

Ethnic Diversity and its importance for the Vojvodina Region¹

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Abstract

Vojvodina is the north region of Serbia. Ethnic diversity is the part of the identity of Vojvodina region. More than 29 minorities live in it. They are its richness. The first part of the paper is related to the short history of process of immigration of minorities in Vojvodina. The main part of the paper is about the importance of ethnic diversity for the territory of Vojvodina region. It is a factor of Vojvodina uniqueness. Analysis of the territorial distribution of minorities has tried to illustrate ethnic diversity and to explain some characteristics of the present situation. National minorities are meritorious for differences of the characteristics of the archeological findings, architecture (sacral buildings, castles and fortresses), but also for cultural and gastronomical features of Vojvodina region. Special attention is given to influences and consequences on the number, distribution, life quality and problems of the minorities. Because of national minorities, Vojvodina region was called “Small Europe”.

Key words: Vojvodina, ethnicities, minorities, regional geography.

Introduction

The Vojvodina region is the north region of Serbia. It covers only 21.506 kilometer square (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2004, 15). This region is situated in the southeast part of Pannonian plain, on the contact of the Balkan and Middle Europe (Geographic map of Vojvodina, 2001). Vojvodina region consists of three sub regions: Bačka, Banat, and Srem. Today, the Vojvodina region represents a multiethnic, multi confessional and multicultural space. There are 29 minorities in the Vojvodina region (Ministrastvo za ljudska i manjiska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, 2004, 462). According to their origin, tradition, culture, mother tongue, religion and demographic characteristics, they are extremely diversified. Good inter ethnical relationships, ethnic and confessional tolerance, respecting and protection rights of minorities are very important for stability, demographic and democratic development of Vojvodina region (Raduški, 2006, 369-374). Because of them ethnic, confessional and cultural disparities, Vojvodina became unique space. This paper tries to explain why national minorities are richness of Vojvodina region.

Immigration of different ethnicity on the territory of Vojvodina

According to archaeological findings, Vojvodina has been populated from the Prehistory. On the different location, material evidences from Paleolithic, Meozolithic, Neolithic and Eneolithic period as well as from the Bronze Age were found. The following “cultural circles” of the Vojvodina past have been connecting with Roman Period, than Period of Big

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Migrations and Hungarian Period. In the first half of the 16th century Turkish Period began (Tomić *et al.* 2004, 42-53). The reign of Turks brought the territory of what Vojvodina means today to a poor condition. The area was full of swamps and neglected fields. Many of towns were deserted. According to some estimation, at the time in the area there could be hardly about 100.000 inhabitants, mostly Serbs with small percentage of Romanians and Bunjevacs (Kicošev, Kovačević, 2004, 271). For historians, Departure of Turks, in 1716, is the moment of the beginning of the development of recent population of Vojvodina (Ivkov, 2006b, 38).

At the suggestion of Eugene of Savoy, the territory of Banat was organized into a special Province, which was under the direct administration of Austrian court. The decision was mainly influenced by strategic reasons, so that there would be no territorial connection between Hungary and Turkey, as the Austrians did not really trust Hungarians after Rakotzi's Uprising. That made Banat a special "chamber area", in which the Austrian Czar was not only the ruler but the sole owner as well. At the same time, greater parts of Bačka and Srem were organized as Border of the Guards under the direct command of Vienna. Considering the economic development of Vojvodina, there were two possibilities: to keep the extensive cattle breeding or to turn pastures and barren areas into plowed fields. The second option was chosen (Kicošev, Kovačević, 2004, 271). For the fast economic growth and renaissance of the region, General Merci was the most responsible, who governed it (Ivkov, 2006b, 38). Under his guidance people began to use important land-reclamation measures, they built roads, plowed the barren fields, restructured cities, built different economic institutions etc. To do all that it was necessary to increase the population. In Vienna, it was decided to inhabit Banat with Germans who lived outside Austrian lands, from the south-western territory of what today constitutes Germany. Besides purely mercantilist reasons, the strategic goals of Vienna also influenced in that settling of Germans. During the period from 1722 to 1726 about Germans took up residence in Banat (Tomić *et al.*, 2004, 42-53). Besides Germans, Merci colonized Banat with Italians, Spanish and French because of their skill in breeding silkworms, cultivating rice, growing vegetables etc. At that time Serbs and Romanians weren't very much liked due to their failing to keep up with the times, so they were often forced to leave the better quality land, making concessions to Germans. In Bačka and Srem that colonization wasn't so extensive at first. Germans dominated in the number of newcomers as well, but there were also Hungarians, Slovaks, Poles, Ruthenians, Armenians and others (Ivkov, 2006b, 38).

After the Austrian and Turkish war, there came big ethnic changes in Vojvodina. When Pomoriška and Potiska borders of Guards were abolished, a part of Serbian population moved to Russia, while others went to live in the South, in newly formed Borders of Guards in Srem, Banat and Šajkaška or to the Great District of Kikinda. A substantial number of Serbs came from the South again, after the war ended. That was a new migration of Serbs under the command of Patriarch Arsenije IV Šakabenta.

After the second half of 18th century, history has brought rules of different states. Some of the ethnic groups have gone and came back, but they never completely disappeared.

Recent distribution of ethnic diversity in the Vojvodina region

The consequences of the World War II (1940-1944) were much more devastating for the ethnic structure of Vojvodina. The scopes of war losses were exceeded by the results of migrations. All the Germans from Vojvodina and Yugoslavia were expelled and the Yugoslav population was colonized on their settlements. Between September 1945 and July 1947 about 225.696 colonists have arrived in Vojvodina region (Gaćeša, 1984, 404).

Analysis of results of Censuses 1948 – 1991 has given trends of dynamism of national minorities in the territory of Vojvodina. Their number and share in ethnic structure have changed over the time. It was the result of the natural increase as well as migrations. Other factors are: change in statements in the moment of declaration about national affiliation, process of assimilation, mixed marriages etc. (Raduški, 1997, 139-147). Low and negative natural increase and balance of migration have influenced decreasing of majority ethnic groups, especially between Hungarians, Croats, Slovaks, Romanians, Ruthenians etc. (Kocsis, Kicošev, 2004). Other national minorities have noticed increase of absolute and relative number. It is a consequence of higher rate of natural increase of Roma, positive balance of migration of Macedonians or change in statements in the moment of declaration about national affiliation of Roma and Yugoslav people (Kicošev, 2004).

In the beginning of the 1990s, the aroused nationalism in the republics of the former SFR Yugoslavia led to the emigration of some ethnic groups into their original republics. In Vojvodina, it was most strikingly obvious when the Croats started to leave or to declare themselves again as Bunjevci and Šokci. However, their emigration was caused not only by political (refusal of mobilization, feeling of uncertainty, etc) but also by economical reasons: bad life conditions caused by economic sanctions against FR Yugoslavia (Tomić *et al.*, 2004, 75). Kicošev (1999) has written that between 1991 and 1996, almost one quarter of a million of Serbs came into Vojvodina, which has significantly changed the ethnic structure of the region. The emigration of one part of national minorities has additionally intensified this process. In certain settlements, the immigration of refugees has lead to the change of ethnic structure, but this was mostly the consequence of property exchange. Such exchanges were characteristic of several settlements in Srem in which Croats used to be a majority.

According to the results of the census of 2002, ethnic disparities on the territory of Vojvodina are still well conspicuous. Figure 1 has been produced from the following methodology. Firstly, every national minority has get own colour. Every settlement, e.g. settlement and its cadastre area, on the territory of Vojvodina region was coloured in accordance with the dominant ethnicity.

The results are evident. Serbs as majority and only eight other ethnic groups have a majority in at least one settlement on the territory of Vojvodina region (Knežević, 2005). Hungarians are dominant in the north part of Vojvodina region. Romanians are present in the settlements which are situated in the south east part of Vojvodina. Croats are concentrated on the northwest part. Montenegrins have majority in the middle of Bačka, sub region of Vojvodina region. Others, like Slovaks, can be found on the different part of Vojvodina region. The most numerous settlements with Serbian domination, according to the results of the census 2002, are marked on the southwest part of Vojvodina region, exactly in Srem sub region.

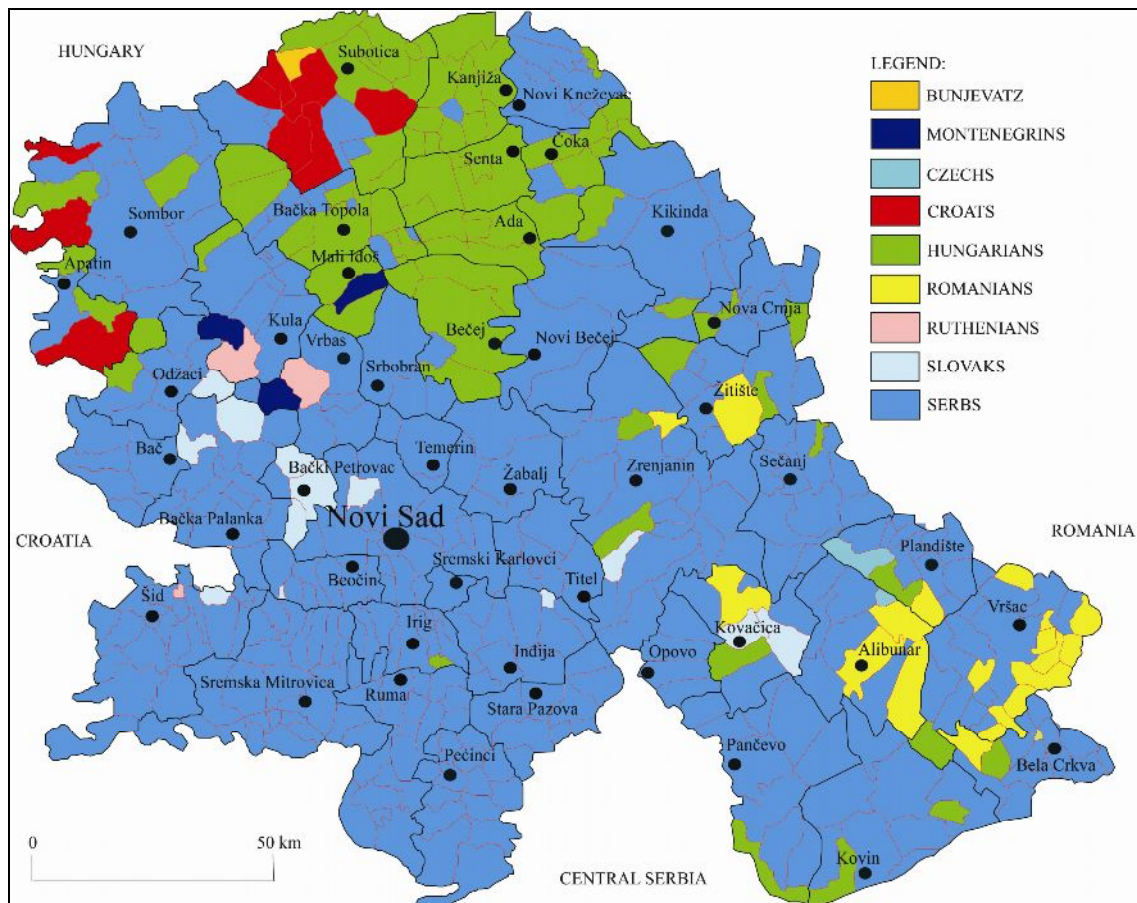


Figure 1: Ethnic map of Vojvodina region, according the Census 2002 (made by author)

Importance of national minorities

National minorities have given identity to the Vojvodina region. They have enriched the cultural heritage of the region. There are many examples of that fact. In the following text the most interesting ones will be referred to.

In the domain of architecture, the most remarkable buildings on territory of Vojvodina region are churches and monasteries. All ethnic groups in Vojvodina have built churches in the past. They have belonged to different confession. For example, there are many differences in the Christian church. Different architectural styles are present on the territory of Vojvodina, as Gothic, Baroque etc (Tomić *et al.*, 2002, 22-63). In addition, several other styles can be found, which have come from the medieval Serbia, as architectural school of Raška or school of Morava etc. In the Hungarian settlements, as Subotica and Palić, secession, architecture style, had the best preservation (Kovačević, 2006, 179).

In the field of arts, Slovaks from Kovačica municipality are well known as painters (Ivkov, 2006a, 44). The style of painting was named “naive”, because the painters have not been educated for painting. They have special talent for that type of art. Romanians have made laces. Romanian women are well known because of free hand. Gypsies have always been excellent musicians (Pleša, 1976). Gypsies from Deronje village, which is situated in the middle of sub region Bačka, are the symbol of good amusement.

Traditionally, every nation on the Vojvodina territory has few well known dishes. For example, Slovaks sausages, Hungarian *goulash* or German *kugloff* are well known (Ivkov,

2006a, 112). Hence, Vojvodina has rich gastronomy to offer. Using this fact, every week different settlement on the territory of Vojvodina have organized different gastronomical happening (Bjeljac, Ćurčić, 2006), (Bjeljac, 1999). It is one of the strongest advantages in the tourist offer of the region.

Factors influencing minorities in Vojvodina region

Some factors have a positive, but some others do not have positive influences on preserving this type of specific richness. Positive influences does have official political postures. From 29 minorities (Ministrastvo za ljudska i manjiska prava Srbije i Crne Gore, 2004, 462), five are in better position. In Vojvodina, according to law, languages of some national minorities are official languages. Beside the language of majority, Serbian, official languages in Vojvodina are: Hungarian, Romanian, Slovak and Ruthenium. These minorities have their newspapers, radio programs, television program, and theatres (Tomic et al., 2004, 164-167). Hungarians, Romanians and Slovaks have several primary and secondary schools, and of course cathedras on the Faculty of Philology. Hence, some of them have never spoken Serbian language. In the process of employment, Institutions of the provincial government have always given priority to minorities, because of language.

Many groups of ethnicities have had small number of members, e.g. Germans, Russians, Turks and Slovenians etc. (Republički zavod za statistiku, 2003, 14) They have kept good and strong connections. Habitually, they have often helped for each other. Every April, Government of Vojvodina Province has organized public calling for all ethnic groups. Government has always planed financial help for them. This year there some 370.000 € reserved for that calling (Korhecz, 2009, 13). It is the form of direct support for preserving ethnic differences on the territory of Vojvodina region.

Negative influences also come from the nature. Average value of median age of population in Vojvodina is high (40.3 years). Median age of some minorities is higher than the average. For example, median age of Slovenians in Vojvodina is 52.5 years (Kovačević et al., 2008, 140). Gypsies have the youngest value of median age compared to others ethnicities: only 24.7 years (Kovačević et al., 2005, 57).

Political games have disturbed and disorganised the good relations among ethnicities with national majority. In the past, especially during the First and the Second World Wars, there were many conflicts between different minorities and the national majority. Many monuments on the territory of Vojvodina region have testified. The motto of the population of Vojvodina is “We must forgive, but we must not forget”.

Mixed marriages have often been in practice, especially after the Second World War. It was the period when official politic did not give any support to development of national consciousness and identity to Serbs, e.g. national majority. Mixed marriages were product of the love between different nationalities in Vojvodina. None has ever seen that fact as excellent example of tolerance, understanding and international love.

Spontaneously exchanging cultural and ethnic characteristics, most often have happened in the institution of marriage. Children from mixed marriages are perfect informed about cultural and ethnic characteristics of theirs parents. However, mixed marriages can, in the same time, make negative influences. Children from mixed marriages can not very often declare themselves as being one particular ethnicity. They become undeclared. In the economical and political instable last decade of 20th century, children from mixed marriages have emigrated

abroad. They felt like a citizen of the world, not member of one of national minority in Vojvodina.

Unfortunately, every conflict between two persons, who have different nationalities, is in the focus of media. It has always been used as an example of international animosity. Officially, they were been conviction by public attitude. In the background, the story is habitually different. Conflicts between people are habitually phenomena. When different nationalities live on the small territory, international conflicts have been more frequent than habitually.

Conclusions

For decades, Serbia has been ready for the European Union. Its north region, Vojvodina, well known as “Small Europe”, is proof of that thought. Living together and sharing destiny with different ethnicities have made “population of Vojvodina”. They have gotten their own identity. From the end of the World War II, on the territory of Vojvodina has exists special respect for all ethnic disparities. Material support of the Government of Vojvodina Province, which is designed for different ethnic group, tries to preserve this kind of richness.

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