

THE ETHNO-DEMOGRAPHIC FRAMEWORK OF GREATER SERBIAN AGGRESSION AGAINST THE REPUBLIC OF CROATIA, 1991-1997

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Introduction

The demographic development of a given area is conditioned by numerous factors; sometimes as the consequence, at other times as the cause of socio-economic events and changes (and more often disturbances). Changes in the dynamics and structures of a population are often the result of disturbances in social and economic development, and if they are abrupt and sudden, then the adverse consequences are more evident and pernicious. In this sense, the events of war especially cause great disturbances in demographic development, for they provoke numerous direct (immediate) and indirect demographic losses which, in the future, can damage and limit the stable population development of an area considerably. It is well known that war always alters the demographic picture of a given area, in the sphere of the natural, spatial (migrational) and general movement of a population, as well as in the sphere of demographic structures, be they age-sex, socio-economic, ethnic, confessional, etc. (Wertheimer-Baletić, A., 1992). The war against Croatia, in Croatia, from 1991 to 1995, as well as several years' occupation of a significant portion of Croatian state territory (1991-1997), aggravated enormous material destruction. But more importantly, the war also exacerbated vast human casualties – some twenty thousand people killed, thousands wounded, tens of thousands of displaced persons. These are only approximate indicators of the demographic damage inflicted against the Croatian population during Greater Serbian aggression. In this article, we shall attempt to demonstrate one of the most significant ethno-demographic aspects (frameworks) of the war against Croatia; for by familiarising ourselves with it we will be able to disclose the cause of these consequences of war and occupation, and their motives from 1991 to 1997.

From mid-1991 and the beginning of Greater Serbian aggression against the Republic of Croatia, significant ethno-demographic processes occurred, incited by direct military activities, but also political ethnic cleansing, thanks to which ethnic relations in approximately one quarter of Croatia's territory were altered and unsettled. Apart from immediate war casualties and destruction, Greater Serbian aggression, as an especially strong and complex influence, emerged in the domain of the spatial movement of the population, namely migration, and exacerbated forced eviction and exile, mainly in relation to the Croatian population in war-affected (occupied) areas, with the aim of creating ethnically pure Serbian regions (Wertheimer-Baletić, A., 1992). Forced migrations are specific population-settlement indicators of Greater Serbian aggression against the Republic of Croatia.

The picture of the population of Croatia according to the 1991 general census

The Republic of Croatia found itself, on the verge of the third millennium, in a somewhat disadvantageous demographic situation, with population trends and relations that were more than unfavourable. The population of Croatia in the second half of the twentieth century is characterised by a considerable reduction in numerical growth (a total population increase of 6.4% during the period 1961-1971 reduced to 4% during the period 1981-1991), as a reflection of natural depopulation (i.e. a continued decline of the birth-rate and natural growth, which has lasted for decades), followed by aging or the senilisation of the population, emigration as a form of the general movement of the population, rural exodus and urban-rural polarisation. The latter unfavourable population processes represent the immediate consequences of the fact that the contemporary demographic development of the Republic of Croatia is essentially determined and oriented by the first and second World Wars, namely absolute and proportionally high direct and indirect demographic (wartime) losses, followed by continued emigration which has occurred for almost a century, an ever-weakening natural dynamics and depopulation, namely the demographic emptying of approximately one half of the state

territory (Crkvenčić, I. and Šterc, S, 1996). The contemporary population-settlement picture of Croatia is, to state the issue mildly, damaged, which is confirmed not so much by recent statistical-demographic indicators, but by decades of descending and negative trends.¹ Unfortunately, Greater Serbian aggression against the Republic of Croatia will incite new disturbances to its demographic development, especially in the development of demographic structures, including the particularly significant ethnic structure of population settlements.²

The ethnic picture of the population is a diversely complex indicator of the demographic development of the Republic of Croatia. Its complexity has emerged out of the more or less congenial affinity of particular peoples who "overlap" Croatian state territory, their mutual diffusion, and historical events which have, occasionally, altered the ethnic picture of the region in a very short period of time. Owing especially to historical and demographic development, which has unfolded within the complex conditions of social, political, economic, military, religious, cultural and other changes during the past century, the ethnic picture of the Republic of Croatia has emerged, whose objective analysis provides for a better familiarisation of contemporary political-territorial events and changes not only in Croatia, but in the wider region also.

The last general pre-war census of the population of Croatia was conducted on March 31, 1991. Even though it was conducted within a new political atmosphere (a year after the first democratic elections in Croatia), it was performed according to

¹ On contemporary demographic processes in the Republic of Croatia, cf. Crkvenčić, I. and Šterc, S (1996): "The Population of Croatia," *Geo Journal* vol. 38, no. 4, Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht; Wertheimer-Baletić, A. (1992): "Demografski razvoj i globalni demografski procesi u Hrvatskoj u poslijeratnom razdoblju," *Encyclopaedia moderna* 29, Zagreb; Šterc, S. (1991): "The General Demographic Cross Section of the Republic of Croatia: Geopolitical and Demographic Issues of Croatia," *Geographical Papers* 8, Zagreb; Nejasmić, I. (1991): *Depopulacija u Hrvatskoj – Korijeni, stanje, izgledi*, Globus, Zagreb.

² "Settlements" include villages, hamlets, small, medium and large sized towns, and cities. In other words, settlements refer to any populated area irrespective of size.

the principles and characteristics of the Federal Bureau of Statistics of Yugoslavia, which were valid for the entire territory of the former state community. It is Croatia's good fortune that all those census registry documents from the general census are located in Zagreb (in the State Bureau of Statistics), including even the census registry documents from former Croatian local municipalities in which Serbs constituted a majority of the total population (Knin, Gračac, Donji Lapac, Dvor, Glina, Vrginmost, etc.). Even though the census was conducted in less than favourable political circumstances, during the days when the "Knin *balvan* revolution"³ had already escalated into an open attack against the Republic of Croatia (the "bloody Easter" at Plitvice Lakes occurred immediately prior to the census), the census results as a whole can be deemed reliable. However, we emphasise the significant and unfavourable political-military circumstances in order to highlight the poor conditions (climate) in which the census was conducted in particular parts of Croatia (and thereby the objectivity of the results also), especially in places where the rebellion of the local Serbian population had already begun or was just beginning.

Given that the development of demographic structures, in this case ethnic structures, depends on the total population development, all disturbances in the numerical and structural development of the population are also reflected in the formation of the ethnic picture of population settlements. Croatia finds itself at the junction or cross-road of three European territorial parts – the central Danube region, the northern Mediterranean region and the western Balkans region. Various civilisations (Central European, Balkan, Mediterranean) and different religious creeds (Roman Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy, Islam) have met and penetrated one another in Croatia (Friganović, A. M. and Živić, D., 1994). Ethnic development followed alterations in historical-political and territorial events. However, the constancy of Croatian characteristics and the development of the area have lasted since the thirteenth century. Owing to its natural-

³ The *balvan* revolution refers to the Serbian uprising that took place in town of Knin in 1991. The word *balvan* literally means "wooden beam," thereby denoting the blockade of major Croatian roads linking the northern and southern parts of the country.

geographic characteristics and socio-economic development, Croatian regions have served, during past centuries, as not only the point of departure, but also as the determining location for numerous emigration/immigration trends, which are also significant in many Croatian regions insofar as they show core changes to the ethnic picture of population settlements of the state territory. In this sense, it is particularly worthwhile to stress emigration, but also numerous colonisations during and following the end of the Ottoman period (fifteenth, sixteenth and seventeenth centuries), followed by immigration into Croatia encouraged by Austria-Hungary during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, emigration out of Croatia due to economic and other political reasons during the nineteenth century, and emigration-immigration movements caused by significant political-territorial changes after the first and second World Wars during the first half of the twentieth century. The land area of Croatia was the location for numerous and frequent migration trends of German, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, Ruthenian, Ukranian, Italian, Serbian, Muslim and other populations during centuries of ethno-demographic processes. All of this influenced, through time, the configuration of a relatively complex and variegated ethnic picture in Croatia (Žuljić, S., 1996), in which Croatians nonetheless dominated significantly according to number and the population size.

In 1991 Croatia had a population of 4,784,265 registered permanent residents which, in relation to the previous census of 1981 (4,601,469 residents), represents a growth of 182,796 persons or 3.97%. The census showed that in 1991 there were 3,763,356 Croatians who made up 78.1% of the total population of the state (cf. Table 1). The other 21.9% of the population consisted of Serbs (581,663 residents or 12.2%), Yugoslavs (106,041 or 2.2%),⁴ Muslims (43,469 or 0.9%), Slovenians (22,376 or 0.5%), Hungarians (22,355 or 0.5%), Italians (21,303

⁴ "Yugoslavs" are a special, artificially created ethnic group of undeclared persons. The proponents of rigid Yugoslav unitarism and hegemony began to use the concept of "Yugoslav nation" without acknowledging that this concept, from a legal-national aspect, can signify only citizenship. But there were neither historical nor cultural-traditional assumptions for such a position, thus Yugoslavs became "extinct" in much the same way as they appeared.

or 0.4%) and others and unknown (250,702 or 5.2%).⁵ From the most recent data, it is evident that the Republic of Croatia constitutes a relatively homogeneous Croatian ethnic area, in which out of every ten residents about eight are Croatians. Other ethnic groups (excluding the Serbs) make up less than 1% of the population of Croatia in their own right. Only the Serbs, with 12%, are somewhat more represented in the total population, and thereby constitute the most numerical ethnic minority in the Republic of Croatia (76.5% of the non-Croatian population of Croatia). Serbs in Croatia are mainly the descendants of the Vlach warrior-grazier population which, professing the Eastern Orthodox faith, settled in significant numbers in Croatian periphery and border regions during the Ottoman period (sixteenth and seventeenth centuries). That population adopted, under the influence of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Serbian ethnic characteristics only in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The problem of Yugoslavs (2.2%) is of a somewhat more complicated nature. In short, the problem consists of an ethnically undeclared (anational) population, which was "made up" of all ethnic groups in Croatia and which will, most probably, "disappear" in the general census 2001. It is worthwhile emphasising that ethnic minorities in the Republic of Croatia were mainly settled according to a plan (colonised) during the past two to three centuries. Only a small portion of minority groups make up an autochthonous population.

Of the total number of settlements in Croatia (6,694) in 1991, Croatians constituted a majority of 5,229 settlements or 78%. In them was a total population of up to 85% Croatians. On the other hand, in the same year Serbs had a majority in a total of 1,105 settlements or 16.5% of the settlements of Croatia. Also, a relatively high homogeneous Croatian state area is visible at the level of district counties (cf. Table 2). Namely, Croatians in 1991 made up a majority in all Croatian counties, including the city of

⁵ In the group "others and unknown" in 1991, the "unknown" dominated (1.3%), followed by those who, according to Article 170 of the Constitution of the former Yugoslavia, did not want to declare their ethnicity (1.5), those who declared themselves according to regional allegiance (0.9%) and, finally, 'others' – Montenegrins, Macedonians, Germans, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, etc. (1.5%).

Zagreb.⁶ Croatians made up more than 90% of the population in the Zagreb County (94.3%), the Krapina-Zagorje County (97.9%), the Varaždin County (96.5%), the Koprivnica-Križevci County (93%), the Split-Dalmatia County (90.8%) and the Međimurje County (94%). These district counties simultaneously had the most homogeneous ethnic component. Croatians constituted a somewhat smaller number in the city of Zagreb itself (85.4%), the Brodska-Posavina County (80.6%), the Šibenik County⁷ (82.5%) and the Dubrovnik-Neretva County (86.4%). All of these latter district counties together had an above average ratio of Croatians in relation to Croatia as a whole (78.1%). In the other remaining district counties, the portion of the population made up by Croatians ranged from 54.6% (the Istra County) to 75.8% (the Primorje-Goranska County). At the same time, the portion of the population made up by Serbs was greater than a third of the total population in only two Croatian district counties, namely in the Sisak-Moslavina County (34.5%) and the Zadar-Knin County⁸ (38.3%), and the number of Croatians was relatively less in them (56.3% and 56.8% respectively). The portion of the Serbian population in 1991 was somewhat more significant in the Karlovac County (22.7%), the Lika-Senj County (23.9%), the Virovitica-Posavina County (20.9%), the Požega-Slavonia County (19.2%) and the Vukovar-Srijem County (19.7%). The smallest portion of Serbs is documented in the Krapina-Zagorje County (0.2%) and the Međimurje County (0.4%). As for other ethnic groups, it is worthwhile noting a somewhat higher portion

⁶ The Croatian Parliament (Sabor) passed an Act on Local Municipalities, Cities and District Counties at the end of 1992, in which the former municipal administrative-territorial organisation of the state was abolished. With this Act, twenty district counties, and the elevation of the city of Zagreb to the status of district county, were established in place of 102 local municipalities. The same Act underwent several amendments up to 1998, the most important being in 1997 when some district counties changed their borders. These changes, however, do not greatly alter the district county ethnic picture of settlements, thus we have not given them special attention. Here, it is also worthwhile noting that the ethnic homogeneity of the Republic of Croatia is evident at the level of former local municipalities. Namely, Croatians in 1991 had a majority in 89 (87.3%), while Serbs had a majority in 13 (12.7%) of the 102 local municipalities of the Republic of Croatia.

⁷ Now reorganised as the Šibenik-Knin County.

⁸ Now reorganised as the Zadar County.

of Hungarians in the Bjelovar-Bilogorska County (1.4%), the Vukovar-Srijem County (1.4%) and the Osijek-Baranja County (3.8%); Muslims in the Istra County (3%) and the Primorje-Goranska County (2.2%); Slovenians in the Primorje-Goranska County (1.4%) and the Istra County (1.4); Italians in the Istra County (7.5%); Ruthenians and Ukrainians in the Vukovar-Srijem County (1.5%); Czechs in the Bjelovar-Bilogorska County (5.8%). What is particularly significant about ethnically undeclared residents is that they are comprised of a relatively high portion of the population who declared themselves in terms of regional allegiances in the Istra County (18.1%), while the number of Yugoslavs ranged from 0.2% (Krapina-Zagorje County) to 4.3% (Osijek-Baranja County).

In considering the ethnic picture of settlements (especially the mutual relation between Croats and Serbs) in traditional Croatian regions, we notice exclusively Croatian ethnic characteristics in Central Croatia, Dalmatia, the Croatian Zagorje, Slavonia and Baranja, Istra, Gorski Kotar and the Varaždin-Međimurje region. More ethnically complex regions include Kordun, Banovina and Lika, and in the last of these regions there lived a somewhat higher number of Serbs (49.5%) than Croats (46.1%) according to the 1991 census (cf. Table 3).

It is obvious from all of these details that the Republic of Croatia represents a relatively homogeneous and authentic Croatian ethnic area, in which the non-Croatian population constitutes only slightly more than one fifth of the total population. Croatian ethnic indicators are also evident at the level of the state as a whole, and particularly at the level of settlements and their administrative-territorial components (district counties). A more detailed ethno-demographic analysis, especially in regards to the population density of "Croatian" and "Serbian" settlements, would affirm the aforesaid. Owing to a deficiency in population density, Serbs in "their" settlements emphasised, with a view to justifying their aggression, the relatively large number and ratio of settlements in which they constituted a majority of the population (1,105 settlements or 16.5% of the total settlements in the Republic of Croatia). Indeed, they "forgot" that people who lived in these settlements represented less than one tenth of the total

population of the Republic of Croatia. The situation is similar at the level of former local municipalities; in thirteen "Serbian" local municipalities in Croatia in 1991 there lived only 5.4% of the population of Croatia.

During the course of Greater Serbian aggression against the Republic of Croatia (1991-1995) and the occupation of a considerable portion of its territory, ethnic relations and the total ethnic picture of settlements within Croatian state territory noticeably changed, especially in those areas that were directly affected by the war.

After having succeeded in temporarily taking possession of a significant part of Croatian state territory,⁹ owing to military superiority at the time, the aggressor attempted to strengthen its power and occupation. The most important medium for attaining this goal, as well as being a very significant ethno-demographic consequence of war and occupation, was the ethnic cleansing of Croatian and other non-Serbian residents from occupied areas, in which the aggressor constantly tried to affirm not only their territorial occupation, but also their demographic occupation and thereby sought to legalise their territorial expansion through force.

Open and direct Greater Serbian aggression against the Republic of Croatia began in spring 1991 (in Borovo Selo).¹⁰ The first displaced persons from occupied Croatian settlements began to arrive in non-occupied regions of the state in the summer of the same year, first from Lika and northern Dalmatia, and then from Slavonia. The village of Čelija in the former local municipality of Vukovar is a particularly tragic example, in which some two hundred evicted residents represented the first large number of

⁹ At the beginning of 1992 there were, according to the 1991 general census, 1,074 settlements in Croatia under Greater Serbian occupation, making up approximately 15,000 square kilometres of the territory (26.5% of the land mass of the Republic of Croatia) with 549,093 residents (11.5% of the population) (Šterc, S and Pokos, N., 1993).

¹⁰ On May 2, 1991, twelve Croatian police officers were ambushed, killed and then massacred in Borovo Selo near Vukovar. Members of the Yugoslav National Army (JNA) offered open support to Greater Serbian terrorists, which signified the beginning of Greater Serbian aggression and war against Croatia.

displaced persons arriving in non-occupied regions of Croatia in July 1991. After that there followed exoduses from Dalj, Erdut, Aljmaš, Hrvatska Kostajnica, Kijevo, Petrinja and many other places throughout Croatia. The climax of the displaced persons crisis occurred in November 1991, when several tens of thousands of persons were evicted from Vukovar and surrounding regions in the face of occupation and massacres. While in July 1991 there were about 30,000 displaced persons in Croatia, only half a year later the Government's Bureau for Displaced Persons and Refugees had more than ten times the amount of displaced persons registered.¹¹ The largest registered number of displaced persons in Croatia was in March 1992 – 356,627 people, which amounts to 7.5% of the Croatian population having been evicted from their homes.¹² In December 1996, something less than 3% of Croatian residents were not in their homes.¹³

We have already stressed that, according to the 1991 general census, the Republic of Croatia had 4,784,265 residents. Owing to specific historico-political and socio-economic developments during the past few centuries, the contemporary ethnic picture of

¹¹ At the beginning of 1992 (the peak of Greater Serbian occupational and territorial expansion), there were 325,000 displaced persons in the Republic of Croatia.

¹² The Government's Bureau for Displaced Persons and Refugees has precise documentation of registered persons who, after having been expelled from their homes, found temporary accommodation in non-occupied Croatian settlements. Part of the evicted population found a temporary home in other countries, first in Germany, Hungary, Slovenia, Austria, etc., but their exact number is not known due to deficiencies in precise documentation and their short stay in these countries. Some research has suggested a number of about 25,000 Croatian refugees in foreign countries in 1991, and a number of 60,000 in 1994 (Rogić and others, 1995). V. Repac-Roknić (1992) stated that as of March 9, 1993, 400,611 citizens of the Republic of Croatia were forced to leave their homes; 237,311 of them found accommodation in Croatia (displaced persons), and 163,300 in foreign countries (refugees). Bearing the latter figure in mind, we can safely assume that at the beginning of 1992 about 600,000 residents, namely 12.5% of the population, were forced to leave their mainly occupied settlements.

¹³ The remaining eighty or so thousand displaced persons from the Croatian Danube region (eastern Slavonia, Baranja and western Srijem) have been given the opportunity to return home with the completion of the peaceful reintegration of the area into the Croatian judicial, political and territorial system (January 15, 1998).

Croatia has emerged which, according to all statistical-demographic indicators, suggests a relatively high level of ethnic homogeneity in which Croats, as the most numerical ethnic group, make up almost 80% of the population (78.1%). The non-Croatian population in 1991 consisted of only one-fifth of the population (21.9%). Among them the most numerical are Serbs (12.2%), Yugoslavs (2.2%) and Muslims (0.9%). Others (Montenegrins, Macedonians, Czechs, Slovenians, Slovaks, Hungarians, Germans, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, etc.) and those classified as unknown made up in the same year 6.6% of the population of the Republic of Croatia. In spite of the fact that they are a minority people, Serbs in Croatia, with the aid of the pro-Serbian oriented Yugoslav National Army (JNA) and Serbia proper, embarked upon open rebellion at the beginning of the 1990s, with the aim of separating a section of Croatian state territory (up to and including the contrived Virovitica-Karlovac-Ogulin-Karlobag line)¹⁴ from Croatia, the formation of a new (western) Serbian state and its inclusion (together with other "centuries' old Serbian regions") in Greater Serbia. After Tito's death in May 1980, the systematically and forced repression of problems relating to mutual relations between peoples and republics (states) within the Yugoslav community surfaced for all to see with great intensity. Wanting to liberate itself from the pressure of Belgrade and (Greater) Serbian ideology, and endeavouring to secure full political, national and economic independence from Belgrade, Croatia found itself standing in the path of the greatest and most destructive assault of Greater Serbian aggression. Slobodan Milošević found himself at the head of the Greater Serbian program in 1986 and had at his (Serbia's) disposal the massive political-police-military apparatus of the former state. To destroy the historical, sacred and cultural heritage of the Croatian people, to evict Croats from their centuries' old homes and eradicate all traces of Croatian identity on Croatian

¹⁴ The complete lack of ethno-demographic justification for Greater Serbian territorial pretensions on the area of Croatia (entrenched for over two centuries) is best seen in the ethnic picture of the population density in those parts of Croatia which Greater Serbian ideologists endeavoured to include in Greater Serbia. Insofar as the area east of "Šešelj's line" – Virovitica-Karlovac-Ogulin-Karlobag – would make up a new Serbian state, there would be, according to the 1991 census, about two and a half million residents living there, consisting of about 70% Croats and only about 19% Serbs.

soil – this was the thorough-going executive program of realising the two centuries' old dream of a Greater Serbia.

Aggression against Croatia encompassed not only those areas (former local municipalities) that had, according to the 1991 census, a Serbian ethnic majority (parts of Banovina, Kordun, Lika, western Slavonia and northern Dalmatia),¹⁵ but also Croatia's border regions with Yugoslavia with a majority Croatian population (the Croatian Danube region) and those regions in which Croats constituted an explicit majority of the population (e.g. Drniš, Dubrovnik, Sinj, Sisak, Šibenik, Virovitica, etc.). Immediate war damage engulfed about 29,000 square kilometres or 50% of the land mass of the Republic of Croatia (i.e. about 35% of all former Croatian local municipalities) containing more than one and a half million residents (i.e. about 33% of the Croatian population). The ethnic structure of the area (Croats 40.1%, Serbs 26.7%, others and unknown 33.2%) clearly quashes the thesis of its Serbian ethnic indicators, as well as the thesis of the ethnic rights of (Greater) Serbia in the region, which all officials and adherents of the Greater Serbian program tried to systematically sell to the world – from the Serbian Academy of Science and the Arts, political and ecclesiastical leaders to the law enforcement and military apparatus. A somewhat large proportion of Serbs lived in those local municipalities with a Serbian ethnic majority (Benkovac, Donji Lapac, Dvor, Glina, Gračac, Knin, Hrvatska Kostajnica, Obrovac, Titova Korenica, Vojnić and Vrginmost),¹⁶ but in them also lived, apart from 74% Serbs, 21.9% Croats and 4.1% others (and unknown). A significant detail to note is that the residents in these eleven local municipalities with an absolute Serbian majority make up only one quarter of the total Serbian population of Croatia (144,260 residents or 24.8%), namely only

¹⁵ This relates to eleven former Croatian local municipalities (Benkovac, Donji Lapac, Dvor, Glina, Gračac, Knin, Hrvatska Kostajnica, Obrovac, Titova Korenica, Vojnić, Vrginmost) in which there was a total of only 24.8% of all Croatian Serbs. In spite of this, Serbs embarked upon an armed uprising and quickly widened it to encompass other parts of Croatia (Crkvenčić, 1994).

¹⁶ To the latter local municipalities with an absolute Serbian majority in the total population should be added Pakrac and Petrinja, in which the Serbian population represented a relative majority in 1991.

4.1% of the total population of Croatia. On what historical, ethnic, legal or other basis could that one quarter of the Serbian population seek, in the name of the other three-quarters of Serbs in the Republic of Croatia, some new state? Or did the reasons for (Greater) Serbian aggression lie elsewhere? On the other hand, for example, border regions of the Republic of Croatia with Yugoslavia (the Croatian Danube region), in which the majority population was overtly Croatian (64.7%), while Serbs made up just over one-fifth (20.6%), were subjected to the harshest Greater Serbian aggression and the greatest destruction of the Croatian people, irrespective of the fact that Serbs had never had any ethnic or historical claim to the area (Živić, D., 1997).

Owing to military-technical superiority, the Greater Serbian aggressor succeeded in temporarily taking possession of a relatively large number of Croatian settlements during the second half of 1991. As of January 3, 1992, a total of 1,074 settlements, namely 16% of settlements in the Republic of Croatia, found themselves under occupation. Most occupied settlements were in Banovina, Kordun and Lika (654 settlements or 60.9%), followed by those in northern Dalmatia (238 settlements or 22.2%), the Croatian Danube region (124 settlements or 11.5%) and western Slavonia (58 settlements or 5.4%) (Šterc, S. and Pokos, N., 1993). In 1991, 549,083 residents or 11.5% of the population of Croatia lived in these areas. Serbs had a majority in two thirds of the settlements (708 or 65.9%), Croats had a majority in just under one third of the settlements (708 or 65.9%), while members of other ethnic groups had a majority in twenty two settlements or 2.1%. If they tried to take control of "their" settlements (due to the supposed claim of danger to Serbian identity and Orthodoxy), it is interesting to discern the reason why Serbs then had to take possession (in most cases destroy, set alight and loot) of 366 Croatian settlements in which they represented a minority population. Here, however, it is worthwhile noting that even if Serbs constituted a majority in most occupied settlements in the Republic of Croatia, their population density would be considerably less to the population density of settlements with Croatian majorities. Namely, in 708 occupied "Serbian" settlements there lived only just over one half of the population of all occupied settlements (58.4%). Apart from this, Serbs also

made up only 52.4% of the total population in occupied settlements in the Republic of Croatia, while Croats made up 37.1% and others 10.5%. The most significant detail, however, is that Serbs in occupied settlements constituted a total of 6% of the Serbian population of Croatia (Šterc, S. and Pokos, N., 1993).

Observing the situation regionally, we notice that the largest "Serbian" occupied settlements were in Banovina, Kordun and Lika (512 or 78.3%), followed by western Slavonia (44 or 75.9%), and somewhat less in northern Dalmatia (106 or 44.5%) and the Croatian Danube region (46 or 37.1%). At the same time, Croats represented a majority population in 137 (20.9%) occupied settlements in Banovina, Kordun and Lika, 14 settlements (24.1%) in western Slavonia, 132 settlements (55.5%) in northern Dalmatia and 61 settlements (49.2%) in the Croatian Danube region. The ethnic picture of the population in occupied settlements shows, according to regions, the predominance of Serbs in Banovina, Kordun and Lika (Serbs 66.4%, Croats 27.1%), northern Dalmatia (Serbs 55.3%, Croats 41.7%) and western Slavonia (Serbs 58.7%, Croats 31.9%), while Croats made up the majority population in the Croatian Danube region (Croats 44.5%, Serbs 35%) (Šterc, S. and Pokos, N., 1993).

A specifically characteristic example is the Vukovar-Srijem area (county) of the Croatian Danube region, with Vukovar as the symbol of the Croatian struggle for freedom and state independence. In this authentic Croatian region (Croats 68.4%, Serbs 19.7%, others and unknown 11.9%), the Greater Serbian aggressor took possession of two-thirds of all settlements (54 out of a total of 84 settlements), in which Croats also constituted a majority (47.1%), Serbs 36.3% and others (and unknown) 16.6% of the population. Vukovar is a striking example, which was claimed to be a "centuries' old Serbian city" by Greater Serbian ideologists, but which actually had an explicit majority of Croats and other non-Serbian people (Croats 47.2%, Hungarians 1.6%, Ruthenians 2.1%, Germans 0.2%, Ukrainians 1.1%, Muslims 0.4%, Slovaks 0.3%, Serbs 32.3%).

The above details demonstrate exceptionally well that, in spite of all attempts at ethnic appropriation in certain parts of the Croatian state, Serbs in occupied Croatian regions represented just over one-half of the total population, thus they resorted to "cleansing" non-Serbian people, and Croats in particular, in order to consolidate their authority. Details concerning the ethnic structure of the population of displaced persons in Croatia best affirms the aforesaid statement.

The ethnic ratio of displaced persons as an indicator of ethnic cleansing

According to information supplied by the Bureau for Displaced Persons and Refugees of the Government of Croatia, as of July 1, 1996, there was a total of 210,341 displaced persons in Croatia, namely 4.4% of the total Croatian population.¹⁷ The territorial origins of Croatian displaced persons are extremely varied. One can ascertain several larger exoduses from particular areas (Banovina, Kordun, Lika, followed by northern Dalmatia, western Slavonia and the Croatian Danube region) (Živić, D., 1997). The largest number of displaced persons came from the Croatian Danube region (83,322 or 39.6% of all displaced persons in Croatia), followed by those from northern Dalmatia (56,600 or 26.9%), from Banovina, Kordun and Lika (52,253 or 24.8%) and, finally, from western Slavonia (14,811 or 7%).¹⁸

The largest number of displaced persons came from the following former local municipalities: Vukovar (16.4% of all displaced persons in Croatia), Beli Manastir (9.5%), Petrinja (6.6%), Osijek (6%), Zadar (5.5%) and Drniš (5.3%). As of July 1, 1996, 103,802 persons (49.3% of displaced persons in Croatia) were evicted from these six Croatian local municipalities, namely one-fifth (20.8%) of their pre-war populations. Even though the above mentioned local municipalities made up one-tenth of the population of the Republic of Croatia (10.5%) in 1991, they

¹⁷ Bureau for Displaced Persons and Refugees of the Government of Croatia, Data Base, the State of Affairs on July 1, 1996, Zagreb.

¹⁸ The territorial origins of 1.7% of displaced persons is not known.

represented one-half of all Croatian displaced persons. It is significant that Serbs constituted a relative majority only in the former local municipality of Petrinja, while Croats constituted a majority in the other local municipalities (an absolute majority in Osijek, Zadar and Drniš, and a relative majority in Vukovar and Beli Manastir). In relation to the pre-war number of residents, proportionally highest number of people were evicted from the following local municipalities: Slunj (52.2%), Drniš (46.3%), Vukovar (40.9%), Petrinja (38.9%), Beli Manastir (36.8%) and Obrovac (31.6%). More than one quarter of the total pre-war population were evicted from the following local municipalities: Benkovac (29.7%), Glina (29.3%) and Pakrac (25.7%) (Živić, D., 1997). 37.3% of the pre-war population were evicted from the above mentioned local municipalities. One-fifth of displaced persons (24.1%) came from the Vukovar-Srijem County, about 15.5% from the Osijek-Baranja County and about 16.4% from the Sisak-Moslavina County (cf. Table 4).

Of the total number of displaced persons in Croatia as of July 1, 1996, Croats represented a massive majority (93.6%), while members of other ethnic groups were considerably less (6.4%); the most numerical of them were Serbs (2.4%),¹⁹ Hungarians (1.8%) and Muslims (0.5%) (cf. Table 5). Similar relations can also be detected in an overview of the ethnic picture of the population of displaced persons according to evictions from individual local municipalities. Only seven local municipalities in Croatia had a portion of Croats that was less than 90% in the displaced persons population (Beli Manastir – 86.4%, Donji Lapac – 65.2%, Osijek – 89%, Otočac – 85.8%, Pakrac – 81.8% and Vojnić – 60.8%); in other places, the highest portion of Croatian displaced persons varied from 95% to 99.9% (e.g. Biograd – 99.3%, Drniš – 98.3%, Obrovac – 99.1%, Zadar – 99.2%, Duga Resa and Glina – 97.8%, Slunj – 97.5%, etc.). A somewhat larger number of Serbs in the displaced persons

¹⁹ It should be noted that the number of evicted Serbs represents the figure documented by the Government's Bureau of Displaced Persons and Refugees, which includes only those members of the evicted Serbian population that were given temporarily haven in non-occupied areas of Croatia, and not those who willingly left Croatia for other countries (Yugoslavia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and elsewhere) (Živić, D., 1997).

population was documented from the local municipalities of Donji Lapac (34.8%) and Otočac (13.7%), but they constitute an explicitly small number of Serbian displaced persons (87 residents in total). In other local municipalities, the portion of Serbs in the total number of displaced persons was less than 10%, and less than 5% in most cases.

The most significant indicator and confirmation of the thesis of the perpetration of ethnic cleansing on one-quarter of Croatian state territory is provided by a comparison between details of the displaced persons population and those evicted residents from occupied settlements in the Republic of Croatia. We have already noted above that 549,083 people or 11.5% of the population of Croatia (Croatsians 37.1%, Serbs 52.4% and others 10.5%) lived in 1,074 occupied settlements in 1991. According to the state of affairs with respect to the population of displaced persons as of July 1, 1996, it is evident that during the course of Greater Serbian aggression almost 40% of the pre-war population of occupied settlements were evicted, with Croatsians making up the largest number (about 97% of the pre-war number of Croatsians in occupied settlements), an insignificant number of Serbs (only about 2%) and members of other national groups (close to 15%). Viewing the situation regionally, the following regions were almost completely cleansed of their Croatian population: Kordun and Lika (about 94% Croatsians and 1% Serbs evicted), northern Dalmatia (about 96% Croatsians and not even 1% Serbs evicted), the Croatian Danube region (close to 88% Croatsians and just over 2% Serbs evicted), and western Slavonia (almost all Croatsians and about 8% Serbs evicted). Following thorough ethnic cleansing by the Greater Serbian aggressor, perhaps only five in one hundred Croatsians who lived in these areas prior to the war remained in occupied regions of Croatia during occupation. This is a neglected number, which very specifically demonstrates the extent of damage inflicted to the non-Serbian, and especially Croatian, population during Greater Serbian aggression and several years' occupation of a significant part of the Croatian state. In this way, the ethnic picture of settlements in one quarter of Croatian state territory was forcibly altered (disturbed) at the roots. The rectification of the negative consequences of ethnic cleansing represents a priority in terms of the national task of

embarking upon a process of renewal and the return of displaced persons to their homes, and especially today when all former occupied regions in the Republic of Croatia have come under Croatian sovereignty and rule.

From 1991 to 1997, and particularly during 1995, there were other numerous migrational movements, and that mainly of Serbs from areas liberated during operations "Lightning Flash"²⁰ and "Storm," towards Bosnia-Herzegovina, the Croatian Danube region and Yugoslavia. But we cannot call these movements ethnic cleansing, for they were instrumentalised by Greater Serbian ideologists who also started the war in the wider region. The exact figures of Serbs leaving is not known. Estimates indicate that during the war (1991-1995) about 70,000 Serbs left non-occupied parts of Croatia and migrated to what were then occupied regions or elsewhere, including Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina or some third country. During the liberation operations of the Croatian Army, about 130,000 persons left former occupied areas. This means that about 200,000 residents of the Republic of Croatia of Serbian national identity took part in migrational movements caused by the war, but not all of them left the territory of the Croatian state. A significant number of Serbs that abandoned their homes are today living in former occupied regions, namely in the Croatian Danube region (about 20,000 people). But these migrational patterns have nonetheless proved to be new burdens to the population-settlement (ethno-demographic) picture of parts of the Republic of Croatia, and whose rectification will require a great deal of time. The following is crucial to a solution: all displaced persons in Croatia (also including Serbian refugees in the Croatian Danube region) should be given the opportunity to return to their homes as soon as possible, for only in this way can the ethnic relation on the ground at least be made approximate to the state of affairs in 1991. This is the only path to quickly, but also partly, eliminate the consequences of war and ethnic cleansing. The psychological and social consequences of war, occupation and exile will continue to be healed many years after the establishment of lasting peace.

²⁰ The term "lightning flash" in the original Croatian is *Bljesak*.

Conclusion

What have the above paragraphs and figures demonstrated? The Republic of Croatia is a state in which Croats make up a significant majority of the population (78.1%). The most numerical non-Croatian ethnic group are Serbs (12.2%). The Croatian state also furnishes evidence, at more particular observational levels (district counties, local municipalities, traditional regions), of authentic Croatian ethnic characteristics. The ethno-demographic picture of Croatia, however, was severely distorted by Greater Serbian war efforts and aggression (1991-1995) and years of occupation (1991-1997) of one-quarter of the state territory, which has prompted, in terms of large scale human casualties and material damage, numerous forced migrations of the population, namely ethnic cleansing. We could emphasise, through argumentation and documentation, that ethnic cleansing was one of the most important means available for attaining the goals of Greater Serbian aggression against Croatia. We could even say that ethnic cleansing was one of the strategic aims of the aggressor, who sought to consolidate its position where Serbs had a majority in 1991, but also establish control in those areas where Serbs constituted a minority. The aggressor wanted to secure ethnic predominance and militarily seize Croatian territory. Up until the beginning of 1992 there were 1,074 settlements under occupation, comprising of nearly 500,000 residents of the Republic of Croatia. Even though Serbs in these regions (a total of 6% of the Serbian population of the Republic of Croatia) made up just over one-half of the population (52.4%), they felt themselves historically and ethnically justified in separating these areas of Croatia and "uniting" them with other "centuries' old Serbian regions." In the name of this "holy aim" almost all Croats, as well as a considerable number of other ethnic groups, were expelled from those regions, and significant parts of the Croatian Danube region, Banovina, Kordun, western Slavonia, Lika and northern Dalmatia were "cleansed."

Translated by Damion Buterin

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APPENDIXES:

Table 1. Ethnic Structure of the Republic of Croatia 1991.

Ethnic Groups	Absolute Indicator	Relative Indicator (%)
Croatians	3,736,356	78.1
Montenegrins	9,724	0.2
Macedonians	6,280	0.1
Muslims	43,469	0.9
Slovenians	22,376	0.5
Serbs	581,663	12.2
Albanians	12,032	0.3
Austrians	214	0
Bulgarians	458	0
Czechs	13,086	0.3
Greeks	281	0
Hungarians	22,355	0.5
Germans	2,635	0.1
Poles	679	0
Gypsies	6,695	0.1
Romanians	810	0
Russians	706	0
Ruthenians	3,253	0.1
Slovaks	5,606	0.1
Italians	21,303	0.4
Turks	320	0
Ukrainians	2,494	0.1
Vlachs	22	0
Jews	600	0
Yugoslavs	106,041	2.2
Regional loyalties	45,493	0.9
Undeclared	73,376	1.5

Others and unknown	65,938	1.4
Total	4,748,265	100

Source: Popis stanovništva 1991., Narodnosni sastav stanovništva Hrvatske po naseljima (General Census of the Population 1991, National Components of the Population of Croatia According to Settlements), Dokumentacija 881, RZSRH, Zagreb 1992.

Table 2. Ethnic Structure of the Population of Croatia According to Counties (%).

Country	Total	Croatians	Serbs	Hungarians	Muslims	Slovenians	Italians	Ruthenians and Ukrainians	Yugoslavs	Others and unknown
City of Zagreb	100	85.4	5.7	0.1	1.5	0.8	0	0.1	1.8	4.6
Zagreb	100	94.3	1.5	0.1	0.3	0.4	0	0	0.7	2.7
Krapina-Zagorje	100	97.9	0.2	0	0.1	0.4	0	0	0.2	1.2
Sisak-Moslavina	100	56.3	34.5	0.1	1.4	0.1	0.1	0.2	3.2	4.1
Karlovac	100	70.3	22.7	0	0.6	0.3	0	0	2.2	3.9
Varaždin	100	96.5	0.7	0	0.1	0.4	0	0	0.5	1.8
Korpiwnica-Križevci	100	93	3.2	0.1	0.1	0.1	0	0	1.3	2.2
Bjelovar-Bilogorska	100	67.9	16.1	1.4	0.1	0.2	0.1	0	4	10.2
Primorje-Goranska	100	75.8	8.8	0.2	2.2	1.4	1.2	0	3.3	7.1
Lika-Senj	100	71.8	23.9	0	0.2	0.1	0	0	1	3
Virovit.-Podravina	100	72	20.9	0.4	0.2	0.1	0	0	2.8	3.6
Požega-Slavonia	100	71.5	19.2	0.3	0.2	0.1	0.7	0	2.6	5.4
Brodsko-Posavina	100	80.6	11.4	0.1	0.3	0.1	0	0.3	2.9	4.3
Zadar-Knin	100	56.8	38.3	0.1	0.2	0.2	0	0	1.2	3.2
Osijek-Baranja	100	70.3	16.3	3.8	0.3	0.3	0	0.1	4.3	4.6
Šibenik	100	82.5	12.8	0.1	0.3	0.2	0	0	1	3.1
Vukovar-Srijem	100	68.4	19.7	1.4	1.2	0.1	0	1.5	3.8	3.9

Split-Dalmatia	100	90.8	3.2	0.1	0.5	0.3	0	0	1.6	3.5
Istra	100	54.6	4.8	0.1	3	1.4	7.5	0	3.6	24.8
Dubrovnik-Neretva	100	86.1	5	0.1	2.6	0.2	0.1	0	1.6	4.3
Medimurje	100	94	0.4	0.1	0.1	0.7	0	0	0.5	4.2
Republic of Croatia	100	78.1	12.2	0.5	0.9	0.5	0.5	0.1	2.2	5

Source: Statistički ljetopis hrvatskih županija 1993. (Statistical Annals of Croatian Counties 1993), DZSRH, Zagreb, 1993.

Table 3. Portion of Croats and Serbs in Traditional Croatian Regions 1991 (%).

Region	Croats	Serbs
City of Zagreb	86.1	5.4
Central Croatia	76.6	13.2
Dalmatia	82	12.1
Croatian Zagorje	97.9	0.2
Kordun	64.1	28.5
Lika	46.1	49.5
Slavonia and Baranja	72.6	16.5
Istra, Gorski kotar, northern Croatian seaside	68	8.5
Banovina	48.8	41.2
Varaždin-Medimurje	95.5	0.6
Republic of Croatia	78.1	12.2

Source: Popis stanovništva 1991., Narodnosni sastav stanovništva Hrvatske po naseljima (General Census of the Population 1991, National Components of the Population of Croatia According to Settlements), Dokumentacija 881, RZSRH, Zagreb 1992.

Table 4. Ethnic Structure of Displaced Persons in the Republic of Croatia According to Local Municipalities from which People Were Evicted

Local Municipality from which Evicted	Total	Croatians	%	Serbs	%	Others and unknown	%
Beli Manastir	19,985	17,258	86.4	289	1.4	2,438	12.2
Benkovac	9,914	9,811	99	58	0.6	45	0.4
Biograd	1,775	1,763	99.3	9	0.5	3	0.2
Donji Lapac	23	15	65.2	8	34.8	0	0
Dniš	11,179	10,986	98.3	146	1.3	47	0.4
Dubrovnik	6,079	5,811	95.6	69	1.1	199	3.3
Duga Resa	982	960	97.8	13	1.3	9	0.9
Dvor	1,038	987	95.1	40	3.9	11	1
Glina	6,760	6,614	97.8	93	1.4	53	0.8
Gospić	1,392	1,278	91.8	95	6.8	19	1.4
Gračac	1,096	1,067	97.4	11	1	8	1.6
Karlovac	6,087	5,836	95.9	192	3.2	59	0.9
Knin	3,014	2,905	96.4	83	2.8	26	0.8
Hrvatska Kostajnica	3,602	3,374	93.7	96	2.7	132	3.6
Nova Gradiška	3,368	3,128	92.9	175	5.2	65	1.9
Novska	4,356	4,028	92.5	261	6	67	1.5
Obrovac	3,650	3,671	99.1	9	0.2	24	0.7
Ogulin	966	934	96.7	28	2.9	4	0.4
Osijek	12,869	11,297	89	491	3.9	901	7.1
Otočac	578	496	85.8	79	13.7	3	0.5
Pakrac	7,087	5,797	81.8	586	8.3	704	9.9
Petrinja	13,819	12,866	93.1	730	5.3	223	1.6
Sinj	5,450	5,342	98	71	1.3	37	0.7
Sisak	1,526	1,355	88.8	143	9.4	28	1.8
Slunj	9,902	9,650	97.5	91	0.9	161	1.6
Šibenik	5,648	5,430	96.1	189	3.3	29	0.6
Titova Korenica	1,516	1,467	96.8	38	2.5	11	0.7
Vinkovci	16,184	15,222	94.1	114	0.7	848	5.2
Vojnić	97	59	60.8	8	8.2	30	31
Vrginmost	3,447	3,329	96.6	71	2.1	47	1.3
Vukovar	34,464	31,779	92.2	543	1.6	2,142	6.2
Zadar	11,666	11,569	99.2	51	0.4	46	0.4

Total	210,341	196,807	93.6	5,094	2.4	8,440	4
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Source: Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Ured za prognanike i izbjeglice, baza podataka, srpanj 1996. (Government of the Republic of Croatia, Bureau of Displaced Persons and Refugees, July 1996).

Table 5. Ethnic Structure of Displaced Persons in Croatia.

Ethnic Groups	Absolute Indicator	Relative Indicator (%)
Albanians	505	0.24
Czechs	382	0.18
Croatians	196,807	93.57
Germans	239	0.11
Gypsies	53	0.03
Hungarians	3,874	1.84
Italians	249	0.12
Jews	20	0.01
Macedonians	89	0.04
Montenegrins	61	0.03
Muslims	1,049	0.5
Poles	25	0.01
Ruthenians	772	0.37
Serbs	5,094	2.42
Slovaks	258	0.12
Slovenians	211	0.1
Ukrainians	14	0.01
Others and unknown	639	0.4
Total	210,341	100

Source: Vlada Republike Hrvatske, Ured za prognanike i izbjeglice, baza podataka, srpanj 1996. (Government of the Republic of Croatia, Bureau of Displaced Persons and Refugees, Data Base, July 1996).