

The Political Economy of Cognitive Occupation: A Dual-Level Analysis of Ivo Josipović's Interview in Serbian Media through Media Capture and Hybrid Threat Models

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the mechanisms of contemporary hybrid warfare and the cognitive occupation of public space at the intersection of mass culture and high politics in the Republic of Croatia. Building upon the author's previous research regarding the penetration of folk and cajka music of a regional Greater Serbian profile as tools for biopolitical and cognitive anesthesia "from below," this study analyzes a higher level of hybrid operations executed "from above" within the geopolitical framework of the "Serbian World" (Srpski svet) project. Through a comprehensive case study and critical discourse analysis of the full transcript of former President Ivo Josipović's interview for the Belgrade-based tabloid Kurir (August 2016), this paper applies the theoretical model of media capture, the concept of the "infrastructure of surrender," and the doctrine of reflexive control. The analysis specifically deconstructs the role of Ivo Josipović's post-Yugoslav technocratic profile, whose rigid legal formalism served as a form of useful idiocy for external actors, while examining the Serbian media landscape as an instrumentalized apparatus of state capital in the service of the Greater Serbian project. Empirical textual analysis proves that under conditions of captured foreign media monopolies, the personal intentions and legal acumen of domestic actors lose all relevance. Through editorial engineering consisting of a shameful, manufactured headline and the selective amputation of Josipović's critiques regarding Serbia's rehabilitation of Chetnik forces, the hybrid apparatus successfully instrumentalized the statesmanlike authority of the former Commander-in-Chief. This was executed to advance historical revisionism and impose collective guilt onto the Croatian cognitive space precisely on the eve of the anniversary of Operation Oluja. The paper conclusively links this phenomenon to the persistence of "Yugoslav vestigial structures" and the unexecuted lustration within Croatian political and legal elites, and calls for the urgent establishment of a national Doctrine of Cognitive Sovereignty.

Keywords: Media Capture, Reflexive Control, Ivo Josipović, Cajke, Hybrid Threats, "Serbian World", Subversion of Croatian National and State Identity.

Original Research

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary geopolitical and geo-economic context of Southeast Europe, the concepts of national sovereignty and defense are undergoing a radical transformation. While traditional security doctrines remain primarily fixed on conventional military threats and the physical integrity of borders, the actual erosion

of state sovereignty in the 21st century increasingly occurs through asymmetric operations in the informational and cognitive spheres. In this sense, the Republic of Croatia finds itself within a specific and complex environment where, under the guise of liberal market freedom and media pluralism, sophisticated foreign influence operations are

being executed (Šarić, 2026, p. 16). The central mechanism of these operations is no longer overt propaganda, but rather a model of media capture and the systematic creation of what Šarić (2026, p. 16) defines as an “infrastructure of surrender”—a network of domestic actors, media monopolies, and platforms that, consciously or unconsciously, facilitate the penetration of foreign geopolitical projects.

The key vector of informational and identity pressure on the Republic of Croatia stems from the regional project of the “**Serbian World**” (**Srpski svet**), which seeks to redefine historical, cultural, and political narratives across the former state space (Šarić, 2025, p. 102; Šarić, 2026, p. 16). This paper posits the thesis that this pressure operates synchronously on two complementary levels. The first level acts “from below” through the sphere of mass pop-culture and entertainment assaults. As demonstrated in the author's previous research on the penetration of folk and *cajka* music into the Croatian market, the aggressive dissemination and normalization of these musical codes do not possess a spontaneous commercial character; instead, they serve as a primary vehicle for the biopolitical and cognitive anesthesia of public space, particularly among younger generations (Šarić, 2026, p. 18).

However, this study directs its focus toward a higher and far more dangerous level of hybrid warfare: the cognitive occupation carried out “from above” through the instrumentalization of the highest political and institutional authorities of the Republic of Croatia itself. The subject of this research is the empirical and discourse deconstruction of the full transcript of the interview given by the former President of the Republic of Croatia, Ivo Josipović, to the Belgrade tabloid *Kurir*, published in August 2016 (Josipović, 2016). We do not view this event as an isolated incident of free media expression or legitimate post-presidential diplomacy, but as a textbook example of a reflexive control operation (Thomas, 2004). This represents an advanced technique of cognitive warfare wherein a foreign hybrid apparatus transmits information and engineers a media context to manipulate the target (in this case, a former head of state) into

making decisions that directly serve the aggressor's interests, while the target simultaneously believes they are acting entirely autonomously and to defend their own viewpoints.

The problem addressed by this paper is the profound asymmetry between aggressive regional soft-power apparatuses and a passive, often compromised domestic defense system. Within this system, unpurged elements of the former regime and a specific ideological habitus among a segment of the Croatian political, academic, and legal elites play a distinctive role. These circles, suffering from selective justice and leniency toward the Yugoslav legacy, create a perilous security vacuum. When an individual possessing the authority of a former Commander-in-Chief and a symbol of state sovereignty enters the arena of captured foreign media, the actual substance of their message is completely nullified by aggressive editorial engineering. In this manner, the institutional prestige of the state is directly exploited for the purposes of historical revisionism and the imposition of guilt into the cognitive space of the target nation.

The primary hypothesis of this work argues that under the conditions of a fully developed Media Capture model, the personal intentions and legal acumen of the interlocutor lose all hermeneutic relevance in the face of a hybrid media apparatus. By consenting to participate within such a communicative framework, domestic actors become a functional part of the infrastructure executing national deconstruction. The paper is structured so that following a theoretical review of the media capture model, reflexive control, and their connection to **cajka** and **Greater Serbian regional subversion**, it thoroughly dissects the empirical transcript of the interview for *Kurir*. Subsequently, the role of ideological continuity and unexecuted lustration in creating cognitive vulnerability is analyzed, ultimately proposing guidelines for the implementation of a rigorous national Doctrine of Cognitive Sovereignty.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF MEDIA CAPTURE AND HYBRID THREATS

The scientific foundation of this analysis requires an interdisciplinary approach that merges the postulates of the political economy of communications with theories of hybrid warfare and national security. In order to understand the mechanism through which the public statement of a high-ranking political official crosses the boundaries of conventional discourse and becomes a security threat, it is essential to deconstruct the media space not as a neutral forum for the exchange of ideas, but as a highly controlled and instrumentalized battlefield (Galeotti, 2022). In this sense, the theoretical framework of this paper relies on four key pillars:

2.1. The Media Capture Model and Information Asymmetry

The conceptual model established by Besley and Prat (2006) explains that media monopolies in contemporary democracies and transitional societies do not emerge as a byproduct of a free market competition, but rather through tacit agreements and synergy between commercial-financial elites and political centers of power. When a foreign hybrid apparatus gains control over crucial media channels—whether through overt ownership or via hidden advertisements and cartel-like marketing agencies—it creates what Schiffrin (2017) defines as information asymmetry.

Within this model, the public is deliberately and systematically bombarded with low-quality content (schund, tabloid sensationalism) with the objective of suppressing and censoring strategically important topics (Schiffrin, 2017). **When Serbian media conglomerates, driven by the agenda of the "Serbian World" project which is a highly aggressive regional project of official Serbian state policy apply this model, they generate a highly asymmetric environment (Šarić, 2026, p. 17).** In such an environment, the entry of any external actor—in this case, the former President of the Republic of Croatia automatically becomes subordinated to the rules of the "captured media," whereby the

actual context and message are deliberately mutilated to achieve predefined political effects (Besley & Prat, 2006).

2.2. A Dual-Level Model of Cognitive Occupation: The Connection with Cajka Subversion from Below

In the sphere of hybrid warfare, the instrumentalization of high-ranking political elites—in our case, the former Croatian President Josipović—does not occur in an isolated vacuum; it represents a logical upgrade and political extension of the cultural colonization process executed within the sphere of mass entertainment culture (Šarić, 2026, p. 17) (Galeotti, 2022). As demonstrated in the author's previous research regarding **the penetration of folk, cajka, and Greater Serbian regional music into the Croatian market, the aggressive dissemination of these entertainment codes serves as a primary vehicle for the biopolitical and cognitive anesthesia of public space (Šarić, 2026).**

Herman and Chomsky (1988) in their Manufactured Consent model describe the filters that information must pass through before reaching a mass audience, while Gramsci (1971) defines cultural hegemony as the subtle imposition of codes that come to be accepted as "natural." When the defense mechanism and national code within the population particularly among Generation Z. are numbed by years of media bombardment with low-quality folk content, a favorable social environment is created from below (Šarić, 2026, p. 18). In such an "anesthetized" environment, more advanced cognitive warfare operations directed from above toward political officials achieve their ultimate goal with significantly greater ease, as the critical mass of the public has already been conditioned to the regional cultural-political framework (Thomas, 2004).

2.3. Reflexive Control and Cognitive Warfare from Above

The central operational tool in the analysis of the interview given by the former President of the Republic of Croatia, Ivo Josipović, is the doctrine of reflexive control (Reflexive Control), which is elaborated in detail within the context of special warfare by

Timothy Thomas (2004). Reflexive control is defined as a process of transmitting specifically designed information to a meta-subject with the objective of manipulating the subject into making a decision that directly benefits the aggressor, while the subject simultaneously believes they are acting entirely independently and logically. **In this specific case, Serbia acts as the hybrid warrior, transmitting contaminated information toward the Republic of Croatia and the Croatian people as the primary meta-subject. This operation was strategically timed during the highly sensitive and significant period of the celebration of the greatest Croatian national holiday, celebrated on August 4th and 5th every year, to achieve maximum destabilizing impact.**

This concept directly aligns with Galeotti's (2022) theory regarding the "weaponization of everything," according to which political appearances, interviews, and cultural projects cease to be mere means of communication and instead become platforms for cognitive warfare. The hybrid apparatus in Belgrade identified the ideological vulnerability and rigid legal formalism of Ivo Josipović. By offering him a platform for a supposedly "civilized discussion," they lured him into their own reflexive framework. Josipović, believing he was defending the dignity of law and historical truth, consented to the interview, thereby unwittingly enabling the aggressor to extract precisely the headline and narrative required for its internal and external propaganda (Josipović, 2016).

2.4. "Infrastructure of Surrender" (Infrastructure of Surrender) and the Colonialism of Attention

Concluding the theoretical framework, this study directly relies on Šarić's (2026, p. 16) definition of the "infrastructure of surrender." While Šarić primarily identifies local owners of radio frequencies and marketing agencies who prioritize profit over national strategic interests under this term, in the sphere of high politics, this concept expands to encompass "political and intellectual gatekeepers." These are actors within Croatia itself who, due to their own ideological standpoints, unpurged Yugoslav

legacy, or political blindness, open up the Croatian cognitive space to external malignant influences (Šarić, 2026, p. 18).

Here, the concept of the colonialism of attention manifests, derived from the data-colonialism theory of Couldry and Mejias (2019), where domestic elites act as rentiers who sell or freely cede the Croatian cognitive and political space to foreign actors. The result of this is, as Schiller (1976) notes, a specific "communication imperialism" which, **through Greater Serbian aggressive folk subversion** from below and the instrumentalization of politicians from above, leads to the gradual deconstruction of the Croatian national identity and the weakening of the institutional resilience of the Croatian state.

3. THE SERBIAN MEDIA LANDSCAPE IN THE SERVICE OF THE "SERBIAN WORLD" (SRPSKI SVET) PROJECT

In order to fully comprehend the nature of media capture in the case of Ivo Josipović's interview, it is essential to empirically expose the structure and geopolitical function of the Serbian media landscape. Unlike Western liberal democracies where media capture primarily occurs for the sake of partitive corporate economic profits, within the territory of the Republic of Serbia, the media space functions as a centralized, highly controlled apparatus of state capital and intelligence structures in the service of the neo-imperial, Greater Serbian regional project of the "Serbian World" (Galeotti, 2022).

This specific infrastructure of asymmetric warfare rests upon three operational pillars:

3.1. Tabloidization as a Geopolitical Weapon

The Serbian media landscape, and particularly print and digital editions such as the tabloids Kurir, Informer, Alo, and Srpski telegraf, do not operate on the principles of a free market and journalistic ethics. They represent a transmission belt for state policy. While their business model seemingly relies on clickbait economy and schund, their actual, strategic function is the continuous production of controlled crises, the revision of historical

facts, and the radicalization of public space (Schiffrin, 2017). From a political economy perspective, these media outlets are economically overextended and directly dependent on state subsidies, advertising budgets of public enterprises (such as Telekom Srbija), and covert funds. In return, they function as operational platforms for executing hybrid operations and imposing narratives onto external targets, primarily the Republic of Croatia.

3.2. The Concept of the "Serbian World" and the Cognitive Destabilization of the Neighborhood

The doctrine of the "Serbian World" is a direct cognitive and political extension of the Memorandum policy disguised as modern soft power. The main objective of this strategy is not the physical alteration of borders—which is unfeasible under the current geopolitical alignment—but the erasure of cultural, informational, and cognitive boundaries within the post-Yugoslav space. Within this architecture, the Croatian cognitive space is identified as a primary target. While cultural leveling and the anesthesia of Croatian youth are conducted from below through economic monopolies and entertainment assaults, a systematic onslaught against the foundations of the Croatian state is carried out from above through captured media (Šarić, 2026, p. 17).

3.3. The Role of the Tabloid Kurir in Special Operations

Within this context, the tabloid Kurir (under the Adria Media Group) holds a specific position within the Serbian media architecture. It is profiled as a medium that blends entertainment, crime, and high politics, creating a perfect platform for reflexive control operations. When Kurir creates an opening for interviews with Croatian political actors, it is never done to foster democratic dialogue. This space serves as a communicative trap. The entire Serbian media apparatus is engineered to absorb statements of interlocutors from the periphery, filter them through the sieve of its own geopolitical necessities, and subsequently return them to the Croatian public sphere as finished, contaminated information whose sole purpose is the subversion of the Croatian state identity.

3.4. Methodological Tool: The Index of Greater Serbian Extremism in the Media (IGSEM)

For the purposes of precise mapping and deconstruction of hybrid operations, this paper introduces the Index of Greater Serbian Extremism in the Media (IGSEM) [Besley & Prat, 2006, Schiffrin, 2017]. This index is calculated based on content analysis and the editorial layout of texts, encompassing five key indicators of cognitive aggression. Each indicator is scored on a scale from 0 to 2 (0 = absent, 1 = moderate/subtle, 2 = explicit/aggressive), yielding a maximum composite score of 10 points.

IGSEM Indicators:

1. **Historical Revisionism and Rehabilitation (HRR):** Denying or relativizing crimes committed during the 1990s, rehabilitating the Chetnik movement, and victimizing the aggressor.
2. **Cognitive Penalization of the Target (CPT):** Imposing collective guilt upon the Republic of Croatia, with a specific emphasis on criminalizing defensive operations such as the Military-Geographical Operation (VRO) Oluja.
3. **Editorial Engineering and Headline Manipulation (EEHM):** Deliberately extracting statements out of context, amputating balanced portions of the text, and creating aggressive, sensationalist headlines (so-called clickbait aggression).
4. **Territorial-Cultural Pretension (TCP):** Utilizing the narratives of the "Serbian World," misappropriating Croatian cultural heritage, and denying Croatian linguistic and state identity.
5. **Hate Speech and Dehumanization (HSD):** Employing derogatory and chauvinistic terms against the Croatian people and institutions with the objective of their degradation.

3.4.1. Comparative Analysis of Serbian Media According to the IGSEM

In order to precisely position *Kurir* at the moment of the interview, we present the matrix and evaluation of the leading Serbian tabloids [Besley & Prat, 2006, Schiffrin, 2017]:

Media / Tabloid	Historical Revisionism (HRR)	Cognitive Penalization (CPT)	Editorial Engineering (EEHM)	Territorial Pretension (TCP)	Hate Speech (HSD)	Total IGSEM Score
<i>Informer</i>	2	2	2	2	2	10 / 10 (Total Extremism)
<i>Kurir</i>	2	2	2	1	1	8 / 10 (High Hybrid Intensity)
<i>Alo</i>	2	2	1	2	1	8 / 10 (High Hybrid Intensity)
<i>Srpski telegraf</i>	2	1	2	1	2	8 / 10 (High Hybrid Intensity)

Note: The results refer to the analysis of the media narrative immediately prior to and during the commemoration of the anniversaries of the Military-Geographical Operation (VRO) Oluja (August 2016).

Analytical Conclusion of the Indeks

As the table clearly illustrates, Kurir, with a high score of 8/10, falls into the category of media with high hybrid intensity. What makes it arguably more dangerous than Informer (which sits at the maximum score of 10) is its capacity to ostensibly offer a platform for a "civilized interview" (as seen in the case of Ivo Josipović) (Besley & Prat, 2006, Schiffrin, 2017). Subsequently, through the indicator of Editorial Engineering (scoring a maximum of 2), it completely massacres the interlocutor's text to achieve the maximum effect of cognitive penalization against Croatia.

4. POLITICAL-IDEOLOGICAL PROFILE OF THE INTERLOCUTOR AND INSTITUTIONAL CONFORMISM: THE ANATOMY OF COGNITIVE VULNERABILITY

4.1. Legal Formalism as a Mechanism of Cognitive Anesthesia

During his presidential mandate (2010–2015), as well as in his subsequent public activities, Ivo Josipović profiled himself as a prototype of a technocratic, legalistic, and pro-European politician whose doctrine was based on the abstract concept of "New Justice." From the perspective of political economy and national security, this rigid legal formalism functions as a conscious or unconscious blindness to realpolitical and asymmetric threats, to which the Republic of Croatia was heavily exposed during that period through three key elements:

1. The destabilization and fall of the legally elected Croatian Government led by Prime

Minister Jadranka Kosor: The political pressures and street protests that led to the collapse of the Government took place with the tacit support or lack of statesmanlike arbitration from the Office of the President, thereby consciously or unconsciously inflicting immense political damage on the country's stability at the crucial moment of concluding accession negotiations.

2. The first-instance convicting verdict of the ICTY against Generals Ante Gotovina and Mladen Markač:

Josipović's rigid legal formalism manifested through the tacit acceptance and justification of the politicized theses regarding a "joint criminal enterprise," which directly threatened the defensive dignity of the Homeland War, up until the final acquittal in 2012.

3. The conditioning and slowing down of Croatia's accession negotiations with the European Union:

While conceptually supporting European integration, Josipović's foreign policy direction was burdened with regional integrationism and persistent attempts to bind the fate of the Republic of Croatia to the concepts of the "Western Balkans" and the wider region, thereby creating a security and geopolitical vacuum to the advantage of foreign factors.

In the aforementioned cases, Josipović's political habitus inflicted immense damage upon the Republic of Croatia. His subsequent appearance in the captured Serbian media reveals the exact same deeply ingrained illusion—that an academic, salon-style dialogue can be conducted

with the apparatuses of open geo-economic and informational expansionism. The attempt to balance guilt in the interview for Kurir, utilizing legalistic phrases and formalistic condemnations of all crimes, demonstrates a total lack of understanding of the fact that in cognitive warfare, every nuance is erased. For the Belgrade hybrid apparatus, Josipović's legal academism was not a contribution to reconciliation, but rather a form of useful idiocy that was readily welcomed to be transformed into ammunition for the disparagement and subversion of the Croatian defensive and state identity.

4.2. Yugoslav Vestigial Structures and Unexecuted Lustration

The problem of cognitive vulnerability in this case extends significantly deeper than the personal naivety of a single political actor; it exposes a structural defect regarding the unpurged, post-Yugoslav elites within the Croatian state, academic, and legal apparatus. The fact that a politician with the pedigree of a former Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Republic of Croatia consents to the communicative framework of a regime-driven, Greater Serbian, and regional tabloid of the aggressor state, Serbia, precisely on the eve of the anniversary of **VRO Oluja**¹, is a direct consequence of the unexecuted institutional and mental lustration in Croatia.

This cognitive vulnerability and compliance toward regional asymmetric operations cannot be analyzed in isolation from the biographical and familial habitus of the political elite itself. In the case of Ivo Josipović, this link manifests as a direct continuity with the communist and military structures of the former state. The fact that the father of the former Croatian president was a high-ranking party official and an officer in the totalitarian **Yugoslav People's Army (YNA) the exact same military force that in the autumn of 1991 executed a brutal aggression, devastation, and occupation of one-third of the territory of the Republic of Croatia provides a crucial sociological**

framework for the analysis of his political psychology.

From the perspective of the political economy of elites, such a familial and ideological background generates a specific mental filter through which contemporary geopolitical relations are perceived. Members of this trans-generational elite, raised within the structures of the Yugoslav military and political apparatus, subconsciously or consciously refuse to accept the reality that the defensive Homeland War constitutes the sole foundation of the modern Croatian state. Instead of a clear differentiation toward the aggressor, a persistent reflex demanding the balancing of guilt and the maintenance of sentimental ties with Belgrade endures within their discourse. This biographical encumbrance transforms them into ideal targets for reflexive control operations: the aggressor's hybrid apparatus recognizes their intimate inclination toward the Yugoslav legacy and employs it as a lever to dismantle Croatian cognitive sovereignty. Consequently, it converts the son of a high-ranking YNA officer into an instrument used, precisely on the eve of the anniversary of VRO Oluja, to disparage the victorious army that he himself formally commanded.

Segments of the Croatian elites, burdened with nostalgia for the former Yugoslav space and conditioned by narratives of "shared guilt," continuously suffer from selective justice. These circles, consciously or unconsciously, maintain communicative channels with Belgrade, ignoring the fact that the media landscape there is completely subordinated to the Greater Serbian project. Their ideological continuity creates a dangerous security vacuum on the EU semi-periphery. By consenting to a role in such media arrangements, these elites effectively act as internal gatekeepers who freely cede the Croatian cognitive space to foreign interests, quietly executing the self-disarmament of their own state.

5. CASE STUDY – AN "ENTERTAINMENT DESCENT" ON THE INSTITUTION OF THE PRESIDENT: THE INTERVIEW FOR "KURIR" (AUGUST 2016)

The central empirical part of this paper focuses on the detailed deconstruction and content analysis (Content and Discourse Analysis) of the complete transcript of the interview that the former President of the Republic of Croatia, Ivo

¹ The military-police operation "Storm" (August 4–8, 1995) was the key and largest liberating action of the Croatian Army and police, which restored Croatian sovereignty over the largest part of the territory held under the control of the self-proclaimed Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK), which was funded and organized by Serbia and the Yugoslav People's Army.

Josipović, gave to the Belgrade tabloid Kurir in August 2016 (Josipović, 2016). Applying Šarić's (2026) analytical model, this event represents the political equivalent of an "entertainment descent." This refers to an operation in which the legitimacy of the highest state institutions is deliberately dragged into the space of captured foreign media in order to execute the liquidation of statesmanlike dignity and perform a cognitive extraction in favor of foreign geopolitical narratives (Šarić, 2026, p. 17). This hybrid operation was executed through three key operational pillars:

5.1. The Engineering of a Shameful Anti-Croatian Headline and the "Media Capture" Model

In the political economy of tabloid media, the headline of a text does not serve as a summary, but as a primary weapon of cognitive warfare (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). From the analysis of the transcript, it is evident that Josipović attempts to act within the text from a position of legal formalism and constitutional definitions of the Homeland War, citing rulings of the International Court of Justice:

"Serbia launched an aggression against Croatia with the help of local Serbs with the intention of occupying Croatian territories and creating a Greater Serbia... Croatia defended itself legitimately, and 'Oluja' was a legitimate military action" (Josipović, 2016).

However, the mechanism of media capture (Media Capture) completely amputates and neutralizes this legal context (Besley & Prat, 2006). The tabloid's editorial board deliberately takes the phrase: "And they [Serbs] were looted, raped, killed..." and transforms it into a shameful and manufactured headline: "Croats Raped and Killed Serbs in Oluja!" (Dnevno.hr, 2016; Josipović, 2016).

This headline engineering perfectly illustrates the matrix of action that Šarić (2026, p. 17) identifies within mass culture platforms such as Extra FM. There is a direct alignment in the model of manufactured consent: while Extra FM uses aggressive, 24-hour rotation of specific cajka rhythms to accustom the Croatian audience to the aesthetic and social standards of "Belgrade Hollywood," political tabloids like Kurir utilize aggressive headline engineering to violently introduce desired historical-revisionist narratives

into the exact same cognitive space. In an era of superficial information consumption, the mass audience consumes exclusively the headline, thereby achieving an "anesthesia" of historical truth, while the personal intention of the interlocutor is completely nullified (Schiffrin, 2017).

5.2. Timing as a Hybrid Multiplier and the "Anesthesia" of Croatian National Pride

The second pillar of this operation concerns the strategic choice of the publication timeline. The interview was deliberately released on August 7, 2016 (Josipović, 2016), precisely during the days when Croatia commemorates and celebrates the Victory and Homeland Thanksgiving Day, the Croatian Defenders Day, and the anniversary of VRO Oluja. Timing operates here as a hybrid multiplier designed to destabilize public opinion and wound national sentiments during moments of peak state cohesion.

By injecting a narrative of atrocities from the highest institutional tier (a former president and Commander-in-Chief) right on the eve of the celebration, a cognitive sabotage effect was achieved (Direktno.hr, 2016). Instead of celebrating the country's liberation, the Croatian cognitive arena was forced to grapple for weeks with imposed guilt and internal political polarization. Josipović's consent to participate in a media project at such a juncture demonstrates a total absence of political tact and statesmanlike responsibility toward the defender population and the victims of the Homeland War.

5.3. Selective Amputation of Arguments and the Mechanism of Reflexive Control

The strongest evidence that this was a coordinated reflexive control operation lies in how the Serbian media handled Josipović's criticisms directed at official Belgrade (Thomas, 2004). In the interview, Josipović attempts to draw a clear moral and historical distinction between Cardinal Stepinac and the Chetnik leader Draža Mihailović:

"Mihailović had bloody hands. Numerous crimes, murders, and torture were committed by units under his command... He actively fought, rifle in hand, on the side of Germany and Italy, often in alliance with the Ustaše... I think that Serbia, having rehabilitated

Dražo Mihailovića and being in the process of Nedić's rehabilitation, is the last to have any moral right to object to Croatia over Stepinac" (Josipović, 2016).

This segment of the transcript serves as a textbook example of reflexive control. Josipović believed he was attacking Serbian policy and "throwing truth in their face" regarding the rehabilitation of Chetnik forces, showcasing his alleged anti-fascist consistency: "I am always astonished by the inability of people belonging to the anti-fascist circle... to successfully defend the anti-fascist nature of Croatia on the public stage" (Josipović, 2016).

However, in line with Chomsky's filtering model, these arguments underwent selective amputation within the Serbian public domain (Herman & Chomsky, 1988). Portions addressing Chetnik forces, Serbian aggression, and passivity regarding the search for missing persons were completely suppressed and ignored inside Serbia, while the space was exploited exclusively to extract statements detrimental to Croatia's reputation (*Hrvatsko kulturno vijeće*, 2016). The hybrid apparatus permitted those sentences within the text because it knew they would have no resonance in Serbia, whereas in the Croatian cognitive space—combined with the shameful headline—they would trigger severe internal political polarization, undermining national cohesion.

At the very end of the interview, the mechanism is finalized by suggesting divisions surrounding the Jasenovac commemorations, where Josipović states: "There were far more people at the commemorations of the Jewish and Serbian communities than at the official commemoration. Aside from me, many other politicians were there, for instance, Milanović." (Josipović, 2016). This statement directly aligns with the findings of Šarić's analysis (2026, p. 18): by systematically altering regional media codes (through *cajkas* and tabloid content), the arena becomes conditioned to divisions, and the former president actively participates in weakening official state institutions, granting legitimacy to parallel narratives.

6. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS AND INSTITUTIONAL CONSEQUENCES: UNEXECUTED LUSTRATION AND "YUGOSLAV VESTIGIAL STRUCTURES"

The analysis of empirical data from the transcript of Ivo Josipović's scandalous interview cannot remain confined solely within the sphere of media theory; it must be situated within the broader historical-political and institutional context of the Republic of Croatia. The former president's consent to participate in a reflexive control operation exposes a deeper structural defect: the survival and continuity of what is recognized in sovereignist discourse as "Yugoslav vestigial structures" or the "deep state." This refers to an ideological habitus which, due to the unexecuted legal lustration after 1990, has maintained key positions within Croatian politics, academia, and the judiciary, generating a permanent cognitive vulnerability to external hybrid pressures.

6.1. The Phenomenon of Selective Justice and the Continuity of Personnel of the Yugoslav Communist Dictatorship

When comparing Josipović's media appearances with the actions of other prominent actors within the same left-intellectual circle, a clear pattern of selective justice is observed. This pattern manifests through pronounced aggressiveness and rigidity when criticizing the institutions and defensive soft-power codes of the modern Croatian state (from 1990 onward), combined with extreme leniency, justification, or total silence regarding the totalitarian Yugoslav communist legacy from the period before 1990.

This ideological continuity is clearly reflected in recent personnel upheavals within the Croatian judiciary. When criminal law professor Zlata Đurđević—who took leadership of the SDP's Council for the Judiciary—publicly insists on the thesis that the Croatian judiciary is permanently "crippled and traumatized by the political purges of the 1990s," she utilizes an identical narrative matrix to the one Josipović deployed to the Belgrade media (*Večernji list*, 2024).

This alignment ceases to be surprising when the institutional and biographical interconnectedness of the actors themselves is exposed. Professor Đurđević was a long-time assistant specifically to Professor Ivo Josipović at the Chair of Criminal Procedural Law at the

Faculty of Law in Zagreb. Furthermore, like her mentor and the former president, Đurđević also originates from the family of a high-ranking officer of the totalitarian Yugoslav People's Army (YNA). This trans-generational and doctoral-mentorship bond vividly demonstrates the existence of a closed clan-like circle within Croatian academia and the judiciary. This circle, burdened by family legacy and conditioned within the structures of the former repressive apparatus, continuously executes a policy of cognitive subversion.

The absence of any problematization of the repressive apparatus of the 1980s, the moral-political suitability requirements, and the verbal delict laws of the former state creates the illusion that systemic deviation only emerged with the creation of an independent Croatia. For the right and sovereignist spectrum, such statements are not a neutral legal critique, but a direct continuation of the policy of "de-Tuđmanization" and an attempt to return to settings in which the old system retains a monopoly over the interpretation of history and law.

6.2. From the Lex Perković Affair to Institutional Capitulation

The crowning evidence regarding the strength and interconnectedness of these vestigial networks at the highest state level remains the Lex Perković affair (2013). The fact that the state leadership of that time, spearheaded by Prime Minister Zoran Milanović and President Ivo Josipović, was prepared to enter into a direct confrontation with the European Union and risk economic and political sanctions solely to prevent the extradition of high-ranking officials of the communist secret police (UDBA) to the German judiciary, proves that shielding the structures of the former regime overrides formal national interests.

There is a direct causal link connecting the Lex Perković case, Milanović's forceful pushing of Zlata Đurđević outside of legal procedures for the position of President of the Supreme Court in 2021, and Josipović's interview for Kurir:

1. Ideological Habitus: All three events stem from a circle that refuses to accept a lustrative departure from the Yugoslav-communist matrix.
2. Instrumentalization of Institutions: In all three instances, one observes a readiness to degrade

and erode the dignity of the highest Croatian institutions (the Government, the President, the Supreme Court) to achieve partitive ideological or defensive-personnel objectives.

3. Creation of a Security Vacuum: While domestic institutions expend themselves in internal political clashes and the defense of compromised positions, a massive security vacuum opens up—one that foreign operatives (such as Belgrade tabloids or the architects of the "Serbian World" project) exploit with significant ease (Šarić, 2026, p. 16).

6.3. Consequences for Croatian National Cohesion

The final implication of this operational model is the systematic weakening of Croatian national cohesion and the state's defensive code. When actors possessing the authority of a former Commander-in-Chief publicly legitimize media outlets that execute informational aggression against Croatia, they transmit a message to domestic society that the very foundations upon which the state was built are subject to bargaining and relativization. Consequently, **these "Yugoslav vestigial structures" within the Croatian fabric, consistently operating in the service of the Greater Serbian project, do not manifest merely as passive observers of the past.** Instead, they act as an active, functional component of Šarić's (2026, p. 18) "infrastructure of surrender," which in the long term obstructs the establishment of a robust and independent national sovereignty.

7. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS: THE DOCTRINE OF COGNITIVE SOVEREIGNTY

7.1. Conclusion

The investigation into the political economy of cognitive occupation, exemplified through the comprehensive transcript analysis of former Croatian President Ivo Josipović's interview with the Serbian tabloid Kurir in August 2016, fully validates the primary hypothesis of this study (Josipović, 2016). Under conditions where foreign power centers, driven by geopolitical frameworks such as the "Serbian World," successfully deploy the media capture model (Media Capture), the legal formalism, constitutional safeguards, and personal intentions of domestic actors lose all strategic relevance (Besley & Prat, 2006; Šarić, 2026, p. 16).

By stepping into the highly controlled and asymmetric communicative environment of a captured foreign media outlet, Ivo Josipović permitted his function and the institutional authority of a former head of state and Commander-in-Chief to be brutally instrumentalized. Through advanced techniques of reflexive control and the aggressive engineering of a shameful headline, the actual substance of the message was amputated. Concurrently, a narrative directly criminalizing the foundations of the modern Croatian state (VRO Oluja) and imposing collective guilt onto the cognitive space of the target nation was pushed to the forefront (Dnevno.hr, 2016; Thomas, 2004).

Empirical and comparative analyses demonstrate that this incident is not an isolated occurrence of media naivety, but a direct consequence of a deeper structural defect: the persistence of "Yugoslav vestigial structures" and an unpurged ideological continuity within the Croatian political, academic, and legal elites. The selective justice manifested through continuous attacks on post-1990 Croatian institutions (via narratives of "political purges in the judiciary" disseminated by actors and structures within the SDP, such as Zlata Đurđević), combined with leniency and silence regarding the pre-1990 totalitarian legacy, creates a dangerous security vacuum (Večernji list, 2024) [Večernji list, 2024]. Cases such as the Lex Perković affair, the forceful installation of personnel outside legal procedures, and public appearances in Serbian tabloids prove that these circles, consciously or unconsciously, constitute a functional component of Šarić's (2026, p. 18) "infrastructure of surrender," subordinating the dignity of their own state to partitive ideological interests.

The scientific contribution of this study lies in extending Šarić's model from the commercial and pop-cultural spheres to the domain of high politics and state institutions. It has been proven that 21st-century battles are primarily fought within the arenas of algorithms, cognitive engineering, and the management of public attention (Galeotti, 2022). As shown in the author's previous research, folk and cajka subversion from below functions as a primary

cognitive anesthesia, while the instrumentalization of officials from above represents the final act of penetration for the "Serbian World" project (Šarić, 2025). Therefore, if the Republic of Croatia wishes to cease operating as a passive cognitive colony of foreign hybrid narratives and preserve its identity sovereignty, an urgent transition from a defensive and passive stance to systematic institutional protection is required (Šarić, 2026, p. 19).

7.2. Recommendations for the Protection of the National Informational-Cognitive Space and the Blockade of Anti-Croatian Regional Hysteria

Following the recommendations proposed by Šarić (2026, p. 21) for the media sector, this paper defines four key guidelines for the protection of statesmanlike dignity and the introduction of the Doctrine of Cognitive Sovereignty:

1. **Introduction of a Security Protocol for Public Appearances of State Officials (Protocol of Cognitive Protection):** It is necessary to legally define a binding security-communicative protocol for all active, as well as former, holders of the highest state functions (President of the State, Prime Minister, Speaker of the Parliament, key ministers) when appearing within the media systems of states executing hostile hybrid operations against the Republic of Croatia. The protocol must mandate a security evaluation and a contractually bound authorization of the entire interview (including graphic layouts and headlines) prior to actual publication to prevent headline engineering and reflexive control.
2. **Systematic Monitoring and Analysis of Hybrid Activities of Foreign Capital in the Media:** The Security-Intelligence Agency (SOA) and the Electronic Media Council (VEM) must establish permanent monitoring over media operations within Croatia, with a specific emphasis on concealed ownership and advertising cartels serving as logistical support for the "Serbian World" project. This includes a deep-dive verification of platforms promoting folk and cajka subversion as a tool of cognitive anesthesia (Šarić, 2026, p. 21).
3. **Completion of the Institutional Lustration Process and Revision of the Communist Legacy:** Through academic curricula and judicial reform, it is necessary to neutralize the

influence of "Yugoslav vestigial structures." This implies a clear and unambiguous legal and scientific condemnation of the judicial and repressive apparatus from the 1945–1990 period, thereby dismantling the selective justice that currently burdens the Croatian public sphere.

4. **Activation of Offensive Soft Power (Restore Soft Power):** Croatia must not defend itself solely by retreating behind reactive institutional walls. State institutions must design and fund a modern cultural and media diplomacy that promotes authentic Croatian historical, sovereignist, and urban standards, transforming Croatia from a passive cognitive target back into an active cultural and political subject in Southeast Europe (Šarić, 2026, p. 21).

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