THE DISAPPEARANCE OF SERBS IN CROATIA*

BRANISLAV S. ĐURĐEV
University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Sciences,
Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management
Trg Dositeja Obradovica 3, 21000 Novi Sad, Republic of Serbia
E-mail: djurdjev@uns.ac.rs

SVETOZAR LIVADA
Retired professor at University of Zagreb
E-mail: svetko.livada@gmail.com

DANIELA ARSENOVIĆ
University of Novi Sad, Faculty of Sciences,
Department of Geography, Tourism and Hotel Management
Trg Dositeja Obradovica 3, 21000 Novi Sad, Republic of Serbia
E-mail: daniela.arsenovic@dgt.uns.ac.rs

ABSTRACT: Based on the latest references and the Census of the population in Croatia from 1880 to 2011, the paper presents current and future trends in the number, share and aging of Serbian population in Croatia. Until the 2001 Census, the share of Serbs was slowly decreasing, in spite of evident persecutions, organized migrations and killings during the First and, especially, the Second World War. The breaking point occurred in the last decade of the 20th century when the share of Serbs dropped to one fifth when compared to the maximum, or to one third, when compared to the beginning of the decade. The 2011 Census shows that a small remaining share of Serbs is dominated by ageing population, so the projections indicate that the share of Serbs will have dropped to only 2.4% until 2051.

KEYWORDS: the Serbs, Croatia, population perspective

In the course of history, the relations between Serbs and Croats went through different phases. Perhaps, the peak of their unity was recorded on June 5, 1848, when Serbian patriarch Josif Rajačić enthroned Josip Jelačić as Croatian Ban [Krestić 2013]. Soon after, these relations were disturbed again. In the period of 131 years, there were 14 censuses on the territory of Croatia and they showed significant fluctuations in non-Croatian population. Almost until the end of the 19th century, the territory of Croatia was inhabited only by Croats

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and Serbs, since other ethnic groups were represented by not more than 2% (Table 1). A tenfold increase of ‘other’ ethnicities was recorded in 1900 and 1910 Censuses, along with a significant decline in the number and share of Croats (from over 80% to below 70%, which is the smallest recorded share of Croats in Croatia in all 14 censuses), whereas the share of Serbs leveled off at 16–17%.

The first Census after the First World War recorded a maximum of 764,901 or 22.2% of Serbs, and their share had constantly been decreasing since 1961, and according to 2001 and 2011 Censuses, it finally reached only one fifth of the share in 1921. A similar thing happened to ‘other’ nationalities, since their share in 2011 Census was only one third of the share in 1910 Census, although there were even more significant declines of their shares in the meantime. Without an in-depth analysis, it is difficult to say why there was a decline of other ethnic groups, but it seems that the earlier category of 'Yugoslav population' had a crucial impact on this. Since the 1981 Census, people have, along with their children from mixed marriages, declared themselves as Croats [Ljajić and Bara 2010]. For the first time in the history of census recordings, Croats accounted for over 90% of the total population of Croatia in 2011, even though their absolute number fell by over a hundred thousand or by 2.6% if compared to the earlier 2001 Census when there was the highest absolute number of Croats in the history of census recordings in Croatia (Figure 1).

### Table 1. Population by ethnicity and censuses in Croatia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Census</th>
<th>Absolute numbers</th>
<th>Share (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Croats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1880</td>
<td>2,506,228</td>
<td>2,018,783</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>2,854,558</td>
<td>2,295,634</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1900</td>
<td>3,161,456</td>
<td>2,162,014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1910</td>
<td>3,460,584</td>
<td>2,371,546</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1921</td>
<td>3,443,375</td>
<td>2,505,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1931</td>
<td>3,785,455</td>
<td>2,660,425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1948</td>
<td>3,779,858</td>
<td>2,975,399</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1953</td>
<td>3,936,033</td>
<td>3,116,625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961</td>
<td>4,159,696</td>
<td>3,339,890</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971</td>
<td>4,426,221</td>
<td>3,513,647</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>4,601,469</td>
<td>3,454,661</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1991</td>
<td>4,784,265</td>
<td>3,736,356</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>4,437,460</td>
<td>3,977,171</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>4,284,889</td>
<td>3,874,321</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Censuses 1880–2011

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1 In the Independent State of Croatia in 1941, by religious denomination, out of a total of 5,655,750 there were 2,993,335 or 52.9% of Roman Catholics and even 1,809,613 or 32.0% of Orthodox Christians [calculations by Škiljan, 2012].
STAGES OF DISAPPEARANCE OF SERBS IN CROATIA

As regards the disappearance of Serbs in Croatia, it could be said that it was a continuous process of several interconnected events starting from the Second World War, i.e. from 1941 to 1995 (Graph 1).

As one of the methods of resolving 'Serbian question', the idea to move Serbs rose immediately after the establishment of the Independent State of Croatia. Organized emigration was conducted between June and October 1941. The first emigrants were Salonika front volunteers from Slavonia and Srem, 28,000 of them, then Orthodox priests with their families, totalling up to 327, and from the Croatian part of the Independent State of Croatia up to 104. This was followed by the emigration of traders and entrepreneurs, and massive organized emigration of the entire Orthodox population began in July with the arrests made in Zagreb and deportations via transit camps in Caprag, Bjelovar and Požega. According to German estimates, 180,000 Serbs had already fled to Serbia by the end of July. Because of the uprising in Serbia, Germans suspended organized emigration of Serbs from the Independent State of Croatia, but it continued illegally in 1942 and 1943 due to Ustaše terror, so the number of 200,000 was not final. After the emigration, all movable and immovable property of Serbs was seized and given to the settlers from Slovenia, Croatian Zagarje, Dalmatia and Herzegovina [Škiljan 2012].

After the end of the Second World War, in communist Yugoslavia, the list of war victims was not compiled in due time so the data published up to now was based on the assumptions of war losses as well as demographic losses in general. According to Kovačević [1992/1993] [after Žerjavić 1989], the total demographic losses during the Second World War on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia comprise pure demographic losses (the decline of birthrates), emigration, murdered or deceased persons outside the country, and killed, murdered and deceased persons within the country. Based on that, total demographic losses in Croatia were 502,000, out of which war losses were 295,000: The total demographic losses of Serbs in Croatia were 159,000, out of which war losses comprise up to 137,000 or 46.4% out of total war losses in Croatia [Kovačević, 1992/93]. The Second World War on the territory of ex-Yugoslavia had taken many victims, and when considering the population of Serbian ethnicity, great human suffering on the territory of Croatia were the result of extermination of Serbian population by the Independent State of Croatia, particularly in the concentration camps of Jasenovac, Jadovno and others, but also during the actions against partisans who were mainly Serbs.

Massive organized migrations, known as the colonization of Vojvodina, were organized by the communist government from 1945 to 1948 under the pretence of solving the agrarian issues. A total of 36,430 families with 216,306 persons were moved to Vojvodina. Out of this number, 52,929 persons or 25% of all the colonists were moved from Croatia, and their origins show that they were from the areas inhabited by Serbs. Those were the demographic regions of Lika and the North Littoral (colonists from this republic account for 61% of all the colonists) and the region of Dalmatia (with 22% of colonists). Colonization, thus, had a very similar effect as the emigration of Serbs at the beginning
of the Second World War. Moreover, the participants of the colonization had often emphasized that local governments forced them to move, so entire villages were often displaced [Đurđev 1994].

The return of colonists was also present during the colonization, but it was only when massive organized migrations stopped that the significance of the return became evident. The phase of spontaneous return lasted much longer than the organized migration and it had been one of the prevailing types of migration in Vojvodina for a period of time. The scale of the return depended on the differences in the economic development between the starting point and the destination, so this is the reason why the return rate to Slovenia was the highest, whereas to Croatia was the lowest, with only 6.5% or just a couple of thousand persons, since the colonists from Croatia did not even have the place to return to because of war devastation [Đurđev 1995].

As far as the chronology of the refugees movement from Croatia to Serbia during the 1990s is concerned, it should be mentioned that after 1991, when Serbia received 16.2% of the total of 233,125 refugees from Croatia to Serbia, the number of refugees was getting smaller in the following three years and it was cut by half in every consecutive year, only to reach a sudden peak in ‘Oluja’, a military campaign of the Croatian army which began in August 1995 when more than a half of the refugees from Croatia (54%) started to flee [Đurđev 1996; Đurđev and Bubalo-Živković 2011]. Until 1995, Serbia had received 330,000 refugees from Croatia, and by the World Refugee Day, June 20, 2014, only 69,000 or 21% returned to Croatia. This year’s World Refugee Day, Serbia marked with the highest number of refugees in Europe – 43,763, out of which 32,371 or almost three quarters are the refugees from Croatia. Why? ‘The Republic of Croatia did not pay outstanding pensions, RSD or

![Figure 1. Share of Serbs in total population of Croatia](source: Table 1)
foreign exchange savings. Tens of thousands of refugees from the Republic of Croatia did not regain their tenancy rights 19 years after the war. The Republic of Croatia has not reconstructed more than 10,000 of destroyed Serbian houses in the areas without war activity and about 8,000 houses in the areas affected by the war. The agricultural land was not restituted either. It is also worrying that competent authorities in the Republic of Croatia do not prosecute individuals who deliver hate speech and campaign against Serbian language and alphabet. All the above arguments support the view that the expected change, unfortunately, did not happen’ [Commissariat for Refugees and Migrations, 2014].

AGEING OF SERBS IN CROATIA

The results of the last Census showed that median age² of Serbs is up to 15 years higher when compared to the median age of the total population of Croatia, or up to 16 years higher when compared to the median age of the population of Croatian ethnicity (Table 2). Similar differences were observed regarding the average age of population by gender, bearing in mind the fact that the median age of 58 years for Serbian females shows small chances of reproduction. Thus, for example, the share of Serbian females up to 50 years of age in the total number of Serbian females is 34.8%, and the share of Serbian females in the fertile period (15–49 years of age) is 28.6%.

Table 2. Median age of the population by ethnicity, age and gender, 2011 Census

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Median Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croats</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Min 41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croats</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Min 39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croats</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Min 43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbs</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Max 57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbs</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Max 55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Serbs</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Max 58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Calculations based on the 2011 Census data.

² The age which divides the population into two equal parts.
However, it is assumed that the median age of the total world population was 29 in 2013, and according to the assumptions for 227 countries of the world, in 2014, the oldest population and the only population with the median age of over 50 lived in Monaco (51 years of age). The populations of Germany and Japan, with 46 years, held the second and third places, respectively, and the youngest population, with 15 years of age, lived in Niger. That year, Croatia reached 21st place, and Serbia 24th place, with the age of 42 [CIA World Factbook, 2014-04-12].

Total population of Croatia

![Image of Population Pyramid for Total Population of Croatia]

Croats

![Image of Population Pyramid for Croats]

Others

![Image of Population Pyramid for Others]

Serbs

![Image of Population Pyramid for Serbs]

Figure 2. Population pyramids for 2011

High age of Serbs is much more obvious in the age pyramids for 2011 (Figure 2). While the age pyramid for Croats shows stationary population, the age pyramid for Serbs is particularly regressive and shows the population in disappearance.

THE FUTURE OF SERBS IN CROATIA

One of the most important objectives of population projections is presenting demographic as well as social and economic trends of future migrations of the population in a certain area. The analysis in this paper comprised the projections for total population of Croatia, as well as the projections by ethnicity, with the aim of showing more clearly the consequences of war activity during the 1990s. The paper includes specially designed projections for the population of Croatian ethnicity and the population of Serbian ethnicity, where-
as all other ethnic groups were observed collectively and categorized as ‘others’. The projections were made for the period until 2051, provided that in the projection period there would be no wars, epidemics or natural disasters, such as devastating earthquakes. Based on the long-term average, it was assumed that in the whole projection period 105 boys and 100 girls would be born. Concerning the fertility, it was assumed that it would remain the same as in 2011, i.e. constantly on the level of 1.51 until the end of the projection period. The changes in the expected life expectancy rate were assumed based on the model of the United Nations for average increase of life expectancy. The model used by the United Nations assumes that the life expectancy for both genders increases by 2.0 to 2.5 years during each five-year period when life expectancy is less than 60 years, and this increase is slower at higher levels. The assumptions made by the Croatian Central Bureau of Statistics (2011) were used for the initial data on life expectancy according to which the life expectancy of the population in Croatia in 2011 was 76, i.e. 72.6 for males and 79.4 for females. Model tables by Coale-Demeny, and model West (IMR=12) were used in the projections. As regards the population migration, the projections were calculated based on the assumption of the zero net migration.

The results of the analysis show that the population in Croatia will still be decreasing by the middle of the 21st century. The decline of population numbers in the projected demographic conditions will be present for both Croatian and Serbian population. However, the share of Croatian population in the total population will be increasing, whereas the share of Serbs and ‘others’ will still be decreasing (Table 3).

Table 3. Population projection for Croatia by ethnicity (a variant of constant fertility)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Absolute numbers</th>
<th>Share (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Croats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2021</td>
<td>4,081,565</td>
<td>3,724,252</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2031</td>
<td>3,820,584</td>
<td>3,513,119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2041</td>
<td>3,499,868</td>
<td>3,237,302</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2051</td>
<td>3,173,046</td>
<td>2,945,197</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

By mid 21st century, the share of Serbs will have been less than 2.5%, i.e. almost half of the share of ‘other’ ethnicities, and this will definitely mean that Serbs no longer live in Croatia, i.e. it is inevitable for them to naturally disappear from these regions [Livada 2014]. Therefore, Tuđman’s programmed idea to have 3% of Serbs in Croatia will exceed the expectations [Livada 2013].

CONCLUSION

A long-term trend in the decline of the number and share of Serbs in Croatia has been evident ever since the end of the First World War. Since 1941,
a continuous policy towards Serbs in Croatia has been observed: Pavelić’s persecutions, and later, slaughter, continued by colonization and ending with Tudman’s persecutions.

Nevertheless, until 1991 Census the share of Serbs decreased slowly, despite evident persecutions, organized emigration and killings during the First, and especially the Second World War. A breaking point happened in the last decade of the 20th century, when the share of Serbs declined by almost three times in comparison to the beginning of the decade.

The 2011 Census data show that the small remaining share of Serbs is dominated by ageing population, so the projections for 2051 indicate the reduction of the share of Serbs to just 2.4%, whereas their age structure shows complete absence of any possibilities for their future reproduction.

REFERENCES:


INTERNET SOURCE

ОРИГИНАЛНИНАУЧНИРАД

НЕСТАЈАЊЕСРБАУХРВАТСКОЈ

БРАНИСЛАВ С. ЂУРЂЕВ
Универзитет у Новом Саду, Природно-математички факултет
Департман за географију, туризам и хотелијерство
Трг Доситеја Обрадовића 3, 21000 Нови Сад, Република Србија
E-адresa: djurdjev@uns.ac.rs

СВЕТОЗАР ЛИВАДА
Професор загребачког универзитета у пензији
E-адresa: svetko.livada@gmail.com

ДАНИЕЛА АРСЕНОВИЋ
Универзитет у Новом Саду, Природно-математички факултет
Департман за географију, туризам и хотелијерство
Трг Доситеја Обрадовића 3, 21000 Нови Сад, Република Србија
E-адresa: daniela.arsenovic@dgt.uns.ac.rs

САЖЕТАК: На основу најновијих референци и пописа становништва Хрватске од 1880. до 2011. у раду се указује на досадашња и будућа кретања броја, удела и старења српског становништва у Хрватској. Све до пописа 2001. удео Срба споро је опадао, упркос евидентним прогонима, организованим пресељењима и убиствима за време Првог, и нарочито Другог светског рата. Преломни момент одиграо се у последњој декади 20. века, када је удео Срба смањен пет пута у односу на максимум, односно три пута у односу на почетак те декаде. Подаци пописа 2011. показују да у том малом преосталом уделу Срба преовлађује остатело становништво, те зато пројекције до 2051. наговештавају свођење удела Срба на само 2,4%.

КЉУЧНЕ РЕЧИ: Срби, Хрватска, будућност становништва