

THE DEVELOPMENT OF GEOGRAPHICAL AND GEOPOLITICAL POSITION OF CROATIA

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Croatia, with an area of 56.538 km² and 4,8 million inhabitants is one of 22 recently recognized European countries. It is considered to be one of the new European states, although it existed as an independent state in the early Middle Ages. Its territorial sovereignty has been again consolidated recently. It is the result of internationally recognized borders, the successful resistance of Croat people to the Serb aggressor as well as its political and institutional relations with the International community, Croatian emigration and Bosnian entity.

The geographical site of Croatia is significant because it occupies a unique position in a contact area between Central Danubian basin and the Central Mediterranean. It is here that the narrowest and the lowest relief barrier between the Central Danubian basin and the Northern Adriatic is found, connecting Central and Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean.

Situated between Western European countries Austria, Slovenia, Italy, and Eastern European countries Hungary, Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia plays an important geopolitical and traffic role in Europe.

Key words: Croatia, historical-geographical development, borders, nation, geopolitics

Hrvatska s površinom od 56.538 km² i 4,8 milijuna stanovnika je jedna od 22 novopriznate Europske zemlje. Smatra se najčešće da je to nova europska zemlja premda je kao neovisna država postojala još u ranom srednjem vijeku. Njen teritorijalni suverenitet ponovno je nedavno utvrđen zahvaljujući međunarodno priznatim granicama, uspješnom otporu hrvatskog naroda srpskoj agresiji, političkim i institucionalnim odnosima s međunarodnom zajednicom, hrvatskom dijasporom i bosansko hercegovačkom državom.

Geografski položaj Hrvatske je značajan jer obuhvaća jedinstvenu zonu dodira Srednjeg Podunavlja i Središnjeg Sredozemlja. Upravo ovdje je reljefna prepreka između srednjepodunavskog bazena i sjevernog Jadrana najuža i najniža, omogućujući povezivanje Srednje i Istočne Europe sa Sredozemljem.

Smještena između Zapadnoeuropskih zemalja Austrije, Slovenije, Italije i istočnoeuropskih, Mađarske, Jugoslavije i Bosne i Hercegovine, Hrvatska ima važnu geopolitičku i prometnu ulogu u Europi.

Ključne riječi: Hrvatska, povijesno-zemljopisni razvoj, granice, narod, geopolitika

Introduction

Connecting European West and East, Panonian Basin and Mediterranean region, Croatia is even today in the focus of many different political and economic interests. It is necessary to apostrophise the importance of Croatia in connecting Visegrad and Mid European countries with the Adriatic and Mediterranean (transport, traffic, oil pipeline, strategic interests).

With an area of 56.538 km² and 4,8 million inhabitants, this country is one of 22 recently recognized European countries. Although it existed as an independent state in the early Middle Ages, Croatia is considered to be one of the new European states. Its territorial sovereignty has been again consolidated recently. It is the result of internationally recognized borders, the successful resistance of Croat people to the Serb aggressor as well as its political and institutional relations with the International community, Croatian emigration and Bosnian entity. Situated between Western European countries Austria, Slovenia, Italy, and Eastern European countries Hungary, Yugoslavia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia plays an important geopolitical and traffic role in Europe.

The geographical site of Croatia is significant because it occupies a unique position in a contact area between Central Danubian basin and the Central Mediterranean. It is here that the narrowest and the lowest relief barrier between the Central Danubian basin and the Northern Adriatic is found, connecting Central and Eastern Europe to the Mediterranean (V. Rogić, 1994).

According to some individual experts, institutions, the July 1993 EBRD report, etc., Croatia is among those new countries with best developing prospects. It is quite understandable if we consider its resources such as tourism, agriculture, light industry, shipbuilding, traffic and trade (M. Foucher, 1994). Even foreign exchange has been developing, in spite of war (post war) conditions.

Undoubtedly, a large diaspora has played an important role in the resistance for political and economic survival, supporting the country during the war. They are also going to be a stable source of investment and expertise.

Because of the war 1991-1995, Croatia was exposed to the risk of being marginalized. Needless to say that it has suffered great damages in this sense. Solving the conflicts, Croatia has all possibilities of making up for what was lost in the war.

In spite of its relevant geographical position, recent geopolitical situation showed that European Council hesitated until 1996 to accept membership of Croatia. The explanation was that Croatia had not accepted all iuridic predispositions to be permitted to join European Council. However the perspectives are not bad in this sense, because after entering the Council, Croatia acclimatized its whole legislative according to the west countries standards.

Although severely damaged by war and has been paying the high price for reconstruction, the Croatian economy has however resisted. With right

diplomatic activity, possibilities of private investments and foreign capital, for the purpose of reviving and reconstructing it, are opened.

Europe, as a relevant political factor, unfortunately was not able to interfere in the right moment and the right way, in solving the crisis and preventing the war in ex Yugoslavia. It seems, that was the reason why UNPROFOR (IFOR), American and NATO interventions had been necessary.

Historical and geographical retrospect

After this brief introduction, here are some important facts from the history and geopolitics of Croatia.

The first form of political and geographical integration of today's Croatian territory happened during the Roman rule, particularly after Diocletian's reforms (the 4th century). The largest part of nowadays Croatia was included in the province of Dalmatia in Illyria which was later divided into two provinces, being separate administrative units (Dalmatia, Liburnia). Their metropolis and administrative centres were Salona (Solin near Split) and Iader (Zadar). Including territorially Mediterranean, Dinaric Mountain range areas, and the Peri-Pannonian border regions, even then, Dalmatia and Liburnia showed the essential features of nowadays Croatia. Besides Dalmatia and Liburnia (their names come from the names of Illyrian ethnics), four Pannonian provinces, which gravitated towards the urban centres of Ptuj (Poetovio), and Szombathely (Savaria), Sisak (Siscia), and Srijemska Mitrovica (Sirmium) belonged partly to the present Northern Croatia (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

The waves of barbarous Germanic and Ural-Altai Tribal Alliances destroyed antique urban net and population density. Slavic colonisation was attributed to the last phase (6th-7th century) and included Croatian tribes too (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

At the beginning of the formation of Croatian territory, two political cores were established. The first one was in the north-western part of the former provinces of Dalmatia and Liburnia (Littoral or Dalmatian Croatia including White and Red Croatia), and the second was organised in the area of the former Sava and Upper Pannonian provinces (Pannonian Croatia, Slavonian Croatia or Sclavonia, Slavonia etc.). In that period the terms "White Croatia" for the northern coastal part and "Red Croatia" for the southern territories, were used.

Between these two political units, Red or Dalmatian Croatia was the first to be politically and territorially organised. It is important to underline that it included geographically the Mediterranean (and sub-Mediterranean area too) and the Dinaric Mountain Range. Its borders were on the rivers Raša (NW) and Cetina (SE). The borderland to Pannonian Croatia or Croatian Slavonia, was stabilised on the Peri-Pannonian hills in the zone Kapela - Plješevica - Grmeč - Petrova Gora - Zrinska Gora (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

The preserved remains of ancient Roman agrarian landscape show that, at the time, Croatia was a significant agrarian area with developed and stabilised agriculture (most significant Roman and Dalmatian urban centres Zadar, Trogir

and Salona and its successor Split, alongside the Adriatic coast). The complementary use of the best winter pastures was of predominant importance too.

Owing to these particularly significant centres the Croats got very quickly in touch with the ancient Roman-Catholic civilisation. As a result of christianisation and the fateful integration of the Croats into the West-European cultural circle, the national centres: Nin, Biograd, Knin, were the first to start developing. Therefore, the early Croatian geopolitical core is closely identified with this central zone in the first dualistic territory of early Croatia. The original name of this area near Zadar (Hrvati=Croats) shows undoubtedly its significance and confirms its central role (V. Rogić, 1994). One of the most important documents in Croatian geopolitical past shows how this land was politically recognised by the pope in 879, during the rule of duke Branimir. It was the first international recognition of Croatia, which so far had suffered Frank or Byzantine domination.

Very soon the White and Red Croatian state integrated with the Slavonic one, comprising the so called Neretva Principality (or Neretva Kraina) as well as medieval core of future Bosnian state. In the very beginning of the 10th century, during the rule of the first Croatian King Tomislav (crowned in 925) and later, united Croatia extended between the Drave and Danube rivers to the NE and the Adriatic sea to the SW. The Sutla, Kupa and Raša rivers formed the NW borders, and the Drine river the E ones (M. Klemenčić, 1993). The Croatian name also expanded in this period. On the eastern outlying territories Croatian sovereignty and influence were only temporary and often diminished by the influences of medieval Byzant, Doclea, Bulgaria or Raska (Serbia) states. So, early medieval Croatian state covered the great deal of Croatian ethnic territory.

Croatian rulers, having the titles of Dukes and later Kings of "Croatia and Dalmatia" (V. Rogić, 1994), dominated the Adriatic Sea, especially its eastern coast, important for navigation. Neither Venice could realise then its aspirations in emerging the leading geopolitical power in the Adriatic and gaining control over its eastern coast.

The organisation of the first Croatian territory expresses the vitality of the early Croatian geopolitical core in the 10th and the 11th centuries. The following facts prove it (V. Rogić, 1994):

- the whole territory was liberated from the Frank and Byzantine domination
- the geopolitical sovereignty covered the area of White and Red Croatia including Croatian Slavonia too.
- the strong land forces of Hungary and Bulgaria were successfully beaten as well as the maritime forces of Venice.
- Croatian authorities in the Adriatic urban centres extended by realising ethnic and socio-cultural integration.

It was especially significant during the reign of King Petar Krešimir IV, who commanded a very strong naval force in the 11th century, and also during the rule of King Zvonimir, one of the latest kings of national blood.

The most important glagolitic monument in Croatia, dating from the early Middle Ages, the "Baška stone" mentions the name of King Zvonimir in the exceptional Croatian glagolitic script (V. Rogić, 1994).

At the beginning of the 12th century, after joining Hungary in a state union, which was a kind of dual royalty, the main Croatian regions started to be named by their regional names (Dalmatia, Slavonia, Bosnia). Croatian territory was diminished considerably, besides some of its regions separated and formed individual states (M. Klemenčić, 1993). For instance: from the 12th to the 14th centuries Bosnia, although being ethnically Croatian territory, stabilised and expanded. In the southern maritime region, the city of Dubrovnik developed as an independent republic with solid sea and continental trade economy. Venice succeeded temporarily in dominating western part of Istria and some Croatian coastal centres.

The unified Hungaro-Croatian Royalty with a new Hungarian Arpad dynasty enabled some changes in relations between Litoral and Pannonian Croatia. These were not in contrast with the establishment of Croatian Medieval state and historical development of the Croats. As complementary territorial units, Croatian territories, both coastal and Pannonian, had a special significance for Hungaro-Croatian Kingdom and the ethnically homogenous population. The process of assimilation of post Roman urban population, some old and territorially separated autochthonous groups of Illyrians, and Vlach shepherds ("the Croatian Vlachs" in some middle ages' documents) happened spontaneously and peacefully among the various groups of Kajkavian, čakavian and Štokavian Croats (V. Rogić, 1994).

The Hungarian royal dynasty, after dying out, was followed by the French Anjou dynasty (1300-1409). It happened with the help of Croatian nobility. After Anjou dynasty, there were German, Lithuanian-Polish and native dynasties enjoying the throne of the United Hungaro-Croatian Royalty. It caused no changes in the geopolitical and administrative unity of coastal and inland Croatian territories (V. Rogić, 1994).

It is necessary to stress the significance of Dubrovnik, which was the main centre in trade connection with the Bosnia-Herzegovina territory, as well as in the development of Medieval Bosnia. These two entities, closely connected both economically and culturally with the old Croatian geopolitical core, played an important role over the Croatian ethnic territory.

The social and cultural emerging of Medieval Bosnia as the most significant Croatian ethnic space outside Dalmatian and Pannonian Croatia, was determined by Ban's (Viceroy's) leadership and by the specific coexistence of the Catholic church and some heretic groups in Bosnia (V. Rogić, 1994).

The penetration of Venetian rule on Croatian coastal territory diminished Croatia's geopolitical function and strength. The territory conquered by Venice, politically and economically important and situated in the non-continuous narrow territory of the coastal Dalmatian Croatia, included (after 1409) almost all Croatian islands and leading ports. Only Dubrovnik and Senj did not suffer this occupation. Dubrovnik, particularly, realised an exceptional economic growth as a politically and economically independent republic under

the paid protection of the Ottoman Empire. The ports and islands, which lost their economic and political freedom, could not develop any more their functions of leading centres of Croatia. But, their cultural function, still remained as the most exclusive one all over the Croatian ethnic territory (V. Rogić, 1994).

After the Turks conquered Bulgaria, Serbia and Bosnia in the 14th-15th c., the diminishing of Croatian state area continued. It is especially because of the fall of Bosnia in the 15th c. that Croatia lost gradually some regions. The widening of the Ottoman Empire and the weakening of Croatia lasted through the 16th century too. Till the end of the century it resulted with an extreme contraction of its territory. The confines included the smallest territory Croatia had ever covered. In historical documents this was called: "reliquiae reliquiarum alim incliti regni Croatiae" ("the remnants of the remnants of once flourishing Croatian Royalty")(see also M. Klemenčić, 1993).

The extension of the Ottoman Empire caused a fatal and tragic transformation of Croatian territory and ethnic in the 16th and the 17th centuries. Border regions were completely deserted, hundreds and hundreds of thousands of people were killed or emigrated towards west and north (Istria, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Slovakia, Moravia), as well as towards local aristocracy settled areas.

As the result of continuous Ottoman war aggressions, demographic and economic regression attacked almost all regions. The tragic destiny of Croatian people was stressed by the division of the Nation into two religions: Catholic and the new Islamic one. It often caused fighting and rebellion between them (see also V. Rogić, 1994). Eastern mentality and Byzantine behaviour infected all the Croatian regions after being occupied by Ottoman Empire and partially named: Turkish or Ottoman Croatia. This geographic notion concerning an area on the NW of today's Bosnia, the last territory of the country to be conquered (at the end of the 16th and start of the 17th centuries), is nothing but a vivid remind of the tradition of the formerly unified Croatian territory (see also V. Rogić, 1994). It has to be stressed that the penetration of Serb orthodox church over the medieval catholic territory was enabled and stimulated by its privilegeous position in Ottoman Empire (Serbian Orthodox Millet).

The defensive character along the Croatian front lines changed into a more offensive one by introducing Habsbourg dynasty to Hungaro-Croatian Royalty throne in the middle of the 16 century. Carrying at the same time the title of the Holy Roman Emperors, they successfully organised defense forces along the Croatian borders, exploiting the effects of the Turkish internal deterioration (see also V. Rogić, 1994)

Border military forces were mobilised out of dissatisfied Turkish frontier guard members. They were Christians attracted, by money or more rights, to cross the border and to fight against Moslems. Similarly, Venice organised southern border military forces, stimulating the fugitive immigrants and local population to fight against Ottoman attacks. During the 17th century an enormous pressure to Ottoman borders was applied, showing the cruelties and methods that had been used in the period of Ottoman expansion (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

The whole period of these dramatic wars against Ottoman aggression, both before and after Ottoman Empire climax, was characterised by very stable and vital Croatian internal political organisation. It included the Croatian parliament (Sabor), and a unique function of Ban's (Viceroy's) rule and authority in the dual Hungaro-Croatian Royalty (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

After the relatively unified ethnic structure of the pre Ottoman time had crushed up, a new and more complex one stabilised. Not only the Croats, who were mainly farmers and borders' settlers, inhabited in 17 c. these regions, but also emigrant Vlachs and Serbs led by pretty aggressive Serbian Orthodox Millet (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

The Ottoman expansive phase turned towards subsequent stagnation and decrease, which was the result of an anti-Ottoman coalition too. Croatia was successfully included in the coalition, especially in their actions against Turkey at the end of the 17th century (1683-99). The return of almost all Pannonian lowland regions (which had been lost in the 16th c.), was an important success with a significant historical and geographic impact on Croatia (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

Partially, some units of Turkish Croatia being parts of the Bosnian Eyalet, which had been conquered by Ottoman Empire, were included into the Dalmatian Croatian territory under the administration of Venice (*acquisto nuovo* = new acquisitions) (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

The Republic of Dubrovnik, under the protectorate of Ottoman Empire, gave two corridors of its own territory (Neum and Sutorina) to Turks in order not to have any border line with possession occupied by Venice. This shows a skilful defensive diplomacy trying to border only Bosnian Eyalet, as a simple but effective protective measure (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

At the beginning of the 18th century Croatia, being a part of Austrian Empire, continued to regain some of the occupied regions. Slavonia, a part of Srijem, Banija and the main part of Lika were, both formally and really, given back by the Peace of Karlowitz (Srijemski Karlovci) in 1699. In 1718, with the Peace of Passarowitz (Požarevac), the remainder part of Srijem was regained too (see also M. Klemenčić, 1993). It is very important to stress that Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina were the predominant ethnic group until the mid of 18 century, when Moslems started to be more numerous. That was the result of big migration process connected with last war actions between Austria and Ottoman Empires, when many Croats were forced to leave Bosnia, and many Moslems entered its territory. Parallely, Venice extended its administration in coastal region until she fell in 1798, and Dalmatian part was territorially united to the Austrian Empire too (see also M. Klemenčić, 1993).

This enabled the initiatives for the reunion of the main Croatian regions, starting with the official name Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia. During the short period of French rule between 1806 and 1815 (Conquists of Napoleon), many reforms were applied in southern Croatian regions and, Dubrovnik Republic, losing its independence, was incorporated in (see also V. Rogić, 1994).

The initiatives of reuniting Croatian regions were openly declared during the national awakening and cultural revival of the 1830s. It was in

revolutionary 1848 that Ban (Viceroy) Josip Jelačić succeeded in introducing Ban's authority in all of them. It means over the greater part of the territory, historically recognised as Croatian one, now being inside the borders of Austrian Monarchy. The new Ban's function covered the Croato-Slavonian area with its military border territories, as well as the district of Rijeka and the whole region of Dalmatian Croatia, including Dubrovnik region (V. Rogić, 1994)..

The name of Triune Kingdom (Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia), started being applied. Confirmed and used only politically and formally, it was not practically used in Dalmatian coastal region. Namely, Croats in Dalmatia, as well as in other regions: Istria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, southern Hungarian districts of Baranya and Bacs-Bodrog, realised a separate social and economic life inside the borders of the new Austrian Monarchy (V. Rogić, 1994).

Political reforms in 1867, characterised by Austro-Hungarian Ausgleich (Arrangement), creating a dual Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (Empire), did not improve the position of the Croatian nation, administratively fragmented into various regions. On the contrary, the main Croatian port, Rijeka, and Međimurje region were taken by Hungary, and Dalmatia by Austria. Bosnia and Herzegovina, being in 1878 practically separated from the Ottoman Empire, was declared as an Austro-Hungarian condominium (V. Rogić, 1994).

Ban Croatia, continuing formally the legal entity of old Croatian Kingdom, had a specific and unique status in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. With the administratively fragmented Slovenian regions, *Ausgleich Croatia* was culturally and economically the most progressive part of future Yugoslavia. Territorial expansion of Serbia in 1878, and in 1913, of Bulgaria in 1882, etc., did not influence the developing trends in Croatian regions (V. Rogić, 1994).

The Austro-Hungarian imperial confederation fell in World War I. It inspired the realisation of the old idea of creating a new south slavic state (later named Yugoslavia). This programme, supported both by open protagonists in Ban Croatia and rather hidden ones in Serbia, was also stimulated by France, England and Russia (V. Rogić, 1994).

Utilising the Yugoslav name, Serbian politicians and the king, accepted this concept as a greater Serbian state project. Being aware of its lower economic and cultural level, Serbians used better political position to enable their imperialistic interests by developing political and military activities. The Yugoslav concept was not accepted in Bulgaria.

With the capitulation of Austro-Hungarian Empire, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary and short lived State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs were constituted. In a very questionable way, the State of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs which included previous parts of A.-H. Empire, joined the Kingdoms of Serbia and Montenegro. The new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was constituted (see also M. Klemenčić, 1993), and Croats, like other south Slavic nations (excluding Bulgarians), came under direct Serbian hegemony. The ethnic and state rights, especially in Croatia, Montenegro etc., were completely suppressed in the name of fictive unity directed from Belgrade.

The new administrative and territorial division in regional districts was formed, trying to break down Croatian and other nations' integrity. Yugoslavia

was artificially regionalised to insure the Serbian hegemony. Also, some important parts of Croatian coastal territory were annexed by Italy in 1920: Istria, some islands, Zadar, Rijeka). "Instead of the idyllically imagined union of the South Slavic peoples from "the Alps to the Black Sea", there was a centralist non democratic unitarian kingdom under expressed Serbian domination." (Rogić, 1994).

Such a situation inspired the resistance of dissatisfied Croats and more repression from the Serbian side. The long lasting period of internal crisis lasted till 1939, when the autonomous Ban Croatia was renewed as a political compromise arranged in the pre-war situation (V. Rogić, 1994). As a provisional solution, it was short-lived (1939-1941). This Ban Croatia extended over the regions with Croatian majority, including even some parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina as well (M. Klemenčić, 1993). It means that all parts of previous Ausgleich Croatia with Međimurje and Dalmatia were included, with the exception of Boka Kotorska, which was traditionally part of Dalmatia. Bordering regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a considerable Croatian majority were integrated too (V. Rogić, 1994). But, the very important region of eastern Srijem was excluded.

After the break down of Yugoslav Kingdom in April 1941, the Independent State of Croatia was proclaimed as one of the German and Italian satellites. It included almost all Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Mussolini's Italy realised an extension of the Italian territory in the significant Croatian coastal region. The territory of The Independent State of Croatia was divided into Italian and German occupied sectors. Military administration and war situation resulted with a significant pressure and dominance introduced by both fascist powers (from Sept. 1943 only German). It was done similarly in other occupied countries in Europe (M. Klemenčić, 1993).

The result of World War II was the breakdown of Nazi Germany. It enabled the reconstruction of Yugoslavia, not as a kingdom but as a federal union of six Yugoslav republics and two autonomous provinces under the communist rule. Also, the result was the establishment Croatia inside its nowadays territory. The present, internationally recognised borders, were stabilised through a compromise of the Croatian Anti-Fascist Movement with other Anti Fascist Movements in ex Yugoslavia. The ethnic moment was taken in consideration as well as the fact of political reaffirmation of Bosnian and Herzegovinian Republic, which is also a state of the Croatian nation (M. Klemenčić, 1993). It reduced Croatia's territory as well.

Again, the territories of ex Triune Kingdom (Croatia, Slavonia, Dalmatia), have become the core of today's Croatia. But a large part of Srijem was given to Serbia (Voivodina), and Montenegro took the southern part of Dalmatia from the Bay of Kotor (Boka Kotorska) to Spič (Sutomore). According to the principle of national majority, Croatia did extend on Southern Baranya, originally Hungarian area that was gained by the Yugoslav Kingdom after World War I. Istria, Rijeka, Zadar and some islands (Cres, Lošinj, Lastovo, Palagruža, etc.) were also incorporated back, to the Croatian sovereignty, after being patronised by Italy for 23 years (see also M. Klemenčić, 1993).

After all the changes that have been discussed above, it is obvious that the present state borders of Croatia are the result of extremely large and continuous territorial reductions, and small, artificial and compromising gains. This characterise, however, almost all other European countries. The gradual independence of Bosnia, starting in the Middle Ages, continuing with Ottoman conquest of Bosnia, and ending with the present territory, prettily reduced Croatian territory. This one was furtherly diminished in the Yugoslav Federation, by losing some regions which came into possession of Serbia and Montenegro, as mentioned (see also M. Klemenčić, 1993).

After the constitution of socialist or better to say communist Yugoslavia, a perfidious model of an artificial and forced "brotherly" balance of proclaimed equality, reciprocity and selfmanagement was applied.

Conducted by the Tito's communist party it was some kind of perfidious federation standing between East and West. Cruel, but very tactically hidden pressure on non-Serbs and democracy, resulted in an enormous military force, emigration and other problems. Serbia and Montenegro generally had, as result, tacitly accepted priority in availability and distribution of federal budget for economic development. After Tito's death, Serbian nationalism escalated, pressing other nations, especially Albanians of Kosovo. The simulated economic problems, forced by Yugoslav Army costs and expenses, produced the expressed reactions of dissatisfaction.

The recent trends of decreasing the Eastern Block pressure, enabled some new democratic changes in ex socialist countries too. Yugoslavia was obliged to permit free elections in constitutional republics.

The first democratic elections in Croatia in 1990 as well as in Slovenia paved the way to the democracy and to the process of economic and political liberation. The official Belgrade policy intensively proserbian, rendered impossible all the attempts of agreement on an equal basis. Serbian minority in Croatia, especially in bordering regions was used for brutal provocations, killing and destroying in Croatia in 1990 and 1991. It led to the dead stop of traffic, to terrorist attacks, to the proclamation of the autonomy of Serbs, to the open attacks against the legal and democratic Croatian Government. The official Yugoslav National Army (YNA) captured the arms and weapons belonging to the Civil Guard and local Territorial Units in whole Croatia, but giving it to Serbs.

Open anticroatian attitude of the official authorities in Belgrade supporting disorders and destruction of goods and killing people in Croatia as well as injustices inflicted on the Croatians, actuated new aspirations of Croatia to secede from Yugoslavia. Slovenia too carried a resolution for independence. The possibilities of a confederation or any kind of agreement were rejected by Serbia. Also, the main political leaders of Croatian Serbs refused to accept new democratic trends.

Serbs in Croatia chose the methods of crime and terror against Croatia. Brutal and exhausting destruction of economy and infrastructure continued constantly. The Croats, especially those living with or among Serbs, were

repressed and terrorised. Very soon all the Croats were obliged to leave communes with predominant Serbian inhabitants, most of them without anything.

At the end of June 1991 Croatia and Slovenia declared their independence answering this way the Serbian, and "YNA" brutal provocations. It was caused by the prompt selection of officer's staff in Yu Army according to the methods of cleaning it on the ethnical bases. "YNA" definitely became Serbian military power.

Armed attacks expanded very quickly, becoming more and more a real war reality. YNA protected the terrorist Serbs, operating closely with them and with volunteers from Serbia, Montenegro and Russia, against Croatia.

Territorially, the very military actions against Croats followed soon in the areas inhabited with Serbs. The real genocide in Serbo-dominated areas (examples: Dalj near Osijek, Struga in Banovina) started with the ethnical cleansing of Croats. The number of refugees was in constant progression as well as the number of victims while Croatian settlements were cruelly ruined, burned down and destroyed (example: Čelije in Slavonia). It is important to stress that first war actions in Bosnia and Herzegovina started in 1991 from the side of YNA and Serbs against Croats.

Undoubtedly, Serbia, using the Serbs in Croatia, and with the protection of more and more pro Serbian "YNA", planned to conquer brutally at least all Croatian territories easternly of the line Virovitica-Karlovac-Ogulin-Karlobag, although this territory has been inhabited predominantly by Croats, and never belonged to Serbia.

By the beginning of 1992 Serbs occupied about 26% of Croatian country attacking important Croatian centres: Zadar, Šibenik and Dubrovnik on the Adriatic Coast and Gospić, Karlovac and Vinkovci in the inland. They banished about 300.000 Croats, and the number of killed people exceeded 15.000. The number of the wounded was about 25.000. Several hundred Croatian settlements were radically or totally destroyed and the town of Vukovar suffered special damage and destruction. United Nations Protection Forces (UNPROFOR) were engaged to stop the war actions and to help the peaceful solving of the situation.

Croatia was internationally recognised on 15th January 1992 and in May of the same year became the member of the United Nations. In order to get back usurped territories, Croatia undertook several military actions. It was necessary because in the period 1992-1995 UNPROFOR actions only cemented the occupation, what was not acceptable for Croatia. By the action of "Maslenica" near Zadar the traffic between South Croatia and other parts of the country was ensured. In spring 1995 the region of West Slavonia was reintegrated and the same happened with bordering parts and Knin, the rebellion centre, in summer 1995.

At the beginning of 1997 4,6% of the national territory along the Danube (Vukovar, Ilok and Baranya regions) in Eastern Croatia has still been occupied. Namely international forces (IFOR) are being introduced there with the goal to realise peacefully the return of this area to Croatia. After slow pacification of the territory, Croatian administration entered the region in the

years 1996/97. The IFOR is planned to leave this region completely in the beginning of 1998.

3) Aspects of Croatian Nation Survival (Resistance Through Centuries).

According to the existing sources the Croats came to the present Croatian territories from the Upper Visla region into their old homeland so called White Croatia. It happened at the beginning of the 6th century after the Croats arrived to Dalmatia and Liburnia as the last Slav wave. There they defeated Avarians and mixed with the older Illyric-Celtic ethnic remains who had been partly latinised (Latines, Wallachs or Vlachs). They had been preceded by the Ostrogots (end of 5th c. and the beginning of 6th c.), the Gepides in far eastern part (middle 6th c.), the Longobards in northern part (middle 6th c.), Byzantine invasions (middle 6th c.) and general Slavic penetration (end of 6th c.).

The establishment of the first Croatian regions happened in the early middle ages social and economic circumstances, quite different from those in antique period. The first Croatian territory was created in the parts of the former Roman provinces of Dalmatia and Liburnia. The second one happened in the area of the ancient Save and Upper Pannonian provinces. There, the Croats were mixed with remains of old Illyric, Liburnian, Celtic, Wallach, and Roman people (see also Rogić, 1994).

The first one, predominantly covering southern areas after the settlement of the Croats, consisted of so called White Croatia (on the NW) and Red Croatia (on the SE). These were traditional names carried over to these new territories from the oldest Croatian tribal spaces in today's Southern Poland and Northern Slovakia. These names, describing territories of the World by colour denotations, could be explained by accepted "Iranian" theory of Croatian heritage. With the foundation of South Slav area of Doclea or Zeta, becoming later a part of Medieval Serbia, the Croatian name of Red Croatia was abandoned. The second core region located further in the northern part was named Pannonic or Slavonic Croatia, even only Slavonia or Pannonia (see also Rogić, 1994).

The first concentrations of Croatian people started to stabilise in the regions of the most significant Roman urban and bishop centres on the coast: Zadar, Split and Trogir. It was the result of adopting Christianity which was inspired from these centres. The Croats contacted there the old and important points of the ancient Roman-Catholic cultural space. The integration of the Croats into the West-European cultural domain was ensured.

Dalmatian Croatia appeared as the oldest Croatian political and territorial entity. Particularly important reasons for it were natural possibilities of stock-raising transhumance economy, which enabled stabilising of the military and economic establishment of the early Medieval

Croatian tribal alliance. Also, essential historical and geopolitical role of the Adriatic Sea region was very significant (see also Rogić, 1994).

The first nucleus of the Croatian territorial and political space, better to say the Croatian geopolitical core, was situated in the coastal Adriatic region neighboring Zadar. The first capital of Croatia, Nin, developed there. Its original name: Hrvati = Croats, which covered Zadar hinterland regions, clearly shows the essential role and importance for the whole Croatian space. It was just the famous French crusader-chronicler Geoffrey de Villehardouin in 1202 who used this denotation in his framework describing Venetian conquest of Zadar (see also Rogić, 1994).

The control over sea navigation routes along the eastern Adriatic coast, using Istrian and Croatian-Dalmatian emporiums, was of the supreme interest not only for Croatia, but also for Venice, the Byzantine Empire etc. It was the basis of cultural integration in this area. The successful organisation of the first Croatian dualistic political space explains the vitality and the strength of the early Croatian geopolitical core. Venetian naval forces, as well as Bulgarian and Hungarian continental forces were fought down. As a result, the political sovereignty covered the area of Croatian Slavonia, and Croatian authority was established in Adriatic urban centres, which enabled and stimulated ethnic, social and cultural integration (see also Rogić, 1994).

The varieties in traditional economic structure between coastal region and hinterland, caused by physical geographical differences, determined specific relations between agriculture (husbandry) and the rising of live stock. The lack of comparable urban centres in Slavonic Croatia, in comparison with coastal region, characterises early medieval period, showing geopolitical, social and cultural differences between these two regions. The best proof is the fact that urban centre Sisak, former antique bishop centre, could not be reestablished because there were no possibilities of rebuilding it (Rogić, 1994).

The Slavonic Croatia with existing "heretical delusions and worshipping of idols" was characterised by the lack of close connections with coastal bishop centres. The foundation of Zagreb Bishopric in 1094 signed the new trends of christianisation in this hinterland region. Finally, the acceptance of Christianity started the social, cultural and political revitalisation and enabled gradual demographic and economic growth in Croatian Slavonia too (Rogić, 1994).

Croatian Slavonia and Dalmatia, as complementary territorial units, were both of great importance for Hungaro-Croatian Royalty from the beginning of the 12th century and for the ethnically homogenous population. The process of assimilation included autochthonous non-Slav population (predominantly Dalmatian and Roman urban population and groups of Vlachs) among the groups of Kajkavian, čakavian and Štokavian Croats. The process particularly included the population that was moving into towns. It is important to say that people belonging to different ethnic groups became Croatian citizens as well as small groups of

Hungarian and other foreign nobility who eagerly defended the feudal society of Croatia (Rogić, 1994).

Croatian ethnic territory in Istria resisted although it was closely exposed to Roman influence from the neighbourhood. Connected with the Croatian Glagolitic cultural centres in Kvarner (Krk, Vinodol, Senj) and Zadar region, Istria produced a lot of glagolitic documents in the Croatian language and script (see also Rogić, 1994).

Inhabited by Croats, Medieval Bosnia used a Štokavian/Ikavian speech, which proves the common origin of the population (Rogić, 1994).

In the Middle Ages the process of sociocultural integration, started with stabilisation of Croats in this part of Europe, and the inclusion of Roman-coastal and original Croatian towns, was finished. Between the pre-Medieval period and the Middle Ages, the complete croatianization of ancient Roman-Dalmatian ports happened. Parallely, the establishment of communal and church organisation and authorities in original Croatian towns ensured them social and cultural equality to the Ancient Roman centres (see also Rogić, 1994).

The superior economic and cultural niveau of the Croatian-Dalmatian autonomous communes, especially in comparison with the recently founded centres in continental regions, was extremely high. Although supreme authorities often changed, these municipalities, developed continuously export-import trade with Croatian and Bosnian continental regions. But, what is very important, they were the main cultural cores. Thanks to this fact, Croats developed, besides Poles, as the only Slav nation, an original renaissance art and literature in their own language (see also Rogić, 1994).

The process of unification and developing communications between two Croatian regions lasted until late 15th and early 16th centuries. With an expanding process of Venice along the coast, and agricultural progress in continental Croatia, Pannonian region became superior. Its urban centres were linked traffically with the Danube and Adriatic zones. Plenty of them had a status of a free royal or noble towns which enabled them to rise, both demographically and economically, to the leading position among Croatian towns (see also Rogić, 1994).

This was the period when coastal towns's role of the supreme economic centres of Croatia weakened owing to the loss of their economic and political independence. However, their significance as main Croatian cultural centres still resisted. Dubrovnik, as an independent republic, was particularly important.

Of course, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire in the 16th and 17th centuries and numerous wars connected with it, were the turning point in the destiny of Croatian nation, as they considerably transformed its life space. They caused huge migrations, and masses of refugees moved towards west. It terribly diminished formerly stabilised Croatian ethnic area established in the Middle Ages. For a long lasting period the Croatians as well as the Hungarians suffered the destiny of "frontier nation"

("antemurale christianitatum"), being exposed in the defence to permanent war destruction.

A considerable part of medieval Croatian ethnic territory suffered Ottoman occupation (Soli with Tuzla from 1512, Knin and parts of Dalmatian Croatia from 1522, Jajce and Lika from 1528, and parts of Pannonic region from 1529 or 1544). It happened after Turks had conquered Central Bosnia and West Herzegovina, and in the period after Croats had been defeated at Krbava Field (Krbavsko polje) in 1493 and again in 1520, as well as Hungarians at Mohacs in 1526. In a complex and painful population exchange, as a result of forced and brutal migrations of hundreds and hundreds of thousand of people, the new distribution of actual ethnic and religious spatial structure in SE Europe settled down (see also Károly Kocsis, 1994).

"The Catholic Croatian population migrated from the war stricken middle and eastern part of their ethnic territory to the outlying regions around Zagreb, the Istrian Peninsula and Dalmatia, and to the Austro-Hungarian borderlands, where they established or repopulated more than 200 settlements. The dwellings of the runaway Croats were occupied mostly by orthodox Vlachs and Serbs who enjoyed a privileged status as military servicemen and were cattle (sheep and goat) herders or pig-breeders. The intensive Vlach-Serbian colonisation totally changed the ethnic situation in the so far deserted borderlands..."(K.Kocsis, 1994.)

Finally, during the war actions 1593-1606, Turkish penetration was diminished and stopped in the western part of Croatia, on the line Virovitica - Sisak - Karlovac - Slunj - Zadar. Only a few littoral towns under the Venetian administration and Republic of Dubrovnik resisted easterly of this line (K.Kocsis, 1994.)

The result of two-century war period and the Ottoman expansion was a significant demographic and economic regression in Croatia. Numerous and essential changes in the homogeneity of population structure, which was established in the early Middle Ages, were caused. According to an estimation, considering demographical losses at the end of the 15th century, about 1 million or a good half of 2 million Croatian residents were lost. A great deal of resident people were subdued as slave labour in occupied regions. The others were forced to migrate and were accepted as a component in the concept of the colonisation politics of the feudal establishment of the Austrian crown lands. They were mostly settled down in today's Burgenland and Slovakia (parts of Hungary in that period) (see also Rogić, 1994).

This tragedy of Croatian people being divided into Catholics and Moslems fighting each other, was reflected very spontaneously in Croatian, so called Uskoks' (fugitives) and Moslem poetry cycles. The destructive and insecure time of border wars enabled no economic development except the old and primitive transhumant cattle rising migrations with an unsettled population dispersion (see also Rogić, 1994).

In occupied areas, which were named Turkish or Ottoman Croatia, administratively in the borders of Bosnian Eyalet, a large portion of the Croats who did not emigrate - especially the participants of heretic, so called "church of Bosnia" connected with Pataren heresy, converted to Islam. Free farmers and serfs, especially those who accepted Islam, as well as Vlach ranchers having extra privileges, preferred the Ottoman system (see also Rogić, 1994).

Moslems being the majority of the settled agricultural population of the villages, made the biggest part of the urban population. The Croats who kept their original Catholic religion were religiously and culturally organised and led by the Franciscans. It was arranged by the famous charter of Mehmet II and with reference to the Croatian Dalmatian Dioceses. The first arrival of Serbs on the historical territory of Croatia and Bosnia, was organised by the Serbian Orthodox autonomous church (Millet) and stimulated with the privileges it had in the Ottoman expansionistic Empire. That is how, for the first time, the traditional border between western and eastern Christianity on the line Singidunum-Scutari (Belgrade-Skadar) or on the river Drina, was changed in 16th century (see also Rogić, 1994).

The Serbian minority began to develop in the eastern Bosnian bordering zone from the 16th century on, as it was the case in Croatian borders towards occupied Bosnia in the next century.

The relatively homogeneous ethnic structure of the Medieval Ages, was changed by a heterogeneous and complicated one. Now, there were large Vlach and Serb groups, patronised by Serbian Orthodox Millet, which mixed with the Croats who were, a large deal, farmers and border settlers (see also Rogić, 1994).

In the 17th century after some military successes of the Habsburgs, all the Muslims left Slavonian and Dalmatian regions for Bosnia where they formed a relative ethnic majority at the beginning of the 18th century. At the same time the humiliation and tyranny over Bosnian Croats became unbearable and it resulted in about 200.000 Croatian refugees who arrived in Slavonia, Baranya and Bačka (Bunjevats Croats) in the second half of the 17th century (K.Kocsis, 1994.)

Also, the Vlachs and Serbians as well as Muslims, were settled by the authorities in the Bihać region and Bosnian bordering area along the Sava and Una rivers (Turkish Croatia). Penetrating very deeply into the resistant Croatian territory, Bihać region was inhabited by predominantly Muslim immigrants (K.Kocsis, 1994.)

The result of the Ottoman occupation and the Christian reconquest, both accompanied by mass migrations, was the diminution of Croatian ethnical and political space. Croatia lost its territories mostly in the present area of Bosnia, compared to their 15th century situation. But, in this period, its ethnic space rised in the Istrian Peninsula as well as in western Hungary, Baranya and Bačka, where significant Croatian ethnic enclaves were formed (see also K. Kocsis, 1994.)

Since the middle of the 18th century there were practically no significant changes in the rural parts of the Croatian ethnic area. Some relevant ethnic changes took place in some towns and urbanised areas since the end of the 19th century. Showing a very low demographical concentration even at the end of the 19th century, Croatian inhabitants did not prevail in today's capital Zagreb (only 19.180 Croats in 1880), but it happened in Subotica (today within the borders of Serbia, better to say Voivodina in ex Yugoslavia), where there were 25.445 Croats living with a Hungarian majority (see also K.Kocsis, 1994.)

The process of national and cultural integration within Croatian ethnic corpus (which included Triune Kingdom Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia as well as Istria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Baranya-Bačka, Boka Kotorska in uniquely governed by Austro-Hungarian Monarchy), although not always in optimal conditions, was not slowed down. Namely, it was a pity that the existing administrative-political desintegration of the Croatian regions still remained after the creation of a dual state entity with the Austro-Hungarian Arrangement in 1867. (see also Rogić, 1994).

However, although the claim of establishing a completely unified Croatian triune territory was left unrealised in Austro-Hungarian Empire, Croatian corpus did gradually develop. As a modern sufficiently autonomous state entity of narrow Croatia and Slavonia if compared with the free states in Southwest Europe: Serbia, Bulgaria, Montenegro, Greece, Turkey, Romania (slovenian regions excluded), Ausgleich Croatia showed the most progressive economical and cultural degree of development (see also Rogić, 1994).

This was the period of exceptional progress of Croatian thought, of cultural and scientific institutions. The Academy of Sciences and Arts, and national theatres started work. Many settlements got primary and secondary schools. The Croatian language progressively deprived the Hungarian, Italian, German and Latin languages of their primacy. Namely, these were the languages the Croats had to use. It was also the period of the revival of editorial activity and journalism in the Croatian language. Little by little the Croatian national corpus was being created, although there were lots of political problems to surmount. In the same time it was the period of building contemporary railway, road and seaport traffic, the beginning of capitalistic expansion of wealth and incorporation of the territory and nation into economic processes of Mid-Europe.

After the breakdown of the Austro-Hungarian Empire the realisation of Yugoslav idea was enabled. But it happened in the form of a Serbo-Balkan imperialism using the Yugoslav name to hide an extremely imperialistic idea which should realise a Greater Serbia. Austro-Hungarian dominancy as a type of highly civilisated and culturally well developed social and political structure, was suddenly replaced by an extremely "balcanic", primitive and cruel domination of a Serbian nondemocratic monarch. It was extremely hard and painful conversion for Croatian nation to live in a completely strange and primitive social circle.

Serbia succeeded in uniting 98,5% of the Serbs in one country under the rule of Serbian dynasty. It happened with the help of Allies, especially France, but the percentage of the non-Serbs arised from 4,5 % to 62,2 (!) % in the Serbian state between 1878 and 1921. It was too great a problem for Serbia and it was never solved (K.Kocsis, 1994). Practically, Serbia did not even try seriously to settle the problem. Forcing to unite Croats, Muslims, Slovenians, Macedonians and Montenegrins in the "Yugoslav" nation, the primitive and arrogant methods were applied. Ethnical and religious tensions spread on. The Croats, who made almost 30% of the new state population were, with Albanians and Macedonians, the most exposed nation to the cruel methods of Serbian regime.

"The multinational SCS Kingdom was actually a centralised, militarist Great Serbian state that not only ignored the existence of the Muslim, Montenegrin, Macedonian nations, but attached special importance to their "Serbianisation". This Serbianisation (Yugoslavisation) policy prevailed in statistics too, even in the first Yugoslavian census in 1921. In the territory of the SCS Kingdom there was no ethnic census, only the mother tongue (native-language) was recorded; so Serbs, Montenegrins, Croats, Muslims, even the Macedonians, whose language was disclaimed, could be categorised as native speakers of Serbo-Croatian."(K. Kocsis, 1994).

The term "Croatian" in the joined name of the language ("Serbo-Croatian") was just a formality. The Serb language was forced upon the public services especially government, jurisdiction, police, army and diplomacy. The share of the Croats in the total population was decreasing and fell from 30% to about 26% before the W.W.II in 1941. It was mostly the consequence of significant emigration. The State, never gave the same rights to the Roman Catholic Church in relation to extremely preferred Serbian Orthodox Church. The concordat with Saint Chair was not ratified.

In this way the Croats, predominantly Catholics, were considerably humiliated. Terrorising the Croats and other nations was of frequent occurrence. In many settlements, the bi- or multinational structure was changed at the expense of the Croat population. The currency conversion (exchange) in 1920 was catastrophic for the Croats. They suffered the loss of 75% of the value of the money they possessed at the moment. Cyrilic alphabet was introduced as the second obligatory script in all Croatian settlements. "Via facti" Croatsians were obliged to recognize a Serbian as a king. There were cases of violent penetration of Serbian Orthodox Church into the Croatian ethnic territory (example: island of Vis).

During the SCS Kingdom the Croatian ethnic territory started to suffer some, although not radical, changes such as calculated expansion of Serbs in certain towns (Osijek, Vukovar, Vinkovci, Pakrac, Karlovac, Gračac, Benkovac, Knin etc.) (see also K. Kocsis, 1994).

This humiliating situation resulted with constant dissatisfaction. It provoked resistance of Croats from one side and more repression from the Serbian side. It was in 1939 that Croats succeeded in the attempt to solve

this long lasting problem by establishing an autonomous Banovina Croatia (Viceroyalty of Croatia). A compromise which unfortunately happened in the prewar situation in Europe and so lasted for two years only (see also Rogić, 1994).

This Banovina enabled the revitalisation of Croat national institutions in Yugoslavia. Perhaps, by compromise with the Serbs, it might have been the basis of an international coexistence, although some important parts of the Croat ethnic territory were left out of Banovina (Boka Kotorska, Bačka, Srijem). But the war interrupted the initiated process.

The fragmentation of the ex Yugoslav kingdom in the war action (April 1941), enabled the establishment of a new Independent State of Croatia. This state was the result of a strong and understandable desire and aspirations of the Croats for independence, and a result of the resistance to the Serbs. But it was also a quisling creation (like Quisling's Norway, Petain's France, Horthy's Hungary, Nedić's Serbia etc.) all close to fascist regimes. It was a process similar to those in other invaded European countries.

In this war, the Croats split into two basic political groups. The first was a large antifascist people's movement, which rose up against fascism. They mainly followed Tito's Resistance front expecting more freedom and democracy for Croatia as a federal unit and, in fact, enabled the rehabilitation of Yugoslavia. It was led by the Croatian communist party, as a part of the Communist party of Yugoslavia. Having a resolute program to struggle against the new state and the fascist aggressor, it organised a wide front and the most successful actions in comparison with movements in other parts of dissolved Yugoslavia (see also Rogić, 1994).

The second group included those who wanted free Croatia, but who, concurrence of the facts, found themselves on the quisling side. The result of this "divide et impera" tactics was just a large number of victims of Croatian people in W. W. II and in post-war period, when the Croats were discredited and when Tito's communists revenged on several hundred thousand of them (for example in Bleiburg, Austria, when British troops in May 1945 turned back Croatian refugees in the hands of communists what finished with catastrophic killing).

It was the triumph of the Great Serbs, who, in spite of being also on the side of fascists almost all the time, dreamed a Yugoslavia (no matter which one), together with the king who had taken refuge in England. Their quisling Serbia also fell, but they made the greatest profit from the communist order. Serbia got two autonomous provinces: Voivodina (which still had almost 10% Croat inhabitants, especially in Srijem /Syrmie/, Bačka /province between the Danube and Tisza), and Kosovo. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Serbs got top position, Montenegro was assigned Boka Kotorska.

Although the Serbs were a minority in Croatia, they were practically undertaking all important political enterprises directed from Belgrade. Croatian people were a great deal discouraged and marginalized.

In the new Tito's Yugoslavia they made 24 % (in 1948) based on the population census, and emigrating went on. Croatia was gradually populated by the Croats from other republics, as they did not feel at ease any more. According to the census in 1991 there were only 18% Croats in ex Yugoslavia, but in contrast, the number of Croat emigrants was estimated more than three million, which was about 40% of the nation.

In ex Yugoslavia the number of Croats was very slowly growing between 1948 and 1971 from 3,784.353 to 4,526.782, but in the next period until 1981 it went down to 4,428.043. In the period after World War II the share of Croats in the total Yugoslav population decreased from 24,0% in 1948 to only 19,7% in 1981 and 18,0 % in 1991. (Z. Pepeonik, 1991).

While the Croat nation was growing weak, the Serbia's old aspirations to create Greater Serbia strengthened. And after Tito's death certain of Serbs expressed such ideas more and more openly.

Since 1986 the whole World has been the witness of the constant (let us hope the last), Serbian attempt, which caused not only the dissolution of Yugoslavia but also the war in Croatia, and later in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Not only the Croats but also other peoples in ex Yugoslavia were exposed to Greater Serbian aspirations. The Albanians were struck first. Oppressed politically and then by the police and army, they lost all the rights they had in the autonomous province of Kosovo (even the minimal ones) in the period 1986-1988. The situation has not changed so far, nevertheless World public opinion knows very little about sufferings of this nation. The Montenegrins were the second nation to have experienced Serbian tactics. Their republic, one of the six federal republics of ex Yugoslavia, lost completely its power in 1989. In quick overthrow, the proserbian current usurped all the power in the country. Today they practically deny Montenegrin selfexistence and their autocephalous Montenegrin Orthodox Church (supressed in 1918 by the Serbian Church and king). Their democratic rights are absolutely denied.

Now it was the turn of the Autonomous Province of Voivodina, where the so called "Yoghourt revolution" was applied in 1989. Owing to organised mass rallies, legally elected government had to withdraw and cede the rule to politicians loyal to Belgrade interests.

The Croats in Voivodina were belittled. They were practically forced to declare themselves as "Bunjevci" and "Šokci" at the census in 1991. Formally they are not recognised as a national minority in Serbia.

Soon after Slovenia, Croatia and Macedonia were attacked by well organised Greater Serbian hordes. Frightened and pressed by the death of democracy and terror that happened in Kosovo, Montenegro and Voivodina, they resisted politically to the realisation of the Greater Serbian idea, that is losing, though limited, democratic and national rights they had so far.

Governing Ligue of Communists split into Serbian part and others. Outvoting started in the presidency of the ex State. Fifty-fifty position and distressing discussions lasted till mid 1990, when in August first stronger provocations of the Serbs in Croatia started (so called "Trunk revolution").

In the meantime there were crucial changes in Europe. Berlin Wall was pulled down. Democracy processes were becoming more intensive in Slovenia, Croatia, Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Soon the first free national elections were held. In Croatia the Croatian Democratic Union won by a large majority. Croatian communists like those in Slovenia peacefully ceded the power.

Serbian minority in Croatia, inspired by the ideas from Belgrade (Serbian Academy, YNA, Administration, formal and nonformal groups) reacted to the changes in Croatia. They closed up highways and byways, started killing people on roads and organising military attacks. It was also the beginning of maltreatment and banishment of the Croats from five communes, where the Serbs were a majority. These are sparsely populated spaces which border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Knin is their centre.

At the beginning of 1991 Serbian provocations started assuming horrible proportions. Banishing of the Croats continued, Croatian police was impotent and the federal army openly took sides with the Serbs. This army not only did not try to make roads serviceable, but tried to proclaim the state of alertness in the country.

The development of such an attack on Croatia, destruction of Croat economy and physical annihilation of the Croats stimulated the aspiration of the Croats to regain independence. The Slovenians too could not bear threatening from Belgrade any more. All this led to the secession of Croatia and Slovenia from ex Yugoslavia at the end of June 1991. Immediately after, Slovenia was military attacked, but the action finished in only one week. Not only military and moral breakdown of ex Yugoslav army was showed, but also a calculation of leaving Slovenians to get out of Yugoslavia.

It was quite different in Croatia. Rebel Serbs and volunteers from Serbia, stimulated by YNA, expanded their attacks to the real war operations, characterised by brutal and wild genocide. The occupation of Croat territory continued. At first the Serbian threatened that they would subdue the whole Croatia, and later they diminished their aspirations to the line Virovitica - Karlovac - Karlobag.

The Croats started defending themselves and fighting for survival. Although in the autumn of 1991 there were about 300.000 refugees and banished and a large number of towns and villages were exposed to artillery and air raid attacks, the Croats organised indispensable defense. In the beginning it was the question of a weak force and diplomatic efforts to stop the aggression. By the end of 1991 about 26 % of Croatia was occupied, about 200 villages were destroyed and also a larger town on the Danube - Vukovar, while a large number of towns suffered remarkable damages. However the vital parts of Croatia subsisted and finally, after European

countries' hesitations, Croatia was recognised on the 15th January 1992. The bloody Serbian invasion was stopped, but a question remained: How to get back captured regions which proclaimed themselves "republic"?

Strategic geopolitical goal of Serbia was to reach the Adriatic, but they did not obtain it. Their second strategic goal was to cut off eastern Croatia with Osijek, but they failed. Their attempts to force the way to the Adriatic along the Neretva river finished with the same result as well as their trials to conquer Dubrovnik.

Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina became members of the United Nations in May 1992. It was their great success. By 1995 Croatia tried diplomatically in various ways to get back occupied territories i.e. to ensure infrastructural connections. Concerning the traffic, Croatia was in a very difficult position as well as Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the war started after heavy weapons had been withdrawn from Croatia. By 1995 Croatian army was strengthened and, as peaceful forces had no success, two quick actions were taken ("Lightning" and "Storm"), which resulted in the liberation of the greatest part of occupied territories. After that the Danubian part of Croatia with Vukovar and Baranya has been proclaimed IFOR's zone and it will be peacefully reintegrated into sovereign and administrative borders of the Republic of Croatia.

During the whole war the aggressor was trying to present the Croats as fascist and genocidal nation. Undoubtedly, Croatian people in Serbia never tried to inspire such a war there, Croatia never tried to attack Serbia. Discoveries and data we have had so far and recent accounts show that the number of Croat victims during the terrorist actions was ten times greater than that of Serbs in Croatia. After the last actions, in spite of being invited not to leave their homes, the Serbian civilians from the occupied territories left and moved in the direction of East. They did it by order of their leaders and army. Only inconsiderable number of them have remained in Croatia. Now they must be conscient that war criminals must be punished. Hague Tribunal has been performing certain actions in order to prosecute war criminals. Will they have enough strength to cite those really responsible in Belgrade, that is the question.

Croats in Bosnia and Herzegovina were also severely attacked by Serbs even before the open aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina began. Starting selfdefending and warning the Moslems that it would come to a general attack on Bosnia and Herzegovina, they tried to get help from the state. There was no help from Muslem Bosnyaks and, what is the worst, when the aggression started in 1992, Muslems were quite unprepared and were cleansed from the complete territory of Eastern Bosnia (except the enclave of Goražde).

The result of the Serbian aggression in Bosnia and Herzegovina was about one million of refugees and 200.000 killed people. The attack was rapid and the Serbs managed to occupy 70% of the Bosnian and Herzegovinian territory. Many Moslems moved towards free regions and abroad. Very complicated situation due to the mixed population led to the

general conflicts in which the Croats and Muslims confronted one another too. A large number of Muslim refugees rushed into Croat settlements, which logically led to the conflicts. And that was convenient for Serbs. Sarajevo, the capital was cruelly bombed by Serbs, but many other settlements suffered destroying and killing. The conflict was calmed down with the help of the USA, and the Croats have united in Federation with Muslims. Dayton agreement, Paris conference and Rome meeting are the new chances for peace in this region.

4. Croatia and the Traditional Problem of Boundaries and Border Spaces in SE Europe.

The problem of boundaries and border spaces is very complex not only in SE Europe but in other European regions, we may say in the whole World. Emphasis will be meanwhile put on Croatia, which claims itself to be a Mid European and Mediterranean country and its boundaries with neighboring countries.

From the historical point of view, one of the oldest civilisations, Greek civilisation, developed just on this space, and was replaced by the Roman Empire. At that time there were no peoples who live there nowadays especially Slavs and Hungarians. The Albanians originated from the old Illyrians, and Greeks have remained in their old country.

During the Roman rule, from the 1st to the 4th centuries, a series of provinces developed on this area. Illyrian provinces: Dalmatia, Liburnia, Pannonia, Praevalis occupied NW part, Dacia NE part, Upper Moesia central part, Lower Moesia and Thrace eastern part. Macedonia, Epirus, Thessaly, Achaia and Crete occupied the southern part.

The dissolution of the Roman Empire marked great migration of ethnics. In the middle of the 4th century the Goths prevailed in Dacia, and at the end of the 4th c. Visigoths, under Alaric, made an irruption from the NE and, across Thrace and Greece reached Italy.

In the period of the 2nd half of the 5th c. and during the 6th c. the Ostrogoths consolidated in Illyria too. It is in this area that the border between the West Roman Empire and the East Roman Empire was formed (Singidunum - Scodra line, or line on Drina river). Gepides consolidated in Dacia in the 6th c. Eastern and southern parts remained in power of Byzantine Empire i.e. the Eastern Roman Empire. During the reign of its emperor Justinian, The Roman Empire was restored. Dalmatia occupied its western part. In the same time the Longobards in Pannonia founded their state.

The invasion of the Slavs and Avars took place in the 6th c. The Avars settled in Pannonia where they formed their state. The Slavs penetrated into almost all parts of SE Europe. The Carantians and the Croats occupied the western, the Serbs and the Strumans the central part. Syevernyans, Smolyans, Draguvites and Velegesites settled in the east and south. Dacia was settled by so called "Wallachian Slavs".

Predispositions to form new states were created slowly but surely. At the beginning of the 9th c. Franks state (i.e. Roman Germanic Empire) included Carantania. Croatia and Hungary recognised its patronage too. Byzantine influence prevailed in the East. In the middle of the 10th c. Croatia, Hungary, Bulgaria and Raska (Serbia) were quite independent kingdoms, while some parts were still under Byzantine Empire (Thrace, Greece). At the end of the 10th c. Macedonia was prospering for a short time under Samuilo. In the 11th c. Docleia, which included Serbia and Bosnia, was growing. The Byzant Empire was exposed to the attacks of the Ottoman invasions.

At the beginning of the 12th c. Hungary and Croatia joined in personal union including Bosnia. Bulgaria and Macedonia were preserving Byzant traditions, while Asia Minor was invaded by the Ottomans. Serbia included mainly the regions of today's eastern Bosnia. Later it lost Bosnia but spread to the East.

It is important to mention the irruption of Tartars (Mongols) in the 13th c. They broke into Hungaro-Croatian Kingdom, Serbia and Bulgaria. Bulgaria dominated in the Balkan Peninsula, while Serbia was still small. South parts were under Byzant domination and Bulgaria kept those from the river Moravia to the Black Sea.

In the first half of the 14th c. Serbia occupied the larger part of central and southern parts of the Balkan. Bulgaria was diminished in the eastern part, and Wallachia (Dacia) and Hungaro-Croatian Kingdom extended northerly of the Danube and in western part. Bosnia also strengthened and reached its greatest size. Albanian principality also grew stronger though temporarily. The Byzant Empire was declining and kept only Solun and Sparta.

The second half of the 14th c. was characterised by the strong extension of the Ottoman Empire. Bulgaria (Rumelia), and Wallachia collapsed. Dubrovnik was strengthening its independence. Venice was gaining power in Aegean, and was trying to ensure the predominance along the eastern Adriatic but without success at the moment.

In the 15th c. the Osmanlis were advancing further. So they annexed Serbia. Bosnia collapsed as well as a large part of Hungaro-Croatian Kingdom. There were big struggles between Islam and Christianity just in Croatia and Hungary. Venice, which was already present, fortified its possession on the Croatian Coast, Ionian and Aegean seas, as far as to Cyprus. In this way it ensured mercantile route to the East. Dubrovnik, which was a free republic, also strengthened under the Turkish patronage. Croatian eastern borders completely moved towards west, what diminished Croatian territory radically.

In the 16th c. pretty powerful Habsburgs were extending in Croatian and Hungarian territories. The greater part of SE Europe was under Turkish domination except the territories in the Habsburgs' possession and those belonging to Venice, Dubrovnik and partly to Lithuania (Moldavia and Wallachia). The Ottoman Empire was administratively organised into eyalets: Rumelian, of Buda, Bosnian, Timisoara's, and Wallachian. Eyalets are divided into *sandjaks*.

After the Ottoman Empire stopped progressing in the 17th c., Venice spread its possession on the eastern Adriatic coast, as well as the Habsburgs theirs in continental part of Croatia.

In the 18th c. the Habsburgs liberated large parts of Hungary with Transylvania. Osmanlies stabilised to the south of the Sava and Danube rivers except in Wallachia. Montenegro originated. Towards the end of the century Venice was dominated by the Habsburgs.

The beginning of the 19th c. was marked by Napoleon's conquests. Some parts of Croatia, so called Illyric provinces, were occupied but it was short-lived. The revolts against Turkey led to the autonomy of Serbia in 1830. The Greek war of independence ended with the establishment of the Kingdom of Greece in 1830, Romania got autonomy in 1858, and was completely independent in 1878, as well as Bulgaria. Ionic islands, dominated by Britain (1815-1863), were annexed to Greece. By the Treaty of San Stephen (between Russia and Osmanlies), the independence of Montenegro, Serbia, Bulgaria and Romania was guaranteed.

Austria-Hungary occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1878, Montenegro was spreading and this treaty defined the boundaries of Greater Bulgaria, which should include Macedonia. The territories of Albania, South Rumelia, Macedonia, Epirus, and Thessaly remained under Osmanlies. The territory of north Rumelia was annexed to Bulgaria in 1885.

In the 20th c. Serbia, Montenegro, Greece and Bulgaria extended their territories in the war against Osmanlies. Albania too got independence, Serbia conquered the northern parts of Macedonia and Greece its southern parts. Serbia and Montenegro divided the territory of Sandjak. Bulgaria with Rumelia expanded towards Aegean and Macedonia. Turkey was reduced to nowadays borders.

The period 1914-1918 were the W.W. I. years. The result was the dissolution of Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. The Pact of Corfu led to the establishment of the Kingdom of SCS. It was composed of Serbia, Montenegro and countries belonging to ex Austro-Hungarian M.: Croatia with Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Slovenian countries and Voivodina.

Some smaller parts of Bulgarian and Albanian territories were annexed, but Italy took some Croatian territories on the Adriatic and in Slovenia (Istria, Rijeka, Zadar and some islands) as well as Trieste. Hungary was formed within nowadays borders, Moldavia joined Romania, Greece got south Rumelian space and Bulgaria lost its way to the Aegean Sea.

The old borders in the interior of ex Yugoslavia, were valid, in certain degree, only till 1931. At the time the state was divided into 33 departments. In 1931 a new administrative division of ex Yugoslavia was performed. Now the state was divided into 9 Banovinas (Viceroyalties or some kind of Governorate) and the city of Belgrade. This division was an open attempt to annul the traditional Croatian borders and the borders of other nations in favor of widening and predominance of the Serbs. Only in 1939 Croatia managed to link together its ethnic territory into unique Banovina (Viceroyalty) Croatia. It was the result of a compromise with the Serbs just before W.W.II.

Till W.W.II the borders were not changed in this part of Europe. War happenings and collapse of Axis powers, i.e. Germany and Italy, led to the changes of borders on these territories during the very war. The biggest changes happened in ex Yugoslavia. Independent states Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro were established.

Croatia unified its territories, which made part of triune kingdom and Bosnia and Herzegovina, but had to cede large parts of the coastal region with its islands to fascist Italy. Međimurje (the territory between the Mura and Drava rivers) was given up to Hungary. The latter returned Bačka, Baranya and Erdely (Transylvania). Banat came under the German administration, i.e. was connected with Romania.

Serbia was radically reduced. It lost all conquered territories. Bulgaria subjugated a large part of Macedonia as well as south-eastern parts. Greater Albania, which was protected by Italy as well as Montenegro, took power over south-western parts. Montenegro widened in Sandjak, and part of littoral was given back to Albania. Slovenian territories were directly shared between conquerors Italy and Germany, and a smaller part was added to Hungary. Greece also lost territories along the Aegean to the advantage of Bulgaria.

This short-lived war-time division was again radically changed in favour of allied countries at the end of W.W.II. Ex Yugoslavia got back the peninsula of Istria (at the North end of the Adriatic), towns Rijeka and Zadar and some islands. The territory of Trieste designated a free territory by the UN (1947), was administrated by the UN and Great Britain until 1953, when by compromise with Italy, N zone including the city of Trieste, came into possession of Italy, while the S zone was incorporated in two ex Yugoslav republics, Slovenia and Croatia. That way Slovenia got an exit to the Adriatic.

Hungary was turned back within its prewar borders. Romania although retaining Erdely was obliged to cede Moldavia to the Soviet Union. Bulgaria also reestablished within its prewar borders though retaining some of the territories which previously belonged to Romania but were annexed in 1940 (Dobruja). Greece got back lost territories. Albania found itself within her prewar borders with slight border modification in favor of ex Yugoslavia.

Political situation in SE Europe was stabilising. It seemed that ex Yugoslavia would escape multinational problems.

Greece and Yugoslavia going through war conflicts from the 1st part of the 20th c. gained considerable areas belonging to neighboring nations. A great number of Albanians, Hungarians and Macedonians found themselves out of their originating countries.

The attempts of solving multinational Yugoslav problem by applying federate system had not, however, predisposition to success. The internal borders of the six new ex Yugoslav republics and two autonomous provinces were a compromising solution. They were based mainly on the national structure.

By the restoration of the Bosnia and Herzegovina, a considerable number of Croats and Serbs found themselves out of their countries. But Bosnia and Herzegovina was the only one with multinational character and it was the republic of all three peoples (Serbs, Croats, Moslems).

Croatia was given back the territories which had been occupied by Italy and Međimurje occupied by Hungary. It also got South Baranya for the first time, which was based on the majority of Croatian population. But it failed again to get back Boka Kotorska (Bay of Kotor).

Autonomous provinces Kosovo and Voivodina, with the minority of Serbian population were joined to Serbia. In order to ensure supremacy in Voivodina after W.W.II, changing of demographic structure went on. Remarkable brinkmanship, quick and cruel actions were the practice of ethnic cleansing. Germans almost disappeared, the percentage of all ethnics, except Serbs diminished. But such a thing could not be realised on Kosovo because of extraordinary predominance of the Albanian population.

Macedonia established its republic but many Slavic Macedonians remained out of the borders of their country especially in Greece. Montenegro, first named Montenegro and Boka (1944-1947), got The Boka Kotorska (the Bay of Kotor) near Kotor as well as Sutorina corridor, which traditionally was part of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Slovenia was constituted, for the first time, as a separate state. Bosnia and Herzegovina was reconstructed more or less in its Austro-Hungarian borders, but lost Sutorina corridor, which went to Montenegro, as mentioned.

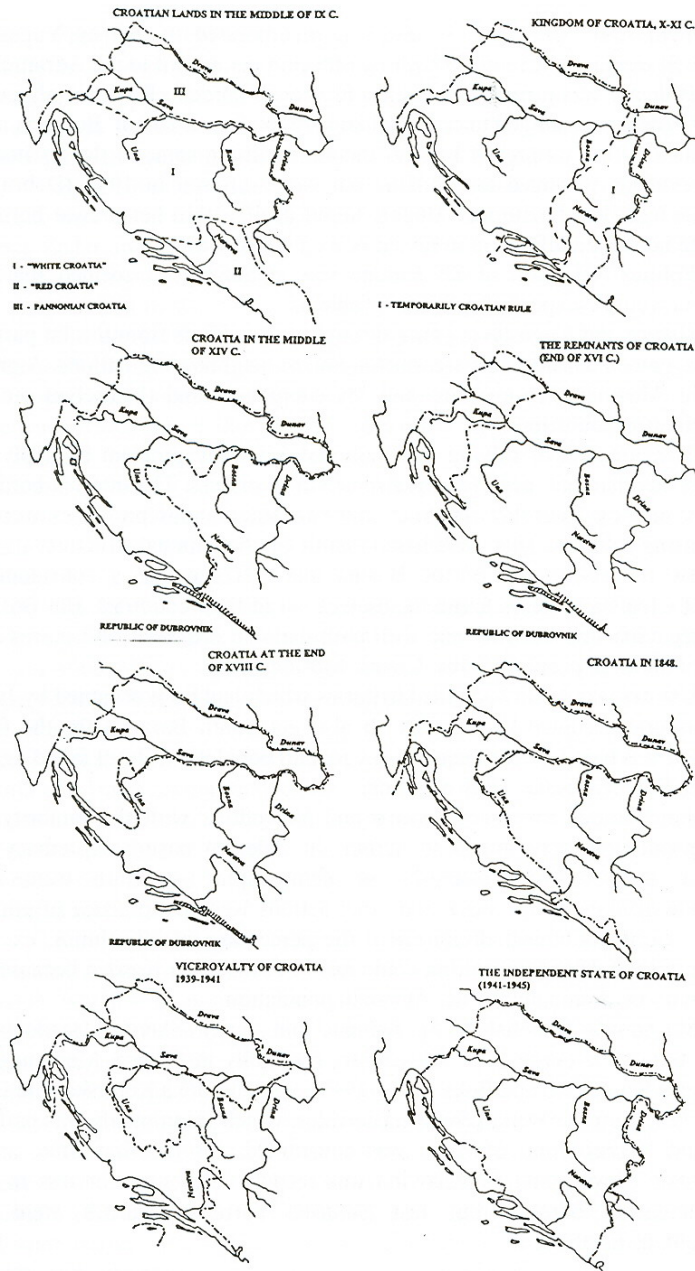


Fig. 1 The development of Croatian state territory
 Sl. 1. Razvoj hrvatskog državnog teritorija

Till the collapse of communism in the Soviet Union there were no serious attempts here to change these borders established in Tito's time. The balance, which was partly realised by force, but mostly with a general benevolence, lasted for 45 years. So far all the countries in SE Europe, except ex Yugoslavia, have managed to hold their postwar borders.



Fig. 2 Croatia after II World War with administrative counties (1997)
 Sl. 2. Hrvatska nakon II. svjetskog rata s podjelom na županije (1997.)

It is not simple to explain what started the war hurricane and cruel happenings in ex Yugoslavia. In any case the basis was the attempt to abrogate the rights of autonomous provinces and, not much later, that of changing of internal borders of ex republics. This attempt started with the program of SANU

(Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts in 1988), and it was just the continuance of an earlier but well-designed process of widening Serbia.

Evidently, aggressive nationalistic forces in Serbia calculated that the collapse of socialism and the death of Tito were a favorable moment for such a project. Numerous political actions were set in motion. First, all autonomous rights of Albanians in Kosovo were formally abrogated, which was executed with terrible repression and introduction of harsh police measures. The Serbian minority in Kosovo became a privileged social category.

The same was happening in Voivodina (so called "Yoghurt revolution" in 1989). The attempt to realise a forcing march on Slovenia failed as well as the attempt to destabilise Croatia (1989). A kind of coup d'etat was accomplished in Montenegro. Its republican system rights were substantially restricted and it was completely at service of Serbian hegemony.

Going to war against Croatia (1991) the Serbs wanted to realise, by aggression, the change of Croatian borders, i.e. they wanted to widen Serbia by establishing various Serbian republics. The same strategy was applied in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The war in Croatia has led to the stabilisation of the situation in the greater part of the country i.e. to the recognition of prewar borders of Croatia. According to this, the territory of Eastern Croatia which was occupied until 1997, is to be returned back to Croatia by mediation of IFOR.

The Serbian attempt in Bosnia and Herzegovina was more successful. It seems that Serbs have made an essential profit out of this war. Namely, before this war there were 35 % Serbian inhabitants settled on 35 % of the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the war actions they captured about 70% of the country. But, situation being calmed down, they have had to accept the solution that their autonomous republic in Bosnia and Herzegovina covers 49 % of the territory.

According to the general opinion it is a great war gain, which should not have been permitted, as the Serbs were those who set in motion enormous war weaponry, while the others had none, and caused many civilian victims.

Now stabilised internal borders in Bosnia and Herzegovina are neither traditional nor ethnic. They have been forced by an aggressive war of Serbs first against Croats and then against Muslims. The whole eastern part of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Muslims were vast majority, has been given to the Serbian entity. And this territory is directly connected with Serbia. It enables, sooner or later, the renewal of Serbian aggression on Bosnia and Herzegovina in the future.

International activity in helping the attacked victims, or in preventing the aggressor was neither fair nor effective. The attacked were forbidden to defend themselves i.e. to procure weapons. So one might conclude that the borders, in favor of Serbs were arranged by their old friends and allies.

Neither the role of the American factor, whose view on the situation was more neutral, contributed more significantly to the real punishment of the aggressor and the just settlement of the crisis. It seems that force as political indicator, was predominant factor in this case. Neither strong economic sanctions

established against the rest of Yugoslavia i.e. Serbia with Montenegro, can diminish this impression.

Concerning other neighboring countries, the war in ex Yugoslavia has finished (at the moment) without spreading conflicts. There were sparks between Greece on one side and Albania and Macedonia on the other. Serbian aggression on Macedonia hung by a thread, but was prevented by the Americans, who sent their units into Macedonia, at the very beginning of the crisis. The old conflict between Turkey and Greece concerning the Aegean Islands appears here and there from time to time.

In the rest of ex Yugoslavia and Macedonia, the unsolved problem of the Albanians is more and more expressed. Eastern border of Croatia is just to be stabilised until the beginning of 1998. And Bosnia and Herzegovina is still to fix, democratically, internal boundaries of the state territory and solve the problem of democratic and national rights in both entities (Serb and Bosnyak-Croat one).

By the end of 1997, geopolitical situation in the region develops to be solved. Some questions of internal situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina have been still opened, as well as in Montenegro and Kosovo. In this moment the security of Croatian borders seems to be consolidated. If the future situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Kosovo would open same new changes, they can influence Croatia more or less too.

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SAŽETAK

Damir Magaš: Razvoj geografskog i geopolitičkog položaja Hrvatske

Autor u svom radu razmatra promjene u geografskom obuhvatu i geopolitičkom položaju Hrvatske kroz stoljeća do najnovijih suvremenih zbivanja. Nakon poznatih političkih zbivanja početkom devedesetih godina dvadesetog stoljeća, Hrvatska se ponovno pojavljuje kao potpuno suverena zemlja na geopolitičkoj karti Europe. Smatra se najčešće da je to nova europska zemlja premda je kao neovisna država postojala još u ranom srednjem vijeku. Zahvaljujući međunarodno priznatim granicama, uspješnom otporu hrvatskog naroda srpskoj agresiji, političkim i institucionalnim odnosima s međunarodnom zajednicom, hrvatskom dijasporom i bosansko hercegovačkom državom, njen teritorijalni suverenitet ponovno je nedavno utvrđen.

Osim obrade geografskog položaja Hrvatske koji je značajan jer obuhvaća jedinstvenu zonu dodira Srednjeg Podunavlja i Središnjeg Sredozemlja, autor obrađuje sustavne promjene granica Hrvatske, te odrednice opstanka hrvatskog naroda u izuzetno složenim geopolitičkim prilikama. Budući da je upravo ovdje reljefna prepreka između srednjepodunavskog bazena i sjevernog Jadrana najjuža i najniža pa omogućava najlakše povezivanje Srednje i Istočne Europe sa Sredozemljem, oduvijek su postojali interesi drugih sila da ovladaju tim prostorom.

Hrvatska ima važnu geopolitičku i prometnu ulogu u Europi. Smještena između Zapadnoeuropskih zemalja Austrije, Slovenije, Italije i istočnoeuropskih, Mađarske, Jugoslavije i Bosne i Hercegovine, danas, kao srednjoeuropsko-sredozemna zemlja ima važnu ulogu u stvaranju geostrateške stabilnosti na jugoistočnim granicama Srednje Europe prema Jugoistočnoj Europi. Posebno značenje u tom kontekstu ima Jadransko more čiji velik dio pripada i Hrvatskoj.