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CROATIAN YOUTH
AND
EUROPEAN INTEGRATION

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PREFACE

Empirical research on youth has been conducted continually by the Institute for social research in Zagreb since its very foundation that is, since the mid 1960s. During this period numerous projects aimed at gaining scientific insight into equally numerous issues relevant for studying youth have been realized. The last of a series of such scientific-research projects – *Youth and European Integration Processes* – whose implementation began at the end of 2002, has been conducted by: Vlasta Ilišin (project manager), Josip Županov, Furio Radin, Dejana Bouillet, Helena Štimac Radin, Ivona Mendeš and Dunja Potočnik. This scientific-empirical project is different from most others focused on the youth population, most of all because this investigation included a control sample of adult examinees. This form of coverage of examinees enables the analysis of possible inter-generational differences, where there are a great many assumptions, but not enough is known for sure.

This book is the first in a series of two scientific monographs that together represent an integral interpretation of the results gained from this project. The subject of analysis in this study is the relationship of youth toward the European integration process and their, in a wider sense, political readiness for inclusion in that process. The analysis includes, apart from inter-generational comparisons, comparisons with the results of previous research on youth in Croatia, along with results of European research conducted on youth or the general population. This book is conceived as a research study, and it is structured into eight chapters.

Youth, Croatia and Europe: An Introduction to the Research written by Vlasta Ilišin is the first, introductory chapter. It outlines the conceptual framework of the research and specifies the social context in which it was conducted, that is, the contemporary Croatian society, the process of European integration and risks accompanying the process of transition and globalization. It thus starts with the general hypothesis that tendencies and changes in Croatian, European and global settings leave a significant mark on the young generation in Croatia, that is, that all this influences the forming of attitudes of youth toward the phenomena researched. The introductory chapter also explains the research methodology, research goals, the instruments applied and the construction of the sample. An integral part of this explanation is the comparison of the structure of the basic sample of youth and the control sample of adults, and the analysis of youth as a foundation for understanding the later differentiations within this population.

The European Union has for several years been present in the Croatian public as an often exploited subject, but that is, for the most part, not accompanied by adequate analytical insights nor by argued and rational discussions about the meaning of the European integration process, as well as the European ambitions of Croatia in that context. Serious discussion have been suppressed into the background by the onrush of emotions, prejudice and stereotypes – and if they are conducted, they are mostly concentrated on the legal and economic aspects of European unification. This is why Damir Grubiša analyzes the genesis and development stages of the European Union in the second chapter, *Political Axiology of the European Union: The Goals and Values of European Integration*, accenting the political dimension of the integration process. Here, special attention is dedicated to the values this process of integration is founded on, which lead to the creation of a new Europe of values.

The following three chapters consider the subjective political preconditions, that is, the socio-political readiness of youth for Croatian integration into the European Union. Thus, in the third chapter, *Political Values, Attitudes and Participation of Youth: Continuity and Change*, Vlasta Ilišin analyzes the political values of youth, the changes in perceptions of social and political problems and forms of participation of youth in social and political processes and institutions. In this context, special emphasis was given to insights into the democratic potential and social capital of youth and an analysis of the perception of Croatian integration into the EU as a political goal, which is in an indicative discrepancy with the officially proclaimed priorities.

Human rights: The ticket towards a Democratic Europe is the title of the fourth chapter written by Dunja Potočnik. Starting with the hypothesis that human rights and freedoms are important for the democratic legitimating of Croatia on its road to a united Europe, she analyzes the evaluation of particular human rights and freedoms, and the perception of youth on the protection of those rights in Croatia, as well as the contribution of different social protagonists to their realization, along with changes that have taken place during the last several years in the dimensions investigated.

In the fifth chapter *National Identity and Attitudes toward Europe* Furio Radin analyzes the phenomena of national cohesion and social distances, changes taking place in that regard and their relation to the attitude toward Europe and Croatian integration into the European Union. In his analysis, along with intra-generational, special attention is dedicated to inter-generational variations in the level of national cohesion, all resulting in some interesting findings.

The sixth and seventh chapters consider the relationship of youth and the process of European integration, especially the perception of existing and

potential problems in the process of Croatian accession to the European Union. Vlasta Ilišin and Ivona Mendeš analyze the existing positive and negative expectations, as well as the perception of potential winners and losers, when Croatia is integrated into the European Union some day, in the chapter named *Youth and the European Union: Perception of Consequences of Integration*. Equal attention is dedicated to the perception of trends of development and potential difficulties in the European Union itself, in order to determine the image young people have about this desired association, because they are the ones that the future of the European Croatia will significantly depend on.

Ivona Mendeš analyzes the existing and desired level of information about European integration and institutions, as well as knowledge about certain aspects of the process of Croatian accession to the European Union, and the institutional configuration of the Union, in the chapter *Knowledge and Information about the European Union*. The disparity between the self-assessed good level of information and the weak knowledge about the investigated dimensions is a significant trend confirming that Croatian citizens are in dire need of education about the main political goal of the actual political option and the prevailing part of the Croatian political elite.

Finally, the *Summary* is also an integral part of this book.

Along with the researchers and the technical services at the Institute, almost one hundred surveyors, having to invest significant effort to reach and animate the examinees to cooperate, are to thank for the realization of the scientific-research project *Youth and European Integration Processes*. The effort to ensure the quality of work of the surveyors and their motivation to successfully finalize the task and within the deadlines was mostly made by the young members of the project, Dunja Potočnik and Ivona Mendeš. Their engagement in the preparation and implementation of the field part of the research by far surpassed the demands usually put before young assistants, and the fact should be emphasized with special pleasure that they proved to be up to all the challenges that faced them.

The project was financed by the Ministry of Science, Technology and Sport of the Republic of Croatia. However, special gratitude is owed to the Department for the Family of the Ministry of the Family, Veterans' Affairs and Intergenerational Solidarity, which, as a co-financer of the project, enabled the field research to be conducted in the planned scale.

Unfortunately, in the last stages of the realization of this project, in November 2004, a member of our research group and a long-standing honorable associate, the academician Josip Županov died. His parting from the social and scientific scene is a great loss for Croatian social sciences, particularly sociology. Regretting the fact that he could not finalize his engagement on our

common project in the form of a written contribution, we remain permanently grateful for all the intriguing and productive ideas he shared with us, as well as his selfless pedagogic advise, in the best sense of those words, that we could always count on when we encountered any research doubts.

In Zagreb, September 2007

Vlasta Ilišin