

**CHANGES IN ETHNIC STRUCTURE OF POPULATION
IN CENTRAL BAČKA REGION OF AP VOJVODINA
(SERBIA) IN THE PERIOD 1948-2011**

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ABSTRACT

The subject of this paper is the analysis of changes in ethnic structure of the population in the central part of Bačka - the region of the Great Bačka Canal, comprising the areas of municipalities through which this canal flows, after the World War II. Natural conditions, war events, political and historical circumstances that led to emigration and immigration have resulted in the ethnic structure as it is today. The paper contains a comparison of changes in the ethnic structure in the region of the Great Bačka Canal, Bačka and Vojvodina. The paper uses descriptive statistics research method and data from the post-war censuses of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia. In the observed period Serbs became the biggest ethnic group, the share of Hungarians in the total population was halved, and the share of Croats was reduced threefold.

Keywords: Great Bačka Canal, Bačka, Vojvodina, ethnic structure

INTRODUCTION

Region of Vojvodina, in geographical terms, includes the northern part of Serbia, northwards from Sava and Danube. Vojvodina covers one quarter of Serbia, and about 27% of the population of Serbia lives on its territory. It consists of three mesoregional units: Banat, Bačka and Srem [1]. Bačka occupies the area of 9,244 km², which makes for 42.89% of the territory of Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (APV), or 10.44% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia.

Determining the region of the Great Bačka Canal (GBC region) is complex procedure. It could only be roughly determined based on the borders of the municipal areas in the central part of Bačka through which this canal flows, connecting its western and eastern landscapes. These are the territories of the city of Sombor and the municipalities of Kula, Vrbas, Srbobran and Bečej, whose total area is about 2,804 km², which is about 13.04% of the area of APV [2].

According to the 2011 Census, this region has 224,764 residents, which is 11.63% of the total number of residents of APV, with the noted decrease of this region's share in the total population of APV – from 13.48% in 1948 to 11.63% according to the 2011 Census [3].

Due to the physical-geographical features, but also the strategic position of migrations in the area of APV have always been extremely important, greater than in any area of the former Yugoslavia, and very often they were extremely turbulent. Namely, the periods of mass immigration and emigration changed, which often completely changed the demographic and ethnic picture of APV in a short period of time. Most often, economic and political factors were the cause of both immigration and emigration.

The greatest influence on today's ethnic structure of APV has been made by migrations from the beginning of the 18th century to the present. War events, natural conditions, political and historical circumstances that led to emigration and immigration have resulted in the ethnic structure as it is today [1].



Figure 1. Location of the Grand Backa Canal Region.

The GBC region is located in the central part of Bačka, where at the end of the 17th century there was about 40% of the area under ponds and swamps. By digging GBC, drainage has increased the area of fertile land, improved living conditions and this region has become a very desirable area for living and business, so that throughout history it has been the subject of settlement by members of different ethnic groups. As the countries to which it belonged changed, there were mechanical movements of the population. During the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the majority of the population were Germans, then Hungarians, and after the First and Second World Wars and the formation of new states, the South Slavic population was colonized. The disintegration of Yugoslavia and the formation of nation-states caused new migrations.

In the second half of the 20th century, periods of immigration, industrialization, emigration for economic reasons, and political turmoil took turns. In the 1990s, with the breakup of Yugoslavia and the creation of new ethno-national states, new mass migrations took place, in which mostly Serbs from the former republics of the Yugoslavia immigrated, and Hungarians and Croats emigrated. Common to all the ethnic groups in this area is the depopulation due to the consequences of negative natural increase, which is a result of their unfavourable age structure, increasingly pronounced need to move to larger city centres for education and employment, emigration for economic reasons [1]. Unlike other parts of APV and Bačka, the GBC region is characterized by the influence of colonisations caused by the construction of the canal, more intensive development of agriculture, significant industrialization and development of the entire area. Because of

that, the migration processes were more pronounced - immigration in favourable periods, emigration of Germans and parts of Hungarians after the world wars, arrival of colonists, rural-urban migration. Fewer and fewer inhabitants were engaged in agriculture, and the transition and the breakup of Yugoslavia had a very unfavourable effect on the economic status of the entire region. From the once leading municipalities in the APV, and even in the entire Republic of Serbia, the entire region has become an exodus area.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND DATA SOURCES

The subject of this paper is the analysis of the changes in ethnic structure of the population in the region of the GBC. The descriptive statistics research method was used in this paper for analysis of the population by national groups. The graphic method was used to display comparative statistical records in the regions of GBC, Bačka and APV.

Changes in the population of Bačka were frequent because the periods of demographic and economic prosperity alternated with the periods of recession and depopulation. Frequent migrations of peoples, numerous wars, epidemics, changes in states and cities, different economic changes, industrialization and urbanization processes caused huge demographic changes. Some of these factors had a stimulating effect, while others had a depressing effect on the number and ethnic structure of the population of Bačka. All these changes are interesting for geographic research, with significant difficulties caused by rare, irregular, incomplete and unreliable censuses [4].

Modern statistics on the territory of today's Vojvodina appeared in the second half of the 19th century, but frequent changes of administrative borders and changes in the methodology of data processing don't offer sufficient opportunities for research and comparison. In the paper, we used data from, post-war censuses of 1948, 1961, 1971, 1991, 2002 and 2011 on the territory of Vojvodina, Bačka and the municipalities belonging to the GBC region.

It is necessary to emphasize here that the question of ethnicity is formulated as an open-ended question with a legal instruction that, according to Article 47 of the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, citizens are not obliged to declare their ethnicity. Thus, in the 2011 Census, the highest international standard was met, according to which every person was guaranteed the right to free expression of his/her ethnicity [3].

Apart from socio-political events and demographic factors (migrations and natural growth), it should be stressed that non-demographic variables were important determinants of changes in the ethnic composition and territorial distribution of Serbia's population. Above all, it is the principal of free declaration on national affiliation which enables change of nationality, namely a temporary one (due to political, social, psychological reasons) or a permanent one (due to assimilation processes), which influences the population dynamics of ethnic communities. Ethno statistical data ranges may also be conditioned by applied (or changed) census – methodological solutions regarding certain nationalities, which are often a result of political circumstances and decisions [5].

RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In ethnic sense, Republic of Serbia is a multinational community. The final results of the 2011 Census showed that there are 21 ethnic communities in Serbia with more than 2,000 members. Besides Serbs, the most numerous are Hungarians, followed by the Roma and Bosniaks. In terms of multi-ethnicity, the region of Vojvodina stands out, where besides

Serbs (66.8%), members of a number of national minorities live as well. They are very different in regards to their origin, tradition, culture, mother tongue, religion and demographic features. Because of their ethnic, religious and cultural differences, the region of Vojvodina became a unique area.

Of the national minorities in APV, the most numerous are Hungarians (13.0%), Slovaks (2.6%), Croats (2.4%), Roma (2.2%), Romanians (1.3%), Montenegrins (1.2%), while members of other minorities individually make up less than 1% of the population of APV [3].

At the level of Bačka, Serbs are the most numerous (62.5%), and of the national minorities, more than 1% of the population are Hungarians (14.3%), Croats (3.6%), Slovaks (2.6%), Montenegrins (2.0%), Roma (1.8%), Bunjevci (1.6%) and Ruthenians (1.2%) [3].

In the GBC region, besides the most numerous Serbs (57.4%), the Hungarians (14.3%), Montenegrins (5.5%), Croats (3.8%), Ruthenians (3.6%) and Roma (1.4%) are the most represented, and about 1% are Ukrainians and Bunjevci.

The size of categories of residents who did not express their national affiliation is interesting - at the level of APV there are 4.19% of such citizens, in Bačka 5.08%, and in the region of GBC 5.77%. In the 1971 Census, the category Yugoslav - nationally undecided was represented by 2-3%, and in 1981 it was 8.5-9.5%, and in 1991 by 8.4-10%. After the breakup of Yugoslavia, in the 2002 Census, the percentage of those who declared themselves as Yugoslavs and those who did not declare themselves or were undecided was approximately the same: 2.5-3.5%. In the 2011 census, the category of Yugoslavs practically disappeared (less than 1%).

Whether they were a specific political category or an equal ethnic entity, the issue of the Yugoslav category depended to a great extent on the political background and social circumstances. Yugoslavs do not have a special ethnic origin, and their mutual frame of reference is identification with the country in which they live [6].

What's obvious is that Serbs and Hungarians together make for 73.61% in the region of the GBC, 76.77% in Bačka and 79.76% in APV [3].

As noted, during the early Middle Ages there was a great migration of people across the territory of today's Bačka. After the Huns, Goths, Alans, Sarmatians, Gepids, Franks, Pannonian Avars and Slavs, only the Hungarians created a more permanent state in these areas. Hungarians dominated Bačka until the arrival of Turks. During Turkish reign, the devastated areas were inhabited with Serbs and Bunjevci, and during the rule of Austria-Hungary, colonization of Hungarians, Germans, Slovaks and Ruthenians followed. The Serbs who were border guards and stock-keepers weren't included in the colonization to a greater extent, but instead they inhabited the area mostly spontaneously. These and all the subsequent migrations determined the ethnic mosaic of this region [4].

In the first half of the 20th century, the dominant ethnic group on the territory of Bačka were the Hungarians (34-42%), followed by Germans (20-25%) and Serbs (19-26%). Two world wars conditioned new migrations and colonisations, and so, from the 1953 Census, Serbs became the biggest ethnic group, while the Germans made for an insignificant ethnic group. With the departure of Germans, a mass colonization of Serbs from passive regions took place in the GBC region, and they became the most numerous ethnic group

Table 1. Changes in the ethnic structure of the population of the GBC region (1948-2011).

Censuses	Total	Serbs	Hungarians	Croats	Ruthenians	Montenegrins
1948	251,193	102,882	79,310	28,295	12,283	18,427
		40.96%	31.57%	11.26%	4.89%	7.34%
1953	257,873	105,115	79,609	26,805	12,877	17,959
		40.76%	30.87%	10.39%	4.99%	6.96%
1961	241,022	110,280	70,375	23,678	...	22,361
		45.76%	29.20%	9.82%	...	9.28%
1971	254,867	113,567	67,940	22,415	11,667	21,926
		44.56%	26.66%	8.79%	4.58%	8.60%
1981	257,638	111,125	59,889	18,262	11,202	24,148
		43.13%	23.25%	7.09%	4.35%	9.37%
1991	251,553	115,811	51,921	11,041	10,484	25,430
		46.04%	20.64%	4.39%	4.17%	10.11%
2002	251,871	115,159	51,565	11,062	10,418	24,642
		45.72%	20.47%	4.39%	4.14%	9.78%
2011	224,764	129,018	36,436	8,607	8,069	12,422
		57.40%	16.21%	3.83%	3.59%	5.53%

Source: Authors' computations based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia data.

The paper is presented an analysis of changes in the ethnic structure in the GBC region, with special emphasis on the groups that are most represented, namely Serbs, Hungarians and Croats. According to results of the 2011 Census, specificity of the GBC region in ethnic composition in relation to the entire territory of Bačka and APV is the noticeably higher presence of Montenegrins and Ruthenians, significant presence of Ukrainians and Bunjevci and practically a symbolic number of Slovaks and Romanians.

Table 1 shows the change in the number and percentage of the most represented ethnic groups in the GBC region, noting that Croats should take into account the fact that starting from the 1991 Census, the Bunjevci and Šokci categories appear, and in previous Censuses they mostly declared themselves as Croats. Until the 1971 Census, Ruthenians and Ukrainians were one category, and since 1971 they became separate categories.

Serbs

Serbs held absolute majority (50.58%) in the first post-war census in 1948. They didn't have even a relative majority (37.55%) in Bačka, while they were a relative majority (40.96%) in the GBC region. Increase of a share in total population is the consequence of emigration of the German population and the result of colonization, which was more intense in other mesoregions of APV than in Bačka, especially its northern part, where the Hungarians, who didn't conduct major emigrations after the war, dominated.

According to records from the census, the absolute number of Serbs during the observed period in Bačka was on a constant rise (from 302,000 that were registered in 1948 to 559,000 from, the 2002 census), while their number fluctuated for years around 110,000-115,000, i.e. around 45% in the GBC region. On the level of the entire AP Vojvodina, absolute number of Serbs at the beginning of the observed period was between 800,000 and 900,000, to be more than one million (1,018,000) for the first time in 1961. After that, a mild growth was recorded, but within the limits around 1.1 million, which made for

around 55-57% of the population. In the last intercensal period, markedly depopulated in all the three regions, the number of Serbs increased significantly, which was reflected in the relative share, which reached 62% in Bačka, 67% in APV, and in the GBC region, for the first time the Serbs had the absolute majority of 57.4% of the population. Serbs became an absolute majority (55-65%) in all the municipalities of the region except in Bečej, where they don't have even a relative majority (41%) [6].

The graph (Figure 2) shows the change in the share of Serbs in the total population in the region of GBC, Bačka and APV. The share of Serbs in the total population at the level of APV is about ten percent higher than the share in Bačka and in the GBC region. In all three regions during the observed period, except in the inter-census period from 1971-1981, the increase was constant and especially pronounced in the last inter-census period (2002-2011).

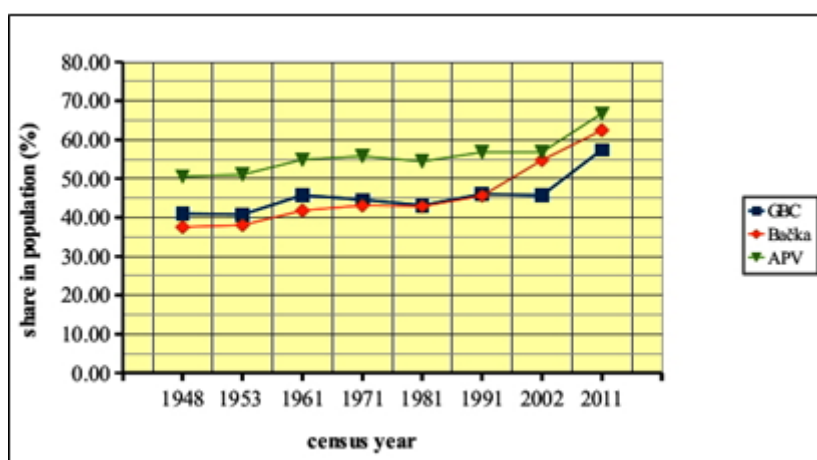


Figure 2. Change in the share of Serbs in the total population of the region GBC, Bačka and APV
Source: Authors' computations based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia data.

Even though the beginning of the observed period coincides with the end of the planned colonization of Serbs and to a lesser extent other South Slavic peoples (Croats, Montenegrins, Macedonians) from the passive mountainous regions of Yugoslavia, the further increase was influenced by spontaneous immigration. The decline in the period from 1971-1981 is explained by the decline in natural increase, and the positive migration balance which mostly referred to Serbs became negative. Also, a number of Serbs began to declare themselves as Yugoslavs [4], which is probably the key moment in this analysis of the decline in relative share.

However, the 1991 census recorded a significant increase in the absolute number of Serbs. This is a consequence of the national homogenization caused by the general political situation in the former SFR Yugoslavia. The 2011 census directly reflects the large immigration of refugees from the war-torn parts of the former Yugoslavia. The record increase in the relative number of Serbs in the GBC region is also a consequence of the emigration of Hungarians and Croats, as well as changes in the declaration of certain ethnic groups (Montenegrins, Croats). The great depopulation is also a result of internal migrations (emigration to Novi Sad and other industrial centres), as well as the reliefs that the residents of this region used in obtaining the citizenship of the countries of the EU, primarily Hungary.

Hungarians

Hungarians were the most numerous people in Bačka until the 1953 census, and after that census they took second place. Their share in the total population of Bačka in the observed period decreased from 38% (1948) to 14.3% (2011). The Hungarians from Bačka recorded their absolute highest population in the 1961 census: 307,307. In the GBC region, the share of Hungarians in the total population has halved - from 32% to 16%. The number of Hungarians decreased 2.17 times. The largest was 79,609. It gradually decreased to 51,565, which is the result from the 2002 Census, and the absolute minimum (36.436) was recorded in the 2011 Census. At the level of the entire APV, the number of Hungarians in the 1946-1961 censuses was about 400,000, with a steady decline after 1953. The largest decline was recorded in the inter-census period from 2002-2011, dropping from 339,491 to 251,136, with a decrease in the relative share of the total population from 26% to 13% [6].

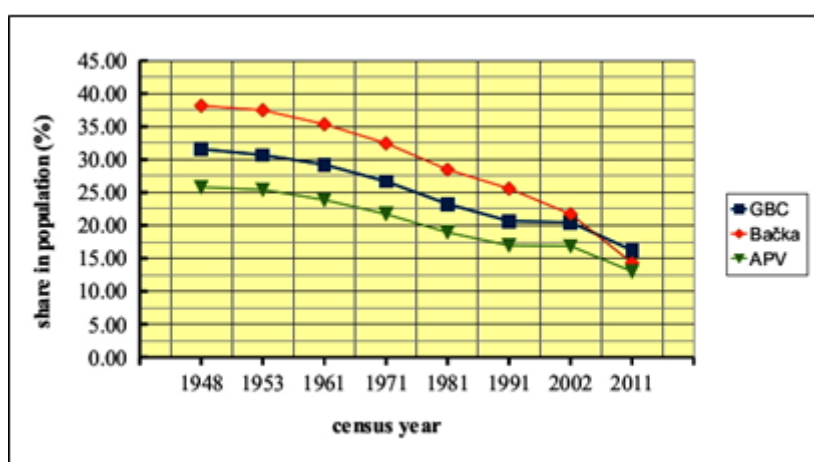


Figure 3. Change in the share of Hungarians in the total population of the region GBC, Bačka and APV
Source: Authors' computations based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia data.

After the emigration of Hungarians from this area after World War I and the negative natural increase, their number has stabilized. After the occupation of Bačka, Hungarian authorities colonized the Hungarians from Bukovina in place of the expelled Serbian colonists. Just before the end of World War II, most of these colonists emigrated to Hungary. The 1948 census registers a significant increase in the number of Hungarians in Bačka, which is an indication that there were no major emigrations of Hungarians after the war, and also that there was relatively little suffering during the war. In addition, 20,000 to 30,000 Germans declared themselves as Hungarians. The next census in 1953 recorded a slight increase in the number of Hungarians, but also a decrease in their share, which will continue in all subsequent censuses. This is explained by the worsened biological structure and the decline in the birth rate, as well as the constantly negative migration balance due to going to work abroad [4]. The GBC region is also characterized by emigration to other parts of Bačka (primarily to industrial centres of Novi Sad and Subotica, as well as areas where Hungarians are the dominant ethnic group).

In the period from 1992-2011, there was a significant emigration of Hungarians to their parent country due to the political and economic circumstances in which Serbia found itself after 1992. Also, we can expect a decrease in the number of Hungarians after 2011, when they were given the opportunity to take Hungarian citizenship, which greatly facilitated their path to resettlement and employment in EU countries, which is significant

in the years of difficult economic situation and significantly reduced employment, especially for the younger population.

In the GBC region, Hungarians in the municipality of Bečej, where they had an absolute majority according to the 2011 census, have a relative majority (41%), in the municipality of Srbobran and the city of Sombor they are second in share, in the municipality of Vrbas third (after Serbs and Montenegrins), and fourth in Kula municipality (after Serbs, Ruthenians and Montenegrins) [3].

Croats

Croats are the third largest ethnic group in Bačka in the post-war period. Until the end of World War I, they were very few in Bačka. At that time, most of the future Croats declared themselves as Bunjevci and Šokci. Only after the end of World War II did the 1948 census provide the first data on the number of Croats. As with most other ethnic groups, the number of Croats grew until the 1961 census, after which it started to decline. In addition to the unfavourable age structure and the decline in natural growth, the decline in the number of Croats is also influenced by going abroad to work. Also, in the 1981 and 1991 censuses, the declaration of Croats, Bunjevci and Šokci as Yugoslavs was noticeably increased [4].

The Croatian national minority is characterized by two long-term and general demographic processes - total depopulation (inter-census population decline) and demographic aging (reduction of the young contingent and increase of the old population). Changes in the number and structural characteristics of the Croatian population in APV during the second half of the 20th century, and especially since the early 1960's, were strongly influenced by demographic (endogenous) and non-demographic (exogenous) factors, among which particularly significant were the long-term emigration trends, increasingly unfavourable bioreproduction (low birth rate and higher mortality), rapid population aging, assimilation processes and census ethnomimicry, unfavourable political and social conditions in Serbia, especially in the late 1980s and 1990s (de-Croatization of Croats and the 'Bunjevci-Šokci' issue), the unresolved issue of Croatian minority, including the non-recognition of the status of (new) national minority after the breakup of Yugoslavia, the bad economic situation in Serbia, which has also encouraged emigration and the like [7].

To these factors of demographic dynamics of Croats in APV should be added the general determinants of modern social and demographic development of Serbia, above all the fact that "in the last decade of the 20th century there were radical political and economic changes in Serbia that significantly affected all segments of social life. The breakup of Yugoslavia and the creation of new ethno-national states, war and ethnic cleansing, a large number of refugees and displaced persons, voluntary and forced ethnocentric migrations have led to great changes in the demographic development and ethnic structure of the Serbian population" [8].

Total depopulation is the dominant dynamic demographic process in the Croatian minority community in Serbia, and has been uninterrupted since 1961. The number of people in APV who declared themselves as Croats in the census decreased in only fifty years (1961-2011) from 145,341 to 47,033 inhabitants or by 67.6%, or absolutely by 98 thousand people, with an average annual rate of -1.34%. In the same period, their share in the total population of the AP Vojvodina decreased from 7.84% to 2.43%. In Bačka in the same period, the number of registered Croats dropped from 96,098 to 35,437, i.e. by 60,661 or 63.1% or -1.26% per year, with a decrease of the relative share from, 11.62%

to 3.58%. In the GBC region, depopulation was present throughout the post-war period and the number of Croats decreased from 28,295 (when they accounted for 11.26% of the total population) to 8,667 or 69.3% or -1.10% per year. The intensity of depopulation was different in certain inter-census periods, which is indicative depending on the basic causes and factors of depopulation [6].

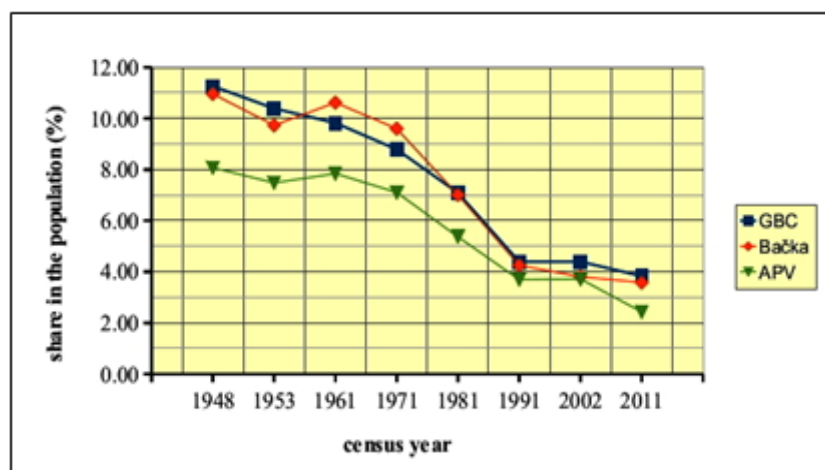


Figure 4. Change in the share of Croats in the total population of the region GBC, Bačka and APV
Source: Authors' computations based on the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia data.

In the region of the GBC, most Croats live in the city of Sombor, where their share went from around 23% down to 8.2%, with a significant number of those who declared themselves as Bunjevci or Šokci. In the municipalities of Kula and Vrbas, the share of Croats in the same period decreased from about 3% to 1.3%, while the municipalities of Srbobran and Bečej never had a significant number of Croats living there and their share was about 1.4%, while now it is below 1% [3],[6].

Other ethnic communities

The specificity of ethnic structure of the GBC region are the Ruthenians, Montenegrins and Ukrainians, whose population is significantly smaller in other parts of Bačka and APV.

Ruthenians and Ukrainians

Although represented in smaller numbers from other ethnic communities in Vojvodina, with a very small population resources, Ruthenians and Ukrainians have a very interesting folklore heritage and a variety of common, but different characteristics. Unlike the Ruthenians, who have migrated from the north-eastern counties of former Hungary in the eighteenth century, the current Ukrainians in Serbia, which mainly live in Vojvodina originate from migrations of Ukrainians from Bosnia, from the time when Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia were in the common state of Yugoslavia most mid-twentieth century [9].

Until the 1971 Census, Ruthenians and Ukrainians were collectively presented, so changes in the number of individual ethnic groups can be analysed in the period from 1971-2011. At the 1971 Census, there were 20,109 Ruthenians in the APV, who made up 1.03% of the total population, and 5,006 Ukrainians or 0.26%. In the same period, 16,802 Ruthenians (1.75%) and 3,441 Ukrainians (0.36%) lived in Bačka. In the GBC region in 1971, 11,667 people declared themselves as Ruthenians, which was 4.58%, while there

were 2,520 Ukrainians (0.99%). Over the next 40 years, the number of Ruthenians and Ukrainians decreased, so that in 2011 - 13,928 (0.72%) Ruthenians and 4,202 (0.22%) Ukrainians were listed in the APV. On the same list, there were 12,148 (1.23%) Ruthenians and 3,591 (0.36%) Ukrainians in Bačka, and 8,069 (3.59%) Ruthenians and 2,199 (0.98%) Ukrainians in the GBC region. So, the number of Ruthenians in the mentioned period decreased by 30%, and the number of Ukrainians at the level of APV by 16%, while at the level of Bačka it increased by 4%, which is a consequence of migration from Srem to Novi Sad [6].

The centres of the Ruthenian population concentration in APV were central parts of Bačka and western part of Srem. According to the 2011 census, the Ruthenians did not make the majority in any of the municipalities. Majority of the Ruthenians in APV (88%) live on the territory of the municipalities of Kula (10.6%), Vrbas (8.0%), Žabalj (5.1%), and Šid (3.4%) and the town of Novi Sad.

Territorial concentration of the Ukrainians differs partly from the Ruthenian population, although most of them live in the central part of Bačka in the municipalities of Kula (making almost 3% of the total population) and Vrbas (about 2% of the total population). In the GBC region, there is Ruski Krstur (Kula municipality) in which the Ruthenians have an absolute majority and Kucura (Vrbas municipality) where they have a relative majority.

Despite relatively favourable conditions for further development in all areas of social and public life, there has been a visible decreasing trend of population within these two communities, which is highly prominent with the Ruthenians. We may expect further decrease in the number of the Ruthenians and the Ukrainians in the future, due to the negative natural population growth, unfavourable age structure, prominent need for migrations to urban centres in search for education and employment opportunities, where there is possibility of exposure to assimilation and acculturation processes, mixed marriages and emigration of educated professionals to foreign countries [9].

Montenegrins

The traces about colonization of Montenegrins on the territory of APV dated from the time after the First World War, 1918, when the king Alexander I Karađorđević gave a prize by the land in APV to the volunteers and warriors of the Balkan wars and the First World War. About agrarian reform after the World War I and the arrival of people from Montenegro, there are numerous sources [10]. The Second World War interrupted this land reform and colonization. At the end of the Second World War, new authority conducted new colonization [11].

Montenegrins were colonized in the central part of Bačka. The biggest migrations of Montenegrins happened in the period from 1947-1948, but the waves of colonization continued later on as well.

Montenegrins have been settling in Serbia for decades. APV (besides Belgrade) is considered the most desirable area for immigration. They would adapt to the new environment quickly and easily, taking massive and active roles in social and political processes. Causes of migrations can be distinguished: an economic nature, the cultural, individual emancipation, the political, the emotional (planning a marriage). The most frequent cause for migration to Serbia was enrolment into high schools or universities. Some of the cases of migrations were inspired by the example of friends or relatives [12]. Number of Montenegrins in APV was increasing with different intensity until disintegration of Yugoslavia. After that, it started to reduce. The most intensive fall was

noticed according to data of census 2011. The greatest intensity was between the years 1971 and 1981. In that period the number of Montenegrins in Vojvodina was increased for 16.2%.

Around 90% of Vojvodinian Montenegrins live in Bačka, around 60% in the GBC region. The biggest population of Montenegrins in the APV was recorded in 1991, when 41,721 members of this ethnic group were registered, and they made for 2.22% of province's population. From this number, 38,138 of them lived in Bačka, where their relative share was 3.79%. In the GBC region, there were 25,430 of them, and with 10.11% they formed the third largest ethnic group per share in the population of this region.

After census in the year 1991, number of Montenegrins decreased for one-fifth (20.8%). From the census 2002 until census 2011 number of Montenegrins decreased for more than one third (37.7%). This decade will be remembered, as it was constituted independent Montenegro, 2006.

If it is compared the greatest number of Montenegrins registered in APV (1991) with the number when they were registered as minimum (2011), it may be said that the size of this ethnic group was divided into halves for only twenty years.

The analysis of the age structure of Montenegrins in APV in the second half of 20th century and during 21st century has shown that they were "slowly" getting old together with the majority of population in the Province, so that is not the main reason.

Proclamation of Montenegro's independency in the year 2006 opened the question of identity. There are some opinions, which are based on the language characteristics, religion, etc. that the Montenegrins are the Serbs who originate from the territory of Montenegro. However, those understandings according which they make a special ethnic group are also evident. According to census 2011, the Montenegrins in APV make two groups of people. One group make those who feel ethnic characteristic in the sense that they speak the Montenegrins language and support the idea of existence of Montenegro's Orthodox Church, according to the government policy of Montenegro. The second one, who make the majority of Montenegrins in APV are those whose origin is from the territory of Montenegro, so they declare uch because of traditional or economic reasons, emphasizing that the most appropriate name for them would be "Serbian-Montenegrin". In the 2011 census, they decided to declare themselves as Serbs or as "other", "did not declare", "regional affiliation" or "unknown" [13].

CONCLUSION

The greatest influence on today's ethnic structure of APV has been made by migrations from the beginning of the 18th century to the present. War events, natural conditions, political and historical circumstances that led to emigration and immigration have resulted in the ethnic structure as it is today [1].

Due to the specific territorial distribution and ethnic dominance of relevant national minorities in the border areas of the country, ethnocentric migration in the observed regions led to an increase in the share of Serbs and a decrease in the share, especially the largest national minorities in these border areas of Serbia.

Ethnocentric migrations (both voluntary and forced) were the driving force behind the change of the country's ethnic structure in terms of creating more nationally homogeneous regions, not only with regard to the national structure of the refugee-population, but also taking into account the emigration of other nationalities as well (Hungarians and Croats) who migrated to their mother countries for political and economic reasons [14].

Serbs held absolute majority (50.58%) in the first post-war census in 1948. They didn't have even a relative majority (37.55%) in Bačka, while they were a relative majority (40.96%) in the GBC region. In all three regions during the observed period, the increase in the share of Serbs is constant and especially pronounced in the last inter-census period (2002-2011), so that the share of Serbs in APV in 2011 reached 67%, in Bačka 62%, and in the GBC region for the first time, Serbs have an absolute majority and make up 57.4%. In the observed period, the share of Hungarians in the total population was halved, and the share of Croats was reduced threefold. For other national minorities, not so many changes in the relative share are evident, except for the categories of Yugoslavs and Montenegrins, where after the disintegration of Yugoslavia and the separation of Montenegro, the right to free expression of ethnicity came to the fore.

Generally observed, it may be concluded that ethnic homogenization and spatial distribution of population at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st century were influenced by massive migrations, ethnically differentiated natural growth, national-religious "awakening" of many ethnic communities, more or less pronounced assimilation and integration processes, as well as a complex political and socio-economic situation in that period. It is justifiably assumed that the tendencies of changes in ethnic population structure are not finished, nor the processes which condition them. However it is not possible to foresee what the changes in ethnic composition will be in the forthcoming period, primarily because of unknown trends in population reproduction, and the even more unclosed questions of the direction and intensity of future internal and external migrations, stability of national determination of certain ethnic communities and similar [5].

Despite all these processes, the regions of GBC, Bačka and APV represents a real ethnic mosaic of various nationalities exceptionally differentiated by their ethnic-cultural characteristics, so good majority-minority relations. National minority rights protection and ethnic tolerance are the key to stability in this province.

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