

# The Serbs in Croatia: from Majority Ethno-Nation to Ethnic Minority

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*Srbsko preoblastvo se je na območju današnje Hrvatske razvilo v eni izmed prvih evropskih (15.-18. stoletje). Prvotno pravoslavno srbsko preoblastvo je v hrvatskih deželah prvotno spramoma razpršeno s nastankom in razvojem srbske preoblastitve. Tako se Srbi v 19. stoletju ustavljajo že več kot 20% preoblastitve Hrvatske. Kasneje je njihov delež zaradi nizkega naravnega prirastka in izseljevanja znatno padel in do leta 1991 upadel na okrog 12%.*

*Nastanek pravoslavne srbske preoblastitve v hrvatskih deželah sprva ni sprožila nobenih nacionalnih nastopov. Do prvih konfliktov je prišlo leta po porazi avstro-ogrskih vojsk (1867) in hrvatsko-ogrskih vojsk (1868), ki sta izpolnili zahteve hrvatskih nacionalistov. V letih do prve svetovne vojne so postajali spori med Hrvati in hrvatskimi Srbi vse pogostejši. Zato niti ni čudno, da so se ustanovili Kraljevine Srbov, Hrvatov in Slovencev 1. januarja 1918 hrvatski Srbi strojno podprli avstrijske voličarske politike režima Aleksandra Karađorđevića. S tem pa so prišli v oster spor s hrvatsko politiko.*

*Mednarodna napetost med Hrvati in hrvatskimi Srbi se svoj vrhunec dosegla med drugo svetovno vojno, ko naj bi – po nekaterih podatkih – ustali s pripadnostjo že stotine tisoč Jugoslovanskih Hrvatov pobliž 900.000 hrvatskih Srbov. Zaradi tega so se nekateri hrvatski Srbi pridružili fašističnemu gibanju, ki več pa so jih je vključilo v komunistično partizansko gibanje pod vodstvom Josipa Brozja-Tita. Gibanje je v grlo v "hrvatske in slovenske" ter v njegovo federativno Jugoslavijo kot zavezanec evropskih narodov upelo na Hrvatskem zlasti pri prvih del srbskega in hrvatskega preoblastitve že avtoritativni boj ter boj proti HDZ in voličarski hegemoniji v prvaletni Jugoslaviji.*

*Vsa hrvatsko-srbska napetost se znova odvila v devetdesetih letih 20. stoletja, ko sta vstala HDZ in hrvatski pravašnik Tuđman zalela v izpolnjevanje pravašniških obljub: oblikovanje hrvatske nacionalne države, v kateri lastno pa Srbi niso bili več ovirani kot konstitucionalni narod. Hrvatski Srbi, ki se niso povezali srbskih pobojev med drugo svetovno vojno, so v strobi prvotni programi podprli Miškovičev začetek po avstrijski (voličarski) jugoslovanski državi. Končni rezultat teh hrvatsko-srbskih napetosti je bila vojna na Hrvatskem (1992-1995), ki se je končala izpolnjevanje več kot polovice srbskega preoblastitve.*



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War-raids of the Ottoman army on the Croatian lands during their attempts to conquer Central Europe took place from the late 15th to the late 17th century. A great number of people belonging to the autochthonous Croatian population were

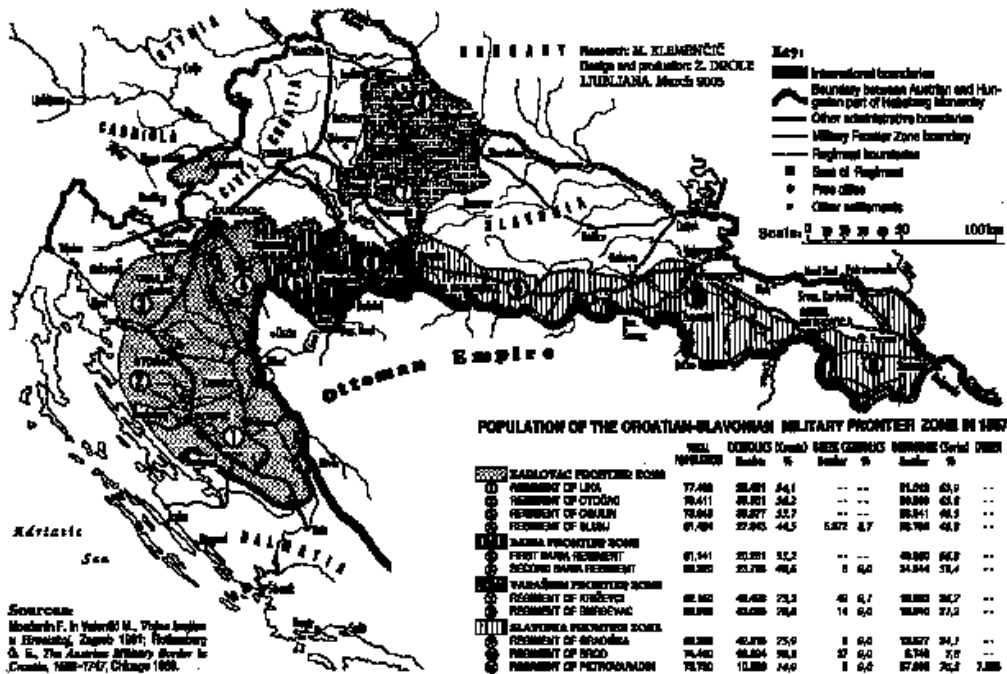
banished or exiled from Croatian lands near the boundary of the Ottoman Empire. The abandoned and sparsely populated territories were then colonized by settlers belonging to other nationalities who came from the interior of southeastern Europe; they were mostly Serbs and Vlachs. Later the Vlachs were effectively assimilated as part of the Serbian nation through the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church. The major part of the Vlach and Serb population immigrated after the so-called "Long War" (1593–1606) and settled on the land between the territories occupied by the Turks and Habsburg-controlled lands. These border lands included parts of Slavonia, Lika, Banija, Kordun and the continental interior of northern Dalmatia <sup>1</sup>. The colonization by Serb and Vlach settlers was organized in such a way that ethnic groups could remain together in the new areas of settlement <sup>2</sup>. Many of the descendants of these settlers eventually moved back to their original lands, while others remained in their new homes until the 1990s.

The Habsburgs exempted the Serbs and Vlachs settled in Croatia's war-wasted borderlands from the feudal system <sup>3</sup> and soon organized them to defend the Monarchy against the Turks in what was known as the *Vojna krajina*. The word *krajina* comes from the Serbo-Croatian word *kraj*, meaning end, or edge. The name of region, *Vojna krajina*, means Military Frontier Zone <sup>4</sup>.

In return for military service, the inhabitants of Krajina were free, i.e. they had no obligations as feudal bondsmen. In 1630, the Austrian Emperor, Ferdinand II, granted a charter (*Statuta Valachorum*) to the inhabitants of Krajina whereby the district of Krajina was proclaimed an autonomous imperial territory. From that time until 1881 the Krajina enjoyed autonomy, being ruled neither from Zagreb nor from Budapest, but directly by the Viennese Court. Until the end of the 16th century the Krajina represented a cheap source of manpower for the Austrian imperial army and *krajina* Serbs and Vlachs were also an important factor in defending the absolutism of the Austrian Emperors. After a peace treaty was signed in Sremski Karlovci in 1699 and the immediate threat from the Turks ceased, the soldiers coming from the Krajina fought all over Europe <sup>5</sup>. Thus the Krajina embodied, from its very creation, two traits: a fierce pride in local independence, and an enthusiastic use of arms <sup>6</sup>.

Although the settlement of Serbs and Vlachs in Croatian lands changed the ethnic and religious structure of population, it did not cause any ethnic conflicts. There were conflicts between Orthodox immigrants and Croatian feudal lords, who demanded feudal duties from them. Therefore the immigrants resisted feudal lords many times in order to defend their autonomy <sup>7</sup>.

Changes in the Austrian-Turkish border in the 17th and 18th century, crises in the Turkish empire and the end of *ancien régime* in some parts of Europe at the end of the 18th century resulted in a slow rapprochement among South Slavs. Croatian Serbs supported the struggle of the Croatian nobility against Hungarization. Their cooperation during the 19th century was further strengthened because of the influence of liberal and nationalist ideas, although at the beginning of the 19th century Serbs did not support the Croatian



Map 1

Illyrian movement in mass<sup>8</sup>. Cooperation strengthened during the "Spring of Nations" in 1848 when the Serbs from the Habsburg Monarchy supported Austro-Slavism, that is the attempts of the Slavs in the Habsburg Monarchy to transform the Austrian Empire into a federation of equal nations. During the Revolution of 1848 Serbs and Croats even coordinated some military operations. Josif Rajačić, Patriarch (that is, Orthodox Bishop) of the Serb Orthodox Church came from Sremski Karlovci to Zagreb in order to bless him (governor) Josip Jelačić and the unity of Croats and Serbs of the Habsburg Monarchy<sup>9</sup>. Ban Jelačić also spoke to both the Croatian and the Serb nations in the Triune Kingdom [*Narodu hrvatskome i srbskome u trojedinoj kraljevini*] of April 25, 1848. He published this proclamation in Latin as well as Cyrillic characters<sup>10</sup>. In 1850 a language agreement was signed in Vienna between representatives of Croatian and Serbian men of letters according to which the Ijekavian variant of Štokavian would become the literary language in Serbia and Croatia, thus showing tendencies toward permanent cooperation between Serbs and Croats<sup>11</sup>. Conditions changed however in the 1860s.

The authorities in the Habsburg Monarchy started to count the population by the end of 18th century. The 1799 census showed that in the Croatian-Slavonian Military Border Zone (which included southern Srem) there were 544,963 inhabitants; in 1814 this area already counted 629,729 inhabitants<sup>12</sup>. By the mid-19th century the census takers started to include language affiliation in their data<sup>13</sup>. According to the 1857 census, which included the religious affiliation of the population living under the Monarchy, there were about 675,000 inhabitants belonging to the Orthodox faith. The majority of them were Serbs, although during the Turkish period a few thousand Croats had become adherents of Orthodox faith, especially in inner Dalmatia in the area surrounding Sinj.

Table 1. Population by religious affiliation in 1857.

Population by Religious Affiliation	Civil Croatia		Dalmatia		Frontier Military Zone		Croatia - Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Catholics	757,802	89.80	337,800	81.34	396,843	58.80	1,492,245	77.09
Greek Catholics	2	--	341	0.08	5,485	0.81	5,828	0.30
Orthodox	83,026	9.82	77,139	18.57	272,254	40.34	432,419	22.34
Protestants	4,873	0.58	25	0.01	282	0.04	5,180	0.27
Total	845,503	100.00	415,305	100.00	674,864	100.00	1,935,672	100.00

SOURCE: *Bevölkerung und Viehstand von der Zählung vom 31. October 1857.*

Most of the followers of the Orthodox faith lived in Lika, Kordun and Banija. Here, in certain districts, the Orthodox constituted between 44% and 67% of the population. The percentage of followers of the Orthodox faith was substantially lower in Slavonia (from 8% to 27%) because they had started to settle there after the Turks had left the region (in 1699) and the Slavonian Military Border Zone was established in 1702<sup>14</sup>. This region of continuous Serb settlement remained intact until the 1990s.

As mentioned above, until the 1860s there were no major conflicts between the Croats and Serbs in Croatia. When the *Ansgleich* of 1867 – the agreement on the reconstruction of the Habsburg Monarchy which divided it into an Austrian and a Hungarian part -- and the *Nagodba* of 1868 -- which regulated Hungarian-Croatian relations-- did not fulfill Croatian demands, the situation changed. Especially the Unionist Party, which demanded closer cooperation with Hungarians, and the Party of Croat State Law, which demanded Croatian independence, were anti-Serb. Only the National Party wanted to abolish anything that might hinder good relations among the South Slavic nations. This party also demanded that both the Latin and Cyrillic alphabets be taught in schools so that Serbs and Croats would be able to work together in the field of literature. At the same time too the Serb national movement was gaining strength because of its victories against Turkish domination; Croat Serbs looked with sympathy at this development. Thus the relations between Croats and Croatian Serbs worsened. Furthermore, the new school law enacted by the Croatian parliament (*sabor*) in 1874 and the Habsburg occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 played a significant role in worsening relations.

The Law on Education envisaged a change in the supervision of schools: until that time schools had been under the control of the Catholic and the Serb Orthodox Churches, but the new law placed them under the control of the Croatian *sabor* itself. Both the Catholic and the Serb Orthodox Churches in Croatia were against it. The second aim of the law was of a purely political nature. The Croatian authorities introduced the same textbooks in schools for Croatian and Serb pupils. They hoped that in this way Serb children would be educated to become loyal Croatian (and Austro-Hungarian) citizens who would not be attracted by the neighboring Serbia, which by then had already reached a high degree of autonomy. Serb nationalists from Austria-Hungary fought against the new Law on Education and demanded that the Serb children be exempted from it.

In addition to the Law on Education, the rebellion in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1875 had a strong echo among Croatian Serbs. The crisis in Bosnia and Herzegovina forced Serbs

and Croats to define their views and for the first time they also tried to define their mutual borders. The differing reactions of Serbs and Croats to the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878 only sharpened their already existing contradictions. Relations between Serbs and Croats deteriorated even in Dalmatia where traditionally they had been good. Until then the Serbs in the Dalmatian *sabor* (regional parliament) had supported demands of the Croats for unification with Croatia and Slavonia. Instead, after 1879 the Serb deputies in the Dalmatian *sabor* started to press for unification of Dalmatia with Bosnia and Herzegovina<sup>15</sup>.

The antagonism between Croats and Croatian Serbs was also encouraged by the ban of Croatia, the Hungarian Karoly Khuen-Héderváry (1883–1903), who supported the Serb minority in the fields of religion, education and economy. With the help of the Serbian deputies, he was able to counter effectively many of the aims of Croatian nationalists, including unification of Dalmatia with Croatia and Slavonia. In 1902 there was a peak in the crisis of Croatian-Serbian relations when the Serb newspaper *Srbobran*, published in Zagreb, printed an article of Nikola Stojanović entitled "Serbs and Croats." In the article, which had already been published in the Belgrade *Srpski književni glasnik*, the author glorified Serbian historic achievements. Stojanović wrote, among other things, that the Croats "... do not have special language, nor customs, nor ... consciousness on mutual belonging and therefore could not be a separate nation ...". He ended the article with the provocative statement that the fight among Serbs and Croats would last until "... our or your end. One side must lose. That that will be the Croats is assured because of their small number, their geographic position and fact that they live mixed with the Serbs ..." <sup>16</sup>. This article made Croats so angry that they went to demonstrate on the streets, fighting physically with the local Serbs and demolishing their shops. The "divide et impera" policy of ban Khuen-Héderváry and the rise of Croatian nationalism provoked real hatred among Croats and Croatian Serbs.<sup>17</sup> Because of the increasing Serb-Croat antagonism at the beginning of the 20th century it seemed that the possibility of South Slavic unification had become past history.

The situation changed significantly in the following years because Khuen-Héderváry left the position of Croatian ban and because under the influence of the Czech professor Tomas Masaryk, South Slavic minded youths began to unite around a Yugoslav program. Therefore as early as 1905 the Croat and the Serb parties in Croatia along with some independent politicians established a Croat-Serb Coalition to support the principle of national unity. Members of the Coalition defended the view that Serbs and Croats were one nation with two names -- or three names if we include the Slovenes. At the beginning they demanded unification of all South Slavs in the Habsburg Monarchy. Later some younger members tried to extend the principle of unity to the Serbs and Montenegrins as well. According to their view the center or capital of the whole country was to be Belgrade<sup>18</sup>. It is interesting to note that Croats and Croatian Serbs were able to cooperate without problems when opposition to the Hungarian or Austrian policy was in question. However they were not able to agree when Bosnia and Herzegovina were involved. This problem again became a hot issue after the Habsburg Monarchy annexed Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1908.

In 1906 elections the Coalition won 42% of all votes and in 1908, 1910, 1911 and 1913 it gained the absolute majority in all Croatian lands and a majority in the Croatian *sabor*.

Misunderstandings on Bosnia and Herzegovina however showed that there were problems in Croatian-Serbian relations<sup>19</sup>. So in the years before World War I it was not clear who would lead South Slav unification.

Although the Serb-Croat Coalition retained the majority in the Croatian *sabor* during the World War, the position of Croatian Serbs worsened. After the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand on June 28, 1914 in Sarajevo, Dr. Ivan Frank, leader of the Croatian Party of Law, during demonstrations in Zagreb asked to settle accounts with advocates of Serb-Croat cooperation. Further anti-Serb demonstrations took place in Djakovo, Petrinja and Slavonski Brod where the Serb churches and cemeteries were destroyed<sup>20</sup>.

After the fighting began, Serb ethnic newspapers (*Srbobran* etc.) were forbidden as was the use of the Cyrillic alphabet and Serb national symbols. The Serbs were identified as "Croats of Greek-Eastern Faith." In spite of all this 15,000 Serbs of Croatia were mobilized into the Austro-Hungarian army. They did not desert, often because in that case their families would have been prosecuted. Ethnic Serbian soldiers fought on numerous battle fields of Europe, especially on the Isonzo front where they defended the regions which had been promised to Italy in the London Pact. Among them Field Marshall Svetozar Borojević (a Serb from Banija) deserves to be mentioned.

Serbs in Croatian lands were among the staunchest defenders of the Yugoslav idea. The dream of unification of the Yugoslav territories into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was fulfilled on December 1, 1918<sup>21</sup>. Serbs were in relative majority in the new state (in 1918 they were 4,665,000 or 38,83%<sup>22</sup>) and had complete control in the newly established state. Serbs were dominant in the government and administration, including the military and bureaucracy, as well as in the diplomatic service<sup>23</sup>. Croatian lands became part of the unitarist Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, which hid its Greater Serbian nature under the policy of Yugoslav unitarism. The majority of Croatian Serbs supported this policy.

The unitarist-centralist constitutional order which was imposed by the Constitution of June 28, 1921 (the so-called St. Virus Day Constitution) caused non-Serbs unhappiness; its philosophy of one nation with three names soon caused discontent even among some of the Serbs of Croatia. Svetozar Pribičević, one of the most important leaders of the Croatian Serbs, changed his policy and joined the opposition in 1927. He made peace with the Croatian nationalist Stjepan Radić, leader of the Croatian Peasant Party, and together they established the Peasant Democratic Opposition. Pribičević tried to appease the Croats. He declared that the Yugoslav state "... does not have a future, if the Croat nation is not equal as a constitutive part of it as it is the Serbian nation, or if this state is not in accordance with the wishes of Croatian nation we must able to decide on its future destiny ..."<sup>24</sup>.

The unsolved national question in Yugoslavia caused numerous conflicts and political crises and prompted the development of numerous extremist movements (Chetniks, Ustasha etc.) which reached their peak during the World War II.

Serbian politicians tried to solve the Croatian question on the eve of World War II and to find a compromise with the Croat politicians. These endeavors resulted in the so-called Cvetković-Maček Agreement signed by the Prime Minister Dragiša Cvetković and Vlatko Maček, the leader of HISS and the Peasant Democratic Opposition party, on 23 August

1939. This compromise agreement was possible because the Croatian and Serbian elite(s) came to recognize that ethnic differences would not disappear, and that national identities could not be transformed into a new Yugoslav national identity. The agreement anticipated the formation of the ethnically defined *Banovina of Croatia* which was to receive broad autonomy including elements of statehood. It emphasized the equality of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in the common state as the foundation for resolving the national question in Yugoslavia. As a result of the compromise, the Croatian Banovina was formed. This banovina included all counties with a majority of Croats in the population. The Banovina of Croatia got its parliament (*Sabor*) back again. It was given substantial autonomy and many functions. The king appointed the governor (*ban*) upon the recommendation of the *Sabor*. In a way, the creation of the Banovina of Croatia meant decentralization of the existing political system and marked a turning point in Yugoslav political development which had been characterized until then by centralism and unitarism<sup>25</sup>. Its fulfillment was prevented by start of World War II.

World War II was the most difficult period in the history of the Serbs in Croatia. At that time, within the German-Italian Nazi-Fascist system, the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) was formed from the territories of Croatia (without Dalmatia between Zadar and Split and Medjimurje and Baranja), Bosnia and Herzegovina and Srem. This state, dependent on the occupiers and ruled by the Ustasha government of Ante Pavelić, was independent only in name. Its government wanted to create an ethnically cleansed Croatia with the help of German and Italian occupational forces. In their political propaganda, the Ustasha described themselves as the "liberators" of the Croatian nation from "the Serbian Belgrade dictatorship" and as guardians of "a thousand years of Croatian statehood." After they proclaimed their state they also started a "racial revolution" against Jews, Gypsies (Roma) and—above all—Serbs, who comprised 30% of the population of the new state. Pavelić held Bosnian Muslims to be "brothers of the purest Croatian blood." For the Serbs he planned the total extermination. Their destiny was clearly defined and decided by Mile Budak, minister of education in NDH. He stated on July 22, 1941: "Part of the Serbs we shall kill, part of the Serbs we shall displace, and the rest of them we shall convert to Catholicism and thus assimilate into Croats"<sup>26</sup>. The number of the Serbs killed during Pavelić's regime has been estimated at between 30,000 and one million. According to the latest scholarly research, the number was about 330,000<sup>27</sup>.

Because of the killings, not only Serbs, Gypsies (Roma) and Jews, whose lives were threatened, were unhappy, but also Croats and Bosnian Muslims, who soon recognized that the Independent State of Croatia was not the state that had been promised. Some people in the NDH were ready to fight the Ustasha regime and the occupation army. Some of them joined the Chetnik movement, more of them however joined the communist partisan movement. With the slogan of "Brotherhood and unity" and the vision of a federated Yugoslavia as a community of equal nations, partisans succeeded in uniting part of the Serb and Croat population in the liberation movement against the occupiers, the NDH and the Greater Serbian hegemony in pre-World War II Yugoslavia. So, rather than being a civil war, the partisans' fight against the domestic "Quisling" military formations was an anti-Fascist/anti-Nazi national liberation war. After the military and political victories of the national liberation movement it seemed in Croatia as well as in the rest of Yugoslavia that the national question was solved once and for all. This was at least the

official ideology of the communist authorities after they exterminated tens of thousands of members of Chetnik, Ustasha and Home defenders (Slovene and Croat quisling paramilitary units) and other opponents of the communist regime during the World War II period. The Serbs of Croatia in their first congress in September 1945 in Zagreb declared in a special resolution that "... their brotherhood with Croats forged in their common fight ... is a guarantee for a happy ... life of Serbs and Croats in Croatia and also for the existence and development ... of the whole of Yugoslavia ..." <sup>28</sup>.

It was not at all that ideal; differences between Serbs and Croats were still there. Serbs could not forgive and forget the Ustasha genocide during the war, Croats could not forgive and forget the extermination of tens of thousand members of their paramilitary formations after the war and they blamed Serb communists for it.

In spite of that, the Croats and Serbian people in Croatia started rebuilding the country with great enthusiasm. Serbian youth participated in voluntary mass physical labor. More and more Serbs started moving into the Croatian towns seeking employment and forming mixed marriages. In proportion, they found more jobs in the army and police and in the administration of the ruling party than the Croats did, because more of them had participated in the war of liberation. Being frontiersmen, military and political activity was their tradition. Proportionately their educational level was lower than that of the Croats, so it was more difficult for them to get jobs in industry and other non-agrarian activities. This was another reason for their joining the army and the police <sup>29</sup>.

In spite of promises by communist leaders during World War II about the equality of all Yugoslav ethno-nations, post-World War II Yugoslavia was again a centralized state. Furthermore, in Croatia Serbs had much more power in their hands than would have been expected on the basis of their demographic strength since they comprised less than 15% of the total population of the Socialist Republic of Croatia.

An interesting innovation in the post-World War II Yugoslav census is the the appearance of a new category, the "Yugoslavs." During the 1970s the number of those who declared themselves "Yugoslavs" increased sharply due to the politics of the Yugoslav state and the

Table 2. Number of Serbs and Yugoslavs in the former SR of Croatia in the post-war Period.

Year	Total number of inhabitants	CROATS		SFRBS		YUGOSLAVS	
		Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
1948	3,779,858	2,975,399	78.71	543,795	14.39	—	—
1953	3,936,022	3,117,513	79.20	588,756	14.96	—	—
1961	4,159,898	3,339,841	80.29	624,991	15.02	15,559	0.37
1971	4,426,221	3,513,647	79.38	626,789	14.16	84,118	1.90
1981	4,601,469	3,454,661	75.07	531,502	11.55	379,057	8.24
1991	4,784,265	3,736,365	78.10	581,653	12.16	106,041	2.22
<b>1991 when 1948= 100</b>	<b>126.6</b>	<b>125.6</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>107.0</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>---</b>	<b>---</b>

SOURCE: Petričević J., *Nacionalnost stanovništva Jugoslavije ...* p. 95; *Prvi rezultati popisa stanovništva, domaćinstava i poljoprivrednih gazdinstava 1991. godine. Statistički bilten broj 1934: Nacionalni sastav stanovništva po opštinama*, Beograd 1995.



Fig. 2

many ethnically mixed marriages. The number and share of “Yugoslavs” sharply declined in the second half of the 1980s due to worsening economic and political conditions, and growing ethnic tensions and divisions in the country<sup>30</sup>.

There were numerous conflicts between Croats and Croatian Serbs in the decades before the 1990s. In an interview for the Belgrade newspaper *Politika*, at the beginning of 1950s, even the leading Croatian communist politician, Vladimir Bakarić, confessed that “... Croatian-Serbian antipathy ... was very much present ...”. This was confirmed by demonstrations in Zagreb after Zagreb’s “Dinamo” won a soccer match against Belgrade’s “Crvena zvezda”. A Slovene writer, Edvard Kocbek, commented prophetically: “... In Belgrade the hatred towards Croats, in Zagreb towards Serbs reigned, that they would in the beginning of the war or state disorder ... shoot at each other, slaughter... and torture... as they had never [done] in history ... We are all sleeping on a volcano, which could erupt at the smallest shake ...”<sup>31</sup>.

The relations between Croats and Serbs sharpened during the so-called “Croatian Spring” and especially during the debate about constitutional amendments in 1971. The Croatian “enfant terrible,” Mika Tripalo, declared that constitutional amendments represented only the beginning of the fight against the federal ‘étatisme’ which could be seen in political practice. In Croatia a policy of “ethnic balance” was initiated so as to bring the percentage of Serbs employed in public sector, especially in the security forces, to be equal to the percentage of the Serb population in the various regions. The Serbs were over-represented due to the fact that they had more members in the League of Communist. The Serbs protested vigorously and compared this policy to the horrible deeds of the Ustasha. “They



Fig. 3

shall never be able to surprise us again ...” declared the Serbs in Krajina and other ethnically mixed regions. “Today we have an axe hidden behind every door”<sup>32</sup>.

In 1971 and 1972 the Yugoslav authorities started to counter the nationalist movement in Croatia. The Croatian leadership finally resigned. In the aftermath of the crisis literally tens of thousands of the League of Communists of Croatia members were expelled and 3,000 persons were imprisoned for political reasons. After the liberals in the League of Communists of Croatia were thrown out of power, the “iron hand” reigned and for two decades Croatia became a “republic of silence”.<sup>33</sup>

The Croat communist regime and Croatian nationalists also remained silent when Slobodan Milošević started to use Serbian nationalism as a power base and rose to power in Serbia. At that time, while mass demonstrations of the Serbs with their Serbian national iconography were organized openly and broadcast on the state TV every day, Croat demonstrations remained hidden. However, the Croatian Democratic Union (HDZ), the main Croatian opposition party ideologically based on Croatian nationalism, held its first demonstration on 28 February 1989, and soon received mass support among Croats. The party was not legalized until December 1989, when Croatian communists, following the Slovene example, decided to call for multiparty elections. During the pre-election battle the Croatian communists were hampered by the fight among the League of Communist fractions, i. e. the reform wing and the wing of the “defenders of the olds ways.” But

Tudjman's HDZ gave Croatian people what they wanted — Croatian nationalism as a weapon against Serbian nationalism and pressure from Belgrade. Tudjman also the gained support of Croats abroad who supported him financially. Simultaneously the situation in Yugoslavia was deteriorating rapidly and, although internally divided, also the Croatian communists left the 14th Yugoslav League of Communist Congress in January 1990. Consequently, the HDZ overwhelmingly won the elections in May 1990. It looked like Croatian independence was within reach. However, the Croatian Serbs in rural areas were against it ...<sup>54</sup>.

The case of the Serbs in Croatia was a special one; according to the Constitution of 1974 they had the status of a 'nation-building nation' (a constitutive nation of the Croatian Republic). The majority of Serbs lived in the hinterland of the Dalmatian coast, in Lika, Banija, Kordun, Slavonia, Western Srijem and Baranja (the regions of autochthonous Serb settlement in the "Military Frontier Region") and in the largest cities.

In spite of the fact that the regions where Serbs settled in Croatia were economically underdeveloped, the main routes of Croatia (and former Yugoslavia) were situated in those regions — from Zagreb to the Dalmatian coast and from Zagreb to Belgrade. Also, the Serbian population produced numerous communist political leaders in Croatia, who occupied many political posts as well as important positions in cultural life and the state-run economy. Once it was certain that Yugoslavia would be dissolved, one of the main aims of Milošević's policy was to incorporate the regions inhabited by Croatian Serbs into Greater Serbia.

In the spring of 1990, the HDZ won the elections. The new Croatian president, Franjo Tudjman, started to implement the political promises the HDZ had made during the electoral campaign, especially the promise to build the Croatian national state. This provoked unrest among the Serbs in Kninska Krajina, who still remembered ethnic

Table 3. Distribution of the Serbs in Croatia after World War II.

Territory	1948		1971		1981		1991		INDEX 1991/48
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%	
Northwest Dalmatia	83,503	15.4	93,255	14.9	83,171	15.6	92,213	15.9	110.4
Lika and Gorski Kotar	81,420	15.0	70,168	11.2	54,435	10.3	55,114	9.5	67.7
Banja and Kordun	134,731	24.8	131,078	20.9	110,184	20.7	117,058	20.1	86.9
Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem	199,929	36.7	227,803	36.3	180,339	33.9	197,209	33.9	98.6
The regions of continuous Serb settlement	499,583	91.9	522,302	83.3	428,129	80.5	461,594	79.4	92.4
Other parts of former Serb Croatia	44,212	8.1	104,487	16.7	103,373	19.5	120,069	20.6	271.6
TOTAL	543,795	100.0	625,789	100.0	531,502	100.0	581,663	100.0	107.0
Share in total population of the former Serbs of Croatia	15.0 %		14.2 %		11.6 %		12.4 %		

SOURCE: Ilić, *The Serbs in the Former SR of Croatia ...*, p. 337.

cleansing during the period of Pavelić's Ustasha regime during World War II. They feared new exterminations and new ethnic cleansing and were, therefore, attracted by the Great Serbian nationalist ideas of Slobodan Milošević's to unite all the Serbs in a common state.

Under these conditions the decisions of the new Croatian authorities did not calm their fears. Exactly the opposite: the new Croatian authorities threw numerous Serbs out of jobs in public service and the police -- in the territories where the Serbs were in a majority as well as in the others. The Croatian flag was changed, replacing its red five-pointed star with a red and white chessboard, the historic coat of arms of Croatia. This was a traditional medieval Croatian coat-of-arms, but Ante Pavelić and Ustasha had used it as the symbol of the Independent State of Croatia (NDH) during World War II. In addition, as suggested by the new authorities, Croatia's new constitution no longer declared the Serbs in Croatia a constitutive nation, which meant that they became a national minority in Croatia<sup>35</sup>. The Serbs found this very disturbing since all previous Croat republican constitutions after World War II had mentioned them a constituent nation.

These actions provoked unrest among the Croatian Serbs. Rather than the moderates Jovan Opačić and Jovan Rašković, who demanded cultural autonomy for the Serbs of Croatia, Milan Babić gained in reputation and followers. His aim was the secession from Croatia of the territories populated by Serbs. Supported by Milošević's statement that republican borders were only administrative divisions and that only nations, and not republics, had the right to secede from the federation, Croatian Serbs started to organize. On July 25, 1990, the Serb parliament in the city of Srb proclaimed its Declaration on sovereignty and autonomy of the Serbian nation and then on August 18, in spite of a ban issued by the Croatian constitutional court, organized a referendum on the cultural and political autonomy of the Serbs in the territory of Kninska Krajina. On August 17, Croatian police units tried unsuccessfully to forbid the referendum by force. Under the leadership of Milan Babić, the Serb population armed itself, put up the barricades and staged an uprising. The Belgrade authorities also intervened with the Zagreb authorities on behalf of the Serbs of Kninska Krajina, gaining for it the status of a para-state divided from the rest of Croatia behind the barricades<sup>36</sup>.

As the Croatian authorities were unable to make the Serbs obey their decisions, the Serbs of Kninska Krajina continued to create their own "state." On September 30, 1990, the Serb National Council declared autonomy of Kninska Krajina (Northwest Dalmatia; later also communes of Lika and Gorski Kotar and Bania and Kordun joined) and built new barricades. On October 3, with the help of the new barricades, they interrupted all traffic by rail and road with the rest of Croatia. On October 21, a special Statute of SAO Krajina was officially proclaimed by the Serb National Council and the Serb Autonomous Authority Krajina — *Srpska autonomna oblast Krajina* (SAO Krajina) — was declared. In this territory the Serbs comprised from 50 % to 97.5 % of the local population.

A few months later, in January 1991, the Serbs in Slavonia organized themselves on the same principle. The Serbs of Slavonia, Baranja and Western Srijem created a Serb



Fig. 3

National Council for their territories in Šidski Banovci. This Serb National Council issued a *Declaration of the Serb Nation* at the end of February 1991. In this territory the Serbs comprised from 20 % to 50 % of the local population<sup>37</sup>.

Croatia found itself in very difficult circumstances. On the one hand, because of the preparations for its secession from Yugoslavia, the JNA (the Yugoslav Army) threatened to proclaim martial law; on the other hand, the Serb rebels controlled large parts of Croatia. In February 1991 the rebels even declared and published a Resolution on dissolution from Croatia and remaining in Yugoslavia. In March 1991 the first armed clashes began between the rebel Serbs and Croatian police units. In order to prevent further clashes, the Yugoslav Presidency ordered the JNA to intervene and separate the sides.

The intervention of the JNA and further worsening of conditions in the federation convinced the Croatian leadership to proceed towards Croatian independence. On May 19, 1991, they organized a referendum in which almost 83% of the voters participated, and 94.17% of them opted for Croatian independence<sup>38</sup>. The Croatian government gained the people's support. The Croatian *Sabor*, on June 25, 1991, declared independence. This meant new troubles for Croatia. Milošević did not oppose the independence of Croatia (and Slovenia) but at the same time he declared that the Croatian Serbs also had the right to secede from Croatia. He declared the right of

Croatian Serbs to change republican administrative borders, so that the border of Croatia would coincide with the ethnic Serb border, allowing Kninska Krajina and Slavonia to remain outside of Croatia<sup>39</sup>.

The JNA started to implement its plan in the middle of July. A real war broke out, in which the Serb insurgents at first provoked fights with the Croatian forces, and the intervention of the JNA followed "to separate the fighting sides". The Croatian army was not powerful enough to deal with both the Serb insurgents and JNA, and every day the JNA controlled a larger part of Croatia. Dalmatia was soon cut off from the rest of Croatia. Slobodan Milošević and his co-visionaries planned to create a New Yugoslavia occupying all the Croatia territories east of the Virovitica-Karlovac-Karlobag line. As the strength of the Croatian army increased, their objective was reduced to occupying the Croatian-Serbian ethnic borders<sup>40</sup>. The front line followed the ethnic borders, so that three separate Serb regions in Croatia were created. They were territorially connected only over the lands of Bosnia-Herzegovina. The largest and best organized was the Kninska Krajina region. The second was the region around Glina and western Slavonia; the third region was eastern Slavonia and Baranja (Croatian Podunavlje), which bordered on Serbia<sup>41</sup>.

After the Serb rebels and the JNA occupied most of the desired territories, the leadership of what remained of Yugoslavia demanded on 9 November 1991 that the United Nations Security Council send peacekeeping forces to Croatia. The UN Security Council adopted its Resolution No. 743 on February 21, 1992<sup>42</sup>. This meant that Serb desires and accomplishments were secured, and the Republic of Serb Krajina [*Republika srpska Krajina* or RSK] was established on December 19, 1991. Milan Babić became its first president<sup>43</sup>.

In spite of the fact that Croatia was recognized by the European Union (January 15, 1992) and by the United States of America (April 7, 1992) and was accepted into the UN on 23 May 1992, the situation on the battleground did not change. Fighting could not be prevented. The front line remained unchanged until spring 1995. At that point Croatia, with the financial help of its émigré communities, succeeded in building a powerful army that, in a blitzkrieg in May 1995, first regained the territories of Western Slavonia<sup>44</sup>. In August 1995, the Croatian army, with its operation "Storm" [*Oluja*], regained control over most of the territories of the RSK<sup>45</sup>.

Four years of war in Croatia had very had consequences for the Croatian economy and social situation. The territories where the military fighting had taken place (especially some regions of the former Serb settlements) were almost deserted because people had fled to escape the war and ethnic cleansing. By the end of summer in 1995, Croatia controlled all the territories with the exception of Podunavlje (4.5% of the state territory), which was still under the UNCRO (United Nation Confidence Restoration Operation) control. Attempts to normalize relations between Croatia and the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia did not hasten the return of the Serbian refugees to Croatia, in spite of the fact that the memorandum of diplomatic ties formally allowed for the safe return of around 200,000 Serbs who escaped from the region of Krajina. The Croatian authorities did not like the idea of Serb refugees being allowed to return to Croatia, and

they did everything in their power to render return of the refugees more difficult. This worsened the international situation of Croatia. Until the beginning of 1998, only 12,000 Serbs had returned to their homes in western Slavonia and Kninska Krajina; and a mere 8,000 Serbs had returned to Croatian Podunavlje (one-tenth of the Serb refugees)<sup>46</sup>.

After its military successes in 1995, Croatia was successful when, as a part of the negotiations at Dayton, Croatian Podunavlje was peacefully reintegrated into Croatia. Jacques Klein's international peace mission also deserves mention in this connection. In spite of the peaceful reestablishment of Croatian authority in this region, quite a few thousand members of the Serbian ethnic group emigrated from it<sup>47</sup>.

President Franjo Tuđman died of cancer on 11 December 1999. Two months after his death, political conditions in Croatia changed completely. Croatia still has to deal with the consequences of the "war for the homeland." It must enable the Serbs of Krajina, who fled from Croatia during the war into Bosnia-Herzegovina and the Federal Republic Yugoslavia, to return to their homes. This has provoked sharp political fights, however. The Stabilization Association Agreement between Croatia and the European Union, among other things, establishes Croatia's obligation to cooperate with its Balkan neighbors. This is too much for many Croats, who stubbornly defend their view of their historical rights and national interests, which they see as oriented towards the Catholic West. They are convinced that Europe is sending them "back to the Balkans," from which they just escaped.

## NOTES

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## SOURCE

Excerpts from the text *Spajanje Srba-Hrvata* (National Unity Between Serbs and Croats) which Nikola Pašić wrote in 1886 against Nikola Pašić it was first published in 1906.

*Imao sam više puta prilike da govorim s Hrvatima o stvari srpsko-hrvatskog naroda i uvijek me jednaka nesigurnost mojih (svoj) sasjednika in njihovo protivljenje kao da ne razumju glavnu stvar u stvari između Srba i Hrvata. Svi se kajine sam dolazivao u taj slučaj govoriti su uopće o stvari vrlo lako može reći izvana, ali su se podjivo čuvali da dodiku glavnu stvar sporu i gotovo nikad nisu pristajali da reče ono, što bi moglo stvari goditi, da reče ono, što bi svešten drugi za ljubav stoga na mesto njihovo radilo. Tek onda kad Srbin odustao i na njihovu lopo priče i kad izšao: a lopo izšao, kad izšao izvana govoriti u stvari, onda traže nešto pre svoje da se zakon u trojedinici utvrdi da su Srbi i Hrvati u svemu ravnopravni narodi [...] U opširne po svim strukturama da se pravoslavni Srbi izvanjski a katoličani, t. j. da Srbi i Hrvati su pravoslavni i katoličani budu ravnopravni. Kad tako kažem u svemu, onda tek dolaze možemo verovati da žele stogu, i onda možemo govoriti što treba dalje reći da se stoga Srba i Hrvata utvrdi još veoma. Inače govoriti o stvari Srba i Hrvata a međutim ne priznajući Srbine ono, što jim je kao narodu najveće – to je prosto misliti praznu stvar.*

*Kad Srbi i Hrvati budu ravnopravni u svemu, na svome domu, kad budu braća ravnopravna u svojoj kući, onda oni treba da se dalje postereju kako da se držati u politici prema srpsko kraljevini i amogorske kneževine, kao i spram ostalih srpskih zemalja. Onda treba da izvede stogu i dalje dok ne obuhvata sveu Sl. [Slovans].*

*Na glavni spor neporažena vri se oko ovog glavnog pitanje: Ka će objediniti Srpsko-hrvatski narod? Hrvati, drže, žele i dolazuju da oni i mogu i trebaju da objedinio srpsko-hrvatsko pleme. Srbi pak drže da to nije ništa moguće ili ako se i izvrši pod rukovodstvom političkih oševu Trojedinice, na osnovi tradicije i svih zemalja, da to znači isto što i propast samostalnog života srpsko-hrvatskog plemena.*

*Neki umareniji Srbi i Hrvati hteli bi da izvedu stogu na osnovi podole to dva naroda i ti umareniji – pokušali tako se razlikuju među sobom kako opredeljuju veće i manje granice*

**jednoma ili drugome plemenu. Na o njima nije vredno govoriti. Istorijski prošlost pokazuje je da se mogu opasati dva nezavisna državlja jednog naroda slobodi pod raznim uticajima. Štaviše iz prošlosti ponoviti bi se u budućnosti [...]**

**[...] Ostaje, dakle, kao jedino i najvažnije pitanje, koje rešiti stogu na osnovu i van granice otadžbine; Ko će povesti kolo ujedinjenja, ko je sposobniji i za taj svet posao preoblikovanja i pošteniji? [...]**

[...] I have had many times an opportunity to speak with Croats about the unity of Serb-Croatian nation and I did not like the insincerity of the people I spoke with. They pretended that they did not understand the main point of quarrel between Serbs and Croats. All the people I debated with about this talked in general about unity being very nice, one might say beautiful, but they very carefully avoided touching the main point of conflict and never did agree to do what could happen in unity, what any other for the sake of unity in their place would do. When the Serb rejects all their nice stories and when he says: good brother, when you speak so beautifully about unity then we should mutually work towards establishing in practice the law on Triune [Kingdom] according to which Serbs and Croats are equal nations in everything [...] In general that the Orthodox Serbs became equal to the Catholics, e.g. that the Serbs and Croats or Orthodox and Catholics will be equal. When they became equal in everything then we could really believe that they wish unity and then we shall be able to talk about what to do in order to preserve unity between Serbs and Croats forever. Otherwise to talk about unity of Serbs and Croats but at the same time not recognizing the matter that to the Serbs as a nation is the holiest –means simply talking nonsense.

When the Serbs and Croats will be equal in everything at their home, when they will become brothers equal in their own house, then they will need to take care how they will deal in politics towards the Serb Kingdom and the Montenegrin Principality as well as towards the other Serb lands. Then they must practice unity until they include all the Slavs.

The main source of misunderstanding is about the important question: who is going to unite the Serb-Croat nation? Croats mean that and try to prove that they can and need to unite the Serb-Croat tribe. Serbs are stating that it is under no circumstances possible and that if this were to happen under the leadership of political aims of Triune [Kingdom] on the basis of tradition of the same lands it would be the same as ruining the independent life of the Serb-Croat tribe.

Some moderate Serbs and Croats would like to introduce unity on the basis of division of those two nations, but those moderates differ between themselves when it comes to the question of drawing the borders between those two tribes. As to the borders, it's not worth talking about them. History has shown that two independent little states of one nation cannot survive because of the different influences. The fights from the past would reemerge in the future [...]

[...] There is only one remaining issue — the most important — which is disturbing peace at home and outside the borders of the fatherland. Who is going to lead unification, who is bet-



