intellectual ranks in all areas of social and intellectual life. We do not want to create or encourage any obedient subjects, intellectual adulators and flattering careerists, nor blinded political opponents or helpless haters, but responsible professional intellectuals and scientifically professional institutions who would, with their critical and positive intellectual creativity, contribute to the prosperity of their own people and to the general advancement of society in which they live and function.

The implementation of normal transference of government, i.e., replacement of the politically operational (functional) layer of the former one-party system, cannot be considered as any kind of revengefulness. That, of course, also goes for the de-bureaucratization of government administration within the modernization and democratization of superfluous institutions and supernumerary public servants. All changes must be implemented with consistent respect of principles of the rule of law government system, and all criminal proceedings and breaches of authority will be subsumed into the laws of our rule of law state system.

In European integration Croatia must ensure its independence and faster progress...

Honorable representatives and parliamentary officers!

At the end of this inaugural address, allow me to endeavor and put forward, in the briefest of points, some of the most urgent and immediate tasks that stand before the new democratic government of Croatia.

1. New Constitution of the Republic of Croatia. The fundamental determinants of the new Croatian Constitution have been set in advance through the plebiscitary declaration of Croatian people for democratic freedoms of citizens and for state sovereignty at recent elections. Best-known people from the political and scientific life will be included into the Constitutional Commission. The new Constitution of Croatia must be free from all ideological dissents; it must be based on experiences of creating a Croatian state and in the spirit of the most democratic traditions of modern Europe and North American reality and science of law.
2. Regulating the new constitutional position of Croatia in Yugoslavia. Given that we need to start from the fact that Croatia is situated in the system of Yugoslavia, which is a recognized member of the international order, we are prepared for negotiations with the representatives of the other nations of SFRY and federal bodies for the purpose of contractual regulations of mutual relations. Based on the totality of historical experience we hold that the state sovereignty within the community of other nations of SFRY can only be secured on confederative foundations, as is a contractual alliance of sovereign states.
3. Inclusion into Europe and Europeanization of Croatia. Simultaneous with democratic transformation we need to undertake all necessary steps for Croatia to be included into the European Union as soon as possible. For centuries, Croatia has been a constituent part of the Western European (Mediterranean and Central-European) culture. Even when it did not have a full political state subject status, Croatia was inseparably connected to the Western European civilization. The contribution to European life several centuries ago, as well as through later history, by Croatian Latinists bears loud witness to that fact. The return to that cultural tradition must be

multilayered. In European integration Croatia must secure its independence and faster progress.

4. The establishment of the rule of law system in a state and the modernization of government administration. Consistency in distribution and responsibility of legislative, executive and judicial powers is a precondition of every genuine democracy. Thorough de-politicization of the judiciary and ensuring its absolute independence is among our first tasks. De-bureaucratization and modernization of the entire government administration requires organizational reform, and personnel and technological update.

5. Spiritual renewal. The democratic movements within the period of the implementation of the first free elections have led to a kind of spiritual revival of the Croatian national pride. The declaration by the enormous majority of Croatian people of choosing the HDZ program goals had, in reality, marked the ending of that “civil war” which had lasted in Croatia since the time of World War II. The victory of the democratic spirit and unity between all Croatian citizens, regardless of their past and their views, has created the preconditions for the removal of all fatal divisions. Finally, divisions of people into first- and second-grade citizens, into conquerors and conquered, into suitable and unsuitable, into trustworthy and enemy, must disappear. We aspire to create a society in which human and work abilities, citizenship and moral virtues, and not origin and attitudinal orientation, will determine the position and value judgments about an individual in society. Beside that, we want to build the genuine democracy in which the rule of the majority will mean the protection of the minority.

6. Radical changes to proprietary relationships and economy. Our democratic government is accepting Croatia in which there is a concerning state of economic impoverishment and general lagging behind Europe. It is necessary to find ways out of public ownership and create conditions for legal and financial security of all economic entrepreneurial projects, as soon as possible. In order to find the most favorable and the fastest solutions for changes in proprietary relationships, for the needed denationalization and re-privatization, for an effective tax system and bank and exchange operations, we need to, along with all our own experts, engage competent foreign professionals.

7. Demographic revival. The former total politics of the past several decades have brought the Croatian national being into a state of demographic endangerment. Beside the change in the spiritual political climate it is necessary to undertake urgent and purposeful steps towards preventing further emigration of our citizens as well as toward increasing natality.

8. Return and inclusion of emigrants. The establishment of spiritual unity between domiciled and emigrated Croatia is undoubtedly one of HDZ's successes, which already have significantly contributed to the carving out of democratic transformation. The new Croatian government should undertake purposeful steps on all levels for the enablement of the quickest possible return of as many Croatians as possible from the world to the homeland. We also need to seriously address the possibility of moving one part of members of Croatian minorities to the depopulated hearths of many parts of the Croatian countryside. Investments by Croatian émigrés in all areas of economic life should be motivated through special privileges. Our distinctive attention must be focused on that, because they have enormous work experiences, technological and financial potential at their disposal with which they can significantly contribute to a faster economic and democratic transformation of their homeland.

9. The necessity of changes in public services. We need urgent and big changes in almost all areas of public life. Culture, science and education, health and social welfare, insurance, media and other public services are burdened with problems and substantial financial difficulties. The old regime leaves us in a spiritual and material desert in many areas, especially in education and teaching. We need the return to our pan-European educational traditions as much as we need a radical turnaround into the futuristic informational era. We need to remove the effects of coercion inflicted by ideological narrow-mindedness upon the culture and the arts by releasing the potential of creativity of modern artists and culturally ambitious people, and striving toward genuine appreciation of the authentic national cultural heritage, but also keeping in step with the superior accomplishments of modern culture of other nations.

10. Moral renewal and work ethics. The unnatural real-Socialist system leaves us the inheritance of fatal consequences especially because it had, through its perversion, demolished and belittled all traditional values and moral norms. This equally relates to family and school education, to professional, work and business ethics. Distortions in the value system paved the way for the escape or apathy of the wise and the capable, and for the advancement of the incapable and inconsiderate careerists. It's going to be a hard and long-lasting job making changes to such a distorted value system, but we must commence with that job immediately, in all spheres and pores of life.

Honorable representatives and officers of the first truly democratic Croatian Parliament!

In conclusion, I thank you once again on the trust you have shown and, at the same time, allow me to direct these words to all the citizens of Croatia and to the entire Croatian nation. Resurrecting – at the time of the electoral breaking point – the subdued and injured national conscience and the thwarted pride of Croatian people, and also the lost hope of all Croatian citizens, we have inspired, by releasing the enormous spiritual and rational energy of the

whole nation, an exultant reviving zeal. It's up to us now, up to the new democratic government of Croatia, to maintain that elation and to channel that reawakened energy into work and creative endeavors for the realization of the sacred ideals of freedom and prosperity of our homeland. On that road, and for that divine goal, the primary and the largest responsibility is on all of us, the elected members of Parliament and representatives of the new Croatian democratic government, but also, on all Croatian citizens. That is, together we must be imbued by the awareness that we cannot expect from our Croatia more than we, ourselves, contribute to its advancement, so that we, ourselves, and our children, and children of our children may enjoy the fruits of our work.

Just as I had believed that the Croatian people would utter their mature word at the first democratic elections, from which this Croatian Parliament originates, so too am I all the more firmly convinced that, with the leadership of its true presidency, they will be able and will know how to build the life which free people deserve in their one and only, weary from suffering, but sacred homeland.

Thank you all from the bottom of my heart for your attention and for your role in this historical occurrence, and also to all those who gave us their trust, and, whom we must not and will not betray!

May our democratic and sovereign Croatia live and progress!

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