

**THE IMPORTANCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT AND
SETTLEMENT SYSTEM IN THE GEOPOLITICAL EVALUATION
OF THE GEOSPACE OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA**

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ABSTRACT

Population, as the most important resource and element of socio-economic development, forms a system of demographic characteristics that has a specific value in the geopolitical evaluation of the geospace of the Republic of Srpska.

Also, specific historical circumstances and political-geographical processes, natural-geographical and economic-geographical features are the basic factors of social development and distribution of settlements in the geospace of the Republic of Srpska. These factors conditioned the existing network of settlements, as well as their development functions and characteristics.

In approaching the topic, we start from the premise that demographic processes and the existing network of settlements are one of the basic factors and determinants of the political-geographical and geopolitical position of the Republic of Srpska as an entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this context, we develop a thesis on the fundamental importance of demographic factors and relevant settlement potentials as a quantitative-qualitative category that ultimately determines contemporary geopolitical characteristics. The subject of research in this paper are the demographic elements and the settlement system of the Republic of Srpska, more precisely, the connection and interaction between demographic and settlement particularities and their implication to the geopolitical characteristics of the researched geospace.

The research methodology is based on the analysis of demographic processes, settlement specifics and development functions, in accordance with scientifically accepted indicators of individual and general regional development. In this context, we determine research methods, both within the framework of standardized methods of analysis and synthesis, and on the basis of methods immanent to geographical research: historical-geographical, comparative, statistical, demographic, mathematical, cartographic and graphic.

Research results should meet a scientific and practical objective. More precisely, scientific results would indicate demographic specifics and development problems, but also offer models of administrative organization and management of geospace that could be applied in different areas of social practice. The paper would improve geopolitical and regional-geographical knowledge of the researched geospace, viewed through the prism of contemporary demographic and political-geographical processes in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Western Balkans as a whole.

Keywords: Republic of Srpska, Bosnia and Herzegovina, demographic characteristics, settlements, geopolitical position

INTRODUCTION

From the political and legal aspect, we can define the state as a community of people in a certain territory in which the political system works effectively.

Thus, population and territory are the basic elements of the political-territorial community. This statement is confirmed by the fact that the Swiss-French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau pointed out that: “A political body can be viewed in two ways - in terms of territory, or in terms of population size, and the appropriate size of a state will depend on the relationship between them (Rousseau 1949)” [1].

States pay special attention to the population - they take care of their health, general ability and culture, because the continuity and stability of the political-territorial community largely depends on the population. Population changes, vital statistics, migration trends, belonging to the rural and urban contingent, national and religious structure - all this has a specific value in the geopolitical valorisation of a particular area. The Republic of Srpska (RS) is an entity in Bosnia and Herzegovina with an area of 24.641 km² and represents about 48% of the total territory of BiH. Mathematically and geographically, it occupies the northern and eastern part of the geospace of BiH, between 42°33'18" and 45°16'36" north latitude and 16°12'18" and 19°03'74" east longitude (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Bosnia and Herzegovina (Republic of Srpska – RS and Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina – FBiH)

The geospace of the Republic of Srpska, in accordance with its geographical position and historical-geographical features, represents an extremely complex civilizational, ethnic and demographic spatial-functional and territorial system.

Due to complex historical and geographical circumstances, but also modern processes and constellations in the international community in this area, there have been frequent interruptions in the continuity of cultural, economic, ethno-demographic and political-territorial development. It is rare that in such a small, naturally and geographically diverse and strategically important area, three opposing religions, and their cultural-civilizational areas, permeate each other, and sometimes to the point of exclusivity.

“Therefore, the geospace of the Republic of Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina is specific in many ways. It has its own integration and disintegration flows in different historical-geographical periods and political-geographical circumstances. This is the reality of this area, and all positive and negative changes are reflected and conditioned primarily by ethno-demographic characteristics, whether it is intra-national or multinational changes” [2].

One of the most important factors of socio-economic development and a determinant of geopolitical evaluation of a political-territorial community, such as the Republic of Srpska, is the population. Total population, population density (distribution), population structures, migration, ethnopsychological characteristics form a set of quantitative and qualitative characteristics, which determine its geopolitical characteristics [3].

A special problematic issue that opens up the analysis of demographic characteristics and specifics of the settlement system of the political-territorial community, such as the Republic of Srpska, are the geopolitical consequences arising from demographic development and existing differences in the spatial-functional polarization of this geospace.

Since the second half of the 20th century, the socio-economic development of the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina has been conditioned by a strong process of industrialization and deagrarianization. The number and function of urban settlements affected by these processes have spatially and functionally increased and expanded to the surrounding rural settlements, accelerating urbanization.

However, “Bosnia and Herzegovina was not a highly urbanized republic in Yugoslavia. Only five cities had a population of more than 50,000, and only municipal centres (64) had more than 5,000 inhabitants, and if we accept the classification according to which urban settlements are determined in this way, then in 1991 there were 1,575,498 inhabitants, or 36.1% of the total population” [4].

Demographic and settlement specifics of the Republic of Srpska make a very heterogeneous area. This heterogeneity is manifested through isolated areas, regions that have their own characteristic demographic development, economic characteristics, settlement system and urban centres [5].

In approaching the topic, we start from the premise that demographic processes and the settlement system are one of the basic determinants of the geopolitical characteristics of the Republic of Srpska as a separate entity within the internationally recognized state of Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this context, we develop a thesis on the fundamental importance of demographic development and relevant settlement processes as quantitative-qualitative categories which, ultimately, determine the geopolitical perspective of the Republic of Srpska.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

The issue and the subject of the research are defined by the title of the topic. The research of demographic development and settlement system and their influences on the geopolitical specifics of the Republic of Srpska will be based on a complex analysis and study: population trends, ethnic structure, population density, regional differentiation and spatial distribution, basic elements of natural population movement and specifics of the settlement system, as well as relevant negative demographic processes, which have a specific value in the geopolitical valorisation of geospace.

Given the complexity of the issue, a multidisciplinary methodological approach and research methods were necessary. Thus, the work was realized by general (analysis and synthesis) and special methods, immanent in geographical and demographic research, and data processing techniques (statistical, cartographic). In this context, we used geographical, demographic, comparative, mathematical-statistical, cartographic and historical methods, as well as the method of generalization in geography in accordance with the historical, geographical, structural, functional and dialectical methodological approach.

The objective and results of the research should indicate that demographic and settlement processes have a specific significance in the geopolitical evaluation of the geospace of the Republic of Srpska.

Basic data on the number, territorial distribution and ethno-confessional structure of the population of the Republic of Srpska are found in publication, published by the Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Srpska, more precisely by analyzing the book *Census of population, households and dwellings in Republic of Srpska 2013.*, (2017). Demographic data on the estimate of the number of persons and population trends in the Republic of Srpska were obtained from the publications of *Bulletins - Demographic statistic*, published by the Institute of Statistics of the Republic of Srpska.

For the study, as well as the analysis of contemporary demographic, ethno-demographic and political-geographical processes, and level of development of local self-government units in the Republic of Srpska, we used relevant scientific literature (Marinković, D. Majić, A., 2018; Zekanović, I., 2020; Mandić, M., 2019) and Proceedings from international scientific Conferences (Third Congress of Serbian geographers with international participation, Banja Luka, 2011; *Geopolitical processes in modern Euro-Asian space*, Banja Luka, 2017), more precisely the scientific papers (Zekanović, I., 2011; Zekanović I., 2017).

THE INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC DEVELOPMENT ON THE GEOPOLITICAL CHARACTERISTICS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

According to the results of the last pre-war census in 1991, Bosnia and Herzegovina had a total population of 4,377,033. The constituent peoples were represented as follows: 1,902,956 Muslims (43.5%), 1,366,104 Serbs (31.2%) and Croats 760,852 (17.4%). The religious structure was almost in line with the percentage of national communities: 42.8% Muslims, 30.1% Orthodox and 17.7% Catholics.

“According to the results of the 1991 census, the demographic situation within the entity division would look like this: The current borders of the Federation of BiH would be home to 2,720,074 people or 61.14% of the total population. The majority of the population would be Bosniaks with 52.34%. In the Republic of Srpska, there would be

1,569,332 people or 35.85% of the total population, and Serbs would be the majority population with a share of 55.43%“ (Table 1, [6], [7]).

Table 1. Estimation of population distribution based on the 1991 census - according to the entity division of BiH

ENTITY	FEDERATION B&H	REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA	BRČKO DISTRICT	BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA
Bosniaks	1 423 593	440 746	38 617	1 902 956
%	52,34	28,08	44,07	43,48
Croats	594 362	144 238	22 252	760 852
%	21,85	9,19	25,39	17,38
Serbs	478 122	869 854	18 128	1 366 104
%	17,58	55,43	20,69	31,21
Other	62 059	39 481	2 899	104 439
%	2,28	2,52	3,31	2,39
Yugoslavs	161 938	75 013	5 731	242 682
%	5,95	4,78	6,54	5,54
TOTAL	2 720 074	1 569 332	87 627	4 377 033
%	62,14	35,85	2,00	100,00

The war conflict in the geospace of BiH, which lasted for about three and a half years in the period from 1992 to 1995, resulted in direct and indirect demographic losses. The war caused an increased mortality rate on the one hand, and a reduction in natural increase on the other.

The consequences of disintegration processes, war conflict, refugee migration and post-war trauma have reduced the reproductive contingent of the population. As a consequence of the reduction of this contingent in the Republic of Srpska, we have continuously negative natural movements of the population.

For twenty-two years, no general census has been conducted in the geospace of Bosnia and Herzegovina according to modern standards of the United Nations Demographic Service, and numerical data on the population were mainly based on estimates, which further complicated the precise analysis of the impact of demographic development on the geopolitical characteristics of the Republic of Srpska. In 2013, the Census of Population, Households and Dwellings in the Republic of Srpska was conducted. According to the Census, the Republic of Srpska had 1,170,342 inhabitants [8].

The results of the census stated the following ethnic structure: the Serb population is the most numerous with 970,857, or 82.9%. They are followed by the Bosniak population with 148,477, or 12.7%. Croats are third with 26,509, or 2.3% of the total population. Other ethnic groups and the population that did not want to declare their ethnicity represent 24,499 persons, or 2.1% (Table 2, [8]).

Table 2. Ethnicity of the population of the Republic of Srpska according to the 2013 Census

Total	Serbs	Bosniaks	Croats	Other
1 170 342	970 857	148 477	26 509	24 499

Political-geographical and socio-economic processes, but also geopolitical relations in the international community in the last decade of the 20th and the first decade of the 21st century, have strongly influenced the number and spatial distribution of the population of the Republic of Srpska. In the inter-census period 1991-2013, the number of inhabitants in the territory of the Republic of Srpska decreased by 25.4%. Demographic potentials

are a limiting factor in the development of most administrative-territorial units in the Republic of Srpska.

Table 3. Estimated population and population density of the Republic of Srpska 2012-2020

Year	Population (estimate)	Density of population in/km²
2012	1 173 131	47,61
2013	1 171 179 (1 170 342 census)	47,53
2014	1 167 082	47,36
2015	1 162 164	47,16
2016	1 157 516	46,97
2017	1 153 017	46,79
2018	1 147 902	46,58
2019	1 142 495	46,37
2020	1 136 274	46,11

Based on the estimated population in the period 2012-2020, the Republic of Srpska is characterized by a constant decrease in population compared to 1991. We record a decrease in population in 2020 compared to 1991 by 27.6%, which in absolute terms amounts to 433,058.

Estimates for 2012 indicate that the Republic of Srpska had 1,173,131 inhabitants, and in 2020 1,136,274 inhabitants. These estimates of the population confirm the previous facts that in the geospace of the Republic of Srpska, in the period 2012-2020, there was an absolute decrease of 36,857, i.e. every year, according to the linear decline, the population is less by 4,607. In the Republic of Srpska, in the last 8 years, decrease in population density is recorded, from 47.61 to 46.11 inhabitants / km², which means that on each km² of its area in just eight years, it has lost an average of 1.5 inhabitants (Table 3 [9], [10], [11], [12], [13]).

Among other things, the Republic of Srpska is characterized by extreme demographic heterogeneity, more precisely, regional differentiation of the population, given that in the western part (between Novi Grad and Brčko) live about 63%, while in the east about 37% of the total population. Differences in population distribution become even more pronounced if we compare the northern and southern parts in accordance with the regional-geographical principle of nodal-functional regionalization. About 74% of the total population live in the northern part, and 26% in the southern.

Based on the nodal-functional principle and its basic criteria, we can single out four regions in the Republic of Srpska:

- 1. Banja Luka region, with the Banja Luka development centre. The mesoregions consist of the functional and gravitational areas of Prijedor and Mrkonjić Grad, and the subregion consists of the gravitational area of Gradiška;
- 2. Doboј-Bijeljina region, which is determined by the function and gravitational range of the two main urban development centres: Doboј and Bijeljina;
- 3. The Sarajevo-Zvornik region is determined by the developmental role of Istočno Sarajevo and Zvornik;
- 4. The Trebinje-Foča region is determined by the sphere of influence of the cities of Trebinje and Foča.

Zones of population demographic growth are in line with the gravitational spheres of the leading nodes in the regions, where the City of Banja Luka stands out with the greatest demographic expansion, thanks to its leading political, economic, administrative, developmental and cultural functions.

Table 4. Spatial distribution of the population of the Republic of Srpska according to nodal-functional regionalization in 2013

REGIONS	Population (2013)
Banja Luka region	527 840
Doboj – Bijeljina region	340 578
I. Sarajevo – Zvornik region	210 018
Trebinje – Foča region	91 906

From the aspect of nodal-functional regionalization, the most populated and largest concentration of population is in the Banja Luka region (527,840 inhabitants). Then follows Doboj-Bijeljina region with 340,578 inhabitants. The third is Sarajevo-Zvornik region with 210,018 inhabitants, and the last is Trebinje-Foča region with 91,906 inhabitants (Table 4, [8]).

Natural population movement

“Components of the natural movement of the population of the Republic of Srpska indicate negative tendencies in the form of declining birth rates and increasing mortality rates. Since 1999, when the absolute maximum number of live births was registered in the Republic of Srpska (14,500), the number of children born has decreased by a third (35%). At the same time, there is an increase in mortality by a quarter as a result of the mortality of the baby boom generation born in the late 1940s and early 1950s. As a result, the process of natural depopulation has been present in the Republic of Srpska since 2002, accompanied by a constant negative natural increase and a decrease in the total population” [14].

Demographic losses in the geospace of the Republic of Srpska in the period 1996–2020. are estimated at almost 255,000 inhabitants. Based on that, the degree of total depopulation of the population exceeds 18% of the population from 1996, ie 28% of the estimated population from 1991 [15], [13].

The components of the natural movement of the population of the Republic of Srpska in the period 2012-2020 confirm the continuation of negative demographic tendencies. In the observed period, the number of newborns was 85,424, and 132,301 people died in the same period, which tells us that the absolute natural increase was negative and amounted to -46,877 (Table 5). As of 2011, the total number of live births does not exceed 10,000 (9,561) [16].

Disorders of vital structures are the result of many years of action of various demographic, sociological, biological, but also political-geographical and psychological factors. With an overall birth rate of 8.1‰ (2020), the Republic of Srpska can be characterized as a very low birth rate area. Demographic aging is a basic determinant of increasing mortality rates. According to data for 2020, the overall mortality rate was 14.6‰, while the natural increase rate was negative (-6.5 ‰), more precisely, in 2020, due to negative trends in natural movement, the Republic of Srpska had 7,421 less inhabitants than in 2019 (Table 5,[13]).

All administrative-territorial units in the Republic of Srpska are characterized by demographic stagnation and negative tendencies in natural increase. According to the data of the Republic of Srpska Institute of Statistics, in 2018 only two local communities achieved a positive natural increase (the City of Banja Luka and the Municipality of Istočno Novo Sarajevo). In the last two reviewed years (2019, 2020), no positive natural population movements were recorded. All local communities in the Republic of Srpska have a negative natural increase, except for the municipality of Jezero, which in 2020 recorded an absolute increase in population by 1 person (6 births and 5 deaths), so that

the statistical indicators of this local community, according to the number of inhabitants and natural movement, are almost negligible.

Disorders of biological structures mostly affected the process of demographic aging of the population of the Republic of Srpska, which is evident from the assessment of data for 2020, where the share of elderly people (65+) reached a record value of 235,972 people or 20.8% [13].

Table 5. Natural movement of the population of Republic of Srpska 1996, 2005, 2009 and 2012-2020

Year	Population	Natality		Mortality		Natural increase	
		Total	%	Total	%	Total	%
1996	1 391 593	12 263	8,8	10 931	7,8	1 332	1,0
2012	1 173 131	9 978	8,5	13 796	11,8	-3 818	-3,2
2013	1 171 179	9 510	8,1	13 978	11,9	-4 468	-3,8
2014	1 167 082	9 335	7,8	14 409	12,3	-5 074	-4,5
2015	1 162 164	9 357	8,0	15 059	13,0	-5 702	-4,9
2016	1 157 516	9 452	8,2	13 970	12,1	-4 518	-3,9
2017	1 153 017	9 339	8,1	14 663	12,7	-5 324	-4,6
2018	1 147 902	9 568	8,3	14 763	12,9	-5 195	-4,5
2019	1 142 495	9 724	8,5	15 081	13,2	-5 357	-4,7
2020	1 136 274	9 161	8,1	16 582	14,6	-7 421	-6,5

Population concentration and population density

According to the results of the 2013 census, the population density in the Republic of Srpska is 47.5 inhabitants / km². According to the estimates of the Republic of Srpska Institute of Statistics, the population density in 2020 was 46.1 inhabitants / km², which puts the Republic of Srpska in the zone of medium-populated areas. Population by local units indicates even greater differences between overpopulation and uninhabited areas.

Table 6: Population density of the Republic of Srpska by administrative-territorial units in 2013

Municipality	Area km ²	Population	Density of population in/km ²
Banjaluka	1 238,9	180 053	145,3
Berkovići	264,0	2 041	7,7
Bijeljina	734,1	103 874	141,5
Bileća	636,8	10 607	16,7
Bratunac	293,1	18 651	63,6
Brod	230,1	15 720	68,3
Višegrad	449,1	10 118	22,5
Vlasenica	217,4	10 657	49,0
Vukosavlje	73,8	4 363	59,1
Gacko	728,4	8 710	12,0
Gradiška	761,7	49 196	64,6
Derвента	516,6	25 922	50,2
Doboj	816,3	68 514	83,9
Doboj (without Stanari)	655,3	61 556	93,9
Donji Žabar	46,8	3 669	78,4
Zvornik	374,4	54 407	145,3
Istočna Ilidža	29,3	14 437	492,7
Istočni Drvar	75,2	66	0,9
Istočni Mostar	88,6	244	2,8
Istočni Stari Grad	88,0	1 116	12,7
Istočno Novo Sarajevo	37,9	10 401	274,4
Jezero	63,2	1 039	16,4
Kalinovik	679,5	1 962	2,9

Kneževo	326,0	9 368	28,7
Kozarska Dubica	499,4	20 681	41,4
Kostajnica	85,9	5 645	65,7
Kotor Varoš	557,3	18 361	32,9
Krupa na Uni	93,2	1 560	16,7
Kupres	44,6	293	6,6
Laktaši	388,3	34 210	88,1
Lopare	297,8	14 689	49,3
Ljubinje	341,3	3 319	9,7
Milići	278,9	10 445	37,5
Modriča	332,1	24 490	73,7
Mrkonjić Grad	669,7	15 926	23,8
Nevesinje	887,1	12 542	14,1
Novi Grad	469,7	25 240	53,7
Novo Goražde	123,1	2 915	23,7
Osmaci	79,5	5 546	69,8
Oštra Luka	206,6	2 705	13,1
Pale	490,4	20 359	41,5
Pelagićevo	115,9	4 358	37,6
Petrovac	146,1	354	2,4
Petrovo	109,5	6 317	57,7
Prijedor	834,1	80 916	97,0
Prnjavor	630,0	34 357	54,5
Ribnik	499,9	5 851	11,7
Rogatica	645,9	10 302	15,9
Rudo	347,7	7 578	21,8
Sokolac	692,3	11 620	16,8
Srbac	452,6	16 933	37,4
Srebrenica	529,8	11 698	22,1
Stanari	161,0	6 958	43,2
Teslić	846,5	37 236	44,0
Trebinje	862,5	28 239	32,7
Trnovo	109,8	1 983	18,1
Ugljevik	170,4	15 118	88,7
Foča	1 118,4	17 580	15,7
Han Pijesak	315,8	3 445	10,9
Čajniče	273,7	4 679	17,1
Čelinac	361,8	15 117	41,8
Šamac	172,2	16 308	94,7
Šekovići	242,4	6 323	26,1
Šipovo	550,2	9 969	18,1
Republic of Srpska	24 641,3	1 170 342	47,5

According to the adopted criteria and the achieved degree of concentration of the population in the area of the Republic of Srpska, we single out four zones:

- 1. sparse population zone (up to 11 inhabitants / km²)
- 2. medium population zone (from 11 to 50 inhabitants / km²)
- 3. dense population zone (from 51 to 100 inhabitants / km²)
- 4. overpopulation zone (more than 100 inhabitants / km²)” [17].

Based on the results of the 2013 Census, the following municipalities belong to the sparse population zone (up to 11 inhabitants / km²): Han Pijesak, Kalinovik, Ljubinje, Kupres, Petrovac, Istočni Drvar, Istočni Mostar, Berkovići, which is 7.93% (1955.1 km²) of the geospace of the Republic of Srpska. This area is formed by municipalities in the hilly-mountainous and karst eastern and southwestern parts of the Republic of Srpska.

The area of medium population (from 11 to 50 inhabitants / km²) includes the territories of 34 local communities: Bileća, Višegrad, Vlasenica, Gacko, Derвента, Istočni Stari Grad, Jezero, Kneževo, Kozarska Dubica, Kotor Varoš, Krupa na Uni, Lopare, Milići, Mrkonjić Grad, Nevesinje, Novo Goražde, Oštra Luka, Pale, Pelagićevo, Ribnik, Rogatica, Rudo, Sokolac, Srbac, Srebrenica, Stanari, Teslić, Trebinje, Trnovo, Foča, Čajniče, Čelinac, Šekovići, Šipovo and they represent 60.63% of the geospace (14,939.4 km²) of the Republic of Srpska.

Dense population zone (from 51 to 100 inhabitants / km²) covers 21.64%, or 5,332.5 km², and consists of the following local community territories: Bratunac, Brod, Vukosavlje, Gradiška, Doboj, Donji Žabar, Kostajnica, Laktaši, Modriča, Novi Grad, Osmaci, Petrovo, Prijedor, Prnjavor, Ugljevik, Šamac.

Overpopulated administrative-territorial units (more than 100 inhabitants / km²) are: Banja Luka, Bijeljina, Zvornik, Istočna Ilidža and Istočno Novo Sarajevo, and they occupy 9.80% of the area (2,414.6 km²) and are mainly urban or nodal-functional centres. The following have the highest population density: Istočna Ilidža 492.7 inhabitants / km², Istočno Novo Sarajevo 274.4 inhabitants / km², Banja Luka 145.3 inhabitants / km², Zvornik 145.3 inhabitants / km² and Bijeljina 141.5 inhabitants / km², while the border municipalities towards the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina still have the lowest population: Istočni Drvar 0.9 inhabitants / km², Petrovac 2.4 inhabitants / km², Istočni Mostar 2.8 inhabitants / km², Kalinovik 2.9 inhabitants / km² and Kupres 6.6 inhabitants / km².

The most administrative-territorial units (municipalities and cities) have between 10-25,000 inhabitants, a total of 23, or 36.51%. This is followed by units with a total population below 5,000, 18 of them, or 28.57%. Ten units have between 10-10,000 inhabitants, or 15.87%. 7 units have between 25-50,000 inhabitants, or 11.11 %, and 5 have over 50,000 inhabitants, or 7.94% (Table 6, [8], [14]).

Geopolitical premises of refugee

Refugee, as a complex socio-political and demographic process is a consequence of the civil conflict in the geospace of the former SFR Yugoslavia.

About 2.2 million people left their pre-war homes in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which represents more than half of the total population. About 1.2 million BiH residents have sought refuge in more than 100 countries around the world. At the same time, about one million people were displaced within Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The refugee process has caused a wide range of socio-economic and political consequences in the geospace of the Republic of Srpska, but also in the wider geopolitical environment.

In addition to spatial and demographic, it caused socio-economic, psychological, cultural-historical and political consequences.

Spatial consequences refer to changes in the natural conditions and social way of life of the refugee population. This consequence is most pronounced among the refugee population from rural areas, because they find it difficult to accept the new - urban way of life. Demographic consequences are represented by disorders in age, gender, education and economic structure. Socio-economic consequences are based on the negative effects of refugees given the inadequate socio-economic status with most of this category of population. The psychological consequences of forced migration and refugees are determined by problems due to changes in lifestyle and refugee status, which often have a negative impact on a person's mental state. Cultural and historical consequences of the refugee process are based on the aggravated process of cultural assimilation of refugees

and displaced persons and adaptation to new environments. Political consequences are manifested in elements of national fragmentation and national disunity when sometimes even minimal differences between refugees and indigenous people are emphasized (overemphasized) and given a political context.

Even today, the refugee and displaced population as a recurrence of the war conflict is one of the most complex demographic elements of the geopolitical position of the Republic of Srpska.

SETTLEMENT SYSTEM OF THE REPUBLIC OF SRPSKA

After the end of the war and the harmonization of the inter-entity demarcation line in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the former 64 municipal centres were divided between the entities, so that the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina got 37 and the Republic of Srpska 27 of them.

The inter-entity line of demarcation conditioned the formation of new units of local self-government in the Republic of Srpska. Some of the newly formed municipalities are: Istočni Mostar, Istočni Drvar, Kupres, Krupa na Uni, Berkovići, Drinić - Petrovac, Petrovo, Vukosavlje, Pelagićevo, Donji Žabar, etc. Only 17 administrative-territorial centres belonging to the Republic of Srpska remained within the same administrative boundaries from the pre-war period.

In the administrative-territorial sense, the settlement system of the Republic of Srpska is organized by division into municipalities and cities.

It is represented by 8 cities (Banja Luka, Istočno Sarajevo, Bijeljina, Doboj, Prijedor, Zvornik, Trebinje, Gradiška) and 56 municipalities. According to the data from the 2013 Census of Population, Households and Dwellings, there are 2,756 inhabited places in the Republic of Srpska.

In composite river valleys: Vrbas, Sava, Sana, Una, Bosna, Drina and Trebišnjica, the following urban settlements developed: Banja Luka, Gradiška, Brod, Bijeljina, Prijedor, Novi Grad, Doboj, Zvornik, Foča, Trebinje. It is estimated that over 70% of the urban population is concentrated along the river valleys.

Based on the functional development of urban centres, the City of Banja Luka is of primary importance in the Republic of Srpska, as the leading political and administrative centre, which has the greatest geopolitical significance. Functional development, territorial size and demographic potential highlight Banja Luka as a strong macro-regional centre.

“The following stand out as the centres of the secondary hierarchical order: Istočno Sarajevo, Bijeljina, Prijedor, Doboj, Trebinje and Gradiška, which have a regional significance in the network of settlements. The centres of the third order are the following cities: Foča, Zvornik, Modriča, Teslić, Prnjavor, Laktaši, Novi Grad, Kozarska Dubica, which have the function of subregional centres. Fourth order centres are underdeveloped urban settlements, which are integrative factors of spatial and functional integration of municipal areas into subregional systems, and these are: Kneževo, Čelinac, Kotor Varoš, Bileća, Gacko, Nevesinje, Mrkonjić Grad” [4].

Based on various parameters (population, economic structure, employment rate, etc.), local self-government units in the Republic of Srpska, according to the level of development, can be classified as follows: developed, moderately developed, underdeveloped and extremely underdeveloped (Table 7 [18]).

Table 6: Local self-government units of the Republic of Srpska according to the level of development

Degree of achieved development of local self-government units - category	Lokal self government unit
Developed	Banjaluka, Bijeljina, Gacko, Gradiška, Derventa, Doboj, Zvornik, Istočna Ilidža, Istočno Novo Sarajevo, Laktaši, Modriča, Mrkonjić Grad, Pale, Prijedor, Prnjavor, Teslić, Trebinje, Ugljevik
Medium developed	Bileća, Brod, Višegrad, Kozarska Dubica, Kotor Varoš, Milići, Novi Grad, Sokolac, Srbac, Stanari, Foča, Čelinac
Underdeveloped	Bratunac, Vlasenica, Donji Žabar, Kostajnica, Ljubinje, Nevesinje, Pelagićevo, Petrovac, Petrovo, Ribnik, Rogatica, Han Pijesak, Šamac, Šipovo
Extremely underdeveloped	Berkovići, Vukosavlje, Istočni Drvar, Istočni Mostar, Istočni Stari Grad, Jezero, Kalinovik, Kneževo, Krupa na Uni, Kupres, Lopare, Novo Goražde, Osmaci, Oštra Luka, Rudo, Srebrenica, Trnovo, Čajniče, Šekovići

CONCLUSION

As a result of the war conflict in the geospace of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the former SFR Yugoslavia, but also global political and geographical processes in the last decade of the 20th and the first two decades of the 21st century, the Republic of Srpska is still going through turbulent phases of demographic and spatial transition.

Historical circumstances, natural-geographical features of the territory and socio-economic development have conditioned the current network of settlements in the Republic of Srpska, its development functions and specific demographic processes.

The demographic development of the Republic of Srpska in the last thirty years is characterized by unfavourable tendencies represented by natural depopulation, intensive aging process and unfavourable influence of emigration processes. Intensification of negative demographic processes threatens to become a decisive factor in the geopolitical valorisation of the Republic of Srpska.

Elements of demographic development directly affect the geopolitical characteristics of the Republic of Srpska. A special problematic issue, which opens with the analysis of demographic factors, are the geopolitical consequences arising from the existing changes in demographic structures and the spatial-demographic polarization of the geospace of the Republic of Srpska.

Demographic development and characteristics of the settlement system, as a quantitative-qualitative category, are an important factor that determines the geopolitical characteristics of the Republic of Srpska. They represent the primary component of the geopolitical position and one of the most important determinants of its political and geographical future.

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