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WHAT IS EUROPE (TO CROATIA) AND WHAT IS CROATIA (TO EUROPE) IN THE MIDDLE AGES

I see the question of the relationship between Croatia and Europe throughout history as above all a question of identity. A distinct Croatian identity is part of common European characteristics, on the one hand, and is separate, on the other. With its separateness it enriches the otherwise heterogeneous European community. Both components, namely, the common and the distinct, are equally important and interesting to me. In my opinion, the one and the other make that which is European. The Europe of history in which Croatia participated in its own way was, first of all, defined by its cultural and civilisational reaches, and not by political unification. Though defined politically today, Europe is primarily a product that is founded on economic strength, and economic interests are its purpose. Today's European product frequently seeks in its spiritual heritage only arguments for temporary political goals. Indeed, the case occurs where the essential characteristics of its cultural originality are forgotten and removed from today's self-identification. I wish to avoid in every way such an 'illustrated' model, because I think that it does not lead to an understanding of the past reality, but rather tends towards the political manipulation of history. Secondly, we are witnesses to the fact that Croatian historiography was traditionally placed in such a way that it corresponded to various political initiatives, without frequently having one of its own. We need only recall how much creative energy was spent in convincing and proving that Croatia belonged or did not belong to this or that state organisation or political option. This acceptance of political themes impoverished our comprehension of the past reality, and directed Croatian historiography to outdated methodological paths. As a result, I certainly do not wish to collect arguments which testify that, in the Middle Ages, Croatia was part of Europe. Instead, I want to raise the question of what Europe was in the Middle Ages, what it was to Croatia and what Croatia was to it, and what has remained in the long duration from that foundation. On the condition that we ourselves design our questions, and that we answer them without the limitation of temporary political aims and the demands of today's political correctness, it is not all that bad that we should judge our position and meaning in history, perhaps in European history, by the measure of community and authenticity.

The centuries between the fourth and fifteenth were decisive and vital for today's Europe - in the whole European heritage, the medieval period is the most important, and the same is valid for Croatia. Particular civilisational values were accepted, and an exceptionally creative and intellectual energy was concentrated in this period. The Middle Ages was the basis upon which everything subsequent was built. Thus many later processes and phenomena can be understood only if they can be stretched back to their medieval roots. In this period, the Croats settled, they give their new space a name and a state organisation. The heritage they found is built into their

national life, they entered into creative interaction with their surroundings and created the valuable foundations of their culture. Europe, that is, the community of European states, appears for the first time in the Middle Ages as a reality and as a mental concept. The basic characteristics of Europe are already formed at that time: unity realised through Christianity and culture, the richness of diversity - from the geographical to the cultural, antagonisms and conflicts between East and West, the profound differences between the North and the South, particular institutions, the forms of government, technological and intellectual advancement, the value of work and productivity, affirmation of the new. Much of this is also valid for the Croatian lands, which were divided by geographical differences and political divisions, while being linked by ethnicity, language and a cultural heritage. Croatian historiography frequently emphasised the political division of the Croatian lands during the Middle Ages, thereby neglecting the fact that the political division and the fluidity of borders was one of the characteristics of a large part of the European area in this period, and that other long-term connections demonstrated greater strength and importance than political ones. After all, borders were only just established throughout Europe in the Middle Ages and were very fluid, while the feeling of belonging was defined by various criteria, among which political criteria were not in the forefront.

The base and starting-point of European unity was set up in the Middle Ages, and this basis was Christianity. During the whole medieval period, the powerful activity of Christianity brought a feeling of community, without regard for borders that divided the various kingdoms. Even after the laicising of European thought during the Enlightenment, this Christian basis was preserved, consciously or unconsciously, as essential. The concept of Christianity became, beginning with the eleventh century, the term of reference for Europe. Only by their name are medieval Europeans the descendants of the beautiful daughter of Ageron and Zeus in the form of a white bull. In reality, medieval Europe is Latin Christianity. *Christianitatis* was not only a mental concept, but was also a geographical concept, which began with Dalmatia, the door of the West. Thus, even in the seventeenth century, a traveller from the East, Peter Mundy from Cornwall, having sailed into the port of Split in 1620, will record in his diary, that "one can see that we have entered into Christendom, this is a completely different world."

That symbolic remark leads to another question: Where was the boundary of medieval Europe, where was the boundary between the East and the West? There are numerous answers to this question, depending on how far east the person who poses the question is found. Nevertheless, the clearest and most important boundary is the one on which the medieval Croatian lands found themselves, a boundary already established in antiquity with the division of the Empire and strengthened by a row of medieval divisions, from the contrasts of the Eastern and Western Empire, the split and growing differences between Roman and Orthodox Christianity, to the borders established by the Turkish conquests. The Ottoman intrusions further strengthened the sign of equality between Christianity and medieval Europe - the border that was defended by the *reliquiae reliquiarum* of Croatia was a clear border and term of reference for Europe. Croatia was not the first or the only medieval 'shield and bulwark of Christianity', but it was indeed a real and material bulwark. Sigismund's encampments and the defensive zone of Mathias Corvinus stemmed the Ottoman high tide, protecting Christianity, that is, Europe. Jacques Le

Goff says in his book, *L'Europe est-elle née au Moyen Age?* (written in 2003 as part of the project "To Create Europe"), that this border was decisive for Christian Europe. The flower of European knighthood fled the many battles with the Turks between 1379 and 1526, while the kingdoms of Central Europe waged battle against the Turks, and sometimes battles were abandoned only to exceptional individuals, mainly from the Croatian lands.

Linked to this question is another, also important, question: Were the medieval Croatian lands on the periphery of Europe? There already appears in the ninth century the idea of *prestantiores Europae species*, which consists of Italy, Gaul/France and Germany. From this view and from a modern Atlantic-oriented Europe, everything outside of this privileged circle is the periphery. However, medieval reality was different. Medieval Europe inherited Mediterranean ecumenism from antiquity. In contrast to modern Western Europe, medieval Europe gathers around the Mediterranean, is oriented towards it and is imbued with its airing. It is Europe's cradle and womb. Through it, Europe materialises communication with Asia and Africa, and receives spiritual and material fruits and influences from them. This fact places Croatia, an Adriatic and Mediterranean land, in its proper context and accentuates its medieval significance. The Croatian area participates in Mediterranean culture. Indeed, it is, beside Christianity, the most important component of Croatian culture. Furthermore, to mention only some factors: the Roman curia built its policy in the Balkans precisely in the Croatian lands, Dalmatia is during the course of the whole Middle Ages in the centre of Venice's interests, Slavonia became a rich outpost of Hungarian rulers. This lowland, in the Middle Ages no-man's land, became an area of settlement and urbanisation, a typical European area of ethnic and cultural mixing. Out of the political division and position of the medieval Croatian lands, there ensued an abundance of heterogeneous affiliations and cultural atmospheres, which in the end contributed to the richness of Croatia. The Croatian lands, and especially Dalmatia, built their cultural particularity in the Middle Ages, above all upon the much-varied richness of the heritage of antiquity. This urban Mediterranean culture radiated deep into the Croatian interior during the course of the whole Middle Ages. On the other hand, influences from the Central European area also reached Croatia, and are already noticeable in the Middle Ages. From 1102, the political reality of Croatia was the union with Hungary, which had a Central European policy and dragged the Croatian lands, and especially Slavonia, in that direction. It was precisely the Central European area that preserved the political force of the medieval idea of Latin Christianity and Christian, that is, European solidarity after the Middle Ages. One of the essential elements of this community, the Latin language, survived the longest as an official language precisely in Hungary and Croatia, until 1847. In addition, the particular heritage of the East also reached medieval Croatia. The Croatian lands, one could say, the West which was acquainted closely with the East, received from Byzantium, and later from the Ottoman Empire, spiritual and material values, even though the Croatian identity was formed chiefly by the values of the Christian West.

Medieval Croatia shared much in common with Europe. Apart from the much varied and far-reaching cultural atmosphere of Christianity, there were also many social correspondences: kingdoms and royal authority, the affirmation of the nobility, the feudal as well as the town patriciate, knightly and chivalrous culture, popular culture, the ecumenical Latin language and literature,

legal culture, urbanisation and the civilisational achievements that go with it, the Romanesque and the Gothic, the monetary economy, the growth of trade and crafts, the great advance of agriculture, new ideas on the value of women and children, the evolution of marriage and the family, the relation to others and the different, to mention only something of the rich mileage of the Croatian Middle Ages, so essential to our contemporary life, whether we are aware of it or not. In the fourteenth century, Croatia shared with Europe all apocalyptic afflictions, from cold spells to long rains, and from great starvation to epidemics of disease, which did not cease until the seventeenth century. The fourteenth century also brought some long-term benefits, precisely when it is a question of the integration of the Croatian lands. Through the ambitious project of Louis the Great, who linked, for the first time, all the Croatian lands, except for Istria, into the same political community, and who brought Dubrovnik into this community for the first time, the Adriatic direction of Croatian politics showed its long-term benefit. Although the crises of the fifteenth century destroyed that political community, it was already strengthened by the existing bonds and became the basis of later integrations. The fifteenth century, crucial for the whole of Europe, brought greater crises to the Croatian lands. The consequences of the Ottoman conquest were catastrophic: there were economic and demographic crises, properties collapsed, trade lagged behind, the population emigrated, with the exception of Dubrovnik, towns stagnated and, in general, the differences between the individual parts of Croatia became greater still. A part of the Croatian lands, above all medieval Croatia, entered into the structure of the Ottoman Empire, and experienced radical and permanent social changes. At the same time, Europe was experiencing demographic expansion, while Croatia remained a *terra deserta*. When conditions calmed down, it became a region of settlement for a new population which had not grown from the medieval traditions of the Croatian area, and which brought with it new social forms and new political problems.

With its manifold affiliations, political and cultural, Croatia was already in the Middle Ages close to European communities. The Croatian regions gravitated towards Venice, Buda, Rome, Austria, Byzantium, the Adriatic, the Mediterranean and Central Europe. The Croatian area communicated with the European in different and manifold ways. Connections came with trade, pilgrimages, schooling and literature. The political division of Croatia, and the recognition of Hungarian and Venetian rule, had its cultural consequences respectively. The centre of authority, and that means not only decision making, but also cultural politics and investment, were outside of Croatia. For the same reason, with the exception of the Dominican *studium generale* in Zadar, in the Croatian lands of the Middle Ages there was not one of the most important institutions on which Western civilization rests, and that is the university, the nursery of intellectual work. However, medieval Croats nonetheless inherited this beautiful Europe of science and art, study and work, in European courts and universities, from Bologna and Paris to Venetian Padua and others. In Croatia itself, *studia humaniora* was taught in higher schools, studies that designated the program of the new European learning, the new practical knowledge and comprehension, the task of which was to influence the activity of man. The intellectual creative work, the cult of the book, the exceptional range of the spirit, did not pass the Croatian lands by. Istria was for centuries the nursery of the main literary texts of the Middle Ages, and from there they crossed into other

Slavic literatures. In equal measure, all the genres of medieval European literatures were planted on Croatian soil. Creativity in the Latin language opened Croatian culture to the European public, and in fact did not compete with the rich current of creativity in the Croatian language. Croatia creatively accepted the Romanesque, the Gothic and, afterwards, the Renaissance. It was precisely Dalmatia, as the first European region, that accepted and was rooted itself in a distinct way into its own identity the phenomenon of Italian humanism and Renaissance. Europe is today once again discovering that fact. The library of the Zadar merchant (of cloth) Mihovil Petrov from 1385, where many popular medieval scientific and literary works are mentioned, among them a luxurious codex of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, bears sufficient witness to the reach of this influence and the level of city culture that arose from it.

At the same time, as the medieval Croatian lands participated in the common European heritage, they also brought with them their particular fruits, all of which are impossible, at this opportunity, to cite. They are manifested in cultural, social and political phenomena. For example, the area of medieval Croatia during the course of the later Middle Ages exhibits pronounced social particularities which originate from the heritage of the early medieval Croatian kingdom, and from the fact that in this area there is *de facto* no royal authority or *iura regalia*. As a result, the power of aristocratic families grew, particularly that of the families of Krk and Bribir, who will, under new conditions and with the new names of Frankopan and Zrinski, during the course of the whole early modern period remain the skeleton of the Croatian lands. There is also the base of the lower nobility, gathered in free noble districts and in the alliance of twelve tribes. Upon this strengthening of the nobility rests the growth of the meaning of the *Sabor* and the so-called Croatian political nation is formed. Free peasant districts, as well as the cantons of autochthonous Vlachs of the Catholic faith and Glagolitic literature, bears witness to the particularities of this area, which were erased by Turkish invasions.

In Dalmatia, we find particular forms of civic administration, similar to those in Italy, but with some solutions of their own. The Dalmatian towns endeavoured to build independence between Venice, Hungary and later Turkey. One has to mention Dubrovnik, which during the course of the Middle Ages developed into a city-state, the form of which was known only in Italy. It preserved that medieval form in the period when other towns became integrated with larger states or became themselves large states, such as Venice. With that, with their freedom, with their nobles, ships in the Levant and West and with exceptional artistic creativity, Dubrovnik is a precious part of the medieval Croatian heritage. In its hinterland is Bosnia, unbrokenly tied to Croatian history during the course of the Middle Ages, a land with marked religious, social and cultural particularities.

The noble pearl of the Croatian medieval heritage is certainly Glagolism. It is interesting that, in spite of the success of the action from Constantinople, the Croats inclined themselves towards the Latin Church, while still keeping as their particular characteristic the cultural and spiritual accomplishment of the mission of the brothers from Salonica. Glagolism was the most distinct way to affirm the Croatian language, but also provided a view of the world that deeply influenced the medieval Croatian man. Written traces and the spiritual radiation of that mentality have remained a permanent Croatian heritage, but also a heritage of European and world history. With

good reason did Pope John Paul II proclaim Cyril and Methodius the patrons of Europe, together with Benedict of Nursia. The decisive meaning of Glagolism for Istria is of immense importance for Croatia. Though Istria developed outside of the Croatian political area, its strong Croatian Glagolitic component preserved the Croatian ethnic and social circle through a continuous sequence of crises and disturbances, which attacked it during the course of its history.

Writers who gave momentum to Latin culture, treading on new humanistic paths, directly stimulated the emergence of a new, secular literature in the national Croatian language. It grew, namely, out of an urban culture, affirming the national language in relation to Latin in the same way as it happened in Italy. Besides Latin and Croatian, there also emerges a literature in Italian, as well as in the Greek language, in the Dalmatian cities. The multi-lingual literature and the use of several alphabets are one of the particularities of medieval Croatian culture. The literary search for the Croatian language, for the 'new sailing ship' and for the 'garden of fame', is interwoven with the roots of national feeling and the feeling of Slavic community. Indeed, the feeling of national belonging receives its modern meaning only in the eighteenth century, but the distant source of that feeling is the Middle Ages. As in Europe, so too in Croatia, national affiliation in the Middle Ages was determined by language. The growing partiality of sixteenth century writers for literature in the national language is a symbol of the feeling of Croatian national affiliation and patriotism, which was mutually explicitly testified to by poets. Humanism, the common European referential point, received in its Croatian reception some particularities that reflected the key problems of people from this area. More than the rest of Europe, Croatian humanists were absorbed with reality: the threatened heritage, language and Christianity. From that resulted a particular patriotic enthusiasm, consciousness of their own national affiliation, of the Slavic and Christian component of that identity and, simultaneously, the universal community of the learned. Through the activity of the humanists, various levels of feeling of belonging were manifested and the basis for future integrations set.

Into the rich luggage of the Croatian Middle Ages entered, of course, the individual achievements of exceptional individuals, which are today still living and inspiring creative sparks. To count all that wealth at this opportunity is not possible, so I will mention only some heights of medieval Croatian creativity: the works and ideas of Herman Dalmatin, Marulić's Christian-humanist best-sellers and the 'new sailing ship' of *Judita*, the strong, original and lonely figure of Marin Držić and the same such works, the ingenious innovation of Juraj Dalmatinac on the Šibenik cathedral.

As already mentioned, in the Middle Ages the idea of Europe appears, and from that follows the political and mobilising calls for unity. One of the enthusiasts and leaders of such a policy was Pius II, who called for the unity of Christianity, in other words, Europe, in a series of letters, epistles and in the 1458 text entitled *De Europa*. In similar manner, two Croats reflected on the idea of Europe and European unity, and that with greater latitude than their contemporaries and continuers in the West. Ivan Stojković emphasised the need to restore and establish the unity of Western ecumenism with the aim of uniting with the Christians of the East. He was deeply convinced that only a strong and politically united Europe could successfully oppose the intrusion of Islam, and liberate the Balkan and Eastern European Christian nations and lands from

Ottoman occupation. In other words, he considered that only a united Europe could survive and preserve its particular identity. For Ivan Vitez of Sredna, the *christianitas* threatened by the Turks encompassed Western and Eastern Christianity, so he condemned the neglect of European states towards Byzantium and the Eastern Church. The ideas of Stojković and Vitez were not only imaginative projects: they poured their ideas and words into deeds, persevering even when they found themselves alone on their path. One could say that these two people of far-sighted intellects and great responsibility had a vision of the future Europe.

The recognition of the Habsburgs as Croatian rulers, which denotes the negotiated end of the Croatian Middle Ages, was also one step on the road to European unity. Namely, the Croatian nobility became at that time a part of the attempt to unite Europe on a dynastic basis, under the rule of the Habsburgs. The conclusions of the parliament of the Croatian estates from the beginning of 1527 bears witness to the fact that the Croatian nobility entered into this integration self-consciously and with pride, looking to its own medieval tradition. Its political program, which not only recognised and accepted contemporary integrations, but also protected the values of its own separateness, was evidence *par excellence* of the dialectic between community and the particularity characteristic of Europe. The ideal of Europe is not some sort of American melting pot, which would be proud of the drowning of difference in the porridge of community, of levelling. The ideal of Europe is unity in difference, which perhaps will not be realised because of the domination and interests of the rich, but that ideal irrevocably exists in the idea of the European community. It has its base in the Middle Ages, which created the original spiritual values of Europe, in which Croatia also had its part.

To conclude, I must say that, with regard to the wealth of values that Croatia exchanged with Europe during the Middle Ages, I have said very little. This great wealth is for neither Europe nor Croatia a thing of the past. It is not a dead, buried heritage, but a live energy, which imbues today's European and Croatian world. At this opportunity, I will conclude with a citation from an Istrian alteration of Lucidar, for I am happy that we have found ourselves here in my Istria: "Europe is alongside the sea and stretches to a land which is called Scotland, then stretches downward to Dacia, Germany, and then it goes along the river Danube all the way to the sea. In between is a land which is called Istria."¹¹ To this medieval Glagolitic evidence of the affiliation of Istria and the remaining Croatian lands to Europe one need not add anything.

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1 | The original citation reads as following: 'Europija je poli mora i jide daže do gor skoze jednu zemlju, jaže zovet se Škocija, a Dacija, Đermanija i jide poli reku Dunai i vaspēt daže do mora. Vaspēt je jedna last, jaže zovet se Istrija'.

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Što je Europa (Hrvatskoj) u srednjem vijeku

U izlaganju o odnosu Hrvatske i Europe u kasnom srednjem vijeku bit će postavljena dva temeljna pitanja to jest, što je to Europa u to vrijeme i što je ona značila Hrvatskoj. Srednji vijek i rano novovjekovlje je vrijeme kada Europljani tek upoznaju jedni druge, kada se granice tek uspostavljaju i vrlo su fluidne. Tada Europa nije u potpunosti konstituiran politički pojam, a kršćanstvo je temeljni i općeprihvaćeni integrativni kriterij njezina određenja, čak i njezin sinonim: Christianitas = Europa. Uz antičku baštinu, zapadno je kršćanstvo osnova na kojoj će se uspostaviti zajednički identitet, koja i u novovjekovlju ostaje ugrađena u novu koncepciju europskog zajedništva. Pitanje koje se nameće s hrvatskog gledišta jest kakav je odnos zajedničkog i lokalnog identiteta. Stoga će se u izlaganju propitati kako Europu vide hrvatski srednjovjekovni izvori, kakvo mjesto u onom što Europa tada jest imaju hrvatske zemlje i što su one namrijele europskoj baštini.