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Croatia (1991 - 1995)

Croatia declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1991, under the leadership of Franjo Tudjman, a hardline nationalist who had been elected president the previous year. Aided by the Yugoslav National Army (JNA), Serb residents took control of a third of the country. The United Nations intervened but was unable to stop communal violence. In 1995, after several broken ceasefires, the Croatian army retook the Serb-held areas. An estimated 40,000 people died in the conflict, which ended with the signing of the Dayton Peace Accords in 1995.

During World War II, Croatian leaders cooperated with the Nazis, murdering hundreds of thousands of Serbs, Jews, and Roma. After the war, Croatia rejoined the rest of Yugoslavia as a multi-ethnic state. When Yugoslav leader Marshall Tito died in 1980, nationalist sentiments grew in Croatia and other Yugoslav republics.

In 1990 Croatia held its first multi-party election since World War II. Tudjman, leader of the HDZ party, Franjo Tudjman, was elected by appealing to Croatian nationalist sentiments. Once elected, he declared Croatia the home of the Croat people and designated all other ethnic groups as minorities residing in Croatia. The Serbian National Council, with representatives in the Serb-dominated regions of Croatia, responded by declaring the sovereignty of the Serbian people. Local skirmishes escalated to full-scale war when the Yugoslav general Ratko Mladic led JNA forces and local Serbs in an attack against a small town in the Krajina region. Soon after, the JNA attacked Vukovar, on the Serbian border, killing hundreds of Croat civilians and soldiers taken from the hospital. A third of Croatia was occupied by Serbs, displacing hundreds of thousands of Croats.

In 1992, the United Nations sent in peacekeepers to separate Serbs and Croats, creating four protected Serb areas. Several ceasefires were signed in the following three years but all of them were broken as Croatia attempted to regain its lost territory. In the meantime, war had broken out in neighboring Bosnia. Croatia sent forces to assist Bosnian Croats, in the hope of annexing some of the territory for Croatia proper. After the 1994 Washington Agreement in which Bosnian Muslims and Croats joined forces against the Serbs, Croatia launched another military offensive and regained several Serb-held areas. In late 1995, Croatia was signatory to the Dayton Accords which ended the Yugoslav wars.

Refugee returns sparked intermittent violence in the late 1990s. With Tudjman's death in 1999, the Croatian government increased its cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, and the new parliament elected in 2000 instituted many reforms. Croatia applied for European Union membership in 2003, but accession has been delayed by EU concerns about corruption and the treatment of non-Croats.

Print Resources

Magaš, Branka and Ivo Žanić (2001) *The War in Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, 1991-1995*. London: Frank Cass.

Woodward, Susan L. (1995) *Balkan Tragedy: Chaos and Dissolution After the Cold War*. Washington: The Brookings Institution.

Online Resources

Reuters AlertNet. *Country Profile: Croatia*.

International Crisis Group. *Croatia Reports*.

BBC News. *Timeline: Croatia*.

European Commission. *Croatia 2006 Progress Report*

Timeline

1980 - Yugoslav leader Marshall Tito dies

1990 - Franjo Tudjman's HDZ party wins multi-party elections on nationalist platform

1991 - Tudjman declares Croatia independent, passes nationalist reforms; Serbs, aided by JNA, force out Croats in the Krajina and eastern Slavonia regions

1992 - United Nations sends peacekeepers; first ceasefire signed

1993 - two ceasefires signed and broken

1994 - third ceasefire signed

1995 - ceasefire broken; Croatia signs Erdut Agreement, pledging to peacefully reintegrate Serb-held areas; Dayton Peace Accords signed