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## **SOME ASPECTS OF WAR AND MIGRATION (THE CROATIAN CASE)**

It would be an understatement to say that the topic of “conflict and migration” is complex. This theme is vast, and although it can be somewhat narrowed by defining “conflict” as primarily military or politically induced conflict, and migration, for our purposes, as ethnic migration, the number of historical cases entering into this category is still enormous. In fact, typical examples have been recorded since the dawn of history. We could, of course, arbitrarily limit the picture and concentrate only on the modern era, or only on recent events. Yet despite the specificities of the modern era, the mechanisms underlying military conflicts and ethnic migration are often very archaic. Likewise the symbolism, both defensive and aggressive, that is invoked in such conflicts is recurrently derived from past ages, although recent events and modern social, economic and political concepts are habitually woven into such a tapestry. Some modernists would assume that these recent components are the true or perhaps only causes of present-day conflicts, and that older historical “levels” are simply instrumentalised to provide long-term justifications for these causes. There is also a school of thought that argues that ethnic or national identity per se is an opportunistic construct, continuously reinvented to affirm the interests of current social groups, or political leaders. The problem with such a view is that it does not explain the continuity of traditions and overemphasises the role of subjective leadership. The break-up of former Yugoslavia seems to confirm the opposite. The subjective interests of individual groups or leaders (regardless of how we evaluate them in the long-run, positively or negatively) can be advanced *if and only if* they were articulated in conformity with the real or perceived needs of already existing ethnic or national identities.

It is important to take this into consideration when attempting to understand and resolve ethnic and national conflicts. Yet continuity is also subtle, often paradoxical, and by its very nature never superficial. Yugoslavia did not collapse due to “ancient hatreds”, according to simple schemes sometimes repeated in various foreign media. Yugoslavia could survive only as long as its constituent South Slavic peoples (and later other minorities) felt that the country preserved and protected their various individual values and identities that had been developed and accepted long before the creation of the first Yugoslav state. In fact, if Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had not already consolidated their own specific ethnic or national identities, the first Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, renamed Yugoslavia in 1929, would never have been formed. And for this very reason, whenever the Yugoslav political leadership attempted to erase these identities and engineer a uniform nation “for above”, the country tended to weaken, leading to immanent ethnonational conflict. This policy of so-called integral Yugoslavism, formally Yugoslav in name but Serbian in content (due to its power structure and relative demographic dominance), was one of the main reasons why the Kingdom of Yugoslavia collapsed in just a few days, after being attacked by Axis forces in April 1941. A partial reversal of this policy in 1939, when the Banovina of Croatia had been set up as an autonomous entity within the kingdom, had come too late to prevent disintegration.

The Independent State of Croatia, abbreviated in Croatian as NDH (*Nezavisna Država Hrvatska*), was established on April 10th 1941 by Croat nationalists, the Ustasha, with the aide of Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy. This political formation received mixed support: the basic concept of a Croatian state was received by many Croats with enthusiasm, however large territorial concessions to Fascist Italy and the nature of the Ustasha regime, which passed racial laws and committed acts of genocide against Jews and Roma, together with mass reprisals and executions of ethnic Serbs and others, also quickly alienated many Croats. Furthermore, in certain areas of NDH (present-day Croatia and Bosnia), insurgent Serb militia, the Chetniks, conducted massacres of Croats and Bosnian Muslims. Indeed, reprisals, murders and forced displacements of members of various ethnic groups were perpetuated by virtually all foreign and local forces after the fall of the first Yugoslavia. And such a situation ultimately brought many people, of various nationalities, into the Anti-Fascist movement led by Tito's Partisans, and in effect by the Communist Party.

Tito and his supporters were well aware of the reasons for the downfall of the previous Yugoslav state. Therefore, during the second session of the Anti-Fascist Council of National Liberation of Yugoslavia (in the last week of November 1943) they proclaimed that the new Yugoslav state would be federation of national republics, established on the principle of self-determination of the South Slavic peoples.

The victory of the Partisans in 1945 led to the creation of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, with six constituent socialist republics. Yet the federal model was clearly copied from the Soviet Union: the state was dominated by the Communist Party, and in the first post-war years its "methodology" was very similar to Soviet practices during the Stalinist era. Moreover, right after their victory, the Partisans conducted summary actions against various "enemies of the people". These included mass executions and "death marches" of Ustasha forces and members of the regular NDH army, many of whom had fled to South Austria together with family members, and also the *foibe* massacres that occurred in Istria and the Slovene littoral after the arrival of the Partisans.<sup>1</sup> The latter contributed to creating an atmosphere of fear and overall insecurity in Istria and in other areas united with Yugoslavia that had been parts of Italia during the interwar period. The peace treaty signed with Italy in 1947 later provided a legal framework by which residents of these areas could "opt" for Italian citizenship and immigrate to Italy. Most ethnic Italians, as well as many local Croats and Slovenes, eventually emigrated. And in the meantime, practically the entire ethnic German population, collectively accused of collaboration with the Nazi forces, had fled or had been expelled from areas of the state, in which Germans had lived since at least the 18th century. Serbs and Croats from agriculturally poor mountain regions were resettled on the fertile lands in Eastern Croatia (Slavonia) and in Vojvodina from which the Germans had been expelled.

So far I have not mentioned statistics in regard to the victims of genocide, of forced expulsions, etc., mainly because these figures have been a political issue and have been manipulated from the start. Right after the war the numbers were intentionally inflated to 1.700.000 to increase the amount of war reparations demanded by Yugoslavia from Germany and other defeated Axis countries. However, a more realistic evaluation by Bogoljub Kočović, a Bosnian Serb statistician living in America, set this number to 1,014,000, which was almost identical to the estimate given by the Croatian UN expert Vladimir Žerjavić, i.e. 1,027,000. Furthermore, Kočović concluded that 487,000 of this number were ethnic Serbs, 207,000 Croats and 86,000 Bosnian Muslims. Žerjavić gave a higher estimate for Serbs, 530,000, a slightly lower estimate for Croats, 192,000, and a higher estimate for Muslims, 103,000. Taking into consideration only the territory of NDH, Bogović estimated Serb deaths at 370.000.<sup>2</sup> Žerjavić calculated this number to be 335,000, i.e. 13,000 killed abroad and 322,000 in the country, of which 125.000 had been combatant deaths and 197,000 civilians' deaths (78,000 killed by the

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<sup>1</sup> The Italian term *foibe* refers to deep pits in the carst area.

<sup>2</sup> See Goran Nikolić, „Istina i pomirenje na ex-Yu prostorima“, [http://www.nspm.org.yu/Debate/2006\\_POM\\_nikolic\\_zrtve111.htm](http://www.nspm.org.yu/Debate/2006_POM_nikolic_zrtve111.htm)

Ustasha, 45.000 killed by Germans, 15,000 killed by Italians, 25,000 victims of typhoid and 34,000 killed in clashes between the Ustasha, Chetniks and Partisans)<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say there were also much exaggerated estimates of the number of victims of Partisan (Communist) actions in the aftermath of the Second World War. Some commentaries arrived at virtually 300.000 Croats, Bosnian Muslims and other members of defeated armies, together with non-combatants, killed in South Austria, in neighbouring Slovenia or during the “death marches”. Žerjavić, however, placed the total number between 45.000 and 55.000. Similarly figures given regarding persons killed by the Partisans during the foibe massacres and in other situations in the areas acquired from Italy, ranged from 2,000 to over 10,000. In 2000, one joint Slovene-Italian report, which was aimed at overcoming historical antagonisms, decided to use the formulation “hundreds of summary executions” in regard to this matter.<sup>4</sup> Yet whatever the exact number of victims, the insecure atmosphere created, as I mentioned, along with other factors, motivated a mass exodus to Italy. Figures given by Italian authors sometimes mention as many as 350,000 Italian exiles, whereas Croatian, Slovenian and other Italian calculations indicate about 250,000 “optants” in the entire period until 1961. And as it seems, about a third of this outflow was made up of ethnic Croats and Slovenes.

The final example of ethnic reprisals conducted by Partisan and Yugoslav authorities after the Second War War pertains to the expulsion of the German minority. In this case, the statistics range from 200,000 to 550,000, with the low figure given by the Centre Against Expulsions in Wiesbaden, based on registered cases for the period 1944 to 1948.<sup>5</sup> However, it should be said that a large proportion of the ethnic German population was evacuated to Germany and Austria prior to the Partisan victory, so that by the end of 1944 only 195.000 Germans remained in the new Yugoslav state. Of this number, 170,000 were placed in concentration camps, where due to illness and poor living conditions, about 60,000 perished. Moreover, the laws of the new regime not only excluded the possible of return of Germans who had already left, but also authorised the confiscation of their lands. In this way, a total of 97.720 farms, encompassing 637.939 hectares were confiscated (5,703 farms in Slovenia, 20.457 in Croatia, 3.523 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 68,035 in Vojvodina and one in the rest of Serbia).<sup>6</sup> In combination with other factors, such a destruction of the economic basis of the German minority, which had previously been mainly rural, essentially forced most of the remaining Germans to emigrate.<sup>7</sup>

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What I have said so far, I believe, is relevant to understanding the most recent experiences of ethnic conflict and migration that occurred during the final dissolution of Yugoslavia, and more precisely during the war in Croatia.

First of all, models of ethnic terrorism and ethnic cleansing in the South Slavic area had been extensively *implemented* and even politically *justified* during WWII and during the post-war years. Yet this was not the result of “ancient hatreds”, but rather the result of state engineering projects that had attempted to deny existing identities, and that had been modelled according to the prevalent totalitarian methods of the day: Nazi-Fascist and later Stalinist methods. Actually, as early as 1937, Vasa Čubrilović (1897–1990) made this logic clear, in a lecture to the Serb Cultural Club in Belgrade, in which he encouraged the expulsion of Albanians from the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. In his words: “If Germany can make tens of thou-

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<sup>3</sup> See Vladimir Žerjavić, „Yugoslavia – Manipulations with the Number of Second World War Victims“, <http://www.hic.hr/books/manipulations/index.htm>

<sup>4</sup> See „Slovene-Italian relations 1880-1956“, <http://www.kozina.com/premik/poreng4.htm>

<sup>5</sup> See *Zentrum gegen Vertreibungen*, <http://www.z-g-v.de/aktuelles/?id=59>

<sup>6</sup> Vladimir Geiger, „Folksdojčeri i nametanje kolektivne krivice“, *Fenster – Poverenje, pomirenje, poštenje*, Sremski Karlovci, May 2003, p. 7.

<sup>7</sup> As an illustration, the number of ethnic Germans decreased in the Serbian autonomous region of Vojvodina from 465,920 in 1941 to only 31,821 in the 1948 census.

sands of Jews emigrate, [and] Russia move millions from one end of the continent to another, there won't be a world war because of a few hundred thousand Albanian emigrants".<sup>8</sup> It might be added that Čubrilović had been a participant in the assassination of Franz Ferdinand in 1914 and eventually became a minister in Tito's government as well as a respected scholar. Later, at the beginning of war (in December 1941), the Chetnik ideologist Stevan Moljević (1883–1946) wrote to his colleague Dragiša Vasić (1885–1945), emphasizing that it is necessary to occupy as much territory as possible and "cleanse" it before anyone notices. The strategy of ethnic cleansing cannot be more obvious than in this statement, as well as in Čubrilović's implication that no one will really care, once it is done.

The second point of relevance is that the experiences of the Second World War and the manipulation of numbers of victims was used extensively to mobilise masses during the dissolution of Yugoslavia and during the post-Yugoslav wars. Prior to the break-up of Yugoslavia, the Serb nationalist movement had inflated the figures of Serbs murdered by the Ustasha to over 700.000, even to over a million, and had characterised Croats as a genocidal people by nature. This spread fear among ethnic Serbs towards any independent Croatian state.

Finally, among all the peoples in question there were numerous cases of strong opposition to the ethnic terrorism conducted by their own groups against members of other ethnic groups. Neighbours also actively protected neighbours belonging to other nationalities. This, together with the proclaimed equity of peoples in the future state, helped stimulate the growth of Tito's Partisan movement. Yet, as I have said, the regime that triumphed in 1945 would also conduct actions of terrorism and ethnic cleansing.

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Although the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia began as a typical Communist state, the political system gradually shifted from the original Stalinist model, and although the state never became democratic until the very eve of its break-up, it seemed to function and to assure a higher standard of living for its peoples. Furthermore, in addition to Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Bosnian Muslims (Bosniaks), Macedonians and Montenegrins were also recognised as constitutive peoples. Greater autonomy was likewise given to ethnic minorities, especially to Albanians in Kosovo and Hungarians in Vojvodina. Nevertheless, if we were to analyse the history of the Socialist Yugoslavia, we would note that serious crises occurred at regular intervals, about every five or so years. Basically two key factors held the country together: 1) the hegemony of the Communist Party, renamed in 1952 the League of Communists, and 2) the specific position that Yugoslavia had assumed in the International community after Tito's break with Stalin in 1948. The second factor had two further aspects: from the outside, Yugoslavia's international position, eventually articulated in the non-aligned movement, seemed to be useful during the Cold War both to the United States and to the Soviet Union; from the inside, the image of the Cold War and of external enemies from both the East and West helped sustain the image that Yugoslavia was necessary for the protection of its constituent peoples. Thus, once the League of Yugoslav Communists fell apart in 1990, leading the way to the first democratic elections in 1991, and once the Cold War ended, Yugoslavia's specific reason for existing disappeared. This was compounded by the fact that the country had experienced almost a decade of economic crisis after Tito's death. Dissolution was to be expected, and in itself did not have to imply anything negative. If a peaceful disbanding could have been achieved, as in the case of Czechoslovakia, one could have imagined even an improvement of relations between former Yugoslav republics, instead of the terrible post-Yugoslav wars that actually occurred.

It is possible to identify various reasons, among all the country's peoples and ethnicities that contributed to the violent end of Yugoslavia. Nevertheless, the root cause was certainly the intense and aggressive Greater Serbian movement, instigated by Slobodan Milošević, who rose to power at the moment when the country's economic and political system was very

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<sup>8</sup> Bože Čović (ed). *Izvori velikosrpske agresije*. Zagreb: August Cesarec – Školska knjiga, 1991, p. 112.



close to collapse. As inflation rates rose to the thousands, Milošević consolidated his position as the leader of the Serbs, at first making use of the animosity between Serbs and Albanians in Kosovo. In 1988, now as president of Serbia, he launched the populist anti-bureaucratic revolution, which provoked the fall of the local governments of Vojvodina and Montenegro. This was followed in 1989 by amendments to the Serbian constitution, which greatly diminished the autonomy of Vojvodina and Kosovo and made their representatives on federal levels mere puppets of Serbia. At the same time, the weak and increasingly incompetent federal government could not find solutions for the general deterioration of the economy.<sup>9</sup>

In the following few years, Milošević's strategy was to insist on greater centralisation in Yugoslavia and on greater power for Serbia, which in fact meant a return to the type of system that had existed in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, i.e. Yugoslav in name and Serb in content. In addition to this, Milošević found support not only among Greater Serb nationalists, but also among Communist hard-liners, especially in the army, who were naturally attracted to the vision of centralism, and were also opposed to the prospect of introducing a multiparty democratic system in Yugoslavia. The fact that Serbs and Montenegrins were disproportionately represented in the higher ranks of the Yugoslav People's Army, further strengthened this alliance between extreme nationalists and Communists.

All these transformations occurred step by step. Milošević managed to capture and animate Serb national feelings, although it is debateable whether or not he was ever a true Serb nationalist. It is more likely that he instrumentalised Serb frustrations and pretensions to his own ends. Yet this instrumentalisation liberated many pent-up feelings. Overt Chetnik groups began to appear, and non-Serbs sensed danger. In January 1990 during the 14th Congress of the League of Communists, Milošević attempted to force through his solutions to the ongoing crisis of the Yugoslav state, which led to a walk-out first by the Slovenian and then by the Croatian Communists. Three months afterwards Slovenia held the first multiparty elections in former Yugoslavia. At the end of the same year (26.12.1990), Slovenia held a referendum which confirmed the country's intent to leave Yugoslavia. This progression was repeated shortly in Croatia: in May 1990 the first multiparty elections were held, with a victory by Franjo Tuđman's Croatian Democratic Union, and in May 19th 1991 a referendum was held with similar results as the referendum in Slovenia. On June 25th 1991, both Slovenia and Croatia declared their independence from Yugoslavia.

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The next day I had to drive to Ljubljana, for some consultations at Ljubljana University. When I left Zagreb and arrived at the Slovenia border, the Slovene flag was already flying and guards were positioned at the border. When I was in Ljubljana, Yugoslav warplanes began to fly low flights over the city, so I decided to rush back to Zagreb. As I drove home I could see soldiers of the Slovenian Territorial Defence positioning themselves in almost all the forests along the road. The next day the Slovenian war broke out. It ended in only ten days, with a Slovene victory, since regime in Belgrade obviously was ready to let Slovenia leave. The war was not however, an "operetta war" as it was often sarcastically labelled after its competition, especially in comparison to the wars in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina that followed. While it lasted it was genuine, and there were real victims. However the decision to "let Slovenia go", indicated something else. The strategy to preserve all of Tito's Yugoslavia had given way to a contingency plan. Slovenia was small; it did not have a long sea coast and the Serb minority in the country was not substantial (the Serb community in Slovenia was basically made up of recent economic immigrants). This was not the case in Croatia, or in Bosnia

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<sup>9</sup> On March 16<sup>th</sup> 1989, the prime minister, Branko Mikulić, resigned his post, and on June 28<sup>th</sup>, at Gazimestan on Kosovo, Milošević made his famous speech, commemorating the 600<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Kosovo. Although the words of the speech spoke also of unity, brotherhood and equity among the Yugoslav peoples, it generally emphasized Serbia's role and Serb unity. Therefore it is generally believed that Gazimestan marked a turning point in the development of the recent Greater Serbian movement.

and Herzegovina. And so the contingency plan implied moving the focus to Serb minorities in Croatia and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

It is difficult to determine exactly when the war in Croatia began. Certain leaders of the Serb ethnic minority in Croatia had proclaimed the “Serb Autonomous Region of Krajina” as early as October 1990, even before the Croatian referendum on independence. This had led to conflicts with Croatia’s regular police forces. During one such incident at Plitvice Lakes on Easter Sunday 1991 (March 28th 1991), a Croatian policeman was killed. This person (Josip Jović, 1969–1991) is generally considered the first Croatian casualty of the Independence War. By this time, militant members of the Serb minority in Croatia, with increasing support from the Yugoslav army, begun to organise their insurrection against the newly elected Croatian government. Violent incidents between Croat groups and the Yugoslav army increased, especially during the Slovenian war, yet the Croatian government, headed by president Franjo Tuđman, was well aware that Croatia could not yet respond with full force.

Militant Serb leaders began to regularly equate Croats with Ustasha, and to provoke an atmosphere of fear among local Serbs in Croatia. Memories of Ustasha crimes during World War II were systematically repeated, as justifications for the Serb insurrection and for refusal to accept any independent Croatia. And once Croatia’s independence was declared, the insurgents responded by proclaiming their own “Republic of Serb Krajina”. This name was in itself a historical fiction, since nothing known as “Serb Krajina” had ever existed. Krajina was a general term referring to the military border between the Kingdom of Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia (within the Habsburg Monarchy), and the Ottoman Turks. This area had never been exclusively Serb ethnically, and it had never been Serb politically.

In the course of events, the Yugoslav Army was rapidly becoming a Serb army, due to the defection of soldiers of other nationalities, and Chetnik irregulars, expressly claiming to be fighting for Great Serbia, were often seen next to Yugoslav soldiers. “Serb Krajina” extended itself over a large part of Croatia’s territory, including much of the Dalmatian hinterland and areas in the Lika, Kordun and Banovina regions, as well as in Western and Eastern Slavonia. A series of sporadic massacres of Croats in these areas occurred, resulting in mass refugee flows to government-held parts of Croatia. The city of Vukovar, on the Danube River, held out against the Yugoslav Army and Serb irregulars from over a hundred days, but finally fell in November 1991. The images of refugees fleeing from these areas left an intense impression on the Croatian public, especially after it was revealed that the Yugoslav Army and Serb irregulars had committed hideous massacres in Vukovar. In the meantime, the Yugoslav Army and the Montenegrin territorial forces began a wholesale attack on the historical city of Dubrovnik, in the extreme South of Croatia.

All this occurred in the period when Croatia was not yet internationally recognised as an independent country. However in January 1992 Croatia and Slovenia were recognised by all member states of the European Union (by Iceland, the Vatican and San Marino even earlier); in February they were recognised by Russia and in April by the United States. In the meantime Bosnia and Herzegovina had also held a referendum on independence (in October 1991), and was recognised by the United States on the same day that the US recognised Croatia.

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It would be difficult to summarise all the frustrations and fears of the majority Croatian population during Liberation war. One could have been either a nationalist or not a nationalist, whatever the case, but the rational response was to identify what force was initiating the aggression – and one’s civil duty, as the bottom line, would have been to help, as much as possible, to stop the aggression.

In the period from the international recognition of Croatia in early 1992 to the victorious operations of 1995, Croatia managed to consolidate its resources and to more or less function, yet it was still difficult to live and “breathe” normally. The country was fragmented and in some parts almost split in half by the loss of control of areas occupied by the insurgent Serbs.

The UN Protection forces (UNPROFOR), established in February 1992, and only consolidated these Serb conquests. Generally this period was marked by a continuous series of negotiated ceasefires and violations of ceasefires. In fact, we could characterise the situation as a type of continuous “trench war”,

The tide changed in 1995. First on May 1st 1995, the Croatian Army conducted operation “Flash”, which very quickly, with minimal casualties, ended the Serb insurgent occupation of Western Slavonia. This was followed in August 1995 by the much more extensive operation “Storm”, which in only a few days totally eliminated all Serb insurgent formations in Croatia, except in the region of Eastern Slavonia and Western Sirmium. This region was peacefully reintegrated into Croatia, with the help of the UN, in 1998.

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Now we finally come to the question of war migrants – and the possibly relevance of the Croatia situation to other situations.

As the figures indicate, in the first years of the war in Croatia, the dominant type of migration provoked by armed conflicts were refugee flows of people, mainly ethnic Croats, who had either fled from war zones or had fled or had been directly expelled from Serb occupied areas. In 1991 about 550,000 such persons had taken refuge in government-controlled parts of Croatia. These persons were collectively denoted as *prognanici* (literally expellees) in official Croatian terminology. We will refer to them here as *internal* Croatian refugees or displaced persons. Furthermore, in the same year, about 148,000 Croatian citizens, once again mainly ethnic Croats fleeing from war zones, or expelled from the Serb occupied areas, found shelter in other countries of Europe, mostly in Germany, Austria, Slovenia and Hungary. These persons can be designated as *external* Croatian refugees.

In 1992 officially 289,295 *internal* Croatian refugees and displaced persons returned to their homes through organised return programmes. This rather large group, for the most part, consisted of persons who had fled from war zones in the initial phase of the war, when it was difficult to foresee how far the Serb expansion would spread, or in other words when the dimensions of potential danger were not yet known. By 1992 the situation was more stable, since Croatian government forces had by then set up a stronger line of defence – and the international recognition of Croatia had also stabilised Croatia’s position. However, such a large scale return did not occur in 1992 among Croatian *external* refugees. The very fact that these people sought refuge farther a field, i.e. in other countries, indicates that they did not have the same support mechanisms in Croatia (including personal networks of relatives and friends) as the internal refugees had, and in general that their situation was more precarious.

Also in 1992, together with the return of some internal and external refugees, Croatia began to receive large numbers of refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina (BH) and from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (FRY). The latter rump Yugoslav state included only the republics of Serbia and Montenegro. Most refugees from BH were Croats and Bosnian Muslims, namely Bosniaks, whereas most refugees from the FRY were ethnic Croats from the Serbian provinces of Vojvodina and Kosovo, and to a lesser extent from the Bay of Kotor region in Montenegro. It should be remembered that the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina became in this year (1992), and that the situation in Serbia and Montenegro had become increasingly difficult for ethnic Croats. According to estimates, about 458,000 refugees from BH and the FRY found refuge in Croatia in 1992 (the number of such refugees officially registered in 1992 was 402.768). The majority came from Bosnia and Herzegovina. The total number of refugees from the FRY in the war period (1992–1998) was about 40,000, of which 30,000 came from Vojvodina, 6,500 from Kosovo, and 3,500 from Montenegro.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Croats in Kosovo were mainly members of an isolated ethnic minority, known as Janjevci, that had lived in the area around the towns of Janjevo and Letnica since the 14th century. In 1991 there were 8.062 Janjevci in Kosovo, and by 1998 only 1,300 remained. This remaining population was further reduced during the Kosovo war

If we analyse the dynamics of the numbers of refugees between 1991 and 1998, we can calculate that in this period 511,238 Croatian internal refugees, or 82.8% of the total number, eventually returned to their homes. In the same period about 106,000 external Croatian refugees returned, or about 71.6% of their number. Of the refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from Serbia and Montenegro, 319,000 returned home, i.e. 79.3%. The Croatian military actions “Flash” and “Storm” in 1995 seem to have had a more immediate effect on the return of Croatian *external* refugees, probably because the return of Croatian *internal* refugees was a continuously organised process. The greatest reduction in the number of refugees in Croatia from the neighbouring countries (BH and the FRY) occurred in 1993. That year had been dominated by the conflict between former allies in BH, Bosnian Croats and Bosnian Muslims (= Bosniaks), which certainly effected refugee flows.

The following tables illustrate the dynamics in the period 1991 to 1998 (i.e. from the beginning of the war in Croatia to the final liberation/reintegration of the country).

Table 1: *The Number of Internal Refugees in the Republic of Croatia and their organised return*

Year	Number of internal refugee sin the Republic of Croatia	Organized return of refugees (numbers)	Index 1991=100
1991	550,000	-	100.0
1992	260,705	289,295	47.4
1993	254,791	34,504	46.3
1994	196,870	57,921	35.8
1995	210,592	13,722	38.3
1996	167,609	42,938	30.5
1997	117,721	49,888	21.4
1998	94,796	22,925	17.2
<i>Total</i>		511,238	

Source: *Government Office for Refugees, Zagreb, 1998,*

Table 2: *The Number of External Refugees from the Republic of Croatia and their Return*

Year	External Refugees from the Republic of Croatia	Returns of External Refugees from the Republic of Croatia	Index 1991=100
1991	148,000	-	100.0

(1996–1999), so that today there are only about 350 Janjevci left in Kosovo. The exodus from Montenegro, primarily from the Bay of Kotor region (Boka kotorska), was less evident, since the number of Croats had been falling throughout the 20th century. Croats (Catholics) had made up about 70% of the population of the Kotor region in 1910, whereas by 1991 they made up 8% of the population and in 2003 7.6% (831 persons in Herceg-Novi, 1,842 in the town of Kotor and 2,761 in Tivat). In Vojvodina the number of Croats diminished in just two decades from 119,157 or 5.4% in 1981, to 56,546 or 2.8% in 2002, with another 19,766 (0.97%) registered as Bunjevci. In 1948 the first Yugoslav census after WWII recorded 134,232 Croats in Vojvodina, which made up 8.1% of the provinces population, and in 1961 this number had been as high as 145,341, although the percentage of Croats in the province's population was slightly lower (7.8%).



1992	136,000	12,000	91.9
1993	112,000	24,000	75.7
1994	98,000	14,000	66.2
1995	64,000	34,000	43.2
1996	58,000	6,000	39.2
1997	49,000	9,000	33.1
1998	42,000	7,000	28.4
<i>Total</i>		106,000	

Source: *Government Office for Refugees, Zagreb, 1998*

Table 3: *Refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and from the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and their Return*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Registered Refugees from BH and the FRY in the Republic of Croatia</i>	<i>Registered and estimated refugees from BH and FRY in the Republic of Croatia</i>	<i>Reduction of the Number</i>	<i>Index 1991=100</i>
1991	-	-	-	-
1992	402,768	458,000	-	100.0
1993	272,859	312,000	146,000	68.1
1994	212,056	272,000	40,000	59.4
1995	188,672	241,000	31,000	52.6
1996	184,545	205,000	36,000	44.8
1997	106,750	147,000	58,000	32.1
1998	37,400	139,000	8,000	30.3
<i>Total</i>			319,000	

Source: *Government Office for Refugees, Zagreb, 1998*

Turning now to the problem of refugees from the “Serb side” during the war in Croatia, if we examine the dynamics of the number of persons or displaced persons who left the previously Serb-held parts of Croatia, we can immediately notice a sharp increase in 1995, following the Croatian military operations “Flash” and “Storm”. According to official Croatian statistics, 130,000 persons, mainly ethnic Serbs, left Croatia in 1995. However, slightly over a half of the total number of the 283,000 refugees from the previously Serb-held areas in Croatia left during other periods: some at the start of the war, some in 1992 (after the international recognition of Croatia), etc. This can be seen in Table 4. There was also a difference in the way the Serb exodus took place, in comparison to earlier flights of refugees and displaced persons. The Serb exodus in 1995 seems to have been well prepared in advance, as could be seen in the way in which it was conducted. After the fall of Vukovar in November 1991 people fled car-

rying just essential belongings in suitcases or plastic bags, whereas the Serb exodus in 1995 involved motorised columns of tractors, wagons and trucks.

Table 4: *Dynamics of Departing from the Republic of Croatia by persons of Serb Nationality (Ethnicity)*

<i>Year</i>	<i>Persons who left the Republic of Croatia</i>	<i>Increase in the number of displaced persons</i>
1991	26,000	26,000
1992	93,000	67,000
1993	117,000	24,000
1994	127,000	10,000
1995	135,000	8,000
1996	265,000	130,000
1997	272,000	7,000
1998	283,000	11,000
<i>Total</i>		283,000

Source: *Government Office for Refugees, Zagreb, 1998,*

Finally, if we look at the overall situation as it was in 1998, at the end of the war, at that moment there were still: 1) 94,796 internal Croatian refugees or displaced persons, 2) 43,000 *external* Croatian refugees (living abroad), 3) 139,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina and the FRY, and finally 4) 250,000 refugees and displaced persons from Croatia in the FRY and in the Serb entity of Bosnia and Herzegovina (i.e. *Republika Srpska*). The fourth group pertains mainly to ethnic Serb refugees and displaced persons who had departed from areas previously occupied by Serb forces.

As to return policies, there is little need to explain efforts made by the Croatian government to stimulate the return of Croat refugees to their homes, as well as of others who had been “on the Croatian side” during the war. These efforts are obvious. However, the Croatian government has also accepted the general principle of upholding the right of return of all war migrants (if they so wish), regardless of their national/ethnic or other affiliation, and not pending on any conditions of reciprocity with neighbouring states (the FRY – i.e. Serbia and Montenegro, and BH). Nevertheless, cooperation with neighbouring states was eventually initiated in regard to this issue. Most notably, on January 31st 2005 the governments of Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro (former SRY<sup>11</sup>) and Bosnia and Herzegovina signed the Sarajevo Declaration, by which these three countries resolved to answer all the remaining problems in regard to refugees by the end of 2006.

The most recent available statistics, published by the Croatian Ministry of the Sea, Transport, Tourism and Development in January 2007, show that from 1995 the total number of refugees and displaced persons that had returned to their homes amounted to 342.897. Of this total 219,255 were internal refugees mainly ethnic Croats (64%), and 123,642 were ethnic Serbs (36%). Of the later number 90,909 returned to Croatia from the Serbia and Montenegro,

<sup>11</sup> The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (or rump Yugoslavia) was reconstructed into the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003. This union lasted until the middle of 2006, when Montenegro (after a referendum on May 21st 2006) declared its independence (June 3rd 2006).

9,148 from Bosnia and Herzegovina and 23,585 from the region of Eastern Slavonia and Western Sirmium that had been peacefully reintegrated into Croatia in 1998. Furthermore refugees in Serbia and Montenegro submitted 11,598 applications to return.

It should also be added that in some areas previously depopulated due to war migrations, immigrants from Bosnia and Herzegovina had been settled after the departure of ethnic Serbs, which later complicated the situation in regard to both Croat and Serb returnees. The following data, derived from the Population Census of 2001, illustrates the situations in four areas of Croatia that had been controlled by insurgent Serb forces during the war:

	<i>Western Slavonia</i>	<i>Eastern Slavonia</i>
Croat returnees	10,737	83,445
Serb returnees	8,198	7,081
Immigrants from B-H	34,197	22,475
TOTAL	53,132	113,001

	<i>Banovina</i>	<i>Dalmatia</i>
Croat returnees	32,764	59,923
Serb returnees	31,731	37,268
Immigrants from B-H	14,845	17,466
TOTAL	79,340	114,657

\* \* \*

There can be no question of the fact that the war altered the national/ethnic structure of Croatia's population by significantly reducing the size of the Serb minority, and its share in the total population. In the 1991 Population Census, just prior to the war, Croats accounted for 78.1% of Croatia's population, and Serbs 12.2%.<sup>12</sup> In the 2001 Population Census, conducted several years after the war, Croats accounted for 89.6% of the population and Serbs for only 4.5% (none of the other 20 or so national/ethnic groups in Croatia made up more than 0.5% of the country's population). A large part of this change was the result of the exodus of Serbs from Croatia, after the fall of the self-proclaimed "Serb Krajina". A smaller part of the change should be attributed to the immigration of Croats to Croatia from Bosnia and Herzegovina, and from the FRY (i.e. Serbia and Montenegro).

However, it should be noted that although the shift in Croatia's national/ethnic structure was significant, Croats had been in a clear majority position throughout (recent) history, and even a hypothetical full return of all Serb refugees would not change this situation.<sup>13</sup> This is

<sup>12</sup> There had been changes during the 20th century, but Croats had always made up over 70% of Croatia's population. The greatest shift occurred between the 1931 and the 1948 census, certainly due to NDH actions towards the Serb minority, which fell from 18.5% of the population to 14.38%, yet also due to the exodus of the Germans, who had made up 2.9% of the population in 1931 and only 0.3% in 1948. In 1948 Croats made up 78.7% of the population and Serbs 14.38%. Various reasons led to the gradual reduction of the Serb minority: for example the organised resettlement of Croatian Serbs on the previous lands of Germans in Vojvodina, a tendency to identify more intimately with the Yugoslav state and declare themselves generally as "Yugoslavs", especially in the interval between the 1971 and 1981 censuses (when the proportion of "Yugoslavs" rose from 1.9% to 8.2%, and the proportion of Serbs fell from 14.2% to 11.6%, although this tendency also effected other ethnic groups), etc.

<sup>13</sup> Although this process was intensified during the various post-Yugoslav wars, it had been a long-term tendency. For instance, in Bosnia and Herzegovina the percentage of Croats fell in about half a century from 23% (1953) to an estimated 14.3% (2000), (see note 10 for Kosovo, Montenegro and Vojvodina). Migration to Croatia seems to have been the main reason for this development, although allowances must be made for shifts in

import to realise, since it means that the return of Serb refugees does not threaten the general national character of the Republic of Croatia.

So far, as we have seen, slightly over a third of the Serb refugees and displaced persons from Croatia have returned to their homes, according to official statistics. It has been suggested, nevertheless, that a large proportion of the officially registered Serb returnees did not have genuine plans to return, but rather registered as returnees simply to solve certain legal or property issues, receive new documents, visit relatives, etc.<sup>14</sup> In fact, A recent UN study on the *sustainability of return* concluded that as much of 44% to 50% of the registered returnees did not permanently reside in Croatia, but rather remained in the countries where they found refuge (generally in Serbia).<sup>15</sup> Nevertheless, the same study concluded that every other returnee occasionally visits his or her home.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, the demographic structure of the Serb returnee population has been quite specific. The average age of returnees has been 51, compared to the overall average age of 39 in Croatia. Every fourth returnee was between 65 and 74 years of age, and 12% over 75 years of age. Although certain methodological factor may contribute to slight deformation in this statistical data (for example young children born after return are not registered as part of the returnee population), the overall impression is of a relatively old age structure. Younger and better educated refugees probably had more opportunities to find work and integrate in the social setting in which they sought refuge, whereas considerations such as previously earned pensions would have been important to older returnees.<sup>17</sup>

Various reasons objectively or subjectively discouraged return migration, or more precisely permanent return migration. In this respect, two major reasons or groups of reasons appear most important.

First, except for areas in the region of Slavonia, many destinations of return were poorly developed economically even before the war. The devastations of the war – including several years of dubious government by the insurgent forces during the war, followed by the destruction of abandoned Serb property after the 1995 exodus – made the situation even worse. The Croatian government provided financial aid for the reconstruction of destroyed homes, up to 215,000 kuna (circa 28,000–30,000 €) for the most damaged category, and by now most homes have been repaired.<sup>18</sup> Yet a serious problem still remains in regard to so-called “social housing” (the transformation of the previous socialist system of housing). People that had lived in the territory of the self-proclaimed “Serb Krajina” missed the chance to purchase the “socially owned” flats in which they had lived, under the same favourable conditions as people in the rest of Croatia, since this specific privatization process had been completed in the rest of Croatia many years ago.

The economic situation in return areas is, all in all, far from ideal, and most returnees explicitly see this as the *main problem*. Statistically, 11% of all Serb returnee households do not have regular incomes, in comparison to 2% in Croatia as a whole, and a fourth of the returnees have incomes of less than 1,000 kuna (circa 140€), whereas this percentage is only 5% in Croatia as a whole. Many returnees supplement their livelihood through agricultural activities, and the size of their agricultural holdings is quite good in Croatian terms, but taken into

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national/ethnic identifications and in census methodologies, as was for differential birth rates and migration to other destinations.

<sup>14</sup> Even possessing a Croatian passport was advantageous, since after the war almost all European countries established a visa-free regime with Croatia, whereas visas were necessary for citizens of BH and the FRY (and later Serbia and Montenegro).

<sup>15</sup> Mesić and Bagić, *Sustainability of Minority return in Croatia*. Zagreb: United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Representation in the Republic of Croatia, 2007, p. 92.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, 33

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, 37, 38, 39, 65, 95.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, 96.

consideration their age structure, and the rather bleak prospects for the development of agriculture in Croatia, especially in the light of present negotiations regarding the entry of Croatia into the EU, it is unlikely that agriculture could stimulate the development of return areas.<sup>19</sup>

In short, the economic basis for return is not optimistic. However, the authors of the study on sustainable return note that the majority of the returnees feel that their economic situation is still *better* than during the period when they lived in countries of refuge, and only returnees from countries outside the ex-Yugoslav area evaluate it as worst.<sup>20</sup> This is logical, if we take into consideration the fact that the countries in which the vast majority of the Serb refugees (close to 90%) found refuge (i.e. Serbia-Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina, particularly its Serb entity) were considerable less developed than Croatia, while most other countries of refuge (mainly in western/northern Europe) were relatively more developed.

The second major set of reasons hindering the return process is sociopsychological. The sociopsychological situation has not been very conducive towards the return of Serbs that had been “on the other side” during the war, or who were at least perceived as having been “on the other side”. And this situation is still far from favourable.

The Croatian government can proclaim the right of return, yet it cannot make people forget what they experienced during the war (this applies mainly to people who had felt the effects of the Serb insurrection in Croatia “on their own skin”). Likewise, the international community or the EU can exert pressure on the Croatian government to respect human rights and speed up the return process, but this cannot by decree change people’s feelings and thoughts, or expect them to behave as if nothing happened. The wounds of the war are still deep.<sup>21</sup> In some areas, however, there have been signs of improvement, as seen in the reconstruction of primary social networks between Serbs and Croats in certain areas of return. This applies mostly to indigenous Serb and Croat returnees, who had lived together in these areas before the war and who could draw on earlier traditions of coexistence and mutual aid (some of which had been preserved from WWII). On the other hand, matters are complicated due to the presence of new immigrants in many areas, namely resettled Croat refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Tensions have been noticed between this group and both the indigenous Serbs and indigenous Croats (in the latter case, despite a common nationality, cultural and social differences exist).

Most analyses and empirical studies carried out by researchers at the Institute for Migrations and Nationalities in Zagreb – especially by Dr. Drago Babić (who is presently leading a new research project on Croat-Serb relations in areas of return) – indicate that the level of antagonism between Croats and Serbs has remained strongest in Eastern Slavonia and Western Sirmium. This may *seem* paradoxical, since this region was the only part of Croatia, previously held by Serb insurgents that was reintegrated into the country by peaceful means (with the assistance of the UN and the international community). Yet peaceful integration also meant that at least a part of the power-structure that had existed during the occupation was preserved and incorporated into the new framework. Conversely, in areas where reintegration had been achieved by direct military action, such power-structures had been destroyed and the Serbs that remained in these regions, or that later returned to them, could begin constructing a new form of coexistence with their Croat neighbours, less burdened by the events of the war. In addition, Serbs returning to such areas after the war, by the very fact of their return directly

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<sup>19</sup> Ibidem, 97, 98,99, 100.

<sup>20</sup> Ibidem, 66, 70, 88,

<sup>21</sup> Mesić and Babić have given an excellent comment on the right of return: “.. even the integration of refugees is primarily characterised as a right. At least, this is how the statement can be understood that ‘there can be no hope of normalcy until the majority of those displaced are able to reintegrate themselves into their societies’ (UNHCR, The State of the World’s Refugees, Geneva, 1997: 162). In the first place, integration is at least a two-way (or rather a multi-way) process and cannot be imposed on the other (majority) ethnic community and, moreover, if it is imposed from the ‘outside’ as an exclusive right, not only will it remain a formal right but will rather cause rejection than reconciliation”, ibidem, 22.



demonstrated their acceptance of the legal government, which distanced them from the image of rebels and enemies.

The recent study on the sustainability of return of Serb refugees to Croatia likewise focused on this sociopsychological aspect, namely on feelings of the safety and tolerance among Serb returnees. When surveying Serb returnees, the researchers found that most of them did not mention any personal experiences of being afraid, unaccepted or discriminated against, even though every fourth respondent stated that he or she had heard that this had happened to some fellow returnee. The researchers concluded that the truth “probably lies” between these statements and the various “rumours”.<sup>22</sup> Incidents did occur, but the authors of the study felt that they were not very severe.<sup>23</sup> However, for their part, most Serb returnees seemed not to be content with their present minority status, which guaranteed minority rights, feeling that this made them second-rate citizens, but rather desired a constitutive (constitutional) position in Croatia, a concept which had in fact initially led to their insurrection and to the war.<sup>24</sup>

Finally, in evaluating the prospects of return – one tendency seems to be always at work: the longer refugees or displaced persons remain in the areas which gave them refuge, the greater the probability that they will adapt to conditions and opt not to return. Moreover this tendency may be even stronger in situations in which refugee flows are directed to countries or regions where the local population shares the same national or ethnic identification of the refugees. True, the Croatian case has shown that Croat refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina, or from Kosovo (from the previously Croat enclave in Janjevo, see note 10) encounter certain difficulties in adapting to the local culture in Croatia. Yet these difficulties are probably lessened by a general Croat self-identification. If we recall the mass exodus of Italians and Germans from Tito’s Yugoslavia in the period after WWII, the way in which these people were received in Italy or Germany included cases of clashes with the indigenous populations. For instance, Italians fleeing before the Partisan advance were viewed as Fascist collaborators by some Anti-Fascist groups in Italy.<sup>25</sup> However, Italian “optants” in Italy or expelled Germans in Germany did enjoy some advantages, that other refugee groups did not, which probably hastened their integration into the social fibre of the receiving countries and gradually eroded their desire to return.

At any rate – although it is important to guarantee war migrants the fundamental right of returning to their homes, psychological, sociological, economic and other factors often make this difficult, and history has confirmed that many war migrants never return. This does not mean that we can be cynical in regard to the issue, such as in the statement of Vasa Čubrilović cited earlier. If people have been forced to leave their homes without being guilty of any crime, and if this expulsion was also conducted by violent means – then even if the desire to return eventually erodes, some form of compensation would seem to be in order.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibidem, 73.

<sup>23</sup> “It is publicly known that there have been several serious incidents in which the safety of Serb returnees has been threatened, and symbolic damage has been inflicted on religious facilities, and so on. However, these incidents have fortunately been less drastic than other xenophobic incidents, including terrorist attacks against foreigners, in some Western European countries where migration occurs”, *ibidem*, 84.

<sup>24</sup> Ibidem, 80.

<sup>25</sup> Similar situations occurred among German refugees, expelled from various Eastern European countries. For example, one Sudeten German woman, deported by Czech forces from the town of Nový Jičín (Neutitschein) in the Moravian-Silesian region in July 1945, described how the refugees were treated after arriving in Germany: “In the meadows and ditches there were none but the poor wretched creatures, we beggars made homeless by the Germans in Germany, treated as lepers. Not even a glass of water was given to us without being asked the question: ‘Why did you come here? Why did you not stay there with the Czechs?’” (see: “An Account of the German expulsion from Neutitschein”, <http://www.conklinhouse.com/genealogy/maternal/heliletter.html>).

<sup>26</sup> In the case of the Italian “optants”, by now the only practical remaining issue concerns the question of compensation for confiscated property. On February 18<sup>th</sup> 1983, former Yugoslavia and Italy signed an agreement, by which Yugoslavia agreed to pay 110 million US\$ in compensation for this loss. A total of only 18 million US\$ was paid by 1991, when Yugoslavia broke up. Slovenia and Croatia accepted the obligation to divide the remain-

At the end of this I will once again refer to the of the UN study on sustainable return, in which the authors concluded: “If there is anything valuable to propose to sustain return, then it could be development programmes for the areas of more massive return, which are mainly the economically undeveloped parts of Croatia. The programmes, however, must not be directed only at returnees and their working capacity, but also at the majority population, so that both communities find their common interest in enhancing the integration of the first, and the goodwill of the other group...”<sup>27</sup>

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ing debt, with the ratio of 62% to be paid by Slovenia and 38% by Croatia. Slovenia completed payment of its portion of the compensation by 2002, whereas Croatia has not yet begun to pay its portion.

<sup>27</sup> Ibidem, 107.