

Unger Foundation Croatia Trip Report June 21-July 8, 2021



The ongoing COVID 19 continues to disrupt international travel and international academic and professional exchanges. Despite these difficulties, the Unger foundation continues its work in Croatia: providing support to **Saša Drezgić's** conference on the Economics of Digital Transformation (helping him secure a grant for the conference from the US Embassy and recruit Brad Delong, one of the world's leading economists, as keynote speaker) and fostering ongoing collaboration between the Levin College at Cleveland State and the Economics Faculty of the University of Rijeka. As the world slowly begin to open up, it is of critical importance for the foundation to maintain existing relationships and develop new ones. This year's trip represented an opportunity to do both, helping to keep our existing projects and initiatives going and also opening up new opportunities for the future, when travel restrictions will finally be lifted and the world will return to some kind of normalcy.

My first meeting in Croatia (June 21) was a dinner with political science professors **Petar Popović** and **Višeslav Raos** (of the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb) and **Vladimir Filipović** and **Damir Mladić** of Libertas University. The dinner was organized to celebrate Petar and Vladimir's recent promotion to full professor at their respective institutions. For the last two years I have conducted guest lectures for Petar's classes (including a two week lecturer tour in Croatia sponsored by the EU's ERASMUS academic exchange program in November 2019). Last semester I also did series of lectures as part of the core curriculum for Libertas University's PhD program in International Relations in the fall of 2021. Over dinner, we discussed ways in which we could continue our cooperation, specifically, the possibility of us organizing a week long workshop where I would help them and other Croatian political scientists develop their research and writing skills so that they are able to publish their works in leading international peer- review journals. Croatian academics are under increased pressure to publish internationally, but still lack many of the skill to do so successfully. Drawing on my extensive publishing experiences as well as my experiences in organizing similar workshops at HSE, I would lead the workshop. We would again apply for funds form the ERASMUS program to cover my travel and other expenses.

I then traveled to Opatja to participate in the fourth annual Economics of Digital Transformation Conference (June 23-25). The conference was a huge success, thanks mostly to the herculean efforts of **Saša Drezgić**, as well as the support from **Molly Schnoke** (Cleveland State) and **Alan Unger** (Unger Family Foundation). **Brad Delong** (UC Berkeley) gave an outstanding keynote-address to open up the conference. Prof. Delong's talk on the transition "From the Commodity to the Attention Economy" was very well received and helped set the table for the discussion we had throughout the conference. The conference also provided me with an opportunity to meet and network with potential future partners for the

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foundation's work, including, **Boris Vujčić**, Governor of the Croatian National Bank and **Nina Vranešević** from the political Affairs Section at the University of Zagreb, whom Saša worked with to help manage the Alumni Grant awarded by the embassy in support of the EDT conference and whom is very supportive of future collaboration with the EDT conference and the foundation in general.



As has now become tradition, I and **Al Saracevic** (San Francisco Examiner) co-chaired the Unger Foundation panel, which was dedicated to a discussion of the “World after the Covid19 Crisis”. The panel brought together a diverse group of scholars (established veterans as well as young researchers just starting out their academic careers) whom tackled the issue from various perspectives and disciplines, in order to gain some insights into how the pandemic has changed politics, economics, and social life in general. Among the presenters were **Predrag Pale** (Faculty of Information Technology, University of Zagreb), **Kristijan Kotarski** (Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb), **Andrei Eydlin** (one of my students at the Higher School of Economics, Moscow) and **Gracielle Li** (UC Berkeley). The panel was one of the best attended at the conference, and also generated a great deal of international interest and dozens of attendees via zoom.

After a few days visiting the nearby island of Brijuni (where Tito had his summer residence), I returned to Zagreb to resume meetings with some of our past and potential future partners. My first meeting (June 29) was with **Predrag Pale**, whom I met for coffee at his office at the IT Faculty of the University of Zagreb. I thanked Predrag for his wonderful presentation on the “Winners and Losers of the Covid Crisis”. We also discussed Predrag's future and possibilities for further cooperation with the foundation. Predrag is set to retire in a few years and plans to devote his time to the development of pedagogy, which has really always been his first love. We talked about the possibilities of organizing a study trip to the US from him in the future and also of helping him develop his plans for a future summer workshop on pedagogy that he would like to organize on the island of Pag (where he spends his summers).

The next day (June 30) I met with my close friend, **Vladimir Hunjak-Štula**, of the Croatian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Vladimir is advancing rapidly in his career. He recently finished his PhD at the Faculty of Political Science at Zagreb University on the topic of the EU's Foreign Aid and is completing his training at the Foreign Ministry's Diplomatic Academy, after which he will be sent for his first mandate abroad, most likely to the Middle East. Vladimir is well on the career path towards becoming an ambassador and also holding a leadership position within the Ministry in the future. As such, I feel he would make an ideal candidate for a future study trip, and he is also very receptive to the idea.

The following day, I met with my old friend **Nikola Jelić**, spokesman to the President of Croatia, **Zoran Milanović**. Nikola hosted me at the Presidential Palace on Pantovčak (the Croatian version of the White House) and gave me the full tour of the building (originally built as a residence for Tito). We even had a chance to have glass of wine on the veranda of the

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president's office (while the President was away). I gave Nikola a quick update on the foundation's activities, including the EDT conference. Nikola pledged his personal support for our future efforts and also promised that he would help us secure the president's support for any future projects that may be interesting to the President. For example, Nikola promised that he would do his best to help arrange for the President to attend next year's EDT conference. This would be crucial if we are able to hold a 100% live conference as it would give an opportunity for our VIP attendees (like Brad DeLong) to personally interact with the president. Nikola also said that it may be possible (if the President's hectic schedule allows) to arrange a meeting to discuss the Foundation's activities with President Milanović the next time Alan Unger (as head of the foundation) is in Zagreb.



My next meeting, on July 2, was with **Vjerran Pavlaković**, Professor at the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Rijeka. In the past Vjerran was the chief organizer of the Cres Summer School on the Politics of Memory and Transitional Justice, which the foundation helped to support with scholarships for Croatian students to attend. He is continuing his negotiations with the University of Renningen (Germany) to restart a summer school program on Cres. Renningen has a strong South Slavic Studies department and the plan would be to expand the new Summer school's curriculum beyond its previous scope, opening up opportunities for the foundation and its partners to organize courses and give lectures. For the time

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being, however, these plans have been put on hold due to the pandemic. Nevertheless, the University of Rijeka has begun to use their building on Cres to organize seminars, conferences and other activities, and Vjeran offered to put me in touch with the folks heading the Center for Advanced Studies at the University of Rijeka (<https://cas.uniri.hr>), which controls the property, should we want to look into holding an event/conference/seminar there in the future. This may be useful for the Saša and **Nick Zingales**'s Smart cities class or for some of the Poli/Sci IR projects I am developing with the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb and Libertas University.

Over the weekend I also followed up with a meeting with **Petar Popović**, professor at the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb. Petar and I have many shared interests related to IR theory and the study of World Politics and we regularly consult each other on our ongoing research. I have done regular guest lectures for his classes over the last two years. Over drinks we discussed some ideas for future collaboration, including an edited volume or journal special issue on revisionism in International Relations. I recently (June 29, 2021) published an article on the subject in *International Politics* (a very well respected IR journal) and Petar is working on a book (in Croatian) of his own on the topic. I introduced him to a colleague of mine, **Igor Istomym**, professor at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO—a part of the Russian Foreign Ministry) and the two of them submitted a proposal for a panel on revisionism for next year's International Studies Association conference in Las Vegas. I and Igor will also begin to run a joint HSE-MGIMO workshop on academic publishing this fall and Petar will attend our meetings via zoom. Petar and some of his colleagues are organizing a political science workshop on Hvar next April and a summer school on the Island of Šipán next August, and he invited me to attend both. Petar is eager to visit Moscow on an ERASMUS fellowship and will organize some lectures and/or seminars for him at our faculty once the ERASMUS program is back online and academic travel between Russia and Croatia is reestablished.

On Monday, July 5, I took **Kristijan Kotarski**, to thank him for the excellent presentation he gave for the Unger panel based on his new book "Corona Economics: The Five Horsemen of the Apocalypse". I taught a couple of lectures for Kristijan's course in November of 2019 as part of my Erasmus fellowship and Kristijan visited Moscow as an Erasmus fellow in December 2019 to give a couple of open seminars at our University (which I helped organize). Kristijan agreed to be part of our Political Science publishing workshop we are organizing. We also discussed the possibility of getting him more involved in the future with the EDT conference, as the issue areas covered by the conference overlap with his own research, which is primarily focused on political economy.

The next day (July 6) I met with coffee with our old friend and Unger Alumnus **Dražen Hoffman**, of GONG. Dražen caught me up with GONG's activities and on the state of political transparency, political governance, and civil society in Croatia. The latest initiative, which Dražen now leads, is to push for the adoption of mail in balloting for Croatia's national elections. This is something that the Croatian political establishment fiercely resists, but which has become urgently important after the pandemic. It is encouraging to see how Dražen's career has developed since his study trip to Cleveland. He is very interested in exploring ways in which he and GONG can get involved in the foundation's activities, and it would be a good idea to organize a zoom meeting between me, him and Alan soon.

My final meeting was on Wednesday (July 7), the day before I was scheduled to leave Croatia. I had coffee with **Dejan Jović**, senior professor at the Political Science Faculty of the University of Zagreb. Dejan also served as foreign policy advisor to former Croatian president **Ivo Josipović** from 2010-2014. We discussed the latest political developments in Croatia and the wider Balkans, and Dejan also gave me some details about his new initiative, the Forum on Foreign Policy (FFP) (<https://www.facebook.com/fpforum/>), which was founded in March of 2021. The FFP is a think tank that he co-leads with Croatian political scientist and former Croatian Foreign Minister and Deputy Prime Minister **Vesna Pusić**. The purpose of the think tank is to bring together foreign and domestic academic, experts, and leaders to research and discuss issues related to international affairs, with the larger goal of advancing public interest and knowledge about these issues in

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Croatia. The FFP has organized a number of online events, including a talk by renowned Turkish political scientist and former Turkish Prime Minister and Foreign Minister **Ahmet Davutoglu**. The FFP could be another good partner for the foundation and I agreed to do a talk/seminar for them on my own research (via zoom) in the near future.

After our coffee, we attended a meeting of the FFP where **Florian Beiber** (University of Graz) and **Zoran Nechev** (Vrije Universiteit, Brussels) presented their report: “Bouncing Back: Completing the EU unification Process”. The report discussed the challenges that face the former Yugoslav Western Balkan states (such as Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Kosovo) as they move towards EU membership and presents some innovative policy ideas for advancing these goals and putting them on a much better path towards integration. This was the FFP’s first live, in-person, event. It was well attended and the discussion was lively and stimulating. A short reception was held after the event, giving me the opportunity to network with some interesting people, including the authors of the report, the second deputy of the Russian Embassy to Croatia, **Roman Shirkunov**, and **Senada Šelo Šabić**, director of the Institute for Development and International Relations (IRMO -<https://irmo.hr/>). Senada could be of particular interest to our activities going forward. I plan to stay in touch with her and to organize a meeting with her the next time I am in Zagreb. I think we can include her and IRMO in and future public lectures and workshops I will do with the Faculty of Political Science in Zagreb and Libertas. Moreover, Senada and IRMO are key partners in the FFP and doing a talk/seminar for them will also help build a relationship with her organization.

Overall this was a very productive and rewarding trip. Despite technological and communication advances, there is still no substitute for personal face to face interactions, which produce a higher level of trust and interpersonal understanding. As such the trip has maintained and strengthened the personal and professional relationships that are at the very heart of the Foundation’s efforts. Building on the success of last year’s Unger panel at EDT, we were able to organize an excellent panel that was focused on the most pressing issue of the day and which gave a group of scholars from very diverse backgrounds and at different stages of the academic careers the opportunity to present their research and ideas. The trip allowed me to further develop my strong relationships with the Faculty of Political Science at the University of Zagreb and Libertas University, initiating an exciting new project (the workshop on academic publishing) that will be of great help to Croatian political scientists, who are under increased pressure to publish in international peer-reviewed publications. Finally, the trip established new contacts with individuals and organization (such as the Forum on Foreign Policy and the Institute for Development and International Relations) we can include in our ongoing projects and with whom the foundation can develop future projects and initiatives.



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