

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

February 24, 1998

The Honorable William Jefferson Clinton
President of the United States
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our deep concern regarding the Croatian government's continued pattern of intolerance toward the basic freedoms of political expression, a free press, and civil liberties. While we expected that the transition from a former communist republic to a democracy would not happen overnight, it has been seven years since Croatia declared itself an independent democratic nation, and little progress has been made in implementing democratic reforms. This was recently reaffirmed by the State Department's *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 1997*. In its report, the State Department makes the finding that in Croatia "the continuing concentration of power within the one-party central government, makes Croatia's nominally democratic system in reality authoritarian."

Most print and broadcast media continue to be owned by the Croatian government resulting in considerable restriction on freedom of the press. Journalists who criticize the government face harassment and even prosecution. The Association of Electronic Media Journalists was established in October 1997, and issued a manifesto ("Forum 21") with 21 points calling for professional and open electronic media. The State Department found "13 of members who worked for state radio and television, came under immediate pressure and threats from the HDZ [President Tudjman's party] and the state-run media to curtail these outside activities." The State Department further reported "The Government maintained an unofficial campaign of harassment of the independent media throughout the year."

In August 1997, the Croatian government brought charges against two prominent human rights activists, Ivan Cicak, long-time President of the Croatian Helsinki Committee, and politician Dobroslav Paraga, President of the Croatian Party of Rights 1861. The government alleged that both men had violated the Criminal Code by disseminating false information with the intent of causing political instability in the country. According to the State Department Report, "...the same and similar statements had been made by these individuals - with no ensuing public disorder - several years previously and that similar sentiments were expressed by others." The charges were brought against these men within days of their meeting with investigators from the Hague War Crimes Tribunal in which they turned over documentation involving allegations against several high government officials.

In addition, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) found the presidential election in June of 1997 to be "fundamentally flawed" and came to a similar conclusion with regards to the parliamentary and local elections in April 1997. The President's

ruling party was given an overwhelming advantage in coverage by the state-owned electronic media throughout the election year. Furthermore, there is a disturbing trend over the past few years by the Croatian government to use administrative courts to replace heads of democratically elected parties. The method is simple, the party is registered as being headed by someone who is favored by the ruling party.


The judicial system continues to be heavily influenced by the Croatian Administration. In 1997, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Krunoslav Olujic, was dismissed. Three members of the State Judiciary Council were witnesses against him while at the same time they also decided his fate. The OSCE reported that Olujic's dismissal "put in question the separation of powers provided for by the Constitution."

Mr. President, we believe it is well past the time for Croatia to hold fair and free elections based on election laws which do not favor the ruling party over the opposition. The government should return democratically elected leaders of Parliamentary parties who were removed by administrative measures. There must be multi-party control of the election process. An independent media must be allowed to report without fear of reprisal, and the judiciary must be independent from any political influence. We therefore urge you to increase the pressure on the Croatian government to come in line with internationally recognized democratic principles through all means at your disposal, including the disbursement of U.S. assistance.


Sincerely,




Tom Lantos
Member of Congress




John Edward Porter
Member of Congress



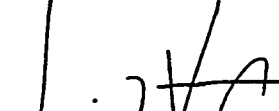
Benjamin A. Gilman
Member of Congress



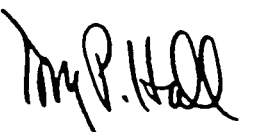
Tom Campbell
Member of Congress



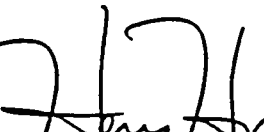
Martin Frost
Member of Congress



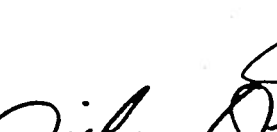
Luise V. Gutierrez
Member of Congress



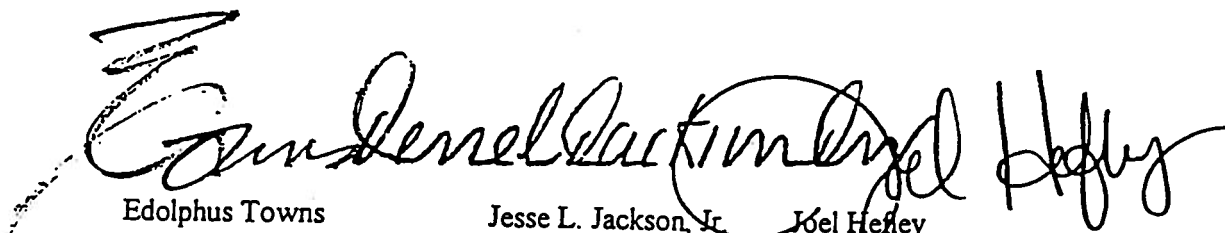
Tony P. Hall
Member of Congress



Henry J. Hyde
Member of Congress



William O. Lipinski
Member of Congress

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, likely a joint signature or a signature that spans across the names of the three individuals listed below. The signature is highly cursive and overlaps the printed names.

Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress

Jesse L. Jackson, Jr.
Member of Congress

Joel Hefley
Member of Congress