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Opposing the Policy of the Twenty-First Century Socialism¹ in Bolivia

The Political Activities of Branko Marinković

Abstract

The Marinković family, which originated from the island of Brač, immigrated to the eastern Bolivian province of Santa Cruz in the mid-1950s. Thanks to a successful agricultural business, among other things, the family has become one of the richest and most influential families in Bolivia. Some analysts link Branko Marinković's origins with his oppositional activities in Bolivia. This is due to the fact that Marinković compares the contemporary "Twenty-first century socialism" policies of Bolivian president Evo Morales with the communist policies of Tito in Yugoslavia. With that in mind, the aim of this paper is to analyze to what extent the immigrant origin of Marinković's family has influenced his political activities. This analysis can be carried out by relating his political activities to the Ustaša immigrants who came to Latin America after the Second World War and also within the context of the narrative of Bolivian authorities who believed Marinković was trying to Balkanize Bolivia.

Introduction

Mass immigration from the countries of South-East Europe to Latin America² began in the second half of the 19th century due to economic and political circumstances. The book *Iseljena Hrvatska* mentions three waves of immigration to Latin America: the first one started in the late 19th and early 20th century, the second one in the inter-war period, and the third one starting after the Second World War.³ The immigrants were quick in adapting to their new social and political environments and took an active part in all activities in their new communities. They founded cultural societies and published newspapers, like *Narodni glas* in Buenos Aires or *Domovina* in Punta Arenas (Chile). Over the years their descendants started participating more actively in the political spheres of their new countries and thusly influenced the shaping of their social and political reality. Within this context of the active participation of Croatian immigrants in their community and the above mentioned circumstances of Croatian immigration, some authors claim that Croats are the perfect example of successful integration. According to estimates by Croatian State Office for Croats Abroad, approximately half a million descendants of Croatian immigrants are currently living in Latin America,⁴ mostly in Argentina and Chile.

One of the most influential families of Croatian origin is the Marinković family in Bolivia. Marinković's father was a Croat from Brač who came to Bolivia in the mid-twentieth century. His mother was a Montenegrin. Over the years the family has become one of the most affluent and most powerful families in Bolivia. According to published data, the Marinković family owns

¹ Spanish: *Socialismo del siglo XXI*.

² The region of Latin America includes the entire South American continent, Central America and the Caribbean, where Romance languages are spoken.

³ Čizmić, Ivan; Sopta, Marin; Šakić, Vlado (eds.) (2005): *Iseljena Hrvatska*. Zagreb: Golden Marketing; Tehnička knjiga, p. 160.

⁴ Državni ured za Hrvate izvan Republike Hrvatske: Stanje hrvatskih iseljenika i njihovih potomaka u inozemstvu. In: Republika Hrvatska, Ministarstvo vanjskih i europskih poslova (Homepage). URL: <http://www.mvep.hr/hr/hmiu/iseljenistvo/stanje-hrvatskih-iseljenika-i-njihovih-potomaka-u-inozemstvu/>, last access: 16th May, 2015

almost 40 million acres of land and has a share in an extremely significant local bank, the *Banco Economico*.

The aim of this paper is to analyze the extent to which the immigrant origin of the Marinković family has shaped Branko's political actions. This analysis is carried out by relating Marinković's political activities to the Ustaša immigrants who came to Latin America after the Second World War as well as taking into consideration the Bolivian authorities' narrative that Marinković was trying to Balkanize Bolivia. The time frame for these issues is the referendum on autonomy (2008) initiated by Marinković and charges for the attempted coup which culminated in 2010 arrests.

In the study of Croatian descendants in Latin America, Ljubomir Antić, a prominent historian, should be mentioned as he has analyzed the reasons, influences and consequences of immigration from Croatia to Latin America, focusing particularly on the consequences for the new host countries of immigrants.⁵ Similarly, the work of the political scientist Lidija Kos-Stanišić deserves attention. In 2009, Kos-Stanišić published a book that Damir Gubiša declared to be *the pioneer book* on the history and politics of Latin America, a region which to that point had been subjected to a stereotypical narrative. There are numerous scientific papers dealing with the role and significance of Croatian immigrants in Latin America.⁶ However, most of them analyze primarily the cultural activities of the descendants.

Comparative Analysis of the Social and Political Context

Before turning to the case study to present the influence of Croatian immigrants' descendants, it is necessary to analyze the social and political circumstances of the second half of the 20th century in order to be able to grasp completely the conditioned actions of Croatian immigrants' descendants and to be able to place their activities in historical and political context. Therefore, this section of the paper uses a comparative overview to present the basic outlines of the social and political situation of immigrants from Yugoslavia,⁷ and especially Croatia in Latin America.

South America has always been one of the world's most dynamic regions, from the arrival of conquistadors, the nineteenth-century wars of independence to the numerous twentieth-century dictatorships of the region and the establishment of "Twenty-First Century Socialism".⁸ This is why Howard Wiarda claims the region to be a living laboratory of social and political changes.⁹

The second half of the twentieth-century was marked with a range of coups, the rule of military juntas, *Operation Condor* and the enormous influence of the United States of America, leading to forms of rule ranging from oligarchy and tyranny to democracy.¹⁰ Notably, through

⁵ Antić, Ljubomir (1992): *Hrvati i Amerika*. Zagreb: Hrvatska sveučilišna naklada.

⁶ Kos-Stanišić, Lidija (2009): *Latinska Amerika. Povijest i politika*. Zagreb: Golden marketing; Tehnička knjiga; Kaselj Peric, Marina; Kuti, Simona (2007): *Croatian Immigrants in Chile*. In: *AEMI Journal* 16 (5), p. 93–106; Perić, Marina (2004): *Aspekti integracije i adaptacije hrvatskih iseljenika u Čileu*. In: *Migracijske i etničke teme* (20) 2-3, p. 243–258; Lasić, Josip (2010): *Jezični identitet hrvatske iseljeničke zajednice u Čileu*. In: *Časopis za hrvatske studije* 6 (1), p. 163–171.

⁷ Since the paper covers the period of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (established in 1945), as well as the era of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (after 1963), it will be more convenient to refer to both countries as Yugoslavia for the purpose of this paper.

⁸ Twenty-first century socialism is a concept of German sociologist and political analyst Heinz Dieterich and refers to a term which describes the unique interpretation of socialist principles, which were accepted by late Hugo Chávez and other president in South America, like Rafael Correa, president of Ecuador or Evo Morales, president of Bolivia.

⁹ Wiarda, Howard J.; Kline, Harvey F. (2014): *Latin America Politics and Development*. Boulder: Westview Press.

¹⁰ Calvocoressi, Peter (2003): *Svjetska politika nakon 1945*. Zagreb: Nakladni zavod Globus.

the region's social and political turmoil, extremely repressive regimes with pronounced militaristic forms were established across the continent, especially in Chile (Augusto Pinochet), Argentina (Jorge Rafaél Videla), and Paraguay (Alfredo Stroessner).

After the juntas were overthrown in the 1990s, the power in Latin America was mostly seized by representatives of neoliberal capitalism who implemented the policies of the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). During the rule of President Carlos Menem in the 1990s Argentina faced great recession and hyperinflation, and the president found himself in numerous corruption scandals. A similar political narrative can be found in the example of the Peruvian president, Alberto Fujimori.

The situation on the continent changed to a great extent in the early twenty first-century when progressive governments came to power. They continued generating leftist ideas which had first emerged in the mid-twentieth century. The leading country in the region regarding these ideas was Venezuela, whose leader, Hugo Chávez (1954-2013), merged them into a set of leftist policies for the entire continent. That is why other countries, such as Bolivia and Ecuador, started following the ideas of the “twenty-first century socialism”, demanding a higher level of social justice and leaning on social solidarity as opposed to class-conditioned stratification. An important segment of this policy is the experience gained in the second half of the twentieth century, when American-aided coups had overthrown unwanted presidents such as Brazilian president João Goulart (1964), Juan Bosch, president of the Dominican Republic (1965) or Chilean president Salvador Allende (1973).

On the other hand, there is growing opposition to these policies, such as in Venezuela. The opposition politician Leopold Lopez, for example, claims that the concept of a new socialism for the twenty first-century doesn't only imply resistance to American interference, but rather embodies a desire of some presidents in the region to seize absolute power. Equally pronounced in his opposition to this form of South American socialism is Branko Marinković in Bolivia.

The second half of the twentieth century was extremely dynamic in Yugoslavia as well. The main reason for that was the moment when the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito, came to power after the end of the Second World War. However, Yugoslavia's alliance with the socialist block was only a short one, as after the Tito-Stalin split in 1948 it was forced to go an own “third” way. What Yugoslavia was most successful at was foreign policy, and particularly its skillful balancing between East¹¹ and West,¹² and its active role in the Non-Aligned Movement. Thanks to the Non-Aligned Movement, in fact, the first diplomatic contacts between Yugoslavia and Latin American countries were formed.¹³ It was also within this movement that numerous delegations from Latin American countries visited Yugoslavia. It is important to mention a visit by Ernesto Che Guevara to Istria in the summer of 1959, as well as his meeting with Tito on The Brijuni Islands.¹⁴ Che Guevara had come to seek help and support for the newly established government in Havana. However, since Yugoslavia was at that time going through a period of economic crisis, the meeting did not result in the desired pledge of economic assistance.

¹¹ Relations between USSR and Yugoslavia were redefined in the mid-1950s, when Nikita Khrushchev visited Yugoslavia.

¹² See: Jakovina, Tvrtko (2002): *Socijalizam na američkoj pšenici* [Socialism by American Wheat]. Zagreb: Matica hrvatska.

¹³ See the contribution of Kullaa and Getchell in this issue.

¹⁴ Scotti, Giacomo (2011): *Fotografija s Che Guevarom. Cheov posjet Rijeci u ljeto 1959*. Rijeka: Izdavački Centar Rijeka.

On the other hand, after the end of the Second World War and after the Ustaša regime of Ante Pavelić had been defeated, a great number of his supporters found refuge in Latin American countries. In the already mentioned book *Iseljena Hrvatska* it is stated that in the period from 1949 to 1950 almost 10,000 Croats found refuge in Argentina alone.¹⁵

At that time, Argentina was inclined to right-wing political immigrants. Robert McCormick states that Argentina was an important headquarters of the *Ustaša*. Through mediation by Branko Benzon, Juan Peron granted Pavelić residence in the country and later allowed him to start his own construction business. It is important to point out that Ante Valenta organized *Domobran* cells in Argentina and enabled the printing of pro-Ustaša newspapers, demonstrating the high degree to which former Ustaša members were free in their political activity.¹⁶ From this aspect, some countries, such as Bolivia, interpret the separatist actions of Croatian immigrants' descendants within the Ustaša framework, which will be explained in more detail later.

In the early 1990s the war in Yugoslavia started, and the territory of the country itself was reduced to Serbia and Montenegro, while the four remaining republics, including Croatia, gained their independence. Even during the war, cooperation with Latin American countries continued, mainly in the form of supplying arms to Croatia due to the country being under an arms embargo. In March 2013 the former Argentine president Menem was convicted of illegal sales of 6,500 tons of arms to Croatia and Ecuador.¹⁷

Croatian influence has been more frequently mentioned in Bolivia since 2005. This is due to the activities undertaken by the political opposition of Branko Marinković. In Bolivia a discourse developed according to which Marinković's activities were highly motivated by the experience of his family in the territory of former Yugoslavia, as well as by the experience he has gained through his participation in the "Patriotic War" which was fought in Croatia (1990-1995). Therefore, the following section of the paper will present an analysis of the way in which Branko Marinković's origins have influenced his Bolivian policies.

Branko Marinković – the King of Soya Fighting the "Twenty-First Century Socialism"

Branko Marinković is quite well-known in Croatia due to his activities as opposition politician in Santa Cruz, particularly his resistance to the policies of president Evo Morales, which are based on the "Twenty-first century socialism. Among other things, these new socialist policies led to the nationalization of natural resources, including calls for agrarian reform which would redistribute great areas of arable land owned by a few families. According to Jim Shultz, director of Democracy Center in Bolivia, these few families are dominated by those of Croatian origin, led by Branko Marinković.¹⁸

In his public appearances, Marinković stresses that he is fighting for democratic principles which he believes are endangered in Bolivia due to the rule of Evo Morales. On the other hand, owing to his militaristic *modus operandi* (i.e. his private army), authorities like minister Juan Ramón Quintana draw a clear line between his illegal military actions in Bolivia to his fighting in Croatia during the post-Yugoslav wars of the 1990s. Moreover, authorities accuse him of being

¹⁵ Čizmić; Sopta; Šakić (2005), p. 160.

¹⁶ McCormick, Robert (2014): *Croatia under Ante Pavelic. America, the Ustase and Croatian Genocide*. London; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 168.

¹⁷ [Al Jazeera] (2013): *Menem kriv za prodaju oružja Hrvatskoj*. In: Al Jazeera, March 9, 2013. URL: <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/vijesti/menem-kriv-za-prodaju-oruzja-hrvatskoj>, last access: May 22, 2015.

¹⁸ Goodman, Amy (2008): *Autonomy Vote Threatens to Pull Bolivia Apart*. In: *Democracy Now!*, May 5, 2008. URL: http://www.democracynow.org/2008/5/5/autonomy_vote_threatens_to_pull_apart, last access: August 21, 2015.

related to the Ustaša regime through contacts with numerous immigrants who came to Latin America after the fall of The Independent State of Croatia (1940-1945).

The Policy of “Twenty-First Century Socialism” in Bolivia

“Twenty-first century socialism” was defined by the German sociologist Heinz Dieterich as a policy in which industrial capitalism and free market are presented as decayed principles of the twentieth-century.¹⁹ Similarly to the dominant social and economic structures in the majority of Latin American countries, Bolivia had until 2006 witnessed a huge discrepancy between the rich social class, mostly immigrants, who controlled the largest segment of the economy and politics and the extremely poor class, which was comprised of indigenous people.

Implementing a policy aimed at reducing social discrepancy, Morales managed to close class differences drastically, improve health care and reduce the rate of extreme poverty.²⁰ An article published in *FT Wealth*, a supplement of the *Financial Times*, presented the changes in the position of indigenous people. It also claimed that those indigenous inhabitants who had emigrated from Bolivia were returning to their homeland.²¹ The article stated that, according to data published by the UN, 1.2 million inhabitants who had been poor in the period from 2006 to 2012 managed to become members of the middle class.

Twenty first-century socialism caused the loss of power of influential businesses which had been frequently associated with the authorities. When Morales became president, all powerful political and economic structures became endangered due to Morales’ belief that “the existing society should be replaced by a higher quality system”. Therefore, in one of the most affluent provinces, Santa Cruz, Branko Marinković, formed *the Civic Committee* and militant group *Santa Cruz Youth Union* in order to start a military fight against the authorities in La Paz in an effort to gain complete autonomy of this region.

Organization of Referendum in “Rebellious Regions”

With the aim of preventing the implementation of twenty first-century Socialism, Branko Marinković established *El Comité pro Santa Cruz* in order to gain autonomy. In early May 2008, opposition politicians led by Marinković called for a referendum on autonomy. Morales ignored the referendum, inviting his supporters to refrain from voting. During his TV presidential address Morales stated that the referendum was illegal and unconstitutional, which was corroborated by the National Electoral Court.²² On the other hand, Marinković believed it was a “historical day”.

Several days before the referendum, Marinković said in an interview that Morales was ruling the country following the model of communist Cuba and called him a puppet of Hugo Chávez.

¹⁹ Dieterich, Heinz (2006): *Der Sozialismus des 21. Jahrhunderts. Wirtschaft, Gesellschaft und Demokratie nach dem globalen Kapitalismus*. Berlin: Kai Homilius Verlag.

²⁰ The Editorial Board (2014): *South America’s New Caudillos. Evo Morales of Bolivia and Democracy*. In: *New York Times*, October 16, 2014. URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/10/17/opinion/evo-morales-of-bolivia-and-democracy.html?_r=0, last access: May 23, 2015.

²¹ Schipani, Andres (2014): *Bolivia’s indigenous people flaunt their new-found wealth*. In: *Financial Times*, December 4, 2014. URL: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9265426c-7594-11e4-a1a9-00144feabdco.html#axzz3ayqyapJl>, last access: May 23, 2015.

²² Reel, Monte (2008): *Bolivia’s Richest Region Votes Solidly for Autonomy*. URL: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2008/05/04/AR2008050402147.html>, last access: May 15, 2015.

Although the referendum result was 85.6% for autonomy, one should take into consideration the fact that almost 39% of population did not vote in the referendum.²³ Several other regions (Beni, Pando, Tarija) followed the example of Santa Cruz and also called for referenda, and the results almost completely matched those of Santa Cruz.

After the Santa Cruz referendum, the opposition initiated a new referendum aimed at Morales' recall. It was held on August 10, 2008. A total of 63.5% of the electorate voted against his recall, meaning that despite fierce opposition to him, Morales remained president of Bolivia.²⁴

*¿Quién es Branko Marinković?*²⁵

Almost since the beginning of Marinković's political activities, Bolivian authorities have been associated his political engagement with his immigrant origin. In the media Marinković is frequently called "croata Branco Marinković". Similarly, an article published in *The New York Times* had the title: *In Bolivia, a Croat and a Critic is Cast in a Harsh Light*.²⁶ In that context most journalists, both Bolivian and foreign, refer to Marinković as a Croat, although he considers himself a Bolivian.

Regarding his origin, in the documentary *¿Quién es Branko Marinković?*, it is stated that the policy of Branko Marinković is conditioned by the ideology of "The Independent State of Croatia" which was established by Hitler's Nazi regime in Croatia during the Second World War with Ante Pavelić as its leader. It is also stated that Marinković uses numerous supporters of "The Independent State of Croatia", that is, Ustaša, who supported racist policy implemented in the territory of Croatia during the war and which Marinković is trying to transfer to Bolivia's contemporary political framework. In that way a narrative has been created that presents Marinković's activities as completely conditioned by his immigrant origin. The documentary insinuates that his father Silvio was associated with the Ustaša who came to South America after the Second World War, as well as with their Nazi patrons.

Marinković, on the other hand, states that his father was a partisan whose family escaped from starvation in Tito's communist Yugoslavia in 1956.²⁷ He points out that he is in no way associated with the Ustaša regime in Croatia.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Romero, Simon (2008a): Recall Vote in Bolivia Seen as Win for Morales. In: *New York Times*, August 10, 2008. URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/08/11/world/americas/11bolivia.html?_r=0, last access: April 13, 2015; [Al Jazeera] (2008): Morales 'wins' Bolivia referendum. Unofficial results and exit polls indicate increased support for president. In: *Al Jazeera*, August 11, 2008. URL: <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/americas/2008/08/20088110421991226.html>, last access: May 27, 2015.

²⁵ This is the title of documentary film which was broadcast on Bolivian television during Marinković's most intensive opposition activities. See: [Ayaviri, Ivan] (2009): *Quién es Branko Marinković?* In: YouTube, January 26, 2009. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YEaHxp8QFCA>, last access: June 12, 2015.

²⁶ Romero, Simon (2008b): *In Bolivia, a Croat and a Critic Is Cast in a Harsh Light*. In: *The New York Times*, September 26, 2008. URL: http://www.nytimes.com/2008/09/27/world/americas/27bolivia.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0, last access: August 21, 2015.

²⁷ [T-portal] (2008): *Bolivija u strahu od ustaša*. In: *H-alter*, September 30, 2008. URL: <http://www.h-alter.org/vijesti/bolivija-u-strahu-od-ustasa>, last access: June 23, 2015.

The Balkanization²⁸ of Bolivia

At least a partial confirmation of the thesis that Marinković's activities have been conditioned by his immigrant origin can be found in a previously mentioned statement when he said that his family had fled the communist repression similar to the one Morales is currently building in Bolivia. In an interview he emphasized that the "Yugoslav form" of repression ("communist dictatorship and extremism") can be seen in contemporary Bolivia and that neither he nor his family want to live in that kind of environment.²⁹

The culmination of Marinković' and others' opposition in Santa Cruz to the central government in La Paz was a violent attempt –, as Bolivian authorities claim – to overthrow the government. This coup took place in October 2008.

The opposition formed military squads which occupied the streets in order to cause a strike which they hoped would result in a blockade of social measures and spur a political crisis which would eventually help the province gain autonomy. Minister Alfredo Rada accused Branko Marinković of orchestrating unrest, pointing out that Marinković had just returned from the United States of America where he had been, according to Rada, instructed on the following course of action and encouraged to attempt *coup d'état*.³⁰

Since Marinković was the leader of the rebellion, Bolivian authorities claimed that he wanted to follow the model of the former Yugoslavia in which individual countries (like Croatia) seceded, and to introduce secessionist policy to enable some provinces (like Santa Cruz) to secede from Bolivia after they have gained a certain level of autonomy. That is how the term "Balkanization" entered the public discourse in Bolivia, denoting the fall of a united Bolivian state and the creation of new countries, following the example of the former Yugoslavia whose collapse and subsequent war led to the creation of new countries (Croatia, Slovenia, etc.) Bolivian authorities claimed that Marinković was trying to Balkanize Bolivia, since it is a multiethnic state.³¹ The same remarks had been given by Ecuadorian president Correa during the escalation of violence in Bolivia in 2008 when he said that *América Latina no permitirá una balcanización*.³²

Another argument to support the thesis that political opposition is trying to create a kind of "Yugoslav scenario" in Bolivia is the fact that US Ambassador in Bolivia Philip Goldberg had been an assistant to the US Ambassador in Croatia, Richard Holbrooke. Holbrooke is believed to have implemented the idea of the disintegration of Yugoslavia. In an article by Marina Menéndez Quintero entitled "Bolivia is One Sole Nation", she stated: "The activity of US Ambassador Philip Goldberg — who was an assistant of Richard Holbrooke, identified as one of the strategists in the disintegration of Yugoslavia — and whose arrival in Bolivia is related to the breakout of the first

²⁸ The term "Balkanization" refers to the policy of dividing a multiethnic state in order to create ethnically homogenous entities. It also denotes an ethnic conflict within a multiethnic state.

²⁹ [Taringa!] (2009): La Verdad Sobre Branko Marinkovic, El Golpista De Bolivia. In: Taringa!. URL: <http://www.taringa.net/posts/info/4629765/La-Verdad-Sobre-Branko-Marinkovic-El-Golpista-De-Bolivia.html>, last access: May 24, 2015.

³⁰ Webber, Jeffery (2011): From Rebellion to Reform in Bolivia. Class Struggle, Indigenous Liberation, and the Politics of Evo Morales. Chicago: Haymarket Books, p. 132.

³¹ Coozens, Darrall (2008): Bolivia: Decisive action needed to confront the oligarchy. URL: <http://www.marxist.com/bolivia-decisive-action-needed-to-confront-oligarchy.htm>, last access: August 20, 2015.

³² Latin America will not permit any Balkanization. Cf. [Venezolana de Televisión] (2008): Rafael Correa: América Latina no permitirá una "balcanización". In: *aporrea*, September 14, 2008. URL: <http://www.aporrea.org/internacionales/n120610.html>, last access: June 16, 2015.

separatist actions.”³³ A similar thesis was presented by Roberto Bardini in a text published in early May 2008, where he wrote: “Between 1994 and 1996 [Goldberg] was Special Assistant to Ambassador Richard Holbrooke, one of the strategists behind Yugoslavian disintegration. Goldberg, recognized as an expert in stoking ethnic or racial conflicts and his experience in Bosnia’s ethnic struggles preceding the breakup of the former Yugoslavia, would be a key figure in Bolivia.”³⁴

Marinković’s Opposition Activities under the Influence of Events in Croatia in the Early 1990s

In the beginning of April 2009, thirty nine members of the autonomy movement – or conspirators, as Bolivian authorities called them – were arrested. Marinković, together with several associates, managed to escape to the USA.

The authorities claimed that the planning of the armed rebellion had been organized in accordance with experience gained by Marinković in the war in Croatia. They also claimed it had been carried out in association with soldiers with whom Marinković served in the International Brigade, which was formed during the war in Croatia. Later on, Marinković took many of his fellow soldiers to Bolivia, where he recruited them as “protection forces”.³⁵

Within this context Bolivian authorities arrested Marko Tadić, Croatian citizen, who had also fought in the “Patriotic War”.³⁶ As Bret Gustafson points out, this only has bolstered criticism related to Marinković’s Croatian roots and his links to a region in which countries chose a violent way to achieve their independence.³⁷ That is why Bolivian media claim that Marinković intends to start a war in order to establish his own state.³⁸ It is interesting to point out that American media paid a lot of attention to Marinković’s democratic fight, portraying him as an opposition politician fighting Morales’ regime. In an interview for the *New York Times* it was stated that for many people Marinković represents the “fight against Morales’ radical policy” and that they believe that he is fighting the intolerance and hatred expressed towards *white Bolivians*.³⁹

³³ Quintero Menéndez, Marina (2008): Bolivia Is One Sole Nation. In: Juventud Rebelde, April 28, 2008. URL: <http://english.juventudrebelde.cu/columnists/2008-04-28/bolivia-is-one-sole-nation/>, last access: April 23, 2015.

³⁴ Bardini, Roberto (2008): The Ambassador of Ethnic Cleansing. In: Machetera, May 3, 2008. URL: <https://machetera.wordpress.com/2008/05/03/the-ambassador-of-ethnic-cleansing/>, last access: April 12, 2015. It is important to note a thesis of Michael Karadjis that Holbrooke was not “behind disintegration of Yugoslavia since he arrived to the region as US Ambassador in 1994, together with the already mentioned Goldberg, who had largely influenced the dismemberment of Bosnia.” Karadijs, Michael (2008): Yugoslavia, Washington and the ‘Balkanisation’ of Bolivia. In: Links: International Journal of Socialist Renewal. URL: <http://links.org.au/node/445>, last access: May 27, 2015.

³⁵ Blažević, Davorka (2010): Hrvatski ‘kralj soje’ u Boliviji Branko Marinković optužen za urotu protiv Moralesa. In: Slobodna Dalmacija, December 21, 2010. URL: <http://www.slobodnadalmacija.hr/Svijet/tabid/67/articleType/ArticleView/articleId/124730/Default.aspx>, last access: May 24, 2015.

³⁶ The verdict was announced for five of the accused people, Mario Tadić included. He was released in March 2015, having served a five-year sentence.

³⁷ Gustafson, Bret (2008): By Means Legal and Otherwise: The Bolivian Right Re-groups. In: nacla. URL: <https://nacla.org/article/means-legal-and-otherwise-bolivian-right-regroups>, last access: April 10, 2015.

³⁸ Romero (2008b); [Bolivia-red.com] (2009): Reaparece Branko Marinkovic, responde a las acusaciones del Gobierno. In: YouTube, April 22, 2009. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1F6r5FKCd3U>, last access: April 10, 2015.

³⁹ Romero (2008b).

In the meantime, Evo Morales has been elected President for the third time, with his current term of office set to expire in 2019. Marinković, on the other hand, after years spent in the United States was granted asylum in Brazil, where he is currently living.⁴⁰

Conclusion

Croatian immigrants' descendants have left a significant and extremely dramatic mark on the social and political circumstances in Latin America, especially in the second half of the twentieth-century. It is in this context that the activities of Branko Marinković as political opponent are always emphasized. He is a descendant of Croatian immigrants in Bolivia, where his family came in the mid-1950s. His family is considered one of the most affluent families in Bolivia, owing to diverse agricultural businesses. That is why Marinković is also known in Bolivia as “the king of soya”.

In accordance with a long political tradition in which political and business elites have created the Bolivian social and political scene, a certain polarity was created in society between the rich class on the one end and the poor, mostly indigenous, inhabitants on the other. Therefore, when Evo Morales became president in 2005 (he is the first indigenous person to become a president) his efforts to implement a version of twenty first-century socialism in the country led to a rebellion in the most affluent eastern province of Bolivia, Santa Cruz. That is why the Civic Committee in Santa Cruz was founded, led by Branko Marinković. He openly stood up against Morales' policy, accusing him of creating a firm totalitarian regime like the one in the former Yugoslavia, from which his family had been forced to flee.

Bolivian authorities created a narrative about the political activities of Branko Marinković which claimed that his immigrant background was directly related to his political activities. After he presented the initiative for the autonomy of Santa Cruz, the Bolivian media presented a thesis that Marinković wanted to, based on the war in Croatia (1990-1995), “Balkanize” Bolivia and that his goal was a complete disintegration of the state in order to enable some provinces to achieve independence.

The culmination of the political conflict took place after Marinković had initiated a referendum on the recall of Morales in 2008. Morales won, which led in the following months to military formations by the opposition. After that, the authorities claimed that the opposition had been planning a coup with the aim of overthrowing President Morales. In turn, this led in April 2010 to the arrest of thirty nine people under charges of planning a coup d'état. Among the arrested were members of the International Brigade who had fought with Marinković in the war in Croatia. That created a stronger link between Marinković's activities in Bolivia and his Croatian/immigrant origin. Branko Marinković managed to avoid arrest and he fled to the United States of America. He was granted asylum in Brazil, where he has been living since 2013.

⁴⁰ Cuiza, Paulo (2013): El excívico cruceño Branko Marinkovic reaparece en Brasil junto a Tuto y Pinto. In: La Razón, October 29, 2013. URL: http://www.la-razon.com/index.php?url=/nacional/Branko-Marinkovic-Brasil-Tuto-Pinto_o_1933606713.html, last access: April 10, 2015.

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