

Intra-Party Democracy in Croatian Political Parties: Politicians' Perspectives

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- In the last fifteen years there has been an increased interest in the problems of intra-party democracy, both in research and in political practice. A trend towards more inclusive and more democratic intra-party decision-making procedures can be observed. The consequences of these changes are still hard to evaluate.
- The findings of this research project are based on 20 in-depth interviews with leading political figures, mostly parliamentarians, from Croatia's main political parties, and in a few cases with former party politicians who left their original parties. The goal was to examine how the interviewed politicians see the problem of intra-party democracy in their own parties, but also in comparison with other parties.
- The interviewed politicians do not have enough information about intra-party democracy in other parties and party systems, their understanding is mostly based on their experience with their political party. They are not satisfied with the level of intra-party democracy. They criticise the excessive centralisation of power in the hands of the party leadership.
- Reforms to improve intra-party democracy are welcomed by the interviewees, especially more democratic methods of selecting party leaders and the main party bodies, as well candidates in elections. The inclusion of ordinary party members in these processes is deemed important. They advocate more open intra-party debates on programmes and policies.
- There is generally a positive attitude towards intra-party democracy, which interviewed politicians see as a value in itself, not as an instrument for other political ends. The request for more inclusive intra-party decision-making is partly in contradiction with politicians' perception of ordinary party members as passive and disinterested.

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1. Political Parties and Intra-Party Democracy: Why Should We Care?

In the last fifteen years, we have witnessed a renewal of scholarly interest in the topic of intra-party democracy among political scientists who are studying political parties and their role in modern democracies. Somewhat paradoxically, the growing amount of research on intra-party democracy has emerged simultaneously with the general trends of 'parties in decline' and 'democracy in crises', both of which have attracted scholars' attention all around the democratic world. This notion was best summarised in the first sentence of Peter Mair's book *Ruling the Void* stating that "[t]he age of party democracy has passed" (Mair, 2013: 1). If this is true, then how can we explain the increased importance for intra-party democracy among political actors and politicians (at least with regards to their public rhetoric), the general public and citizens, and in the eyes of political scientists? What is even more interesting, this increased interest has happened precisely at the same time when both building blocks of modern democratic systems – political parties and representative democracy – were put under severe pressure and strongly delegitimised in the face of political, social and economic crises.

Moreover, the dominant findings of contemporary research on intra-party democracy have revealed that many scholars are very cautious when it comes to the desirability of intra-party democracy and its role in system-level democracy. Notwithstanding the empirical findings that show political parties are more democratic now than they were before (Krouwel, 1999; Bille, 2001; Lundell 2004), it has often been stressed that "democracy is not (...) the sum of many little democracies" (Sartori, 1965: 124) or that "[d]emocracy is not found in the parties but between parties" (Schattschneider, 1942: 60) or simply that "[d]emocracy leads to oligarchy (...)" (Michels, 1911: viii). Indeed, scholars of intra-party democracy are rather neutral towards the concept taken as a value in itself. Let us mention just one recent example of this dominant scholarly attitude towards intra-party democracy. In their outline of an analytical framework for the comparison of candidate selection methods, Rahat and Hazan (2001) warn that the democratisation of party organisation through a drastic widening of the selectorate in candidate selection procedures can have negative impacts on party discipline and cohesion, thus reducing the efficacy of political parties as central organisations of political representation and interest aggregation. Their findings show that the democratisation of candidate selection procedures can have a negative effect on representativeness (e.g. it leads to gender imbalance), the level of intra-party competition does not necessarily increase, while the responsiveness of legislators seems to decline when inclusiveness rises significantly, leading to lower party cohesion (Hazan and

Rahat, 2006). In addition, research conducted by Hazan, Rahat and Katz (2008) has shown that the increased inclusiveness of the selectorate in candidate selection procedures cannot simultaneously achieve greater participation, competition and representativeness, but actually can negatively influence each other.

On the other hand, even when engaged in the democratisation of internal procedures, political leaders are open for introducing principles and mechanisms of intra-party democracy mostly for instrumental reasons (attracting new members, acquiring legitimacy), rather than for their beliefs in inherent merits and internal values of intra-party democracy. Several prominent scholars and experts in party politics like Richard Katz and Peter Mair were very critical of broadening intra-party democracy in terms of more inclusiveness and participation, saying that "the result is a leadership that can legitimise its position both inside and outside the party by pointing to a large and formally empowered membership. At the same time its autonomy is enhanced, since an atomised membership is less likely to provide the basis for the mobilisation of challenges, and since the position of local activists as necessary intermediaries is undercut" (Katz and Mair, 1995: 21).

Although there is justified reason to expect its support for intra-party democratisation, party membership does not always exhibit straightforward support for more democratic intra-party decision-making in their own parties (see Saglie and Heidar, 2004 vs. Young and Cross, 2002). Intra-party democracy is perhaps present as a desirable political goal in public opinion, but once citizens cast their ballots, this impression withers away. At first glance, it would be hard to find empirical evidence showing that new political parties emerging in European countries are able to reach electoral success more frequently in those political systems marked by internally closed political parties, or if new, electorally successful parties are on average more democratic than the old ones. Simply, it seems that intra-party democracy can hardly be a solution to the problem of the general declining capacities of political parties in their relations to citizens (Katz, 2013).

2. What Is Intra-Party Democracy and What Are Its Dimensions?

Intra-party democracy is a multifaceted political phenomenon. Thus, the state of research on this topic shows a plethora of approaches that try to emphasise one or several aspects that a number of authors consider crucial for understanding and measuring democracy within contemporary political parties. When evaluating the current research on intra-party democracy, we differentiate between dimensions through which we can define intra-party democracy and categories through which we can measure intra-party democracy.

Two basic definitional dimensions, which we employ in classifying research on intra-party democracy, are procedures and outcomes. While the former deals with the way a party functions internally, the latter concerns itself with the products of specific intra-party actions and their repercussions for both the party itself, and the party's function and role in relation to other parties and to voters. We can view procedures as the quantitative dimension and outcomes as the qualitative dimension.

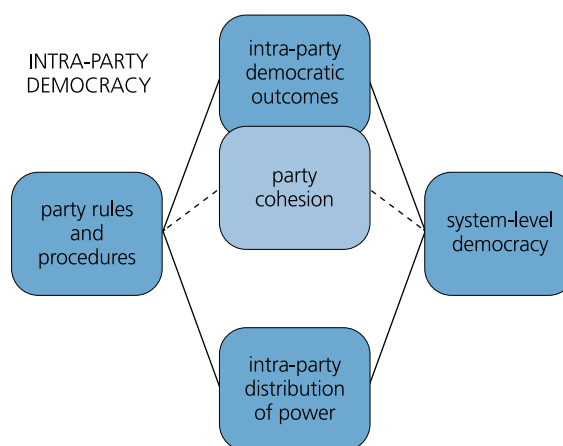
Under procedures, we understand how internal decision-making processes in political parties have a binding character for all of its members. A majority of researchers agree on two basic questions regarding the procedural dimension of intra-party democracy – inclusiveness and decentralisation. Inclusiveness implies the level of openness of these decision-making processes, i.e. the scope of individuals and groups involved in making crucial decisions on behalf of a political party. Decentralisation stands for the level of vertical division of competencies in intra-party decision-making, i.e. the range of decision-making autonomy party branches enjoy in relations to the party central office and vice versa.

Under outcomes, we understand the practical implications of intra-party processes. As stated before, this dimension is concerned with the quality of intra-party democracy and the actual consequences it has for the character of a given political party, as well as for its societal function and standing in inter-party competition. Bearing this in mind, we can infer that the outcomes dimension of intra-party democracy includes external outcomes (balance of democratic outcomes) and internal outcomes (intra-party power distribution). The balance of democratic outcomes involves outcomes which are essential for the functioning of parties as linkage institutions, but also involves those outcomes which a party needs to be effective in competition with other parties. Therefore, this part of the outcomes dimension of intra-party democracy includes the issues of participation, representation, responsiveness, accountability and deliberation (traits which the party needs to fulfil its societal role and to retain support and loyalty), as well as cohesion (a trait which the party needs to maintain effectiveness and competitiveness). Intra-party power distribution concerns the distribution of actual power between rank-and-file members, party leaders and officials and intra-party groups. This part of the outcomes dimension derives from a notional understanding of politics as a game of gaining, distributing, delegating and retaining power.

We can also differentiate between functional and structural categories through which we can measure intra-party democracy. The functional categories are concerned with certain key processes that respond to key functions of each political party. The structural categories include

organisational questions, i.e. the framework within which key intra-party decisions take place. Processes that account for the functional categories include leadership selection, candidate selection and policy-making. Although different national traditions and ideological profiles of a given political party may produce different kinds of party leadership (individual, dual, collective, informal, etc.), the question of party leadership selection remains one of the most important categories for measuring intra-party democracy. Furthermore, there is a close link between procedures of party leadership selection and candidate selection; a process that proceeds from one of the main functions of political parties and that is seeking of public office. Finally, the way parties shape their policies is a fundamental aspect of intra-party workings because a party's policies can determine both its outward profile and its inward character.

Figure 1: Analytical concept of intra-party democracy



The structural categories comprise membership rights, intra-party rules of conduct and organisational arrangements. Membership rights not only have a major impact on the nature of decision-making processes, but also fundamentally determine the general character of a party. Intra-party rules of conduct include both formal rules (codified in party rulebooks), as well as informal rules and practices that create a framework within which members can take action and procedures can take place. Finally, the organisational arrangement of a political party, i.e. its internal configuration, has a strong influence on the way a party conducts its internal work.

3. How to Evaluate Intra-Party Democracy in Croatian Political Parties? Politicians' Perspectives

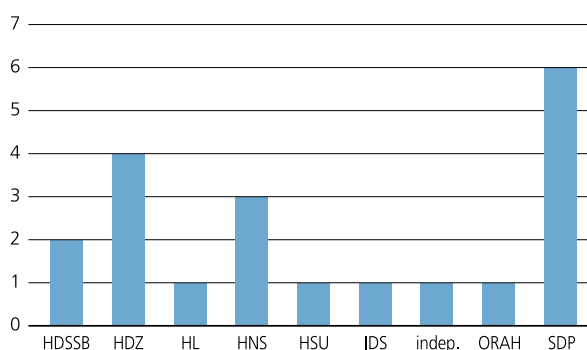
Political parties in Croatia have been criticised for a low level of intra-party democracy. The criticism comes from the public, civic organisations, independent politicians as well as from experts and intellectuals. The lack of intra-party democracy in Croatian political parties is often seen as one of the major reasons why democratic institutions in Croatia have also been lacking in responsibility and transparency in decision-making processes, and ultimately produce a low level of public confidence in political parties, political elites and democratic institutions. Though the pressure on political parties is very heavy, it seems that Croatian parties in general successfully resist implementing substantial changes in their intra-party decision-making or intra-party policy deliberation. Moreover, in recent cases of rising intra-party opposition and intra-party conflicts, several ideologically and organisationally different parties have applied the same strategy of radical expulsion of their prominent members and party officials.

The aim of this project was to find out how intra-party democracy is perceived from another perspective – the one of prominent party politicians. Do Croatian politicians consider intra-party democracy as a value in itself or as another unrealistic, public demand? How do they define intra-party democracy? How do they rate their own parties with regard to intra-party democracy in comparison with other Croatian parties? In other words, the aim of the project is to capture and analyse party elites' attitudes on intra-party democracy in order to understand what the main obstacles for party leadership are, in an effort to implement more internal democratic mechanisms and principles in their parties.

The most suitable methodological tool for such a purpose are semi-structured interviews with selected prominent party officials. The planned sample encompassed thirty party officials, mostly MPs, coming from the major political parties in Croatia. The selection was supposed to guarantee that respondents were well informed about power relations in their parties, and that they are objective enough to take into consideration different views and initiatives within their parties and willing to talk about them as freely and unrestricted as possible. Apart from party members, several former party members and officials (who left a party or were expelled) were also planned to be interviewed in order to provide some kind of control group. However, of the planned number of party officials with whom we wanted to talk, in the end we managed to conduct twenty interviews. We encountered certain difficulties while planning and arranging the interviews since our initiative overlapped with the 2015 parliamentary election campaign and the subsequent long-lasting and

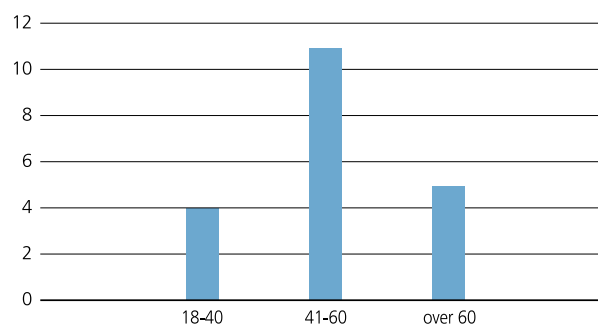
exhaustive negotiations over the Government's formation. Because of that, we had a hard time persuading party officials to speak with us, and even when we finally managed to do so, in some cases it was really difficult to set up a meeting.

Figure 2: Number of interviewees by party



Semi-structured interviews offer topics and questions to the interviewee, but are carefully designed to elicit the interviewee's ideas and opinions on the topic of interest, as opposed to leading the interviewee toward preconceived choices. They rely on the interviewer following up with probes to get in-depth information on topics of interest (Zorn, 2005). Therefore, the main strategy for the interviews was to try to capture genuine attitudes of respondents on intra-party democracy. When formulating questions, we wanted them to be exempted as much as possible from general positive and normative views on intra-party democracy, as well as to build enough confidence with respondents to push them to talk freely about intra-party relations. Thus, it was important to persuade interviewees that the only purpose of the project was to get empirical material for the expert analysis of the politicians' perspectives on intra-party democracy and to promise to the respondents that their answers, in cases when appropriate, would be quoted anonymously without any personal reference or reference to their parties. This was particularly important since the interviews were recorded and then transcribed.

Figure 3: Interviewees by age group



The questions were designed in a rather straightforward and general way, exempting the respondents from both normative pressure and a pre-determined conceptual frame. The main goals were to get the best quality information from those who were being interviewed, than to capture the original and genuine answers, and to deepen our understanding of the elements that were originally mentioned by the respondents. In order to accomplish this, we insisted on additional questions, but they were related only to the aforementioned content and were not supposed to push respondents to other ideas or elements. For instance, Q2 asked the respondents about elements of party life which they regarded to be the most important for intra-party democracy. After they had

mentioned those elements, the interviewer asked some details with regard to those mentioned elements, but did not ask the respondents about the relationship between the party and its parliamentary party group, if it had not been originally mentioned.

The questions covered four main themes: each respondent's conceptualisation of intra-party democracy and ability to compare parties (Q1-Q3); each respondent's attitudes on the existing changes towards more or less intra-party democracy in his or her respective party (Q4-Q7); each respondent's perceptions on the role, habits and attitudes of rank-and-file members (Q8) and each respondent's normative judgements on intra-party democracy (Q9-Q11)

Table 1: Questions designed for semi-structured interviews with party officials

<p>Q1 – to generally evaluate the state of intra-party democracy in Croatian parties and specifically in the respondent's party (for independents – former party) – an introductory Q</p> <p>Irrespective of your normative stances toward intra-party democracy, can you assess a general level of intra-party democracy in the main Croatian political parties and compare it with other party systems with which you are familiar? How do you evaluate intra-party democracy in your own party in comparison to other?</p>
<p>Q2 – to define intra-party democracy generally and to specify certain elements, dimensions and indicators of intra-party democracy</p> <p>If you were given the task to analyse intra-party democracy in Croatia, what elements of intra-party life would be in the focus of your interest? What are the elements of intra-party life where you can clearly identify the level of intra-party democracy in a party?</p>
<p>Q3 – to compare and evaluate the level of intra-party democracy on the mentioned elements in Q2 in the case of his/her party</p> <p>Do you think that your (former) party achieved the same level of intra-party democracy on all these aforementioned elements, or do you think that in some aspects it is more democratic than in the others? In what aspects?</p>
<p>Q4 – to point to very concrete changes that happened/not happened in respondent's party with regard to intra-party democracy – introduction to following Q</p> <p>Would you assess the state of intra-party democracy in your (former) party as static or have changes occurred over time? Could you specify any of these? Try to mention those which expanded and those which narrowed intra-party democracy.</p>
<p>Q5 – to identify major actors of change or opponents to change within the respondent's party – to get an insight into the "real" party dynamics, causes and reasons for changes or the absence of changes</p> <p>Who initiated changes within the party and with what motives and goals? Was there any resistance of certain groups within the party or were the changes easily accepted by others?</p>
<p>Q6 – to identify the political position of respondent in the process of change – sort of retrospective judgements</p> <p>How did you personally assess the changes at that time – positively or negatively? Did you actively support and advocate for changes or were you against them? Or were you just a passive bystander?</p>
<p>Q7 – to push the respondent to evaluate the effects of specific changes and to express his or her current attitudes – to identify the effects of "the process of learning from experience"</p> <p>Did these changes have any effect? Did they yield only the planned goals or were there any unplanned effects? With the advantage of hindsight, how would you evaluate the changes from your current perspective?</p>
<p>Q8 – to get the respondent's perception of positions of different groups and layers (especially members) of his/her party with regard to intra-party democracy</p> <p>Do you think that ordinary party members of your (former) party are interested in changes towards more intra-party democracy? For what in particular? Is there a group or a layer within the party which is especially interested in changes aiming for more intra-party democracy? For which one?</p>
<p>Q9 – the next three questions refer to the respondent's normative judgements on intra-party democracy – Q9 generally</p> <p>How do you generally assess intra-party democracy, as something desirable and valuable or undesirable and unnecessary? Or are you pretty much neutral towards this issue?</p>
<p>Q10 – with regard to the evaluation criteria</p> <p>Do you consider intra-party democracy as a value in itself and an essential part of a democratic system or should it be valued only with regard to the effects it yields within the party or the system as a whole? In relation to what effects?</p>
<p>Q11 – with regard to specific and concrete changes that are needed in the respondent's party</p> <p>If you were in a position to change something in your (former) party with regard to intra-party democracy, what would it be?</p>

4. The Qualitative Analysis of Semi-Structured Interviews with Party Officials

Q1: *Irrespective of your normative stances toward intra-party democracy, can you assess a general level of intra-party democracy in the main Croatian political parties and compare it with other party systems with which you are familiar? How do you evaluate intra-party democracy in your own party in comparison to others?*

When providing a general assessment of the state of intra-party democracy in Croatia, all interviewees agreed that it was lacking and at a substantially lower level than in other EU member states and their respective political parties. Many party officials based such opinions on the direct experience of cooperation with sister political parties on the EU level, either through the European Parliament, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, or as cabinet ministers, or members of respective parliamentary committees. Several respondents emphasised the historical context of the development of democracy in Croatia and the long-term effects of these historical circumstances on the present-day nature of intra-party life. In addition, several respondents spoke about differences in the political culture in Croatia and other EU member states. The legacy of a one-party system and communism also featured as a recurring theme in many of the interviews. This implies that the path dependency approach, which analyses political processes and outcomes in the light of a sequence of choices and actions political actors have made in the past, is a very fitting analytical framework for the assessment of party politics in Croatia.

One interviewee linked the level of intra-party democracy in Croatia to the general level of democracy in Croatia. This party official said that this level was not so low, yet the expectations have changed, since both the society and its surroundings (the European Union) have changed, setting new standards that Croatian parties now have to meet. Generally, the respondent emphasised the sorry state of political culture in Croatia and linked it to lacking or struggling intra-party democracy in Croatian political parties.

One of the respondents voiced an opinion that Croatian political parties actually enjoyed a somewhat higher degree of intra-party democracy in the early days of democracy in Croatia, while nowadays we can observe regressive processes that have led Croatia away from other EU member states. In addition, this interviewee also pointed out that parties in opposition were generally more internally democratic than in government. In several interviews, we could hear the notion that there is a huge difference in levels of intra-party democracy regarding

opposition and government parties. In other words, the contextual framework, within which the parties acted (opposition status versus participation in government), had a major effect on intra-party life and intra-party power distribution, hence changing the way intra-party democracy worked in each of these situations.

Besides that, one of the respondents linked low levels of intra-party democracy with a claim that Croatia is a society of unfree people, economically very dependent on the state. Croatian parties mainly recruit their members from the public sector. Due to the fact that the public sector and its human resources policies is very much based on party politics, party members cannot act in a free manner, which stunts the development of intra-party democracy. Such reasoning actually reflects a classical liberal position that sees individual liberty and possession of private property as prerequisites for meaningful civic and thus political engagement. This party official also linked the state of intra-party democracy with the legal framework regulating the work of political parties, as well as to the electoral system. One of the interviewees even hinted at problems at the constitutional level, i.e. bad or ambiguous constitutional wording that had a negative impact on intra-party dynamics.

Furthermore, one of the respondents claimed that it is not party members or the party leadership that are able to influence the state of intra-party democracy. Instead, this party official claimed that it is the external meta-structures, such as the electoral system, the laws regulating the establishment and financing of parties, as well as the constitutional framework, that have a decisive impact on the nature of intra-party life. In this regard, this party official offered an explanation from a rational choice institutionalist point of view. Following this perspective, we can see how parties act and organise their internal workings according to the impulses and constrains of the institutional architecture within which they exist and function.

Interestingly, one of the respondents stated that we should strive towards such legislation on political parties that would force them to adopt certain standards of intra-party democracy. These standards would curb the power of party leaders and enable inclusive decision-making in key intra-party processes.

One of the respondents clearly stated that formal rules in the party rulebook might provide an excellent framework for intra-party democracy, yet one should pay more attention to actual, informal rules, set by the party leadership and their style of leading the party.

Another party official pointed out that low levels of intra-party democracy are a vicious circle. This interviewee

claimed that party presidents are elected because they know the internal, unwritten and written, rules best, and not because they might be the best option for the party members. Thus, such party presidents select their coworkers in such a fashion as not to get overshadowed and endangered. This follows on lower levels of party organisation, until people who just have a very good instinct for political survival run the whole party.

We should also point out that several respondents voiced worries about how too much internal democracy would jeopardise efficiency and cohesion.

With regard to comparisons of intra-party democracy (IPD) in the Croatian parties, interviewees from smaller parties and those coming from the left-of-centre generally claimed that their parties enjoyed higher levels of intra-party democracy. Usually, these respondents would mention more inclusive selection procedures and more freedom of action for individual party members as signs of a higher degree of intra-party democracy. One of the respondents not only claimed that this official's party enjoyed a much higher degree of intra-party democracy, but that other parties were actively copying from them, trying to implement similar regulations in their party rulebooks.

Nevertheless, most interviewees also showed a certain degree of self-reflection and criticism of the actual state of intra-party democracy in their parties. For example, several interviewees that claimed that their party enjoyed a reputation of having a much higher level of intra-party democracy while pointing out that the real differences between Croatian political parties in this regard were not so big. Another respondent claimed that this respondent's party truly enable its members (not just according to the rulebook, but also in practice) to speak and act freely, yet that personal animosity eventually leads to conflicts and expulsions. In other words, intra-party life suffers under personal conflicts that cannot be resolved in a civilised manner. The interviewees also criticised the general tendency in Croatian political parties to centralise power around the party president and to prevent dissenting tones. While discussions were possible, and sometimes even encouraged, in the end, the president's will and opinion always prevailed.

Finally, one respondent claimed that all Croatian political parties functioned in the same fashion. One of the main features of such a style was a tendency to see leaders as idols and not as mere party presidents. In addition, he claimed that dissenting tones were highly discouraged.

Q2: *If you were given the task to analyse intra-party democracy in Croatia, what elements of intra-party life would be in the focus of your interest? What are the*

elements of intra-party life where you can clearly identify the level of intra-party democracy in a party?

Q3: *Do you think that your (former) party achieved the same level of intra-party democracy on all these aforementioned elements, or do you think that in some aspects it is more democratic than others? In what aspects?*

Most interviewed party officials focused on the inclusiveness of candidate and leadership selection procedures as those elements they saw as most important considering intra-party democracy in again, the nature of these procedures was, according to some respondents, linked to specific traits of political culture in Croatia. In addition, some interviewees pointed out that we cannot measure intra-party democracy in the same manner on the local as on the national level of the party organisation, due to specific circumstances and context. One party official linked problems with selection procedures with issues stemming from the current electoral system, i.e. the respondent spoke of a negative interplay of intra-party democracy and electoral politics. We should also note that several respondents named poor coordination and cooperation between the party in the central office and the party in parliament as the sure signs of low levels of intra-party democracy.

Many respondents stated that free expression of opinion by each party member was a key element of effective intra-party democracy. Explicitly, one of the interviewed described the ability of different members of the party to have diverging opinions and statements in the public as one of the crucial elements of intra-party democracy. In addition, one of the respondents mentioned quality communication between the party leadership with its membership base as one of the key elements of intra-party democracy, i.e. the transparent sharing of information and coordination. Another element would be conflict resolution, without public defaming opposing party members. One of the party officials insisted that a transparent procedure of expelling unruly party members, i.e. through a secret vote of the general committee, displayed elements by which we could measure intra-party democracy. In addition, this person spoke of conventions and democratic norms that exist in those parties that are more internally democratic than others. In contrast to candidate selection and leadership selection, this party official did not see the participation of ordinary party members as a particularly important element of intra-party democracy. The interviewee explained this with the prevalent passive nature of most of party members.

The interviewees did not just highlight members' rights, but also linked issues of intra-party democracy with the question of the quality of members, the so-called cadre policy. For example, one party official openly complained about the fact that intra-party democratisation has

reduced the quality of members in the party and actually enabled local party leaders to seize more power. Another interviewee explicitly called the cadre policy a key element of intra-party democracy and its measurements.

One of the respondents stated that one of the key elements by which we can measure intra-party democracy is a clear definition of the role of the party leadership and of its powers. In addition, such a party body should be able to have an open debate on vital issues, such as party finances or candidacy for senior party posts. Besides that, several respondents claimed that intra-party democracy should include intra-party decisions and respective decision-making bodies that would always hold minutes, i.e. write down the order of the day and their decisions. A neglect for formal procedures set in the party rulebooks emerged as a recurring issue in many critical comments made by the interviewed party officials. For example, one interview revealed that professional staff working at the party central office just catered to the party's leadership and acted as his or her personal staff, although the party rulebook made these employees responsible to the national committee and part of the human resources of the whole party.

One respondent described the general framework of intra-party life, i.e. its rules and procedures, as the main element through which we should measure intra-party democracy. This party official once again pointed out that there was often a discrepancy between those party bodies that were formally in possession of some competencies and powers, while other, non-institutionalised quorums actually did all the decision-making. Furthermore, the respondent explicitly mentioned selection procedures, for not only the party leadership and candidates, but also cadre decisions that one could not trace back to elected, institutionalised party bodies, but to informal groups close to the party's leadership.

Q4: *Would you assess the state of intra-party democracy in your (former) party as static or have changes occurred over time? Could you specify any of these? Try to mention those which expanded and those which narrowed intra-party democracy.*

All interviewees claimed that they could observe some changes in the levels of intra-party democracy in their respective parties (or several parties, given the fact that some of the respondents had changed their party allegiance over the course of their parliamentary careers). However, not all of them saw these changes as a gradual, yet steady progress towards more democracy in intra-party life. Naturally, those respondents that left their original parties or were even faced with expulsion and thus forcibly had to renounce their party membership, had highly negative views about the development of intra-

party democracy in the parties that we discussed during the interviews. In fact, some of them stated low levels of intra-party democracy as a reason and motivation for their defection from their previous party.

A recurring notion in the interviewees' responses to the question about change and continuity in levels of intra-party democracy is the claim that intra-party life is very much dependent on party leaders. In other words, if the leader wished for more openness and inclusiveness in intra-party affairs, changes that would enable such an atmosphere received a blessing from the party central office. If not, the whole party organisation had to follow a rigid, highly hierarchical style of dealing with intra-party personal and policy differences in order to appease the leader and express loyalty. In many interviews, one could hear the notion of a personality cult that had developed around the party president. While some respondents praised their leaders for showing courage and vision in the promotion of changes that led to more intra-party democracy, others saw abrupt changes on the top, even involving expulsions of party leaders, as prerequisites and necessary conditions for substantial democratisation in their respective political parties. Interestingly, one of the respondents stated that most party presidents started out with a rather democratic style of leading the party, yet became less inclusive over time as they felt insecure or perceived a lack of control. As another party official pointed out, oftentimes leaders would respond to poor electoral performance with a greater centralisation of decision-making and cadre policy.

When trying to describe in what ways their party changed towards higher levels of intra-party democracy, interviewees focused on the rules regulating party leadership selection. Thus, they highlighted the introduction of the one-member-one-vote system for party president selection as a crucial step and a clear sign of greater levels of intra-party democracy. In addition, some respondents mentioned other innovations in the leadership selection process, such as the introduction of secret voting and the ability to nominate candidates in a bottom-up process, starting at the level of local branches and ending with the party convention.

Some respondents claimed that their party was a natural leader in innovations considering openness and inclusiveness in intra-party life since their party's outlook and ideology were progressive. However, other members of the same or closely related parties showed disappointment with the fact that they could not achieve substantial changes in intra-party life despite the progressive self-label of their party.

While interviewing some of the party officials, we came across an explanation for increased intra-party democracy

as a combination of external and internal factors. The external factors that contributed to more transparent communication between the party central office and its local branches, and thus to higher levels of intra-party democracy, came from a new legal framework regarding the financing of party activities. The internal factors pertained to party size, i.e. respondents claimed that smaller parties, with a less massive membership, could more easily adopt procedures and patterns of behaviour that would lead to more intra-party democracy. Other respondents added that the general nature of political culture in Croatia had a decisive impact on intra-party democracy in Croatian political parties. In addition, one party official linked the levels of intra-party democracy to self-observed deficiencies in the electoral system, as well as in the system of local and regional government, i.e. claimed that greater personalisation of the electoral system, and greater administrative and fiscal decentralisation would have a positive impact on intra-party life.

While most interviewees described these changes in terms of formal changes to party rulebooks, some party officials spoke of rather subtle, informal changes. These informal changes included a general change in atmosphere in the respective parties in the sense that members were becoming more involved in the intra-party process and that they showed greater understanding and knowledge.

Q5: Who initiated the changes within the party and with what motives and goals? Was there any resistance of certain groups within the party or were the changes easily accepted by others?

As we can already deduce from the respondents' answers to the previous question, intra-party changes were, for the most part, initiated by the party president him- or herself. In addition, in most cases, the party convention gladly accepted these changes as amendments to existing party rulebooks and very few members voiced their resistance to these innovations. The way particular interviewees described these changes and the motives behind them greatly depended on their personal role, i.e. whether they were personally involved in these processes and whether they supported them or belonged to a small group of dissenters. We should also not forget that many of the interviewed party officials were at some point party leaders themselves or closely linked to the president of their party.

One interviewee, as party leader, initiated changes that included the introduction of the one-member-one-vote system, because the interviewee wanted to see more competitiveness at intra-party elections, despite resistance that accused the interviewee, as party leader, of wanting to introduce these innovations for personal gains only. Generally, many respondents questioned the true motives of the introduction of such a system of leadership selection.

A few interviewees lauded changes introduced by their parties' leaders as signs of modernisation, rejuvenation, and innovation. While the respective party presidents officially proclaimed this innovation as a step towards more inclusiveness and more involvement of ordinary members in the intra-party decision-making process, older party members were worried that the actual goal of these changes was the centralisation of power in the hands of the president. Namely, a directly elected party president would enjoy a much higher degree of legitimisation than other senior party officials that came to their post through voting at the party convention.

As already mentioned, the party leaders justified these centralising changes as a means of providing a framework for party stabilisation and achieving greater cohesion. One interviewee pointed out that resistance manifested itself mainly through diminishing membership, as dissenting members simply left the party. In addition, the interviewee highlighted his or her personal engagement, together with another prominent party member and MP, at opposing these centralising tendencies and providing a clearer ideological profile for the party.

Some respondents pointed out that their party leaders introduced the one-member-one vote system in order to gain tactical ground for their own survival inside the party and to portray their own role as more democratic than that of their competitors in the struggle for the party president's post. According to some interviews, critics offered good arguments for the retaining of the old intra-party selection system. However, some of the party members that offered the most resistance to this change are nowadays vocal supporters of the new system, because there is no turning back to the old selection system.

Another interviewee explained that party leaders designed these changes in such a fashion as not to disturb the existing power relations within the party, i.e. not to change the substantial internal party structure. This interviewee claimed that members were reluctant to voice opposition to these changes in order to avoid suffering negative consequences under the new, one-member-one-vote system for selecting the national party leader, as well as regional and local party leaders.

One interviewee claimed that there was no resistance to the proposed party rulebook changes, because these changes went hand-in-hand with cyclic intra-party leadership elections and leadership changes. The interviewee compared the inclusiveness and breadth of the process of the drafting of the new party rulebook to the general legislative process within parliamentary committees, including multiple amendments and additions. Yet, at the same time, the interviewee pointed out that parties (not just this party) changes their party rulebooks too often.

The interviewee then linked this intra-party tendency with the general tendency of constant legislative change.

Q6: *How did you personally assess changes at that time – positively or negatively? Did you actively support and advocate for changes or were you against them? Or were you just passive bystander?*

Most of the party officials we interviewed stated that they supported changes proposed by their respective party leaders. Some of them claimed to have been at the forefront of these changes, and that they actually wanted to go a step further, and propose further innovations. Some of these additional ideas included preferential voting at intra-party elections, and the introduction of the one-member-one-vote system for the selection of all party offices. One interviewee claimed that his or her personal, active campaigning for change was one of the reasons for the end of his or her membership in the previous party.

A few respondents clearly stated that they were against the introduction of the one-member-one-vote system for the selection of the party president and that they still maintain this opinion. Just one respondent adopted a neutral stance towards the introduction of such a selection system. The interviewee understood the need for change, yet also agreed with some of the dissenting arguments that favoured the delegate system. Critics of these changes mentioned problems of quality control in terms of influence on the quality of candidates for party offices, as well as the appropriate representation of women and young party members.

One interviewee has been a prominent party member for years and has played a key role in all the major changes of the party rulebook, which also meant changes to the state of intra-party democracy. As a key player, the interviewee naturally had a positive view of these changes. Yet, at the same time, the interviewee was critical of the immense centralisation of power in the hands of the party leader that occurred in a certain period.

Another interviewee was an active supporter of changes that destroyed the personality cult in that respective party, yet had problems with other aspects of other innovations, such as the frequent use of letters to party members, instead of personal, live contact. Finally, some respondents claimed that they supported the changes, but were not sure whether their party was ready for them.

Q7: *Did these changes have any effect? Did they yield only planned goals or were there any unplanned effects? With the advantage of hindsight, how would you evaluate the changes from your current perspective?*

Understandably, those party officials that were sceptical about or directly opposed the changes mentioned in the previous questions were more prone to a negative evaluation of the effects and outcomes of these changes in intra-party life. Many respondents observed both negative and positive outcomes of these changes. For example, party officials that did support the introduction of the one-member-one-vote system displayed some uncertainty about the trade-offs between inclusiveness and efficiency.

In previous questions, we saw that some party officials made a distinction between intra-party democracy on the national and on the local level. Thus, one of the interviewees differentiated between effects on national intra-party life and local intra-party life. This party official offered a conclusion that the introduction of the one-member-one-vote system for the selection of local party leaders was not a good idea, because it has led to a concentration of power, instead of compromise and checks and balances.

Some interviewees were not completely sure about the actual effects of the (party rulebook) changes, yet generally described them as positive. Specifically, this included the strengthening of the rule of functional organisations (women's organisation, the youth wing) in the intra-party decision-making process.

In the words of one of the respondents, "changes did achieve effects, but not the effects they were supposed to achieve, such as stronger transmission links between the party on the ground and the party in central office". The interviewee pointed out that the changes strengthened the role of the party leader and promoted a specific leadership style, whereby local leaders copied the national leader. In addition, the new system created new tensions between party branch committees and party branch leaders. Furthermore, changes that were supposed to bring about a greater democratisation of the party did not have the desired effects. Instead, lobbying for specific candidates made intra-party elections predictable and less competitive. Besides that, several party officials claimed that democratisation in their parties has led to negative personalisation, so that people voted according to personal sympathies, and not policy preferences.

It is important to mention that some interviewees were convinced that these changes have produced negative effects in terms of the differentiated legitimacy of the party leader as compared to other party offices and have enabled centralisation of power in the hands of the party leader. Others noticed that it takes a lot of time for the changes to take effect and for the party organisation to adapt to such changes.

Q8: *Do you think that ordinary party members of your (former) party are interested in changes towards more intra-party democracy? For what in particular? Is there a group or a layer within the party which is especially interested in changes aiming for more intra-party democracy? For which one?*

Although general trends in Western European party politics indicate that ordinary party members are gradually losing interest in intra-party matters, comparative studies on party membership report that parties' grassroots still highly value all processes that bring more democracy to intra-party decision-making. There is strong evidence coming from political parties in countries like the United Kingdom, The Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Belgium, as well as Canada, showing that party members are much more active in intra-party matters when they have a greater say in formulating party policies, manifestos or selecting party leadership and candidates. On a different note, the introduction of more participatory forms of intra-party democracy is always coupled with party leaders offering greater privileges to party members in order not only to keep their old members, but also to attract new ones.

When it comes to the question of estimating the levels of ordinary party members' interest in changes aiming towards greater intra-party democracy in Croatia, party leaders and senior party officials who were interviewed, largely show serious reservations about this issue. The general impression of our interviewees is that ordinary party members are a rather passive and heterogeneous group who have no intrinsic motivations and interests to participate in most of the parties' activities, except maybe in selecting the party leadership in those parties that have introduced the one-member-one-vote system. They also think that party members have very little interest in changes towards more intra-party democracy because they perceive intra-party democracy as having nothing to do with intra-party life and they do not think of it as something important. Several of our interviewees said that party members are not inclined to come to local party meetings and sometimes even do not want to participate in the selection of party leadership. It is hard to make members interested in participating in intra-party discussions and policy consultations, while members' activities boil down to humanitarian work and organising card playing tournaments.

Several party officials pointed at an authoritarian mentality as the main reason for members' passivity. They argued that party members are accustomed to doing things in accordance with the principle 'business as usual' and they think that it should suffice only to have a good relationship with a party leader. Members do not want to participate in intra-party processes because they consider personal

relations to be much more important than participation. They expect of a strong leader to get in charge and they prefer to leave all decision-making to the leader. This problem with a passive mentality has its roots in the socialist culture of subordination and patriarchal norms as some interviewees identified difficulties facing party members and activists stemming from a certain sort of a socialist chip or a syndrome inserted in their mentality, which prevents them from taking an active role in party affairs. As one party official accentuated: "The President is president, the president is God, and the president can do anything." Such findings support the validity of the cultural approach in party research, which emphasises historical, *longue durée* structures that affect values and identities that shape both voters and party members.

However, these observations do not come as much of a surprise, since they are in line with trends of personalisation and presidentialisation of political parties and party politics in most European democracies. Numerous studies have shown that party leaders are becoming the most powerful political actors, not only in the electoral arena, where the media, voters and party campaigning were focused more on leaders, but also in the arena of political parties which involved a shift in intra-party power to the benefit of the leader. Looking from the point of the internal distribution of power, some scholars argue that inclusive rules and procedures can result in even more power concentrated in the hands of party leaders, and therefore it is not strange that they often act as the main advocates for the democratisation of the decision-making procedures within political parties.

Finally, since party officials identified underdeveloped democratic political culture as the main cause of low levels of party members' interest in introducing new mechanisms of intra-party democracy, some of them argued that there should be more civic education and education for democracy provided not only for party members and supporters, but also for ordinary people outside political parties. In that way people would get much more interested in politics in general, and political parties and party activism in particular. Our interviewees mostly agreed that this is the only way to change the current system of strong personal rule and patronage imposed by party leaders, but some of them are not convinced that it would be enough.

Q9: *How do you generally assess intra-party democracy, as something desirable and valuable or undesirable and unnecessary? Or are you pretty much neutral towards this issue?*

The last three questions were concerned with the normative and functional assessments of intra-party democracy from general and specific points of view. When it comes to the

question of a general and normative evaluation of intra-party democracy, whether it is something desirable and valuable or invaluable and unnecessary, there is almost unanimity among our respondents in favour of the former. According to their opinion, intra-party democracy is a necessary precondition for the quality of intra-party life. They also argue that the democratisation of political parties is only one aspect of democratisation and the opening of the whole society, and the way to make democracy in general work better. Democratic principles of participation and deliberation on the one hand, and mechanisms of dispersion of power and accountability on the other should be strongly implemented in the structure of political parties. Intra-party democracy should be especially pronounced in areas of bottom-up policy initiatives, unrestricted debates and discussions, critical thinking and free expression of one's opinion. Our interviewees generally concluded that party members and supporters should have more say in intra-party life and the decision-making processes, while party leaders should take these opinions and initiatives into account.

While there is a general normative consensus on the need for development towards more intra-party democracy, several party officials pointed to difficulties on how to motivate members to participate and to be active in party life. Party leaderships usually do not provide these kind of incentives to include members in the decision-making process or to make them active in any kind of way. They mainly want to use members to legitimise their leadership positions. Such party leaders' stances and strategies are very well known in the party politics literature. Thus, our respondents made some very clear statements in line with these theoretical assumptions, by pointing to party leaders as one part of the problem, but also to party members and their general disinterest in party affairs as the other side of the coin. As one party official put it: "Sometimes the party leadership has demands which are impossible to implement, but usually it is ordinary members who have such demands. The party grassroots always ask for more, but these demands are not always justified."

When talking about normative assessments of intra-party democracy, a couple of interviewed party officials made some interesting observations with regard to the desirability of intra-party democracy. They generally accept intra-party democracy as a necessity and a norm for the democratisation of the society. Yet, they also warn that one should be very careful when it comes to introducing intra-party mechanisms and instruments that are more democratic, because it sets serious limitations and restrictions on the efficacy of the decision-making process and efficient governing of the party. They think that there is always some sort of a trade-off between democracy and freedom on the one side, and efficacy and functionality on the other, and it seems that most of them would always

favour more efficacy over democracy. Political parties are a specific type of political organisation in which the freedom of speech and giving initiatives should be at a high value, but too much freedom can lead to unrealistic initiatives and ideas, only because democracy gives everyone an opportunity to speak. As one party official said: "There is a cult of expressing one's own opinion and that is not a good thing in a system like a political party because the party needs efficacy and professionalism."

Q10: *Do you consider intra-party democracy as a value in itself and an essential part of a democratic system or should it be valued only with regard to effects it yields within the party or the system in a whole? In relation to what effects?*

The next question dealt with the issue of assessing intra-party democracy as a value in itself and its impact on system-level democracy. Therefore, we asked interviewees whether they perceive intra-party democracy as a value in itself and as an indispensable part of a democratic system, or if should it be valued exclusively depending on its effects towards party or a system in general. As we previously mentioned, from a theoretical and analytical point of view, dominant findings of contemporary research on intra-party democracy have revealed that scholars are very cautious about the desirability of intra-party democracy and its role in system-level democracy.

As far as party officials in Croatia are concerned, they mostly think of intra-party democracy as a value in itself, but some of them also argue that the mutual impact of intra-party democracy and system-level democracy should also be taken into consideration. For instance, one party official said that the relationship between democracy in political parties and democracy on the system-level is like an iron law: the lower the level of intra-party democracy, the lower the level of democracy in a political system. Other party officials praise intra-party democracy as a value in itself, but also argue that democracy within political parties is under the influence of system-level democracy. What happens in the political system has an impact on intra-party life, but what happens in parties does not necessarily have any effect on the political system. It depends on the size of a party, whereby larger parties have more influence than smaller ones. Considering all these answers, we got the impression that several party officials did not understand the question properly, because they were contradictory and inconsistent in their answers. Thus, we can conclude that interviewees favour intra-party democracy for its intrinsic value, which should be, in their opinion, pursued as much as possible. However, many of them once again turned back to the aforementioned instrumental and functional tension between a broadening of intra-party democracy on the one hand, and efficacy in governing political parties or a system as a whole, on the other hand.

Several party officials provided strong arguments in favour of efficacy in decision-making. For example, one of them said that freedom has to have its limits, especially when the efficacy of decision-making comes into question. The other interviewee said that parties should be efficient, and that comes on the account of democracy. "One should be careful with intra-party democracy because it can destroy the party's efficacy, and when the party leadership intervenes it is manifested as undemocratic, but it is necessary because of the stability and the image of the party. The party leadership has to hold control; otherwise, there would be negative effects." In a similar vein, one party official argued that parties are not supposed to be undemocratic or authoritarian, but they also do not have to be very democratic. Parties have an effect on the system, and if there is too much intra-party democracy, which can be on account of the party's efficacy, than a party will not have a stabilising effect on the system as a whole.

Q11: If you were in a position to change something in your (former) party with regard to intra-party democracy, what would it be?

Finally, in the last question we asked party officials to make suggestions for changes within their parties regarding intra-party democracy. A majority of interviewees commented that parties should be much more opened for discussions on policy formulation and generating new political ideas. They also argue that much of the publics' distrust in political parties originates from public perceptions of parties as crony networks and systems of patronage that prefer negative selection to a meritocratic system. Therefore, parties should insist on much more restrictive and controlled admission system of new party members, which would serve as a filter to select only quality members who can contribute to the party's goals.

The interviewed party officials also strongly argued for the transformation of candidate selection mechanisms within the parties, making them much more inclusive and open to ordinary party members. Similar to the experience of political parties in other party systems in Western Europe and North America, our interviewees think that political parties in Croatia could significantly benefit from introducing primaries and preferential voting in selection procedures. In that way, candidates' selection would be more open and democratic, while at the same time the personal influence and arbitrariness of party leaders at the national and especially at the local level would be notably reduced and limited.

5. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

In this section we focus on the findings of our research project that allow us to detect dominant trends among high party officials in their attitudes on intra-party democracy. Also, based on these findings, we recommend some possible concrete modes of assistance to political parties, particularly thinking about the ways in which foundations, civic organisations and the academic community can facilitate the process of opening parties to discussing reforms aimed at a higher level of intra-party democracy.

High party officials in the Croatian political parties generally value intra-party democracy very positively and consider it mostly as a value in itself. Although they are aware of the possibility that intra-party democracy can be a demanding task for a party, since it can sometimes ruin party cohesion, electoral prospects or simply result in wrong decisions, they accept intra-party democracy as both a solution to the existing problems in party organisations, and as an indispensable part of system-level democracy. There is an impression that they do honestly support the idea of the changes that can move them towards more intra-party democracy in their parties and not merely as a reaction to an increasing criticism and pressure from media and experts. They are basically not satisfied with the state of intra-party life and decision-making in their respective parties, and do think that implementation or improvement of some elements of intra-party democracy could be a mechanism of positive change. We judge that such an open attitude towards intra-party democracy of high party officials shows that the Croatian parties would welcome outside incentives to engage in intra-party reforms or assistance in conceptualising or the application of certain intra-party measures.

When it comes to their conceptualisation of intra-party democracy, we witness a significant variance. While only some of our respondents were able to match clearly the concept of intra-party democracy with very specific aims and values, as well as to concrete measures or reforms that could lead in a desired direction, most of the respondents show a moderate or low ability for such a conceptual rigour. Respondents were usually quite able to recognise the problem and clearly describe the preferred aims, but they are less successful in detecting the precise mechanisms in party organisation and procedures that should be reformed. Even when they point to a concrete decision making process, they do it in a rather superficial way, rarely going into operational details and without a strong awareness of all the effects one could expect. It witnesses the fact that most of highly positioned party people actually did not invest sufficient time and devout efforts in conceptualising possible party reforms, but they

are rather in the stage of "something should be done". This finding suggests that they need certain incentives to push them more deeply to the matter. Only through discussions about very specific proposals of organisational or procedural party reforms party officials would be able to link the general aims of intra-party reforms, along with specific and different ways of achieving them. Such incentives do not often come from inside their parties or, even if they come, they are compounded with an internal power struggle of different groups and individuals. Therefore, there is a need to create outside incentives for discussion about the possibilities of very specific reform solutions, liberated from direct involvement in intra-party power relations.

Finally, questions about comparing the state of intra-party democracy in Croatian parties vs. parties in the West showed that most party officials lack any information about the latter, except their general impressions. This is rather strange, given the fact that almost all the parties we contacted are full members of some of Euro-parties and that one could expect a certain flow of information between sister parties. Respondents very rarely mentioned a specific reform that was undertaken in a specific European party and they were even less able to point to any effects the reforms produced. Our impression is that generally party officials in Croatia lack a proper insight into the varieties of the ways a party can be organised even when belonging to the same ideological family, and they have no idea about different organisational or decision-making procedures that exist in contemporary political parties. Instead, high party officials are fully constrained by the existing framework of organisational practice as it has been developing in the last 25 years of the Croatian party system, which has them thinking only within the range of the existing solutions, while being generally closed to innovations.

Taking into consideration all these conclusions, we think that organisations that would like to assist political parties in their efforts to build up mechanisms of intra-party democracy should engage in activities that would, as a final end, expose high party officials to different organisational experiences and undertaken party reforms. Apart from the knowledge about how parties could be organised, this would make them more open-minded and less reluctant to similar proposals coming from inside their parties. The level of their operative thinking of possible party reforms would improve and the whole process would yield a more rational approach by pushing them to discuss the positive and negative effects of a reform. By that, high party officials would more easily analyse the long-term effects of specific party rules and procedures, instead of judging them only from their short-term power distribution effects.

The Friedrich Ebert Stiftung, alone or in cooperation with other such foundations in Croatia, could engage in a project of "bridging the gap" between Croatian

political parties and their European party companions by facilitating links between specific parties in Croatia and in Europe that focus on the mutual exchange of information on organisational structures and reforms. Two forms of such activities could be: a) helping organise visits of high-positioned party members to a sister party in Europe, whether because the party recently undertook a specific organisational reform or the party applies a specific mechanism of intra-party democracy; b) helping organise discussions in Croatia led by party representatives from a sister European party focused to the specific organisational solution or reform. In both cases high party officials should be exposed not to academic or political science lectures, but to party persons from the sister party directly involved into the reform in question. Ideally, it should be someone from the research unit or advisory bodies of the party who closely analysed and evaluated the specific process or reform in question and who can freely speak about positive and negative effects of the reform. We believe that such an interaction would prepare party officials to adopt a much more open and less biased approach to different initiatives in their parties or to push them to initiate a reform themselves. Simultaneously, faced with a concrete topic in a concrete party, party officials would improve their operative conceptualisation of intra-party democracy and establish a link between goals and ways of applying a reform.

Concerning the elements of intra-party democracy the respondents focused on in their interviews, we can conclude that they mostly name the same elements that are in the standard political science literature linked to the concept of intra-party democracy: leadership and candidate selection, passing party programs and electoral platforms and deliberation on ideology and policies. It is interesting that more inclusive leadership selection procedures also provoked criticism among respondents, even more so among those coming from parties that implemented the one-member-one-vote model of electing the party president. This criticism, it seems, was not present originally, in times when a party introduced the new method of leader selection, but has developed as our respondents started to face all the consequences of such an inclusive method. For the political science literature already acknowledged the negative aspects of the one-member-one-vote leadership selection, it seems that party members trust more to "learning through experience". Despite that fact, many of our respondents saw more inclusive candidate selection methods as the primary mechanism for assuring more intra-party democracy in political parties.

While accents on selection procedures as the main element of intra-party democracy could be expected, we did not expect that party officials would insist largely on deliberation and discussion about party ideology, party

program and policy solutions as one of the main indicators of the state of intra-party democracy in a party. However, a more precise insight reveals that this particularly holds for the respondents from leftist parties. Demands for more discussion and deliberation on programmatic and policy issues refer to both the level of the political elite and central party bodies, as well as to the inclusion of a wider membership in the process. This aspect is also connected to the perception that there is not enough space in parties for different opinions to be freely expressed, that intra-party opposition is suppressed and threatened by expulsion from the party and that party leadership promotes loyalty and obedience instead of open discussion and deliberation. It is interesting that respondents attach these characteristics more to "political culture" and "informal party hierarchy" and less to the formal statutory rules. Concerning formal decision-making processes, they most frequently mention the dominance of the party president in the candidate selection process as one of the critical source of his/her power position that is spread also to other aspects of party life, such as suppression of critical views in the party, cultivating a personal loyalty or subordinated role of party bodies and the parliamentary party to the executive or party leader.

Whereas high party officials are mostly inclined to opening the party floor to a wider party membership, in the same time they express their reserves with regard to members' willingness to take part in such a processes. They generally perceive the membership as a passive part of the party, not interested in matters concerning the improvement of intra-party democracy, and accustomed to following the politics of the leadership. Some respondents attach it to the inherited socialist political culture, while others talk about the development of a new authoritarian organisational culture. Therefore, it is not strange that, according to the respondents, all party reforms have been initiated by party leadership and none of them evolved from the bottom up.

The contradiction in normative attitudes and perceptions of high party officials on a more active role of members in intra-party deliberation on programs and policies, asks for outside incentives and assistance in broadening intra-party deliberative space. Foundations like Friedrich Ebert could, in cooperation with the academic community and political scientists, initiate specific projects with the main aim to push a party to test the deliberative capacities of its membership. Such projects have already been implemented for years in local politics all around the world (Fishkin, 2009). The idea of deliberative pooling holds a scientifically guided "in vivo" experiment in which a group of randomly selected individuals comes together and discusses the proposed issue, with the ultimate end of influencing the decisions of elected authorities. Since the process is methodologically scrutinised and guided, simultaneously with actual impact of the discussion on

decision-making, it is possible to measure different effects of the deliberation with regard to criteria of the self-selection of participants, the way in which the very process of deliberation develops, internal deliberative dynamics among individuals, changes in participants' attitudes and finally the effects of the deliberation onto actual decisions of the authorities. The application of such a project in the context of party politics could be an interesting innovation and could provide a starting point for the party itself to engage in more deliberative actions, but now with clear expectations and awareness of all the constraints of the process.

In conclusion, interviews with high party officials detected a clear lack of satisfaction with the state of intra-party democracy in Croatian political parties. This could be a good starting point to think about different forms of outside assistance, assistance that should be accepted by a party and that would only give incentives to intra-party reforms, discussions or the decision-making process, and by no means determine or influence their outcomes.

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