

**Recreation of personal activist identity in a post-war west Balkan city: Petrinja****DOI:** <http://doi.org/10.26758/8.1.20>

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Address correspondence to: Deniz Yoldas; E-mail: [denizyoldas@mail.ru](mailto:denizyoldas@mail.ru)**Abstract**

**Objectives.** Civil Society is the most important instrument to obtain democratic transformation and get EU membership in post-Yugoslav countries. Activism in post-war West Balkan cities, especially in border cities like Petrinja, has communication difficulties with the local communities. The aim of this study was to determine the source of the difficulties by carrying out an analysis on the evolution of personal activist identity in Petrinja as an example.

**Material and methods.** Between September 2016 - April 2017, data were obtained from 40 urban and rural respondents aged 17-55 in Petrinja. Speech analysis method was used on depth-interviews. The interviews focused on topics related to activism topics: active citizenship, multiculturalism, local development, ecology, LGBT rights, Activists' and associations' daily practices.

**Results.** These face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted on the question of property, veteran status, and unemployed (socio-economic) problems. At the time the interviews were carried out, 25 years after the war, nearly 50% of the real estates in the city were abandoned (vacant estate); a feeling of powerlessness is shared by the youth, in general, voting rates nearly attain 15%. Young people find local development perspective less popular than immigration tendency. The "strange"/"foreign" image of activists limits their social integration capacity in the local community.

**Conclusions.** A new activist policy of EU is needed regarding the integration of veterans and local communities, which would facilitate positive change and development for the area.

**Keywords:** Post-War, West Balkans, activism, vacant estate, NGO-mafia.

*“Counting other people's sins does not make you a saint”  
“Entre le choléra et la peste, on ne choisit pas.” Maurice Thorez*

**Introduction**

Petrinja is a small city/town in the central part of Croatia. It's an inheritor of a difficult history. Even today the town faces unsupportable difficulties: alcoholism, deindustrialization, emigration, demographic crisis, right-wing movements and ethnic-religious hate. 25 years after the war, in this European Union (EU) member country's post-war border city, being an activist for defending the values like multiculturalism, active citizenship, feminism, LGBTI rights is still difficult and activists stay in an isolated position out of the local community.

Petrinja had several rich natural stone sources during the period of the Roman Empire, it was a buffer zone between Ottoman Empire and Austria-Hungary Empire as “war front” in 17-18th centuries, it was a highly industrialized zone in Socialist Yugoslavia times, it's the city also of the genocidal massacres in WW2 and 1991 Yugoslavian civil war periods and currently, the city of

unemployment, alcoholism, emigrations, deindustrialization, hopeless youth and the minority activists with their exaggerated hopes about European Union EU.

The city is founded by the Roman Empire. The origin of the name comes from Petra (Greek) or Petrus (Latin), it means stone. The historical region of Banovina, the current name Sisak-Moslavina County of which Petrinja is a part, it has rich natural stone sources. The city was controlled by the Roman Empire, the Ottoman Empire, Napoleon's France, Austria-Hungary Empire, Yugoslavia Kingdom, Nazi Germany, Socialist Yugoslavia, Republic of Serbian Krajina and currently it's controlled by Croatia. Croatia is an EU member since 2013.

Petrinja's people are like general Balkan geography, it is separated by different sects and religions and each religion and sect have a real or supposed relationship with an empire/post-empire state. The real or supposed supporter of Catholicism is Italy and Austria (as the inheritors of Roman and Austria-Hungary Empire), for Islam, it's Turkey (as the inheritor of Ottoman Empire), for Orthodoxy, it's Russia (as the inheritor of Russian Empire) and for new small Protestant communities it's USA and Germany. Islam is accepted mainly by Bosnians, Orthodox by Serbs and Catholicism by Croats. Protestant missionaries try to share their faith with social help campaigns in disadvantaged social groups. The identity of "Bosnian" "Serbs" and "Croats" come from these differentiations: Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats are all Slaves and they speak the same language.

Petrinja was/is a small but multicultural city. Orthodox Serbs, Catholic Croats, and Muslim Bosnians live together in the city. The massacres (Čačić-Kumpes and Nejašmić, 1999, pp.253-275) imprisoned the multicultural life but was not enough to kill it. The first genocidal massacre claim in the modern times for Petrinja comes from the WW2 period. By the claim, Pro-Nazi Croatian paramilitary organization Ustashe made a genocide or genocidal massacre against Serbs. By USA Holocaust Memorial Museum, between 1941-45, approximately 320.000 – 340.000 Serbs who lived in Croatia and Bosnia were killed by the Nazi collaborator Ustashe regime. According to the Shoah Research Center, in this period, approximately 500.000 Serbs were killed, 250.000 were deported and 200.000 were forced to convert to Catholicism. Children concentration camp of Sisak, concentration camps of Sisak and Jasenovac were in the most active concentration camps in Axis collaborator Croatia, Three camps were very close to Petrinja. In Only concentration camp of Jasenovac, 45-52.000 people were killed by Nazi collaborator Croatian regime. (\*\*\*)Shoah Resource Center, pp.1-2). By the Federal Institute for Statistics in Belgrade, all WW2 period, because of war, in all Yugoslavia, 597,323 people dead: 346,740 were Serbs and 83,257 were Croats (McAdams, 1992, p.17).

### **Demographic crisis and vacant real estate problem after 1995**

The majority of the population in Petrinja was historically the Serbs. After WW2 (\*\*\*)Shoah Resource Center, pp.1-2) genocidal massacres, they lost their demographic advantages (Čacic, Nejasmc, 1999, p.260) but in 1991 they regained it, but they are erased mass to Petrija by NATO operation (Operation Storm) in 1995. Approximately 250.000 Serbs were forced to leave from all over the Republic of Serbian Krajina territory. (Amnesty International, 2005) Petrinja was a part of it. They were deported and the Krajina Serbian Republic was erased. Currently, the total population of Petrinja is approximately 25.000: 15.000 live in urban part and 10.000 live in rural part of Petrinja. Before the Yugoslavian Civil War of 1991, the population of Petrinja was approximately 70.0004. After 1995, Petrinja went through a demographic crisis: the city lost approximately 70% of its total population. To solve the problem, Croatian government accepted the Catholic Croats from Bosnia and Herzegovina and relocated them in Petrinja and giving the Serbians' properties. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, historically the Muslims (Bosnians) are the majority in Bosnia and the

Catholics are the majority in Herzegovina. The government gave away properties for free of those Serbs who were already deported or killed but it couldn't solve the legal status problem. The owners of the properties are still officially the Serbs. The government "captures"/gives a public property status to vacant real estates. 25 years after the civil war, in Petrinja, 50% of the real estates are stated vacancies. The situation is very similar to the Turkish cities after 1915 Tragedy/deportation/genocide/genocidal massacre, how to call. The best part of the Serbs' properties is captured by "veterans". There is academic research on the claims of the war crimes and especially sexual violence against women by the "veterans" in civil war period in Petrinja (Stevanović, 1998, pp.63-76).

**Table 1. Demography of Petrinja in History (Census:2011)**

<i>Historical Population of Petrinja</i>		
<i>Year</i>	<i>Population</i>	<i>+/_ %</i>
1857	18,448	-----
1869	20,403	+10,6%
1880	21,091	+3.4%
1890	24,958	+18.3%
1900	27,873	+11.7%
1910	29,633	+6.3%
1921	28,383	-4.2%
1931	29,808	+5.0%
1948	24,293	-18.5%
1953	25,070	+3.2%
1961	38,465	+53.4%
1971	49,545	+28.8%
1981	61,124	+23.4%
1991	69,151	+13.1%
2001	23,414	-66.1%
2011	24,671	+5.3%

**Table 2. Population by ethnicity in Petrinja in History (Census,2011)**

<i>Population by ethnicity</i>				
<i>Year of census</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Croats</i>	<i>Serbs</i>	<i>Others</i>
1961	27,517	14,942 (54.30%)	11,955 (43.45%)	620 (2.25%)
1981	33,570	14,621 (43.55%)	12,617 (37.58%)	6,332 (18.86%)
1991	33,565	15,791(44.40%)	15,969 (44.90%)	3,805 (10.70%)
2001	23,413	19,280 (82.35%)	2,809 (12.00%)	1,324 (5.65%)
2011	24,671	20,925 (84.82%)	2,710 (10.98%)	1,036 (4.20%)

### Contemporary Petrinja

After the war in 1991, Petrinja lost approximately 70% of its total population. The total population now is approximately 25.000: 15.000 live in urban and 10.000 live in rural areas. The industrial infrastructure is broken. (Stipersky and Braičić, 2009, pp.103-112) With the exception of the historical and symbol factory of Croatian industry: Gavrilović sausage factory (Vuksic, 2011,

p.8), which stayed in Petrinja but lost the railway facility of the factory because of the war. 25 years after the war, even today the railway hasn't yet been repaired (Braičić and Lončar, 2011, p.99). After 1995, a lot of NGOs from all over Europe, especially from Germany arrived in Petrinja to improve post-war rehabilitation process: repair the houses, reconstruct the schools, offering social aid for the disadvantaged population. The first basis of NGO sectors of Petrinja were created in this period. The first local contacts (translators for foreign NGO workers and communication facilitators) became the future NGO leaders of Petrinja. As it was a deindustrialized area, NGO sector looked like a new fruitful one. After Croatia got the EU membership in 2013, NGO sector developed with EU funds and programs like Erasmus+. This sector gave a chance even ex-Yugoslav returned immigrants: Yugoslavia had immigration facility agreement for some developed countries like Germany and Australia. Some Croatian retired ex-immigrants could get a chance to find a job in NGO sector thanks to their foreign language skills. Contemporary Petrinja has very few jobs offers: in NGO sector, in public services or temporary jobs like waitressing. There is only one branch of faculty: Zagreb University's Faculty of Pedagogy. Contemporary population of Petrinja is eroded by two immigration tendencies: Internal and external. Internal emigration tendency could be divided into seasonal and permanent tendencies. Seasonal: Each summer, a great amount of Petrinja's population moves to Seaside of Croatia (especially Split, Zadar and Dubrovnik) to work temporary jobs in the tourism sector, especially in restauration sector. The permanent tendency of internal emigration could be evaluated about education and to find a fixed job: most of young people would like to look for a steady job or pursuing a university degree, principally in Zagreb. Zagreb as a capital attracts them. External migration tendency would be evaluated as permanent. Germany, Australia, and Austria are traditional preferred countries. For youth, new interesting countries for immigration are Ireland and UK. The USA could be a "dream country" for youth, Croatian citizens couldn't yet benefice visa-free regime for the USA. That's why there is no immigration facility for the USA. The emigrants work mainly in the restauration sector, as homecare assistants or security guards. Some of the external immigrants prefer to spend their holiday in Petrinja. Because of exchange rate difference between Euro and Croatian national money Kuna, they could get a purchasing power advantage. On another hand, the external money flow could be a cause of relatively high life cost of Croatia. FMCG prices could be evaluated approximately 2 times expensive in Croatia than Serbia, Bosnia, and Macedonia. Unemployment, an ominous depression, alcoholism and a high support for right-wing movement could be evaluated as the principal contemporary problems of Petrinja.

### **Theoretical conceptions/literature review on Activist identity in the West Balkan**

West Balkans social context is examined as an academic topic on war crimes and post-war traumas. Petrinja can be studied as a specific area in this research, but in the academic literature, a unique specific approach about the NGO's role in postwar West Balkan cities, especially in Petrinja sets an example, for understanding the activism/activist identity like the research of Sampson (Sampson, 2002). The title of Sampson's study could be regarded as a sample of his point of view: "Weak States, Uncivil societies and thousands of NGOs: Benevolent colonialism in the Balkans" Sampson's paper could be evaluated as a consistent debriefing of the situation but the article could also be criticized from two different aspects: First, from 2002 to 2017, the new facts need new reviews: In 2002, according to Sampson, the NGOs and activist movements could create the "new elite". After Ukrainian and Georgian "color revolution" experiences, now, the "new elite" could be evaluated more specifically as pro-Western lumpen de-classed elements' within an unshaped mass. By its literature review, the article about the recreation of individual activist image enriches the

information on a subject still fresh. It's significant and original, because it shows new specific information on the subject, with clear results and a reevaluation of available information. Also, the literature review shows us the same subject was treated via different examples from Kosovo or Bosnia but using as an example Petrinja/Krajina is the first time done by any study. The literature review of Sampson's study could be evaluated as a sample of the situation but his explaining for the main causes of the situation can be reevaluated and updated with the new information. Sampson used the term "NGO-mafia" to describe predominantly the NGOs of West Balkans touched by corruption. This term could be explicative also for the new post-war geographies corruptive NGOs like Syria, especially Idlib zone and future possible post-war geographies like Iran or/and Bosnia. When Sampson's study was published in 2002, Croatia was not an EU member state and Germany's dominant role was not as clear as nowadays. Also, Russia in 2002 did not have such an active role in international affairs like nowadays. Sampson named the NGO workers and activists a new elite, but after Ukraine's and Georgia's color revolution, the same groups were evaluated as lumpen, adventurous and declassed and as 'fifth column' of different international powers. In this table, Sampson searched the causes of the corruption and benevolent colonialism's root in Balkan traditions and family/clan relationships. Nowadays, this study proves also that the real source of the corruption is not the traditions or family/clan relationships, they are much probably that the deindustrialization and also by the research, the local communities don't believe that the EU could be a solution to the corruption problem. Croatia is an EU member from 2013 and today the facts that were noticed by Sampson's study in 2002 still stayed in a central position of the public mind. EU's deindustrialization and the mass immigration policy are created and executed by Germany-dominated EU are decreasing the rehabilitation potential of the post-war areas.

### **Objectives**

The objective of the article is to look for a sustainable model as theoretical cadre for explaining of NGO activities and activist image in post-war geographies on the West Balkans and especially in Petrinja. In post-war geographies, could NGO activities be used as a tool for neo-colonialist politics? Could West Balkans experiences before the 1991-95 war be an example to prove it? Could Pro-Western activist movements be counted as the 'fifth column' in Ex-Yugoslavia and/or Ex-Soviet geographies? How to describe the position and role of the Pro-Russian NGO's and right-wing movements in this table? The aim of this study was to determine the source of the social difficulties by carrying out an analysis on the evolution of individual activist identity in Petrinja as an example. Which difficulties block the relevant communication/relation between the local communities and activist movements? Why pro-western NGOs could be evaluated as corruptive and why the activist movements are evaluated as degenerate by local communities? How the local communities' mindset creates these perceptions? The aim of the study is to understand the source of the image in the middle of the local communities' mind, via the example of Petrinja. The study could be a theoretical base to understand the NGO activities' character, target and goal in current and previous post-war areas like Idlib/Syria for now and possibly for Iran and Bosnia in future. The authenticity of the study is that it enriches the information about the specific area: NGOs' position and activists' image in post-war zones' communities and the specific communication/relation difficulties for both sides via the example of Petrinja/West Balkans. For example, the study discusses the roles and positions of NGOs (either Pro-EU or Pro-Russian or local left-wing) in post-war areas' communities' mindsets. The importance of the study is that it could offer a consistent and relevant explanation of these specific areas becoming a theoretical base for new researchers. Thanks to this, a new academic perspective on activism and NGO works, neither pro-western nor pro-

Russian or pro-local right-wing, more relevant, trustworthy and effective could be gained - an independent perspective acting as facilitator for improving the activist – local communities communications for post-war areas' rehabilitation projects. The arguments defended by the study are historically consistent and relevant, as available literature shows us the problems and situation have been already researched (Sampson, 2002). The study condenses, reevaluates and enriches the available information on the subject from 1991-95 to 2017 and offers an academic perspective for a future similar situation and also an analysis tool.

### **Materials and methods**

The in-depth interviews were realized from September 2016 to March 2017. The description of stakeholders was constructed on a solid historical and socioeconomic analysis of Petrinja: Pro-EU and Pro-government NGO participants; volunteers and social workers and their relatives; EU institutions public servants in Petrinja. In a larger scale, the non-structured in-depth interviews were realized by small shop-owners and high school students in Petrinja. The plan of in-depth interviews was constructed on two parts: build up the more effective and concrete questions about daily life practices and mindsets as activists in Petrinja - details about the present status as activists and the main subjects of their daily life, their auto-perception and the perception of Petrinja inhabitants. Non-structured in-depth interviews could give an occasion for describing the main subjects of the activist and local community members' mindset about daily life practices. After a description of main subjects, there is a solid base to propose the semi-structured in-depth interview to get more specific information and to collect data. The individuals in Petrinja with whom the in-depth interviews were realized represent: one pro-EU, two Pro-government, one neutral NGO's social workers and volunteers, one local EU rural development office and one local administration office's public servants. The number of participants is forty. Content / speech analysis is also used for the research.

Depth interview plan is prepared following 6 steps (Boyce, Neale, 2009): Planning, Develop Instruments, Train data collectors, Collect Data, Analyze Data, Disseminate finding. In the planning process, the NGO workers and activist are defined as the principal source for NGO sector and activist movement. The local community members are the main information source for the general situation and all interview questions are supported by bibliography. The socioeconomic general table is created upon data collections, which is based on bibliography. The theoretical background needed for the study is put together using two sources: bibliography and participative observation. Basic questions like "Why 50 % of the city is empty?"; "Where are the owners of the properties?" came from observations and historical background following ideas and theories found in bibliography and using them as framework for the results. The instruments developing stage consisted in recorded interviews on video camera. The questions focused directly on specific subjects. Participants felt comfortable and relaxed. They were well informed about the aim and structure of the interview. In the third stage (Training Data Collectors) the interviews were constructed in a professional intercultural and interpersonal communication manner, addressing: duration, the number of questions, effective using of time and insuring the interviews were ethically conducted. In the fourth stage (Collect Data) the interviews were realized over a long period. This allowed the check and recheck the results and insured the sustainable, reliable and consistent data collection on the subject. As the fifth stage (Data Analysis) the results were interpreted in a qualitative research approach by speech analysis and plus, they were also included in statistics. Each response is matched with a specific topic and the source of the information and classified by the

specific position. In this case, the content is evaluated via double check by two parameters (by source and by subject). As the six and last stage, the final overview study is executed.

### Classification of the participants

The present government in Croatia can be evaluated as far-right and Eurosceptic. NGO sector of Petrinja is divided in two principal orientations: Pro-EU and pro-government. There was only one NGO which was allowed to join Erasmus+ projects until 2017. Nevertheless, same association could beneficiate one time of EU funding and another time of local government fund or, in some cases, it could beneficiate of both types of funding at the same time.

**Table 3. Classification of the participants**

CLASSIFICATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS									
Pro-EU Association		Pro-Government Association		Neutral Association		Local Administration	EU Office		
Social Worker	Local Community	Social Worker	Local Community	Social Worker	Local Community	Officers	Officer	Local Community	
Total	7	8	3	6	1	6	2	3	6
Men	2	2	1	5	0	1	1	3	2
Women	5	6	2	1	1	5	1	0	4
Average age									
Men	32	19	32	19	0	22	34	41	43
Women	38	19	45	17	45	31	50	0	39

**2.a. The questionnaire:** 20 questions were prepared for each participant at different times in groups of 10. In each session, a maximum of 15 questions were asked of the participants.

The 21st question was: “A gdje si ti bio 91.?” or “A di si ti bijo 91.?” (Where were you at 1991)? All in-depth interviews show that the answer to the question “where you in 1991?” describes the participants social status. The war participants, nowadays they are veterans, get the highest social status in the local community. Their confirmation is the main source of legitimacy there. The Catholic Croatian “refugees” from Bosnia have also social acceptance. The Serbian or Croatian-Serbian mix family members were forced to leave Petrinja in this period. After the war, the families which came back to Petrinja couldn’t beneficiate of the social acceptance. For example, one of the vice presidents of Pro-EU association is an ethnic Serbian; among 40 Catholic Croat participants to interviews, nobody expressed positive opinions or feelings about her. The Yugoslavian immigrants who worked abroad in this period also couldn’t benefice the social acceptance. Another vice president of the association was an immigrant who worked 15 years abroad. The positive opinion and feeling expression rate were the same: zero. On the other hand, these minorities are accused of an exploitation of EU funds, corruption and “degenerating the local culture in hiding behind the EU values”. For example: even an association’s own social workers believed that the corruption claims

about the association were true. Nowadays two vice-presidents of the association are tried in court with corruption. According to one ethnic Serb social worker participant from a neutral Association: “She (a vice-president) exploits her ‘victim status, she was perhaps victim 25 years ago, now she is just an exploiter.” These negative images established also the difficulties for activists to communicate with the local community.

**Table 4. The subjects and positions: Discourse Analysis**

Subject	Pro-EU Activist Positions	Pro-Government Positions
Pro-EU Activist Position Pro-Government Position Emigration: Interior: Seaside: Split Dubrovnik Zadar Zagreb Abroad: Germany Austria Ireland UK Australia	Local and sustainable development for Petrinja (by discourse)  Project writing and trying to benefice EU funds for useless activities (by practice)	Absolut pessimism: EU couldn't help us. Russia is an enemy. Croatia should be saved by Croatian State and Croatians
Unemployment	Deindustrialization couldn't be changed. Ecotourism, micro-credit and start up projects could be the new future (by discourse)	The local development comes from local administration and its budget. EU funds could be profitable for solid Agriculture projects. Petrinja could be a new agriculture area.
Veterans	Veterans are fascists	Veterans are heroes.
Vacant Estate	Greta buildings could be dedicated for Pro-EU NGOs. For simple building: Silence.	Absolut silence. (NB: They have already benefited the buildings.)
Demographic crisis	Immigration will finish the Croatian nation. In long term, there is no hope for Croatians.	Abortion should be illegal. Only Catholic values could save our nation.
Deindustrialization	Destiny	Create a new light industry on agriculture base is possible.
Economic depression	Immigration is unique solution	Agriculture projects could decrease the immigration flux from Croatia to abroad.
Corruption	All political parties are cheaters. Croats are politics or fascists. They are all corruptive.	If you work with the public, you can benefice a limited occasion. If you do nothing for public and benefice an occasion, that's the corruption. Pro-Eu activists are corruptive.
Political absenteeism	All are same.	High political participation
Wahhabism-Salafism in Bosnia	A new Balkan war is coming	A new Balkan war is coming

Economic genocide of EU in Slavonia	EU destroys Croatia and it makes an economic genocide against Croats. Germans see the Croats as their slaves.	EU destroys Croatia and it makes an economic genocide against Croats. Germans see the Croats as their slaves.
EU/Future of EU	Germany wants to assimilate the Croats. They have already assimilated the Slovenes. They see the Croats as their slaves. EU destroys Croatia, but at the same time EU is unique hope for Croatsians for looking for a job and if there is no EU, Serbs will come back thanks to Russians. EU will be dissolved in near-future.	Germany wants to assimilate the Croats. They have already assimilated the Slovenes. They see the Croats as their slaves. EU destroys Croatia. Croatia should draw its own way to economic development. Croatia has a geopolitical importance. The Western and Catholic world will protect us.
Alcoholism	National/Slavic culture	National/Slavic culture
Conservatism	Croats are highly Catholic and patriotic.	Croats are highly Catholic and patriotic but at the same time, they try to be adapted for new things in protecting their values.
LGBTI rights	We should support the LGBTI rights but the community is so conservative, that's why we can't. Plus, LGBTs are disgusting.	We respect, protect and economically help for LGBTI persons if they don't show openly their identity. Because LGBTI could be contagious for Youngs. We need to increase the population. Gay marriage is against Catholic values. They are not disgusting.
Drug addiction	We couldn't see but one-day cannabis will be legal in Croatia. Synthetic drugs are ruined Croatian youth. Unemployment increases the consumption. State should fight against it	We should erase all drugs in Croatia to save the health of new generation and increase the population of Croats. Trying only one-two time different drugs is exactly acceptable.
Future	Immigration	Agriculture

After 20 questions (with sub questions), the answer focalizes on 10 principal topics.

## Results

These face-to-face in-depth interviews were conducted on the question of property, veteran status, and unemployed (socio-economic) problems. During these interviews, three sequences that addressed time were used: War period, the property and veteran status, the problem of inheritance. At the time the interviews were carried out 25 years after the war when nearly 50% of the real estates in the city were abandoned (vacant estate). Anti-EU and xenophobic-homophobic sentiments are strong amongst the participants, especially amongst those who come from veteran families; a feeling of powerlessness is shared by the youth in general, voting participation rates are therefore

nearly 15%. Local development perspective is found less popular than immigration option by the youth. Young people are looking for new immigration routes like Canada, New Zealand, and Vietnam. Activists represent a very limited minority of the population and in general, they have either a multicultural background (mixt marriages), or are refugees, or come from immigrant workers families. The "strange"/ "foreign" image limits their social integration capacity in the local community.

Pro-Eu and Eurosceptic/Pro-government side, accuse each other of corruption. Pro-Eu NGOs are accused of corruption with to EU funds by Pro-government agents and Pro-government local and central structures are accused by Pro-EU activists of corruption with public budget. Pro-EU activists' arguments look like coming from one source, uniformized and not related to any specific situation. In this case, their accusation could be evaluated as a classic "color revolution propaganda". It could be evaluated also as a psychologic reflection for both of two sides. The main daily conversation subjects are totally same for both sides. For example: they want to join the demonstrations against the criminalization of abortion right in Croatia but on the other side, they are afraid of the decrease of Croatian population due to demographic crisis - that's why they couldn't have a sharp position on this topic. They beneficiate of the EU funds but they accused at the same time EU of making an "economic genocide in Slavonia". They want to go to Germany to work, they send their children to German high school in Petrinja, they speak German in open bazaar of town but at the same time, they are afraid to "assimilate to a German" for their children. The majority of activists' dream is escaping not only Petrinja but also Croatia, to immigrate USA, Australia, Germany, UK, Ireland or Austria.

## Discussions

The veterans, who are sometimes evaluated as the war criminals, represent a moral and economic force in Petrinja. Their confirmation for an event or an association could be the main source of legitimacy there. The veterans' attitude and abandoned estates represents vivid topics that fuel far-right movements. On the other side, Pro-EU activists are trapped in ethnic-religion minorities' issues. Pro-EU associations couldn't find easily participants from Croatian Catholic majority. Especially because the majority of activists/social workers are of Muslim origin, Orthodox Christian Serbs, Muslim Roma and LGBT individuals. After 1991 war changed dramatically the demographic situation in Petrinja. After 2013 EU-accession, the immigration flux to Germany, UK, Ireland, and Austria increased. Both sides of the local community (pro-EU and Eurosceptic) shared same feelings against EU: helplessness and a sort of "Stockholm Syndrome": Their feelings about EU are evaluated at least as skeptic. But their geopolitical and demographic situation put them in a unique position: Petrinja was historically a Serbian city. Until 1993-95 it kept the Serbian identity. Because of this fact, as emerged from the interviews, Croatian Catholic majority has some anti-Serbian/ anti-Orthodox feelings and they think that Russia supports Serbians, therefore they have anti-Russian feelings. In this case, classic "Pro-EU-Pro-Russian" contradiction doesn't work in Petrinja. The Pro-EU side has Eurosceptic feelings, they accuse EU of "economic genocide" in Slavonia, consisting of population decrease, deindustrialization and country's destruction. Their point of view is totally same with the Pro-government NGOs, but at the same time, they think that EU is unique hope of salvation for Croatians, but not Croatia. The pro-government side at the same time has negative ideas and feeling against EU and Russia. They represent the majority in Petrinja. This situation creates a unique socio-psychologic ambiance: Pro-EU activist could be evaluated as "western spy/EU spy" in an EU member country (Croatia) by another EU citizens: Croatians. The deindustrialization process after 1991 could show some part of the majority the EU funds as a new

economic sector to earn their living. The local people with different backgrounds and different purposes try to benefit from these funds. In some cases, the corruption claims couldn't stay as a public rumor. In the 2016-2017 period, largest pro-EU Association of Petrinja was arraigned with corruption. After the war, one German NGO helped the reconstruction of Petrinja. This association's local contacts remained as a human resource base for all contemporary NGO sector in Petrinja. Pro-government NGO participants have no problem with integration in the local community. They have no contradiction about traditional values. Pro-EU association social workers and participants have strong integration problem with local communities. They are seen as "western spies" and their activity could be evaluated by the local community as detrimental to their local, patriotic and religious values. In some case, even their own families reject them because of their opposition to the central and local government. In some case, families think that they could lose their good relations with local administrations and some social benefits because of a family member who is activist, therefore they break contact with this one. Activists cannot create a coherent ideologic line and social identity for themselves, settling only to the use the EU funding benefits.

## Conclusions

Petrinja, from "battleground" to concentration camps of WW2 and Operation Storm of 90's, has a unique and tragic history. Contemporary Petrinja is ruined by the demographic crisis, deindustrialization, and alcoholism. In this context, to find a reliable solution could be possible. Benefits for Serbian veterans, killed/deported relatives could use the same measurement as for the mass majority. By discourse, Pro-EU activist represents the universal humanitarian values but by practice, they are not untouched by corruption. Deindustrialization and very high unemployment rate poison the activism. Around the EU funds, corruption claims are shared by the mass majority and they are approved by courts. Some declassed and lumpen individuals could search an economic benefit on EU funds in NGO sector with a fake activist identity. Or some other part of "activists" could find the EU supported activities as a source of socialization or just sexual exploitation. In 2017, a sexual exploitation scandal aimed the interviews for recruitment in Pro-EU NGOs. Catholic Croat immigrants who were invited by Croatian government to solve the demographic crisis in Petrinja could be a solution for the crisis. Although this population also could become as a part of the problem, not the solution, like war-criminal veterans.

As the war's main "heritage", property issues and veteran status problems limit the positive changing capacity of the local communities. Activist identity and activist values stay isolated and "strange". The powerlessness increases the immigration tendency amongst the local youth. A new activist policy is needed regarding veterans and local communities, which must facilitate positive change and development in the local communities.

To get the contribution of not war criminal veterans as a community for activism could be a reliable step to advance the universal democracy base NGO activities. The activist may break the delusion: "Mass majority in Petrinja is far-right". This delusion comes from their isolation and increases it. The mass majority is not far-right there, also the activists are not the champions of democracy. Petrinja is a post-war, post-ethnic clarification city. The "mass far right" delusion could give euphoria and self-proclaimed status as "unique defender of democracy and humanitarian" value but also, it's a delusion. Their image is ruined by corruption/exploit of EU funds/tax and "Western spy" claims.

A genuine solution could be inviting the Serbian population of Petrinja to take back their property and setting up a "truth and reconciliation commission" like South Africa after Apartheid regime for war criminal veterans, reindustrialization the territory, support the local economy,

ecotourism, create the local and sustainable ecologic development there and terminate the pseudo role of EU funds as an economic support for unemployed purposeless people. These steps could be a solid base to create a peaceful multicultural local community in Petrinja.

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