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# Advocacy Coalitions in Transport Policy: A Case of Rail Sector in Croatia<sup>2</sup>

**ABSTRACT:** *The author analyses the transport policy of the rail sector in Croatia and tries to give answers regarding the policy stability and change based on the actors in the rail transport. The aim of the paper is to give an overview of the development of the rail sector in modern Croatia and to explore, in a larger period, the relations and beliefs of all types of actors in this area at the national level. As a theoretical background, the author uses an advocacy coalition framework, which states that policy actors are grouped into coalitions within a policy subsystem in which they advocate their beliefs in order to transfer them into government programs, thus provoking change and stability in the system. The author methodologically uses qualitative content analysis in the form of coding of the collected material based on transcripts of interviews with actors, official documents, and transcript of one parliamentary debate. Following is a review of the historical development of the rail sector in Croatia, with an emphasis on the post-independence Croatia period, which provides a basis for concrete research findings. The results are presented in two units: (1) identified actors and their relations, and (2) beliefs of actors. The follow-up discussion points to the existence of similar patterns of beliefs among the actors at the national level. However, the empirical material collected does not establish clear relationships that could be classified as an advocacy coalition. In conclusion, the author argues that the coded material does not give away any importance of the coalitions of actors at the national level for policy stability and change of rail sector leading to recommendations for further research in this area, where other transport sectors should be included as well as international actors.*

**KEYWORDS:** advocacy coalition framework; advocacy coalitions; transport policy; rail policy; rail transport; actor analysis

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## INTRODUCTION

Transport policy is a special sectoral public policy in charge of ‘provision of transport operations and infrastructure for air, rail, road, water and urban transport’ (Compston, 2004, p. 8). The basic element of transport policy is transport that ‘involves the movement of goods and people between various locations’ and ‘requires significant amounts of both link (roads, railways, etc.) and node (stations, airports, etc.) infrastructure’ (Button, 2006, p. 324). In Croatian political science, we can find scientific and professional literature dealing with various policies: social, criminal, education, economics, health and so on. However, a modest number of (national) policies have still not been studied and such a situation is present in the sphere of transport policy as well.<sup>3</sup> In other words, a political science approach that would study actors, political processes and decision-making arenas in an extremely large sector such as transport was, at least for now, left out. Of course, that does not mean that researchers from other social disciplines have not dealt with transport policy – most notably economy (see Padjen, 2003; Vedriš, 2015).

Therefore, this paper will try to approach the transport policy from the perspective of political science, more specifically, from the sphere of public policy and administration branch. As a case, we have chosen a rail transport that is a part of transport policy. The reason for choosing the rail sector is that it underwent a very dynamic development, especially in the period after 1991 in Croatia,

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<sup>3</sup> To learn more about the development of political science and public policy as its branch in Croatia, see Petak, 2007; Kasapović 2008; Petković, 2014.

during which two major reform measures of rails took place. Rails have thus encountered many challenges through its modern history, from the destruction of infrastructure during the Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995), all the way to the liberalization of rail freight and passenger transport services (after 2000).

One of the most surprising things is, for example, in the 1990s, the rail union scene was extremely strong and active in terms of protest and labour union strikes (Rul, 2016, p. 1) but none of the significant changes in rail sector took place (Stefičar, 2008, p. 3). Quite the opposite, after 2000, a strong rail union scene disappeared, and the formal policy actors introduced significant reforms to this subsystem. Such a situation, where we have a lack of policy studies in Croatia that would deal with the development of rail transport and the actors involved in this sector, leads us to the following research question: *What explains change and stability of rail sector in Croatia since the independence in 1991?* Our main argumentation is that different policy actors' relations and beliefs in terms of coalitions have caused different periods of change and stability in Croatian rail sector. In the paper, therefore, we aim to give an overview of the development of the rail sector and to explore, on a larger time scale, the relations and beliefs of all types of actors in the field at the national level as an indicator of policy change and stability.

As a theoretical starting point for the analysis of transport policy of rail sector over a period of more than 25 years, we have decided to use advocacy coalition framework (ACF). ACF is a contemporary approach to public policy research that has been theoretically, and to a lesser extent methodologically, developing since the mid-80s with various applications to different policies (Weible et al., 2009; Pierce et al., 2017). The framework describes the process of policy-making over a long period of time, in which various types of coalitions of formal and informal actors are formed that try to influence policies by incorporating their beliefs into the government programs (Sabatier, 1987). The emphasis will be placed on the qualitative methodology in the form of deductive and inductive approach to coding collected material based on three key codes: (1) actors, (2) beliefs and (3) relations, since these are some of the basic terms on which the framework was built on.

With all that in mind, first, we will present the theoretical framework of the concept of advocacy coalitions, after which we give a more detailed view of the methodology of the research, in which we present the collected materials and methods of data analysis. Then, we give a historical overview, with an emphasis on the post-independence period (after 1991). Subsequently, the results of the research, which include two parts. The first part presents (1) identified actors with an overview of their relations, and the second part deals with (2) beliefs of identified actors, after which we give discussion by analysing the relations and beliefs of actors within the rail sector.

## THEORETICAL OVERVIEW OF ADVOCACY COALITIONS

ACF represents a contemporary framework for the study of the policy-making process. It has gradually been evolving since the mid-eighties of the last century (Sabatier, 1986); today, it has become an unavoidable concept of many relevant textbooks of public policy, (see Araral et al. eds., 2013; Peters & Zittoun eds., 2016) even in literature in the Croatian language (see Petek & Petković eds., 2014; Poljak, 2017). The concept itself has based its theoretical development on the premise that the process of policy-making takes place over a long period of time, which can often include decades (Sabatier, 2007, p. 3-4). Therefore, ACF views policy-making as a complex phenomenon that can hardly be explained through the standardized phase model (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1994, p. 176–178).

In a narrower perspective, ACF addresses the policy subsystems as a place where actors are grouped into coalitions that advocate for inclusion of their beliefs in government programs. Subsystems represent sectors and decision-making arenas that can be formulated at all levels of government and can be interwoven with other subsystems, and thus affect one another. Actors involved in subsystem may be formal or informal. Here, we primarily talk about the actors who are 'actively concerned with a policy problem or issue' (Sabatier, 1987, p. 652), and so the coalitions are formed between actors who have the same or similar beliefs. There are three levels of beliefs that can be categorized hierarchically by the level of generality, and we will describe them below.

At the very top, there are (1) *deep core beliefs* that are of ontological nature. Their change is almost impossible, and they are at the highest level of the generality of beliefs. These beliefs address the identity or values of the actors (Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1999 in Weible & Sabatier, 2006, p. 127). As a concrete example, the division into the left/right political spectrum can be taken or the views on issues such as 'how we should rank values such as freedom and security' (Sabatier, 1993 & 1998 in Cairney, 2015, p. 486).

Then, (2) *policy core beliefs*, that are hierarchically in the second place. They are less general and abstract than the previous beliefs, and their attributes are more specific and directly linked to policy. This type of beliefs represents 'the fundamental "glue" of coalitions'

(Sabatier, 1998, p. 103), and is based on different policy-oriented views such as ‘basic problem definitions, causal understandings, and policy positions related to the policy subsystem’ (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 20). Examples of these beliefs can be explored in terms of stance towards the relationship between the state and the market, how serious a problem is and what causes it and so on (Sabatier, 1998, p. 103). Although these beliefs are ‘very stable’, they are nonetheless ‘more susceptible to change than deep core beliefs’ (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 20).

Finally, (3) *secondary aspects* are the lowest level of belief system dealing with preferences to mechanisms and instruments used in addressing problems (Weible & Sabatier, 2006, p. 128). In other words, these beliefs try to translate the above-mentioned beliefs into clear and concrete descriptions of their implementation. Secondary aspects, therefore, do not have a solid foundation as the previous two beliefs, their change is possible and common, and this type of belief in some situations is ‘the focus of negotiations and compromise’ (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016, p. 20). As an example of these beliefs, we can add ‘policy preferences regarding desirable regulations or budgetary allocations, the design of specific institutions, and the evaluations of various actors’ performance’ (Sabatier, 1998, p. 104).

Such a posture of beliefs allows the possibility of forming relations or networks between actors, thus creating coalitions that can vary from one to several, mostly ‘two to four’ (Cairney, 2015, p. 486). Once the coalition is formed, actors within the coalition use various resources to achieve mail goal, which is to change government programs that will reflect their beliefs. Resources vary from mobilization capacities and skilful leadership, up to official power to make political decisions (see Weible & Sabatier, 2006, p. 129, Sabatier & Weible, 2007, p. 201–203, Weible & Nohrstedt, 2013, p. 129), which then opens space for active action in the subsystem. In addition to the coalitions, subsystems also have policy brokers in order to calm down potential conflict and have the authority to ‘find a reasonable compromise’ (Sabatier, 1988, p. 133) between the two clashing coalitions. The culmination results in a change of subsystem or a particular sector that policy addresses, as well as beliefs.<sup>4</sup>

Systematically speaking, there are three main aims and theoretical pillars on which framework is grounded: (1) advocacy coalitions, (2) policy-oriented learning and (3) policy change (Weible & Jenkins-Smith, 2016; Pierce et al., 2017). Advocacy coalitions represent coordination of policy actors that are grouped within specific coalition based on similar policy-core beliefs. Policy-oriented learning is devoted to the question of long-term changes in belief system within specific coalition. Finally, there is policy change that can have different variations from major to minor change that is caused by different elements, from external events (e.g., changes in public opinion) to the questions of coalitions (e.g., dominant or minority coalition belief change). Given that we emphasize policy changes caused by actors and coalitions, our research stands somewhere between the first and third pillar.

To conclude, consideration should be given to the reasons for choosing ACF as the theoretical starting point of this paper. The first reason is that ACF rests on the premise that policy changes over a longer period, decades or more (Sabatier, 2007); therefore, encompassing both periods of policy change and stability. Given the period of 25 years that this research is engaging - this makes ACF a good basis for analysis. The other reason is that the ACF, as we have previously said, assumes that various types of actors form coalitions within the policy subsystem. Transport policy is a sector that brings together a rich spectrum of actors, from executive authorities, led by Ministry of Transport that has existed in various variants since the 1990s till today (Petek, 2012, p. 40–41), and, for example, increasing number of unions operating within the rail sector (Stefičar, 2008, p. 5–6). The third reason lies in the fact that the ACF places emphasis on actors in the process of policy-making, and the research of actors is one of the key political science contributions to public policy research (see Petek, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

Given that the actors in the rail sector are at the centre of this paper as an indicator of policy stability and change, we use one of the fundamental approaches to policy research that is linked to the accounts of policy as a *structured interaction* of various involved actors (Colebatch, 2006, p. 11). This tradition in the public policy research uses a small sample that provides the usage of qualitative methodology that can be done by methods such as interviewing, analysing documents or analysing actors (Petek, 2016, p. 13). ACF

<sup>4</sup> It is important to keep in mind that ACF also describes the bigger context in which coalitions, as well as subsystems, operate. To learn more about other aspects of ACF that are not explored in this paper, see the papers and book chapters quoted and cited in this part of the paper.

itself has been applied using the qualitative methodology on various subsystems such as sports (Green & Houlihan, 2004) or forest management (Elliott & Schlaepfer, 2001), and in different democratic political systems from the USA, across Europe, to Australia and South Korea (Weible et al., 2009; Jang et al., 2016). The latest evaluation shows how ACF is today mostly applied by qualitative methodology, although many scholars use quantitative methods as well (see Pierce et al., 2017).

It should be emphasized that our analysis will be limited to the actors acting at the national level and that we will not go into deeper analysis of international actors such as the World Bank or the European Union. With that in mind, in the first phase of the research, we worked on collecting materials that were related to the relations and beliefs of actors in the rail sector. Interviews were used as the most relevant sources of data, so we conducted two semi-structured interviews, one of which was conducted with two highly ranked officials from the Ministry of the Sea, Transport and Infrastructure in Croatia (Interview 1, 2017), and other with one of the highly-positioned employee in state-owned rail company HŽ Passenger Transport (Interview 2, 2017).

Regarding unions, secondary data sources were used – five interviews with prominent present and former representatives of the two most relevant labour unions. Interviews were conducted in 2016 within the project *Work and War: Investigation of strikes in Croatia in 1988–1996 (Case Study: Croatian Railways)*.<sup>5</sup> In order to collect beliefs of the two most relevant Croatian political parties, centre-right Croatian Democratic Union (Hrvatska demokratska zajednica – HDZ) and centre-left Social Democratic Party (Socijal-demokratska partija – SDP) (Stefičar, 2008), we collected a transcript of the parliamentary debate<sup>6</sup> that reflected most of the recent history of the rail subsystem development in Croatia (Croatian Parliament, 2012).

In order to have comparable data, while conducting primary interviews with the Ministry and rail company HŽ, we asked questions concerning the reflections of the development of rail sector, problems that the rails are facing today, as well as how the actors think the problems should and can be fixed. This provides us with similar data, both primary and secondary, in terms of the most relevant policy actors such as rail unions, political parties, Ministry and rail companies. In order to straighten the data collected by the interview, it was necessary to take over some of the official documents that, to a certain extent, addressed the actors' beliefs. So, from the official documents, we use the Transport Development Strategy (MPPI, 2014) that was adopted in 2014 by the Croatian Government and the annual work programs of the rail sector agencies for 2017 (AIN, 2016, ASŽ, 2016, HAKOM, 2016). In addition, as far as the state-owned rail companies are concerned, the most recent annual reports from 2015 were used (HŽ Cargo, 2016; HŽ Infrastructure, 2016; HŽ PP, 2016). The aforementioned documents have been selected because they reflect the mission and vision of the actors, and the goals they strive for, which provides a good basis for the analysis of beliefs. We have to keep in mind that the collected material mostly reflects the beliefs and relations of today's actors. The reason for this is the limited resources and unavailability of materials that would reflect the beliefs and relations of actors during, for example, the 1990s, although the interviews posed as a basis for analysing that period.

After we collected the material, we decided to apply a qualitative content analysis in the form of coding (see Saldaña, 2009), and in that sense, we coded the above-mentioned official documents, transcripts of interviews and transcript of the parliamentary debate in order to give an answer to our research question. We used the thematic criterion of determining coding units, that is, coding units vary in the sense that in some cases, we used only one part of the sentence, and sometimes the whole paragraph related to beliefs and/or relations. All that was not in the domain of beliefs and relations in the mentioned empirical material was not coded.

Coding was performed in two phases. Thus, in the first stage, we deductively introduced the coding scheme (see Table 1). The materials were coded according to three basic codes: the first referred to a specific actor, the other to the aforementioned three levels of ACF belief system, and we finally coded (none) the existence of relations between the actors. In other words, each unit of analysis was coded in all the codes, but then it was coded only within one sub-code (for example, only one level of belief) (see Table 1).

Within the first code of the actors, we coded the units according to the type of actors interviewed or who created the document. The only exception in this respect was the transcript of parliamentary debate, where it was necessary to code a debate by parties HDZ or SDP acting within the Croatian Parliament as actors. In this case, the coding unit was coded according to which party the MP that spoke belonged to. Beliefs were coded according to the following criterion: deep core beliefs were coded if topically related to a certain core value, such as visions around rail transport (e.g., sustainable development of railways); policy beliefs were coded for themes that

<sup>5</sup> Researchers from the Center for Peace Studies in Zagreb (CMS) and the Organization for Workers' Initiative and Democratization (BRID) carried out the project supported by Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung Southeast Europe.

<sup>6</sup> Transcript of parliamentary debate that was collected took place in 2012, when the Government introduced an important bill that gave almost complete autonomy to state-owned rail companies.

**Tab. 1:** Coding scheme.

CODE	SUB-CODE
a) Actors	Specific actor
b) Actors' beliefs	1) Deep core 2) Policy core 3) Secondary aspects
c) Actors' relations	1) Existent 2) Non-existent

Source: author

were related to goals (e.g., such as pro-market orientation) and problems (e.g., poor infrastructure); secondary aspects gathered coded units that were related to implementation (e.g., coordination) and instruments (e.g., EU funds). Finally, the relations were coded with two sub-codes, in which one code signified the existence of the actor's relationship (e.g., signing of collective agreements), while the other indicated the absence of a relationship in the sense that no other actor and relationship with him was mentioned.

In the second phase of coding, we focused on the already coded material within the code of the actors' beliefs. The underlying intent was to find the lower-ranked codes, that is, the features or dimensions of the actors' beliefs themselves, addressed in the collected empirical material, using an inductive approach of open coding (see Thomas, 2006). We did this in a way to take on one identified actor and then analyse and identify the chapters for all three levels of beliefs, more detailed view of which can be seen in the results section. Thus, they pose as a third level of codes within the aforementioned *Table 1*.

## DEVELOPMENT OF RAIL TRANSPORT POLICY IN MODERN CROATIA

The analysis of this paper focuses on the period after Croatia got its independence in 1991, which finally 'allowed Croatia to be a subject and not the object of transport policy' (Padjen, 2003, p. 345). Nevertheless, after independence and all the way up to 2000, 'railway has not been seen as a focus of transport policy and you could even hear the attitudes that Croatia doesn't even need railways' (Stefičar, 2008, p. 3). Moreover, an additional problem was a Croatian War of Independence (1991–1995) that resulted in a drastic rail passenger traffic drop (World Bank, 2005, p. 29; Vedriš, 2015, p. 194). Still, during the period of the 90s, we can say that rail transport policy had been established by a legislative framework that was introduced by the Croatian Government at the time. In addition, the state-owned company *Croatian Railways* (HŽ) was established in 1991, which operated within the rail sector in terms of providing services such as passenger's transportation and maintenance of railway infrastructure.

It is important to point out the informal actors during the 1990s, that is, the rail labour union scene that was extremely strong during that period, 'probably the strongest union scene in Croatia at the time, which was characterized by its militancy that was rarely present after that' (Rul, 2016, p. 1). Specifically, there were massive union strikes that took place in 1993, 1994 and 1996. The reasons behind these strikes were diverse, ranging from wage cuts to degradation of the status of rails and exposure to dangers during the war.

After 10 years of centre-right government in the 90s, the centre-left coalition came to power in January 2000. Things changed drastically in transport policy, and in the period from 2000 to 2005, the first modern reform in the field of rail transport took place in Croatia, which was carried on even when the new centre-right government came to power in December 2003. The basis of the reform was a shift of the Croatian foreign policy towards the European integration, and in this regard, the rail legislation had to be harmonization with the EU acquis, which carried out the process of Europeanisation of transport policy and therefore, the rail policy as well.<sup>7</sup> The main goal of such a rail policy was to 'adapt to EU law and to meet European standards' (Stefičar, 2008, p. 3), without a clear picture of how to implement those goals aside from re-writing the laws. In addition, up until 2000, the modernization of the railway infrastructure was never carried out, which resulted in 'technical and technological backwardness of railway infrastructure and transport equipment, and thus the poor quality of service' (Ilić, 2000, p. 68).

<sup>7</sup> To learn more about Croatia's public policies in the process of EU policy-making and Europeanisation, see Lajh & Petak, 2015.



So in this regard, the New Public Management<sup>8</sup> became the dominant paradigm in the rail service provision that wanted to liberalize railways and place them in the market.<sup>9</sup> This was achieved when the *Rail Law* was newly adopted, in which ‘concrete result was liberalization of the rail market, stating regulations according to which the Croatian railways can be used by any operator in passenger or freight transport’ (Sućeska, 2015, p. 6). This led to splitting of HŽ into five limited liability companies owned by the Croatian Government, three of which operate today: (1) *HŽ Passenger Transport* that is focused on passengers (people) transport via rails, (2) *HŽ Cargo* that is active in market in the domain of freight transport, and (3) *HŽ Infrastructure* that works on rail infrastructure in Croatia. At the time, they were all a part of the umbrella company, *HŽ Holding*.

In the period after 2005, the Government formed three agencies that were present in order to ensure the right implementation of NPM and to put the focus on security in order to prevent rail accidents. Therefore, in 2007, the *Agency for Regulation of the Rail Market* (ARTŽU) was formed, and in 2009, the *Croatian Railway Safety Agency* (ASŽ). Lastly, in 2013, a new agency was formed in charge of the investigation of accidents in railway traffic, among other things (AIN). In this period, since December 2011, we have a new centre-left Government, which started new reform of rail transport policy throughout their mandate that put the focus on modernization.

In that narrative, *HŽ Holding* was dissolved, which resulted in many workers being fired and the formation of almost full independence of the three HŽ rail companies mentioned above, which would have to be liberated even more towards the market, except for *HŽ Infrastructure*, which would still depend on the state. Modernization of service provision in passengers’ transport also took place, while the Government bought new modern electric passengers trains. Finally, the Government in 2015, together with the World Bank, through the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, signed an agreement for a guarantee for financing the project *Sustainable Croatian Railways in Europe* for all the three HŽ companies. Lastly, in 2014, ARTŽU was integrated within the *Croatian Regulatory Authority for Network Industries* (HAKOM) as a special division.

Today, we can see that the transport policy was generally well present on different agendas in Croatia since independence, comparing it to the other policy sectors (see Širinić, 2016; Petek, 2017). However, this is mostly due to high attention focused on road and highway transport, which resulted in modest investments to the rail sector and attention to this area of transport. Furthermore, the rail workers’ labour union scene was reduced to ‘sadness and misery’ (Pavletić, 2016, in Rul, 2016, p. 1) and has never returned to the position it used to be in, during the 1990s. This is seen in terms of mobilization capacities that were lost through the fragmentation of unions. They are today ‘significantly weakened, without a clear common strategy and unified attitudes, unable to provide any more significant resistance’ (Rul, 2016, p. 1). This all culminated with different problems in the Croatian rail transport such as low-quality infrastructure, which had ‘reduced the efficiency of the railways, reflecting low commercial speeds on selected sections, repeated cancellations and delayed trains, and recent frequent traffic accidents’ (Dundović & Plazibat, 2011, p. 217).

## IDENTIFIED ACTORS AND THEIR RELATIONS

As it can be seen from the previous part, there are five main nation-based actors that had influenced the policy-making of transport policy in terms of rail sectors, as well as service provision: (1) the Croatian Government, (2) state-owned companies, (3) agencies, (4) labour unions and (5) political parties. We will explore, in the following part, the identified actors and their relations (see *Figure 1*). First and foremost, the Ministry is seen as a fundamental actor establishing a regulatory framework in which the rail sector provides services (Interview 2, 2017). They outline the underlying goals of the rails and work on establishing rail related legislative proposals. When drafting legislation in the rail sector, the Ministry takes care of maintaining the contacts with all interested parties (Interview 1, 2017). Below the Ministry, there are agencies whose administrative control is appointed by the Ministry, which nevertheless has no influence on the conduct of inspections carried out by the agencies.

<sup>8</sup> NPM is a service and administration reform paradigm that can be strongly associated with the liberalization of service provision and can be traced back to periods when Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan were in power. It has been ‘widely adopted across countries and levels of government with the purpose of improving the quality of public service and make it more efficient and effective’ (Nohrstedt, 2015, p. 143). To learn more about NPM, see Kettl, 1997; Hill & Hupe, 2009; Osborne, 2010; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011, and so on.

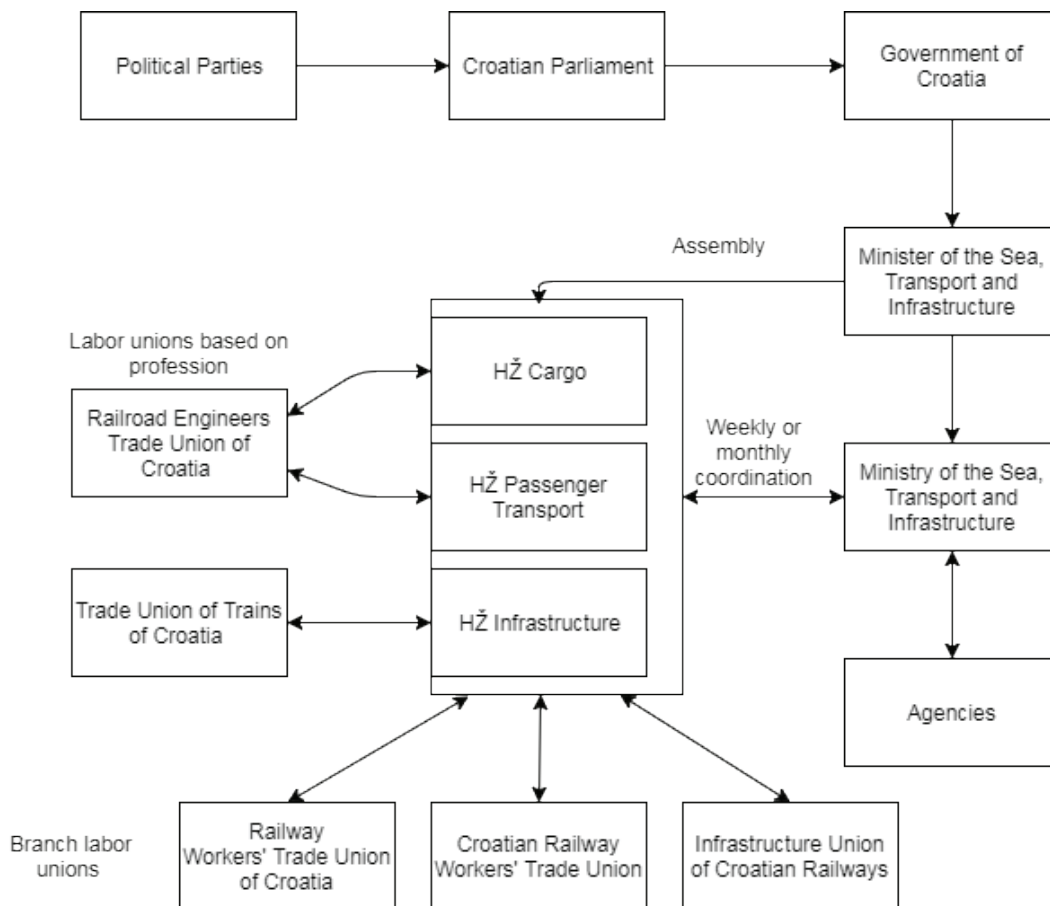
<sup>9</sup> What role NPM played, as well as New Public Governance and Neo-Weberian State, in public administration development and reform in independent Croatia, see Petak, 2006; 2012; Koprić, 2011; Kekez, 2016; 2018, and so on.

State-owned rail companies are in charge of establishing a business in the rail sector as well as service provision and the Ministry on a regular basis, which can be monthly or weekly, maintain coordination meetings with representatives of the companies (Interview 1, 2017). At the head of the companies is the Assembly, which is presided over by the Minister of Transport. Thus, in this domain, the minister is the key person who approves the financial plans of the companies (Interview 2, 2017). Agencies are involved in the relationship with the companies within the framework of the quality of implementation of the rail service; so, for example, HAKOM participates in the appeal of the end users of rail service and has ‘inspection responsibility in the part of the rights of passengers in rail traffic’ (HAKOM, 2016, p. 34). Agencies cooperate with other state administrative units (AIN, 2016, p. 5).

Relations of labour unions are primarily focused on the employer-worker level – between labour unions and representatives of the company, employers. However, the Ministry is open to hearing the union representatives, and in some cases, mediate between them and the employer (Interview 1, 2017). The exclusive relationship takes place within the transportation (HŽ Cargo and HŽ Passenger Transport), where the Railroad Engineers Trade Union of Croatia is exceptionally strong, and the Trade Union of Trains of Croatia is present only within HŽ Infrastructure. All three companies gather three branch unions that have their members through all three of them. Companies view unions as ‘social partners in the full sense of the word’ (Interview 2, 2017), with which they sign collective agreements that arise through ‘negotiations that always come up with some optimal solutions’ (Interview 2, 2017).

However, it is obvious that certain labour unions have not been very happy with the signing of collective agreements (Forgač, 2016) during their history, and the relations between the labour unions have been rather disrupted since the great strikes of the 1990s. So, there is a lack of social dialogue among trade unions (Maršić, 2016b), especially in a more peaceful period when they are hostile

Fig. 1: Overview of the actors’ relations in the rail sector in Croatia.



Source: author (based on coded material)

towards each other (Mindum, 2016). Regardless of this, they have been working intensively for some time to establish and integrate branch unions, which could certainly lead to their greater power and influence.

## ACTORS AND THEIR BELIEFS

With relations in mind, we can present beliefs of the identified policy actors. We will do so for each of the actors acting at the national level starting with the Croatian Government and ending with political parties. Presenting the beliefs will set the ground for discussing the national actors as an indicator of policy stability and change of rail sector in Croatia.

### Croatian Government

Croatian Government can be seen through the current Ministry of the Sea, Transport, and Infrastructure (MPPI). Ever since independence in 1991, all the past Croatian Governments have formed a special ministry, which has dealt with the transport policy among other things most associated with, that is, infrastructure, tourism and so on (see Petek, 2012). As seen from *Table 2*, deep-core belief of the Ministry is an efficient and sustainable transport system where rail sector is located with other means of transport. This fundamental belief is linked to economic, environmental and social challenges connected with sustainability goals that are important within the new European Union framework (MPPI, 2014).

In the domain of policy belief, MPPI sees road transport as a threat and a challenge, because of its ‘speed, convenience and accuracy’, that leads to a drop in a rail transport, and the backdrop of this is the fact that far more investment has been made in road infrastructure than in rail infrastructure since the 90s (Interview 1, 2017). In addition to road, rails are competing with air transport as well (MPPI, 2014). Furthermore, there is a problem of centralization and dehumidification of rural areas as well as extremely poor rail infrastructure (Interview 1, 2017, MPPI, 2014). As noted by the officials, an additional problem is the corridors that have changed the route and flow of goods due to the war in Croatia and are now difficult to be changed. Within the framework of liberalization, *HŽ Cargo* has to turn more proactively towards the market in order to deliver better results (Interview 1, 2017).

The problem of infrastructure, within the secondary aspects of the Ministry’s beliefs, plans to be improved through EU funds, because only in this way can the above-mentioned shortcomings be most efficiently solved. It is also noted that there is poor quality of the rail service, which is evident in a large number of train delays (Interview 1, 2017), but also problems related to maritime and rail transport that should be addressed through the development of the internal rail network (MPPI, 2014). There is a need for better coordination of executive powers such as the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Finance with the Ministry of Transport (MPPI, 2014).

**Tab. 2:** Beliefs of the Ministry of Transport.

Deep core	(1) Efficient and sustainable transport system
Policy core	(1) Domination of road and air transport
	(2) Decrease in passenger and freight transport
	(3) Poor state of infrastructure
	(4) Problem of corridors
	(5) Better position of freight transport on market
Secondary aspects	(1) Greater investment in infrastructure through EU funds
	(2) Poor quality of rail services
	(3) Development of the internal rail network
	(4) Lack of executive power co-ordination

Source: author (based on coded material)



## State-owned rail companies

Concerning the state-owned rail companies (HŽ), it should be borne in mind that there are three independent companies that have different activities and should be perceived as three different actors, and therefore, their beliefs are treated separately (see *Table 3*). Within the coded material, we can see that HŽ Cargo's deep-core belief is to become a 'leading carrier of freight services that will perform in a competitive, safe, economical and environmentally friendly way' (HŽ Cargo, 2016, p. 61). Such a situation, of course, retracts the idea that the HŽ Cargo should work towards better market orientation and advocates the need to ensure greater investment in terms of secondary beliefs.

On the other hand, HŽ Infrastructure, in its deep core, has been 'increasing the quality of railway infrastructure' (HŽ Infrastructure, 2016, p. 6). A more positive connotation is noted in the slight business growth observed in the suburban transport, but it is way beyond the potential 'rail transport recovery' (HŽ Infrastructure, 2016, p. 22). A positive view is also present in terms of the liberalization of freight transport, which is currently experiencing certain changes in the way of new goods entering the market (HŽ Infrastructure, 2016, p. 7). The Company is also aware of the disadvantages of rail infrastructure and rail tracks (HŽ Infrastructure, 2016, p. 23; 27). All of this refers to the policy beliefs, and from secondary aspects, we find the company's aspirations for EU funds, as well as greater investments that are needed.

As far as HŽ Passenger Transport (HŽ PP) is concerned, it emphasizes the connection of railway networks that enable the transport of passengers from different parts of Croatia and the world (HŽ PP, 2016). We then follow the HŽ PP's policy beliefs that recognize the company as a holder of monopoly in the passenger rail transport market, but a competition in the form of bus operators in road transport is noted (Interview 2, 2017; HŽ PP, 2016, p. 7). In addition, as with HŽ Infrastructure, there is a great lack of high-quality infrastructure that would allow trains to drive at high speed and there is no relevant role of railways in transport corridors (Interview 2, 2017). At the level of secondary aspects, EU funds are mentioned as a choice of funding and a lack of a clear plan where railways are going to be in the next decades (Interview 2, 2017). The HŽ PP's position on secondary aspects emphasizes the lack of quality communication with the local authorities, as is the case with the City of Zagreb, and the implementation of the service also has its own difficulties in terms of delay in trains (HŽ PP, 2016).

**Tab.3:** Beliefs of the state-owned companies.

	HŽ Cargo	HŽ Infrastructure	HŽ Passenger Transport
Deep core	(1) Leading cargo carrier	(1) Increasing the quality of infrastructure	(1) Connecting railway networks by means of transport
Policy core	(1) Turning freight transport to market	(1) Decrease in passenger and freight traffic (2) Positive liberalization trends (3) Poor state of infrastructure	(1) Domination of road (2) Monopoly of passenger transport (3) Poor state of infrastructure (4) Problem of corridors (5) Decrease in passenger transport
Secondary aspects	(1) Greater investments needed	(1) Greater investment in infrastructure through EU funds (2) Greater investments needed	(1) Lack of railway plan (2) Greater investment through EU funds (3) Lack of communication / political will (4) Poor quality of rail services

Source: author (based on coded material)

## Labour unions

Within HŽ, there is a large group of labour unions that have been established as key players in the modern history of the rail sector, at least until 2000. The large dispersion of unions, which exceeded the number of over 20 unions in the 1990s (Forgač, 2016, Mindum, 2016), can now be systematized into two groups from today's point of view. Trade unions that group together workers by their profession represent the first group, while the other group consists of branch unions – those who 'gather different professions in different companies' (Stefičar, 2008, p. 5). For this paper, we will focus on two biggest branch unions, SŽH (Railway Workers' Trade Union of Croatia) and SHŽ (Croatian Railway Workers' Trade Union), because they both 'have the larger number of members in all or almost all companies that are formed by the division of HŽ and in many companies owned by HŽ' (Stefičar, 2008, p. 5).

Within secondary data interviews with above-mentioned branch trade union representatives, we can find the features for all the beliefs (see *Table 4*). Within SHŽ, as a deep belief, we find determination to stop the decay of the railways as a key pole of rails in Croatia, which became essential after the Europeanization of transport policy in Croatia had begun. This is also evident in the case of concrete strikes, in which only SHŽ participated in the organization while pointing out that the other trade unions were satisfied with the signing of collective agreements, which increased the salaries of workers. By doing so, the unions did not realize that such an approach would lead the rails to ruin (Forgač, 2016). We find a similar deep core with SŽH that wants to abolish ignoring of rails that has been present since the '90s stressing that there is still no clear strategy of Government concerning rails. Such situations have resulted in a strike in 1996 aimed at focusing on such problems (Đurić, 2016), and there is still the presence of the view that there is a lack of a long-term plan and strong political stance concerning the rail sector (Maršić, 2016a & 2016b).

The policy beliefs show that SHŽ and SŽH share extremely close views that are most obvious in the belief that division of HŽ from 2005 resulted in inefficiency (Đurić, 2016, Forgač, 2016, Mindum, 2016, Pavletić, 2016). Similar attitudes are also present on the subject of privatization, which is approved under certain circumstances, but both unions believe that the infrastructure should remain state-owned (Forgač, 2016, Maršić, 2016b). Privatization is approved if the state is not able to implement a clear policy, but the emphasis is put on a strategic partnership, in which the state would be the majority owner (Mindum, 2016). Within SHŽ, there is the idea of setting up an umbrella company that should not encounter the problems the previous Holding has faced leading to its dissolution in 2012 (Forgač, 2016). This is also the view of the SŽH that considers that coordination and social dialogue between the three companies as an important moment (Mindum, 2016), while also advocating the return of Holding (Maršić, 2016a, Pavletić, 2016). As a problem, both trade unions stress road transport, especially highways which present serious competing (Đurić, 2016, Forgač, 2016). Problematic policy towards transport corridors is also mentioned (Maršić, 2016a, Pavletić, 2016).

In terms of secondary aspects, SHŽ thinks there is a need for bigger investments that were at a remarkably low level in the 1990s, which resulted in the 1994 strike, and although Račan's government (2000–2003) made certain moves, the policy of poor investment continued to be present during Sanader's government (2003–2009). Such a situation had negatively affected railway infrastructure and during the 90s, trains as well (Forgač, 2016). There is also the presence of poor quality of service and management that has occurred especially after the 2005 division (Forgač, 2016), and in the SŽH, the prevailing attitude is that an 'integrated property

**Tab. 4:** Beliefs of the labour unions.

	SHŽ	SŽH
Deep core	(1) Stopping the decay of the railways	(1) Stop ignoring the railways
Policy core	(1) Division of state-owned companies has led to inefficiency (2) The need for the umbrella company (3) Against the privatization of infrastructure (4) Domination of road	(1) Division of state-owned companies has led to inefficiency (2) The need for Holding comeback (coordination and social dialogue) (3) Against the privatization of infrastructure (4) Domination of road (5) Poor work on corridors
Secondary aspects	(1) Greater investments needed (2) Poor quality of rail services	(1) Poor quality of rail services (2) Lack of executive power co-ordination (3) Revision of the Strategy

Source: author (based on coded material)

management system’ is needed for better quality of management (Mršić, 2016b). Likewise, the SŽH considers that there is a lack of coordination within the executive branch; specifically, between the Ministry of Transport and Ministry of Foreign Affairs while also noting that there is a need for a revision of the transport strategy for a more efficient use of EU funds (Maršić, 2016a).

## Agencies

Each of the three agencies is in charge of a narrow sector, which opens up room for finding basic beliefs and more concrete secondary aspects (see *Table 5*). Thus, at HAKOM, we have an emphasis on the protection of market competition that wants to create ‘equal conditions for all applicants for the allocation of infrastructure capacity in the railway services market’ (HAKOM, 2016, p. 27). The other important pillar on which HAKOM is based on is the protection of the end users of rail services that wants to protect the passengers and provide them with all the rights they enjoy. In this respect, we are talking about the beliefs that are based on the efficient implementation of the liberalization of the railways, especially in freight transport (HAKOM, 2016).

The agency responsible for accident investigation has no intention of ‘finding the guilty and responsibility of the individual, but the prevention of accidents and accidents in the future’ (AIN, 2016, p. 4). This is the dominant belief with which we link the AIN rail safety that is achieved by ‘identifying the causes of accidents and inconvenience and providing safety recommendations’ (AIN, 2016, p. 8). We also identify the same thing in the case of the Railway Safety Agency, which is based on ‘progress in the safety and interoperability of the railway system’ (ASŽ, 2016, p. 10). In addition, ASŽ notes infrastructure requiring ‘urgent attention to the ongoing maintenance and replacement of obsolete equipment’ and addresses that ‘most vehicles in use are past 40 years old and are at the end of their life’ (ASŽ, 2016, p. 20).

**Tab. 5:** Beliefs of the agencies.

	HAKOM	AIN	ASŽ
Deep core	-	-	-
Policy core	(1) Protection of competition on market	-	(1) Poor state of infrastructure
Secondary aspects	(1) Protection of end users of service	(1) Emphasis on railway safety	(1) Emphasis on railway safety (2) Old vehicles

Source: author (based on coded material)

## Political parties

Finally, we also have the political parties, which in this paper we view through their debate within the Croatian Parliament during a discussion on the key legislative changes in the rail sector. We see the parties as relevant actors who have presented certain plans and goals for a transport policy in Croatia through the competition in the elections, writing policy programs and so on. In this context, the level of parliament is extremely significant for the MPs who articulate interests in the rail sector and are associated with a certain party identification. These interests come to light in the discussions that took place when adopting many of the government’s legislative proposals that had an impact on the rail sector (see *Table 6*).

Thus, during the debate at the Croatian Parliament, we focused on the two most powerful political parties in Croatia, the centre-left SDP (in government 2000–2003; 2011–2016) and the centre-right HDZ (in government throughout the 90s; 2003–2011; 2016–present). The underlying belief of the HDZ is a view that during the modern history of Croatia rail sector has not been ignored, with HDZ MPs claiming how ‘railways are so important and relevant’ (Croatian Parliament, 2012, p. 16). In terms of policy belief, as one of the pillar problems, HDZ emphasizes lack of money while stressing that the division of HŽ in 2005 works (Croatian Parliament, 2012, p. 15). Likewise, there is an opinion that it is unrealistic to expect bigger investments in railways when there is still

**Tab. 6:** Beliefs of the political parties.

	HDZ	SDP
Deep core	(1) Railways are not ignored	(1) Stop ignoring the railways
Policy core	(1) Lack of money as fundamental problem	(1) Poor state of infrastructure
	(2) The division of state-owned companies' functions	(2) Decrease in passenger and freight transport
	(3) Domination of road	(3) Division of state-owned companies has led to inefficiency
Secondary aspects	(1) Greater investments needed	(4) Turning to liberalization
		(5) Domination of road
		(1) Poor quality of rail services
		(2) Greater investments needed

Source: author (based on coded material)

a large investment in the road (Croatian Parliament, 2012, p. 18). The secondary aspects of the HDZ's beliefs are the need for even more money that can be extracted from a variety of sources.

In the case of SDP, whose representatives were more active in debate, we found the core belief that the railways for many years, especially after Račan's Government (2000–2003), was 'primarily a victim of long-term neglect' (Croatian Parliament, 2012, p. 12–13), which gives rise to various questions about the money invested in those periods and the results of which are non-existent. This is the result of the SDP's views on the policy that we have a poorly disadvantaged infrastructure (Croatian Parliament, 2012, p. 13), and that the 2005 divisions 'do not fully follow the technological processes in the production of transport services within companies' (Croatian Parliament, 2012, p. 17). Therefore, we find similar results as with the previous actors. The same thing is happening in the secondary aspects of beliefs, within which the problems of bad service are mentioned, but also the need for greater investment in the rail sector.

## DISCUSSION: ANALYSIS OF RELATIONS AND BELIEFS

Finally, we will discuss the obtained results through a brief comparative analysis of the beliefs of all the actors we have identified at the national level, when conducting the research and coding. The task of this part of the paper is to try to group the actors with respect to similarities and differences in beliefs at all their levels and relations that were identified.

*Deep core.* The underlying beliefs we have been able to identify tell us that all actors put rail subsystem into a certain normative framework that would imply a sustainable development of the rail transport with the intent to lead it into a 'better tomorrow'. Certain beliefs vary, but no radical attitudes are found that would say that the rail sector has no difficulties or that the railroad should be restricted and abolished. The only moment where we could potentially talk about a certain kind of polarization in the deep core is located between the political parties – SDP and HDZ, which reflects the attitude of the former governments regarding the rail subsystem in question. At this level, it is not possible to find the competitive beliefs of the actors and coalitions of actors with respect to their deep core beliefs. However, this is partly due to the limitation of empirical material and secondary data sources in which the ideological positions and basic social values associated with the rail were rarely found.

*Policy core.* As one of the MP in the transcript says, 'We can all agree that the situation (in the rail sector) is bad' (Croatian Parliament, 2015, p. 15). Coded materials point exactly to this – the dominant codes of negative connotations occur when there is a presence of policy core belief and these codes are mostly present within the majority of actors. In other words, it is obvious that the focus on the rail sector in terms of transport policy has left not only a bitter taste in everyone involved in the rail sector, but also internal rail problems such as railway infrastructure issues, which in several moments stand out as the pillar on which all of the other difficulties lie. In this aspect, there is no significant coalition of actors around different beliefs.

*Secondary aspects.* Unfortunately, negative aspects have also been reintroduced through the secondary aspects' beliefs in terms of the implementation of rail services. Actors say how efficiency and effectiveness of service are below average, noting various bad factors related to the provision of services in terms of freight and passenger transport, such as a clear lack of coordination. As a more

optimistic connotation, the EU funds emerge as a potential source of funding in terms of policy instruments. Again, there is no significant coalition of actors in this belief's domain.

What comes out of the analysis is the fact that in most cases, we find very similar or nearly the same patterns of belief among the actors. On the other hand, their relations do not point to the existence of an advocacy coalition, although the theory gives the possibility of one coalition – which, according to the coded material, should be to some extent present in the Croatian rail sector. The dominant type of relationship between actors is formal, which usually involves conflict or bargaining.

Such a situation is not in line with the assumptions proposed by the ACF and is apparent within the framework of policy beliefs that should serve as the 'glue' that holds the coalition together and thus causing policy change and stability. In this research, such solid relationships, which would encourage translation of belief to government programs, is simply non-existent, though the patterns of beliefs are similar. The only exception in this respect are the labour unions who really do group together when they encounter a certain problem, and such a type of action is particularly present during the 1990s but has rather evoked no major changes. However, it should be borne in mind that most of the coded material is limited when informal relationships are involved, so we cannot fully speak of how many deeper and more intertwined relationships are missing. This can be especially important in terms of international actors that were not analysed, which could have caused policy changes after 2000 in terms of the process of Europeanization where the EU served as a major policy actor which alongside the Croatian Government formed important coalition.

Of course, we can also offer another interpretation that the actors, because of the fact that their beliefs are largely in common with the other actors, simply do not see the need to form a coalition, assuming that the other, the more powerful actor will fight for those beliefs – Government and Ministry for example. The underlying problem with such an interpretation can be the existence of conflicts between various relations, even though the beliefs are mostly one and a same. In this respect, for example, it would be difficult to justify many strikes of labour unions through this brief history or the intervention of the Ministry to mediate between unions and heads of state-owned companies.

## CONCLUSION

Rail sector in Croatia has gone through several key phases. From the establishment of the new regulatory framework following Croatian separation from Yugoslavia, through the Europeanization of transport policy, which led to the liberalization of the rail service, up to certain modernization and reform measures. This rich period of over 25 years is abundant with the work of a large number of significant policy actors involved in the creation of transport policy in the rail sector and have affected significant changes that have led to the current state of rail transport.

Because of the above, this paper aimed to give answers to the research question that deals with policy change and stability in the rail sector. We have used the advocacy coalition framework as a theoretical starting point, which allows us to analyse the rail sector in a larger period and to see what kind of belief system is present in the transport policy as well as the relations of the actors, which could potentially form coalition groups leading the sector to a change or stability. Our analysis has shown that the actors share the same patterns of policy beliefs when it comes to the transport policy of rail sectors, but their relations are present only on a formal level. Rail labour unions could be described as an advocacy coalition, but only at certain times since most of the unions are constantly in conflict and disagreement. Thus, this analysis can, to a certain extent, give an answer to our research question: coalitions of national actors are not the indicator of policy change and stability in rail sector of Croatia. Consequently, we have fulfilled the two fundamental aims of this paper – we provided a detailed overview of the development of the rail sector and explored the beliefs and relations of all types of actors in this area at the national level as an indicator of policy change and stability.

Finally, it should be borne in mind that this research is not entirely comprehensive. In order to strengthen the empirical foundations of the (none) existence of the advocacy coalitions, it will be necessary to carry out additional interviews with the actors and to process the official documents from different periods if they can be located. Likewise, further research on this topic should not leave out other supranational actors, such as the EU or the World Bank, which we did not analyse in this paper as well as other means of transport, such as road or air. There is a high likelihood that coalitions exist in some other relationship that did not necessarily take place at the national level that was investigated here. From all of the above, we can conclude with the hope that this type of policy research will indeed lead to a better status of the rail sector within Croatia's transport policy and will focus even greater attention of the experts and the public on the issues that the rail sector is facing today.

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