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The Serbs in Slovenia: a New Minority

The breakdown of the former Yugoslavia has resulted in formation of new, independent states while the former co-citizens and constitutive people have found themselves in new roles. Some have become a majority while some have become a minority, with an aspiration to affirm the status in the public sphere. As a country with a large numbers of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia, Slovenia is facing a challenge of the confirmation of ethnic pluralism within its borders, along with solutions and appropriate places for “new” minorities (the usual appellation for ethnic groups formed by the members of the former Yugoslavia, where the Serbs are outnumbering the rest). At the same time, the new minorities face a challenge of constitution, foundation of their own associations, that is, formation of their own identity and public affirmation in the new context. This paper discusses these ongoing processes with a special attention to the Serbian ethnic group.

Key words:

Serbs in Slovenia, migrations, immigrants, ethnic minorities, categorization of ethnic group, status of ethnic groups.

In the newly created independent states formed at the territory of the former Yugoslavia, the former co-citizens and constitutive people have found themselves in new roles. Some have become a majority while some others have become a minority, with an aspiration to affirm the status within the new conditions. During the breakdown of the former Yugoslavia, some of these states went through harsh experiences of war and ethnic conflict. In the six newly formed states, the situation regarding ethnic relations and status of citizenship varies from state to state. This paper focuses on Slovenia, which managed to confirm independence and international acclaim the first out of the former Yugoslav republics. This has happened after the “ten day war”, a conflict between Slovenian territorial defense army and JNA, in June 27-July 6 1991. Thus, this state underwent the processes of transition with the optimal starting positions for creating modern, stable democratic state.

Even in this case, such processes carried certain problems leaving thus open ended questions.

In this paper, I will discuss the status of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia in the state of Slovenia, with a special emphasis on the Serbs, as the most numerous ethnic group.¹

According to the Slovenian 2002 census, around 1.9 % (38.964) declared to be Serbs. After the Slovenians themselves, Serbs so appear to be the largest ethnic group in the country. The Serbian group was formed in several migration waves since the 16th century, with a special influx at the time of Yugoslavia (1918-1991), especially so after WW II, mostly due to economic reasons. Given the different migration periods, the group is not homogenous: the members have different background, education and homeland areas. As well, the members of the Serbian ethnic group are habitually scattered, occupying urban and industrial centers throughout Slovenia.

In this paper I will briefly discuss data which reflect the contemporary status of the Serbs in Slovenia – such as various legislation, attitudes of the surrounding society, and similarities with other ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia, socio-demographic characteristics, the group activities and affirmation within public sphere and so on.

New Minorities in the Republic of Slovenia

After Slovenia declared independence subsequent Constitutional legislation followed, regarding regulations and character of the state.² These included legislative criteria regarding citizenship and foreign inhabitants. The citizenship principle is determined by The Law on citizenship in 1991, as well in some other regulative (Medved 2007) but not in the Constitution. This paper focuses on the status of the former Yugoslavia immigrants.

In this regard, the new state appeared as liberal. At one time period (June-December 1991), under the favorable conditions, all members of the former Yugoslavia with permanent residence in Slovenia could ask for, and in most cases, were granted Slovenian citizenship (Žagar 2001). According to the available official data, most of the immigrants, almost 80%, have used this option (Komac 2004: 791). However, this has also created a new category of people (29.054), whose problem,

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² The beginning of the 1990’s has witnessed a breakdown of the former federal state, with the Slovenian elite leading the way toward independence, achieved in 1990’ referendum, and confirmed in June 25 1991, with a Constitutional proclaim. The secession provoked a strong reaction of the other members of the federation, especially so Serbia and JNA. After the “10 day war”, the Republic of Slovenia has become an independent and recognized state.

created by the state itself, is not solved in the proper manner until today. These are “the erased” ones, the people who, due to the administrative mistake (some argue due to “the mistake built in the system”) did not apply for the citizenship in due time, and who were then totally erased from the population base of the Slovenia. In addition, the people’s personal documents as well as proofs on legal residence on the Slovenian territory have been systematically destroyed. A large number of the immigrants from the former Yugoslavia have found themselves among the erased.³

So, the law has established a right to citizenship as well as regulations regarding foreigners. The immigrants were mostly included in the new state as citizens,⁴ hence the next question to be asked is an ethnic pluralism of the new state and its acknowledgment through legislation.

Based on its ethnic composition, Slovenia could be determined as a relatively homogenous state. All of the modern states today have to a certain extent, various ethnic that is national categories, different than the majority. The population base in Slovenia was affected to a large extent, by the migrations from the former Yugoslavia after WW II. That is how the percentage of those who declared as ethnic Slovenians gradually decreased from census to census:

1953 - 96,52%
 1961 - 96,65%
 1971 - 94,04%
 1981 - 90,77%
 1991 - 88,31%
 2002 - 83,06%

The censuses of the Republic of Slovenia in between 1951-2002 show the following results:

Nationality	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002
Slovenians	1 415 448	1 522 248	1 578 963	1 668 623	1 698 657	1 631 363
Italians	854	3 072	2 987	2 138	2 959	2258
Hungarians	11 019	10 498	8 943	8 777	8 000	6243
Roma	1 663	158	951	1 393	2 259	3246
Albanians	169	282	1 266	1 933	3 534	6186
Austrians	289	254	266	146	126	181

³See for example: Dedić, et. al, 2003; Beznec 2007; Stojić 2008.

⁴It should be noted that Slovenia firmly applies EU laws regarding permanent residency and citizenship, with procedures being time consuming.

Bulgarians	49	180	138	103	168	138
Bosniaks	...	...	...	...	...	21 542
Czechs	807	584	442	423	315	273
Montenegrins	1 356	1 384	1 950	3 175	4 339	2667
Greeks	24	50	24	15	21	54
Croatians	17 978	31 429	41 556	53 882	52 876	35 642
Jews	15	21	72	9	37	28
Macedonians	640	1 009	1 572	3 227	4 371	3972
Muslims	1 617	465	3 197	13 399	2 6577	10467
Germans	1 617	732	400	309	298	499
Polish	275	222	191	200	196	140
Romanians	41	48	41	93	115	122
Russians	593	259	297	189	167	451
Ruthenians	46	384	66	54	57	40
Slovakians	60	71	75	139	139	216
Serbs	11 225	13 609	20 209	41 695	47 401	38 964
Turks	68	135	52	86	142	259
Ukrainians	...	...	138	190	210	470
Vlacks	9	6	4	16	37	13
Others	352	449	293	526	1 021	1 548

Vague nationality	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002
Yugoslavs	...	2784	6616	25 615	12 075	527
Bosnians	8062
Regional	2652	3932	5187	1467
Others	48 588
Unknown	126 325
No answer.	48 588

	1953	1961	1971	1981	1991	2002
Total	1 466 425	1 591 523	1 679 051	1 838 381	1 913 355	1 964 036

The Slovenian political elite have embraced, in the Constitution and legislation, an ethnic pluralism. This was done on the level of individual and, for some group, on collective level. On the individual level, the Constitution guarantees freedom to express ethnic membership, culture, and usage of language and alphabet to all citizens.⁵ As far as collective rights, they are also protected but only in few cases. Slovenian law makes a distinction between autochthons/native and immigrants⁶ ethnic groups. Relying on EU standards, Slovenia especially protected three native groups (Italians, Hungarians, Roma). Hence, by applying this principle⁷ and quantities, one can distinguish several types of ethnic groups in Slovenia. This has also affected the legislation (Žagar 2001:111):

1. Slovenian people/ ethnic Slovenians, as the native, majority ethnic group
2. native national minorities with a special protection guaranteed by the Constitution – the Italians and Hungarians
3. the native Roma group, also with a special protection guaranteed by the Constitution
4. minority ethnic groups, citizens of the Republic of Slovenia but without special protection; these are further divided into two groups, which incorporate persons who declare as Serbs today:
5. small native ethnic groups, such as the Serbs in Bela Krajina, Croatians living near the border, the Germans...
6. immigrant/new comers groups with Slovenian citizenship, immigrated relatively recently, mostly in the 1960's.
7. new comers, immigrants, without the Slovenian citizenship (foreigners) but with permanent residence (ibid).

This kind of division, however, is an object of scientific critique. Firstly, the distinction among native and new comer groups is considered unnecessary (Komac, 2007; Žitnik Serafin, 2008), even random and without foundation (Šumi, 2004). Secondly, due to the fact that not all native groups have the guaranteed protection, it appears that quantity (of membership) has influenced the lawmakers-which in effect, do not correspond to the principal regulatory solution (Bašič, 2005: 86-87).

In the terminology of the new state of Slovenia, in media, wider public and within the professional literature (mostly sociology and politics), the members of the people of the former Yugoslavia (the Serbs included) are labeled as “new” or, in Slovenian, “novodobne” minorities (Bašič, 2005: 86-87; Žagar, 2001: 116-118)⁸,

⁵ Article 61, the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, Uradni list RS 1, 33/1991 (Žagar 2001: 109).

⁶ The Slovenian term for immigrants is “priseljenci”.

⁷ In literature which does not make this distinction between native and new comer immigrant groups, one can find a more precise definition of ‘nativity’, based on Minority Right Group, 1990, xiv, where it says that a criteria for achieving this condition should be an assumption that 2-3 generations of ancestors of the groups in question, have lived in continuum at certain area (Žagar 2001:112).

⁸ This terms seems as the most appropriate under these circumstances, hence I use it myself.

but some other disputable terms are used also such as non-Slovenians,⁹ immigrants,¹⁰ the rest,¹¹ code ABCHMMS.¹² It is important to emphasize once again that their collective rights are not guaranteed. Within relevant literature there are two perspectives about how these groups should be categorized and whether their status should be equal to those of the native minorities. According to the first perspective, it is not possible to equalize immigrant group with the “classical” minority (being present for a long time at the state’s territory, being at the same time a historical territory of the given minority); this is not being done in other states, including EU which in some proclaims specifically distinguishes between these categories (Žagar, 2001: 117). The second, seemingly prevailing perspective, holds that “new” minorities, that is, “immigrants” should have the same cultural and social needs as those labeled as “classic” or “historical”, or “native” minorities (Žitnik 2004; Žitnik Serafin 2008). The difference is in the way these respective minorities originated which does not imply that the state should not equally protect them (Komac 2007/1: 1-3); likewise, the new Slovenian state still did not find the best solution in responses to appearance of these new minorities but it certainly should provide them a better protection (Kržišnik-Bukić 2003: 36- 37). Some authors, in a critical manner, connect an emphasis of the idea of autochthon minorities with badly concept or notion of the Slovenian jeopardized nation and its small scope (Šumi 2004).

The question remaining, for these authors, is not should immigrants and their descendants be treated as minority with the protection rights but ways of achieving this, considering that the protected minorities – the Italians and Hungarians – assumed an existence of a historical territory occupied by these groups, on which account the state has granted them their rights and protection. This kind of system could not be applied automatically (Komac 2007/1: 61-63).

An interesting question to pose is, besides the state and social sciences, what is the treatment received from the surrounding society? The research of public opinion and vox pops from the 1990’s until today reflect continuous negative stereotypes associated with the categories of immigrants from the former Yugoslavia (Komac, 2000: 22-27; Omerzu, 2001). The difference between the autochthon and immigrant’ groups exists in the public oppinion too, including also the descendants from these groups born in Slovenia. This intolerance is present the most in the economic sphere (a large percent of the informants consider that the new comers are taking over jobs that the Slovenians should be doing, that in the case of economic crisis the new comers are the first to be laid off, that they should go back where

⁹ This is a negative determination – determining what is not, instead of what it is- and the members of the Serbian group reject this notion all together.

¹⁰ This term includes also a second generation, born in Slovenia. The today’s immigrants immigrated to Slovenia while it was in the federation, and they have become foreigners due to the administrative change of the state status and not by immigration to some foreign country. It could be assumed that many have come to Slovenia in the 1970’s, and not to Austria or Germany

¹¹ This term also minimizes the significance of designated groups.

¹² This term is an abbreviation of the first letters of all the former Yugoslavia’ minorities. According to my Serbian informants, this terms is neutral having no specific content.

ever they came from etc.), then within cultural sphere there are questions regarding freedom of ethnic identity expression – for instance, there is a negation to the right of the usage of native language and education (ibid). The negative stereotypes are accompanied by negative connotations too: Southerners, Jugovics (Kržišnik-Bukić 2003: 13), Čefurji.¹³ It is interesting to note that the usage of the term Čefurji/Southerners is being gradually altered, accompanying markings within sub-cultural or alternative ways of expression among the Slovenian younger generations. Recently, everything connected with the “Southerner” Balkans culture became a demarcation from the Slovenian mainstream culture, while the youth became accustomed and developer in a sense of the same trend (there is a huge popularity of the Southerners music of every kind, from the Balkans ethno-music to a specific Serbian turbo-folk).¹⁴ This could be explained in various ways, being that the trend is still very marginal, still it may represent a beginning of a new way of understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity within the Slovenian society, which could lead to a new way of cultural pluralism.

The Serbs in Slovenia: population characteristics

This part of the paper will present migratory processes that brought the Serbs to Slovenia, and in addition I will assess contemporary socio-demographic characteristic of the Serbs as a minority in Slovenia.

The migratory waves from south to north which had historically formed the Serbian group in Slovenia are not recognized today in an equal level. From the four most significant waves, the third was the largest and responsible for the formation of the group declared as Serbs today. However, even older migratory waves have certain influences on the identity concept and self determination of the Serbs in Slovenia.

The oldest level of immigrants, according to the historical data, belong to the group, small in numbers, inhabiting Bela Krajina, a region in the southeastern part of the state, near the river Krupa and Croatian border. The oldest source about the Serbs in Bela Krajina dates back to 1530 (Filipovic, 1970: 156). The migration is a consequence of the Turkish presence in the Balkans. Four villages- Bojanci, Marindol, Milići and Paunovići, numbering 243 people, declare today as being Orthodox and Serbian. They probably represent remnants of once numerous Orthodox populations, the descendants of the Uskoks’ which once inhabited the area of the former Military border, in between Ottoman Empire and Habsburg Empire. The Uskoks’ and general Orthodox populations, under the Turkish pressure, used to inhabit a larger area than these four villages from today. The other former Orthodox villages in Bela Krajina and Zumberak (on the other side of the mountain Gorjanci) are inhabited today by Greek-Catholics and Catholics (Petrovic, 2009: 25). Histori-

¹³ This is an unclear term, relating to Southerners and also people from the Balkans. Some explanations connect it with *Čifuti*, Turkish term for Jews.

¹⁴ Fieldwork data, October 2006.

cal sources noted the populations of Bela Krajina and Zumberak as being one ethnic entity; however, in time, these populations became diverse in regards to national sentiment, religion and language. The process of nation-building in the 19th century had divided them into three groups- those that today accept Greek-Catholics and Catholics affiliation and speak only Slovenian; those (Zumbek) who accept Greek-Catholics affiliation but feel like Croats, and those outnumbered, who declare as Serbs, in the four mentioned villages and, in turn, experience complex and bumpy processes regarding language and identity (ibid.: 31-32). During the past 500 years, religion, customs as well as language were preserved; the language belongs to eastern Herzegovina dialect (Ivić 1991: 270, cited in Petrović 2009: 25). The preservation of the religion and language was aided by the prohibition of mixing with the populations of different religious confessions, as well as existence of school and church. Church was a significant unifying factor until WW II, when it gradually ceased to exist in the 1960s. The population entered exogamous marriages with near by populations of Orthodox confession, from Lika and Kordun in neighboring Croatia. The surrounding majority showed somewhat less distance during the era of socialism, and raised it at the time of independence. In 1990's referendum, the population mostly voted in favor of Slovenian independence; they did not ask for a minority status or schools in Serbian language. However, as many similar destinies of ethnic minorities in conflict times, they were treated as "suspects" in the period of secession and they were not included in the territorial defense of Slovenia in the beginning of the 1990's (Petrović 2009: 36-41; Knežević Hočevar 2004).

Migratory processes between Slovenia and the other areas of the state created after WW I (Kingdom of SCS, then Yugoslavia) were active. The combined state insisted on communication, hence the migrations took place in both directions. The Serbs who came to Slovenia in between the two wars were military personel, state clerks, educational and cultural workers. Based on cenuses alone (1921 and 1931) it is not possible to estimate their exact number since the population was noted down according to language and religion, and there was an option of choosing Serbo-Croatian language. Around 2% declared for this option, but this does not include only Serbs. Based on Ortodox affiliation, it seems there were around 5000. Also, in the period between the two wars, three Ortodox temples were build, in Ljubljana, Maribor and Celje. In 1941, the churches in Maribor and Celje were destroyed under the German occupation, by the war prisoners from Serbia (Banjac, 1997: 28). The descendants of this wave who have stayed in Slovenia are third or fourth generation, which by birth, socialization and citizenship is Slovenian but have kept religio affiliation and particular need for origin remembrance (Miletić, 2002: 7).

After WW II, migrations had intensified and this actually created the group who declares today as nationally, that is, ethnically special. The new, after-the war government needed some time to develop administrative apparatus, so there were no data on migrations until 1954 (Komac 2004: 797). It is well known, however, that after 1945, a large influx of Serbs arrived in Slovenia, officers, state administrators, war orphans and especially labor force/workers, who will in the later decades become the most significant migratory factor (Banjac 1997: 29). After 1954 a

registry was formed with the precise data about migrations; however, it has many flaws, and it is considered that the real number of immigrants is much bigger than presented by the official statistic. This was probable and possible since the migration happened within one state (Komac 2004: 789-790). In addition, in 1950's political reasons contributed to the migrations also. A number of students, who originated in ideologically inapt families, managed to continue schooling in other republics, especially at the University of Ljubljana, with much less ideological pressure (Banjac 1997: 29). Then, there is the economy.

In the period after WW II, migratory movements in the socialist Yugoslavia have become accelerated – both inner and inter – thanks to foremost the country's industrialization. The 1961 data reveal that every third inhabitant of Yugoslavia lives outside his/hers respective place of birth. After that period, migrations have lessen but still appear as significant. A lesser part belongs to inter-republic migrations. This has brought about the population of Yugoslavia in the phase of demographic makeover- from relatively static to dynamic population. In the beginning of this process, more develop areas received more migrants, while undevelop areas remain the main source of the migratory population. In the period of the 1960's and 1970's, peasant population moved first toward more urban centers and then inter-regionally (to other federal republics) or abroad. At that time, the most people emigrated from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Rural and mountain areas are being abandoned in this time period (Mežnarić 1986: 25-38).

It is not possible to determine the exact number of immigrants in Slovenia. In 1981, the estimated number was 106.224 or 5.6% out of the population as a whole (15 years old and up). This however is just an estimate since many have worked without being registered. In 1971, the majority came from Croatia, Bosnia and Serbia. Most declared as Croatians, Serbs and Muslims. There were the least Albanians. Out of the Serbs for example, the majority came from Bosnia, mostly after 1971. This is the time when the migrations from Bosnia intensify. After 1974, at the time of market cessation in Europe, the pressure to move to Slovenia became greater (ibid: 69-77).

Here is how the sociologists in mid 1980's have described the proto-type of an immigrant in Slovenia: he came to Slovenia in between 1975-1985, low skill laborer, mother tongue is Serbo-Croatian (Serbian or Croatian), he is usually married while his family does not reside in Slovenia, he supports more family members than an average Slovenian and he generally comes from the least developed area in Bosnia and Herzegovina (ibid: 77).

In spite of this grim description, there were some better educated immigrants; all in all, this profile blended well into the local population characteristics since their educational level was quite similar. For instance, in 1981 census, Slovenia had only 3.3% college educated population (ibid: 72-74).

Migratory processes continued after this period too, although in somewhat different circumstances. In the late 1980's and beginning of the 1990's, the revival of nationalism and especially the wars have contributed greatly to migrations and contra-migrations... In beginning of the 1990's, after the 10-day war and Slove-

nian's secession, many of the military personnel (the former JNA) left Slovenia for good, either voluntarily or under pressure. It is not clear how many have left while some authors try to show that this exodus has never happened (Komac, 2004: 791). In time, it is probably that some objective numbers will come into light, after emotions settle on both sides. During the 1990's wars, Slovenia has accepted many refugees who have returned after peace talks during the mid 1990's. On the other hand, since the 1990's, many young and educated from Serbia have moved to Slovenia, attracted by the better life conditions and standards; some could not, in their own country, identify with the current processes of re-construction of the national identity. Their own sense of identification is rather connected with regional and local¹⁵ and some cosmopolitan. This declaration does not imply that these people do not have certain cultural needs associated with their own objective ethnic identity (i.e., language). According to censuses, in 1991-2002, there were 23.245 individuals who have moved to Slovenia, where 6375 have been given Slovenian citizenship, while 16.873 had foreign status (Komac 2004: 801).

Besides, even today there is an ongoing process of migrations of unqualified labor force, after the establishment of 1992 on Law of employment of foreigners, many times in black market, and considering Serbian population, especially so from Bosnia.¹⁶

As far as socio-demographic data on the contemporary population, the censuses from 1991-2002 provide various information. Firstly, there is a question of how many immigrants there are.

According to the 2002 census, there were 38.964 Serbs in the republic of Slovenia; in 1991, there were 47.911. Percentage rates also changed during the years:

1953: 0,77%
1961: 0,86%
1971: 1, 20%
1981: 2,27%
1991: 2,48%
2001: 1,96%

(Komac 2004: 790).

After the periods of gradual, percentage and absolute increase of the Serbs in the given periods, the number has decreased. There is a wide range discussion within literature about possible causes of this decrease of the Serbs (ethnic mimicry, assimilation or even moving out from pressure), while statistics do not provide the adequate answer (ibid, 796).

¹⁵ These data are gathered in Ljubljana in 2007; I thank PhD J. Djordjević from EI SASA.

¹⁶ These are illegal migrations and this field data is difficult to back up with actual numbers, but Peric considers the same (Perić 2005: 746).

1991 census shows that 29.3 % of persons declared as Serbs were born in Slovenia, 36,9% were born in Bosnia 20,2% in Serbia, 5,1% in Croatia, 3,9% in Vojvodina, and 3,1% in Kosovo (Komac 2000: 8).

The most common cause for moving in to Slovenia (employment possibility, often in industry and personal services) has determined the most significant feature of the Serbian population- spatial dispersion. The least amount is noted in the municipality Ljutomer, and the greatest in the municipality Moste-Polje (Ljubljana). Other industrial centers also were densely populated: Velenje, Jesenice, Kopar, Kranju, etc. (Komac 2004: 797).

As far as gender and ethnic endogamy/exogamy, in 1991 census there were 53.6% men to 46.4% women. There were more singles than married, a consequence of the migration type. Even when there is a family, visitation is individual, at least in the beginning. This implies mix marriages potentially. However, considerable number of marriages is ethnically homogenous:

Ethnically homogenous	46, 82%
Ethnically heterogeneous	53, 18% ¹⁷

Serbian women tend to be in ethnically homogenous marriages more than men (Komac 2000: 12-13).

On average, Serbs are older: 10,9% is above 60 years of age, and 20,1% are up to 18.¹⁸ In the time period between the two censuses, Serbian population underwent a huge change: in 1991, it is relatively young (82.8% younger than 45 years of age) while in 2002 the process is reversed (aging population). (Komac 2004: 799).

In addition to the age structure, educational levels also have change in between two censuses. In 1991, almost half of the population had elementary school and less, while today 1/3 has the elementary school and less. It should be noted that due to the methodological differences, these data are not completely comparable. The number of the least educated part of population decreased partially due to the mortality rates of the older generations. On the other hand, the population with high school educational levels has increased: more than half of the today's generation has high school educational levels (54.1%). This also is the fact among the majority. College educational levels are low among the Serbs- the greatest level is among the Montenegrins (10%), Slovenians (7.1%), Macedonians (6.6%), Serbs (4.8%). Albanians, Muslims and Bosniaks range from 1.7%-0.5% (ibid: 789-791).

As far as occupation, there is a reverse trend among immigrants and the local population: immigrants are employed in jobs which the locals do not do (less paid jobs, simple jobs...), and their numbers is considerably lower in management, administration and agriculture. Activity of the working population is presented by

¹⁷ Among these, 33,98% individuals married into the majority, while 19,20% married into other groups.

¹⁸ The same is valid for the majority of populations and other ethnic groups – optimal structure and younger generations are the characteristics of those declaring as Albanians, Bosniaks, Muslims and people from Bosnia..

more retired people among the locals, while the unemployment rate among the immigrants is higher- 8.5%-11%, depending on an ethnic group (ibid: 801-802).

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the population of immigrants, and especially so their descendants, provides above the average rate of delinquency (Komac 2000: 29-30).

The Serbs in Slovenia – an insider's outlook

After the secession, the members of the Serbian group have started to show a need to organize themselves and to exhibit their own identity, suddenly aware of the same in the newly created circumstances.¹⁹ However, this new minority unexpectedly faced the challenge to turn an ethnic category from census into a self-conscious, institutionalized community which will be connected by firmer internal ties, more than ever.

The Serbs in Slovenia represent, as argued before, a relatively numerous but spatially, socially, educationally and judging based on many other characteristics (including regional origin, lifestyle, ideological differences etc) an inhomogeneous group. This makes it more difficult to the group to organize and to expect from its members to feel as one uniform community, connected internally by ties of solidarity and cooperation. In addition, one of the evident problems was that assimilation was greater than maybe expected although many members declared their known personal desire for preservation and expression of a separate ethnic or cultural identity. An especially illustrative example is language assimilation.²⁰ Lack of collective rights also bears some negative consequences. Among others, they include unpredictable, disorderly and insufficient granting of cultural activities, grim possibilities of schooling in Serbian language, lack of media, scanty presence in the Slovenian public sphere, lack of partnership with various majority institutions etc. In Slovenian media, the Serbian community still appears as stigmatized as a consequence of the conflicts in the past decade, even though the representatives of the Serbs claim they never took part in any such event which would harm the image of the community (Banjac 1997: 34). The general intolerance toward the others surely is not a solely characteristic of the Slovenian society but the Serbian community yet feel especially addressed. On the other hand, the Slovenian state allows and grants to everybody, including the Serbs, the equality of citizens. Considering the guaranteed citizens equal rights alliance, spontaneous self-organization has caused a creation of several Serbian associations in Slovenia.²¹ In Ljubljana, there are three associations which make a foundation however, according to the accounts of the mem-

¹⁹ Similar attitudes exist on Croats in Slovenia (Peric 2005).

²⁰ Only about 20% of those who declared as Serbs claimed on censuses they speak Serbian language within their respective families (cited according to Miletic 2003). A specially interesting is socio-linguistic aspect: hybrid of Serbian and Slovenian language, which some use to communicate among themselves and with the majority. To my best knowledge, this was not researched.

²¹ In October 2006 there were 14 of such associations, while in June 2009 – 15.

bers themselves, also make a potential for conflicts. Additionally, in other areas (Kranj, Postojna, Radovljici, Nova Gorica) there are numerous other associations which try to organize cultural and national life of the Serbs in particular places throughout Slovenia – and taken together, they represent Assembly of Associations of the Serbian community in Slovenia – the organization which had many difficulties to organize – vanity, ignorance, fear were among several factors influencing it (Banjac 1997: 36), but it has come to certain success today, in 2009. However, authorities of this Assembly are very limited considering the Slovenian laws hence this Assembly does not represent a legitimate representative of the Serbs in Slovenia as an acknowledged entity but only an alliance of cultural associations.

Serbian Orthodox Church has also a considerable role. It is common to stress out its specific role that is, a dimension in maintaining religious and national identity, and in the new circumstances, it grew even larger. Hence, the Serbs in Slovenia have a relatively intense religious life, although it can be questioned whether this is a religious life in the narrow sense or a need to gather together in times of crisis- as experienced by the members of this community in the post-socialist and post-Yugoslavian transformation of their own status and identity. Still, even the Church does not appear as capable of uniting all the Serbs in Slovenia – within the group, there must be some who are atheists, as well as those who do not experience the Church as a national institution or vice versa. Also, due to the living in a different environment and a large number of mixed marriages, it is possible that among those who feel like Serbs there are some who confess Catholicism or Protestantism.

One of the problems stressed out repeatedly by the informants in Ljubljana is that the home state does not provide systematic and calculated interest/plan for its minorities in neighboring countries, that is, towards the Serbs in Slovenia. Another issue is that almost one third of the Bosnian Serbs belong to this group and it is still not clear whether Serbia is their home land or not.

Finally, this particular minority group has managed to achieve considerable success in levels of inner consolidation and institutionalized development thanks to the effort of certain number of people, however many problems remain, in work conception and results alike. In addition to some very liberal solutions regarding citizens' rights protection as well as integration of immigrants into corpus of the Slovenian citizens, there is still a lack of formal acknowledgment of the status of national minority for several groups, including the Serbs in Slovenia. Such granted status would allow an affirmation within the public sphere, supported by the state, as well as more systematical possibilities of maintaining one's own cultural particulars. Integration of immigrants and their descendants is not a problem unique to the Slovenian state; many other countries, including those in EU, still haven't solved these problems or offered appropriate solutions. This further point out to the complexity of inter-ethnic relations in the contemporary world, which are being solved or unsolved with more or less success by even "older" democracies, new states with intertwine issues in cultural and political powers, as well as many other questions. These and other issues offer a possibility of cultural pluralism and multiculturalism in practice as proclaimed modern values. It appears thus that some of the practical solutions contain valuable solutions tested in practice and experience, while on the

other hand, perhaps every society should be regarded as a case for itself, where unique solutions would work much better toward the road of subtle multi-ethnicity.

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Младена Прелић

Срби у Словенији као новодобна мањина

Кључне речи:

Срби у Словенији, миграције, мигранти, етничке мањине, категоризација етничких група, статус етничких група

Са распадом претходне заједничке државе (Југославије) и формирањем нових независних држава на њеном простору, ранији сународници и конститутивни народи нашли су се у новим улогама: једни постају већина, а други мањине, чији статус тек треба да се афирмише и званично потврди у јавној сфери. Словенија, као земља са, између осталог, великим бројем имиграната из бивше Југославије, нашла се пред изазовом потврђивања етничког плурализма у својим оквирима, и налажења одговарајућег места за *нове* или *новодобне мањине* – што је најчешћи назив за етничке групе које формирају грађани бивше заједничке државе, међу којима су Срби данас најбројнији – а саме те мањине налазе се пред изазовом конституисања у заједницу, оснивања сопствених удружења, односно формулисања свог идентитета и његове јавне афирмације у новом контексту. У раду се говори о овим још увек незавршеним процесима на примеру српске етничке групе.