



Pskov Journal of Regional Studies 2013-2024

ISSN 2079-8784

URL - <http://ras.jes.su>

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Volume 17. No4 /2021 Volume . 2021

The impact of ethnic and religious diversity in the Herzegovina-Neretva canton on the socio-economic situation of inhabitants in 2005-2015

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Abstract

The break-up of Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century showed the importance of national and religious diversity for the peaceful existence of the region. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) and the peace that followed, showed how difficult it is to coexist in a nationally and religiously divided society. The aim of the analysis is an attempt to show the impact of ethnic and religious diversity and conflict in the area of the Herzegovina-Neretva canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the economic situation of its inhabitants in the analyzed period. The research was conducted based on the analysis of existing data, decision-making processes and literature analysis. The undertaken analysis confirmed that the main reasons leading to the political crisis in the studied Herzegovina-Neretva canton include the cultural, ethnic and religious mosaic. The novelty of the research undertaken is the indication of the impact that the conflict had on the economic situation of the inhabitants of the canton and its neighboring regions. Ethnic and religious mosaic and the related conflict led to an increase in unemployment and economic migrations. It had a negative impact on the level of education and contributes to the lack of clear solutions in terms of the competences of many cantonal and government services.

Keywords list (en): Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Yugoslavia, canton, economy, ethnicity, Islam, religion, Catholicism

Publication date: 05.12.2021

Citation link:

Tomasz W., Jan A. W. The impact of ethnic and religious diversity in the Herzegovina-Neretva canton on the socio-economic situation of inhabitants in 2005-2015 // Pskov Journal of Regional Studies – 2021. – Volume 17. No4 /2021 C. 16-25 [Electronic resource]. URL: <https://prj.pskgu.ru/S221979310016951-9-1> (circulation date: 21.02.2024). DOI: 10.37490/S221979310016951-9

¹ **Introduction.** The break-up of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in the 1990s revealed the strength of national and religious antagonisms. In all countries, the so-called Socialist bloc social and political changes took place through the Velvet Revolution. Only the changes in the Balkans took their dramatic character [24]. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina of 1992–1995 was one of the bloodiest and most difficult to resolve conflicts in Europe after World War II. Importantly, national and religious conflicts still complicate the internal situation and international relations not only in this region [11]. The aim of this work is to show the impact of ethnic-religious diversity / conflict in the area of the Herzegovina-Neretva canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was an example of non-cooperation and where this diversity is most visible. The research was conducted based on the analysis of existing data, decision-making processes and literature analysis [6; 15].

² Among the main reasons leading to the unstable situation in the canton, the most frequently indicated are a mosaic of cultures, nationalities and religions [1]. In the name of their own convictions, the worst crimes were committed against believers of other faiths or people of different origins, while at the same time forming coalitions against their own religious community (the commander of the defence of Sarajevo, during the siege of the city by Serbs, was a Serb of origin). The remnant of the conflict was the creation of Bosnia and Herzegovina as a kind of Yugoslavia in miniature. Its area is still inhabited by three main ethnic groups of the former federation, whose members are followers of Islam, Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The multi-ethnicity of this area was expressed, among others, by in the structure of the legislative power, on the one hand fostering antagonism in society, and on the other hand submitting to it.

³ **Historical conditions.** For centuries, the area of the Herzegovinian-Neretva canton, and in particular the port of Neum, was a contested area between the ruling countries in this area. From the beginning of the 10th century, the territory of the canton was under Croatian rule. This was not prevented by the attempts by Venice to remove the tribute to the kingdom of Dalmatia and Croatia, paid in exchange for the possibility of free navigation in the Croatian waters of the Adriatic Sea. The situation changed after 997, when a civil war broke out between the sons of Držislav — the first king of Croatia and Dalmatia. Venice intervened in this conflict, which, in agreement with the Byzantine emperor, seized the islands and cities along the Adriatic coast, making them dependent on itself [18]. Croatian rule over this territory was re-established by Stephen I. This was favoured by his good relations with Byzantium, which contributed to the fall of southern

Italy. The authorities on the territory of the Apennine peninsula were taken over by the Normans, who for decades played an important role in international relations on the Adriatic coast. In the mid-fourteenth century, Stefan Tvrtko the I became a Bosnian ban. By 1390 he conquered all of Croatia south of Velebit and assumed the title of king of "Croatia and Dalmatia, as well as Raška and Przymorze" [13]. Vladislav of Naples joined the fight for the Hungarian crown and influence in Bosnia and Croatia. He landed with his troops in Zadar in 1409 and was crowned king there [7]. However, when he realized that he was unable to win the Hungarian throne, he decided to betray the faithful Croats by selling to Venice such cities as Novigrad, Vrana and Zadar and his alleged rights to rule Dalmatia. By 1420, the Venetians took control of almost the entire territory of the Adriatic coast. Thus, the territory of the canton was ruled by the Republic of Venice, the Ottoman Empire and the Kingdom of Croatia and Dalmatia.

⁴ Due to the expansionist policy of the Ottoman Turks, Bosnia fell in 1463, and Herzegovina fell in 1482 [25]. This was due to a low desire to defend against invasion and a greater fear of the papacy than of the Turkish invasion.

⁵ The beginnings of the division of the coastal zone of the territory of Herzegovina from the areas currently recognized as Croatian date back to 1699, when the Peace of Karlowice was signed. Under it, the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnicka) gave a piece of its territory (today's Neum) to the rule of the Ottoman Empire. The purpose of this operation was to ensure its safety against possible attacks by the Republic of Venice.

⁶ In 1875, an uprising broke out on the territory of Herzegovina, which spread to Bosnia within a few months. This uprising was soon supported by the Principality of Montenegro and the Principality of Serbia [10]. The Austro-Hungarian Empire, with the support of the German Empire, took over the political initiative. On April 24, 1877, the troops of the Russian Empire entered Bulgaria, which led to the signing of the San Stefano Peace Treaty in 1878. Under it, Bosnia and Herzegovina was granted autonomy within the Ottoman Empire. This de facto situation led to the strengthening of the position of the Russian Empire in the Balkans, which resulted in opposition from other powers. A peace congress has been called in Berlin. Under its provisions, the territory of Bosnia and Herzegovina came under the armed occupation of Austria-Hungary, while remaining within the borders of the Turkish Empire [13]. At the end of 1878, the Croatian Sabor petitioned the emperor to join Bosnia and Herzegovina to Croatia, which was rejected as a result of Hungarian protests. This was the case until 1908, when Bosnia and Herzegovina was finally annexed by Austria-Hungary [26].

⁷ After the First World War, the first since the 14th century unification of the Croatian and Herzegovinian lands within one country took place. On October 26, 1918, the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs was created from the border, Croatian and Slavonic counties, which on December 1 of the same year was transformed into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (the Kingdom of SHS). It included the Kingdom of Serbia, the Kingdom of Montenegro, Austria-Hungary's Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Duchy of Kraina, the southern part of the Kingdom of Hungary, the Hungarian Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia and the Austrian Kingdom of Dalmatia. As a result of Puniš Račić's assassination on the deputies of the Croatian Peasants' Party on June 20, 1928 [5], King Alexander I Karadziordziewić decided to suspend the

constitution on January 6, 1929 and dissolve all political parties in the territory of the SHS Kingdom. On October 3, 1929, the name of the country was changed to the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. After the defeat of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in the war against the Third Reich, on April 10, 1941, the Independent State of Croatia was created and joined the Pact of Three [17].

⁸ As a result of further military operations and the activities of the National Liberation Army of Yugoslavia on November 25, 1943, the Socialist Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina was established, which on January 31, 1946, under the constitution of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia, became part of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia as one of the its six republics.

⁹ **Social conditions — ethnic groups — religions.** The territory of the People's Republic of Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1961, i. e. 18 years after its creation, was largely inhabited by the Serb community. It accounted for almost 42.9 % of the republic's population. The Muslim population accounted for 25.7 %, and the Croatian population for 21.7 %. However, the inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) professing Islam did not have the possibility to define their nationality. This situation began to change in the 1960s. The 1961 census allowed for the possibility of self-identification as “Muslim in the ethnic sense”. In 1971, the census questionnaire found the phrase “Muslim in the national sense” for the first time. The announcement of national identity caused controversy among the inhabitants of the country regarding the naming. In September 1993, it was decided to replace the term “Muslim” with “Bošnjak” [22].

¹⁰ During the civil war in Yugoslavia, when Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) fought for its independence, the parties to the conflict were supported by countries that were civilizational in the same way. Croats were supported by Austria, Croatia, Germany, the Vatican and other Catholic states, Muslims by Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya, Pakistan, Turkey and Islamic organizations, and Serbs by Bulgaria, Greece, Russia, Romania, Serbia and Ukraine. Despite the embargo imposed, weapons were delivered to all parties to the conflict and volunteers from other countries joined. The Croatian side was supported by military equipment, including by Poland and Hungary, and people from Central and Eastern Europe and Western Europe joined the volunteer army. It is also known that volunteers from Greece, about a thousand volunteers from Russia and Romania joined the Serbian army. However, Bosnian Muslims received the most support. The states that supported them competed in providing aid. In September 1992, a conference of Islamic states on organizing financial aid for Bosnians was held, the call for aid made at the conference led to an increased mobilization of volunteers, who were joined by Osama bin Laden, who in 1993 obtained Bosnian citizenship.

¹¹ In the years 1961–91, the share of the Muslim population in the area of today's BiH increased from 25.7 % to 43.5 %, the Serbian population decreased from 42.9 % to 31.4 %, and the Croatian population, despite the increase in the nominal number of inhabitants describing themselves as Croats, the share dropped from 21.7 % to 17.3 %. The difficulty of the BiH problem lay in the distribution of individual ethnic groups. Often, individual groups lived in the same or close to each other localities. Most often they were groups of Serbs and Muslims, which to some extent is explained by the fact that fights took place mainly between them. On the other hand, the population of Bosnian Croats remained concentrated at the border with Croatia, and in particular in the

study area. The latest census in BiH was supposed to take place in 2011. It was supposed to help answer the question about the nationality of the society. The ethnically complicated structure of the population did not make the situation any easier [12]. Due to the boycott of the government of BiH by the Bosnian Serbs, the census was delayed by two years. Bosnian Serbs sought to include questions about ethnicity in the inventory. At the same time, the idea was opposed by Croatian and Bosnian Muslim MPs. As a result of the agreement reached, including the introduction of questions about ethnic origin in a voluntary form, a census was conducted in 2013. The results of the census were published only in mid-2016. Their publication was postponed due to the lack of consent as to the research methodology used between the two parts BiH. The results, however, were published in accordance with the methodology in force in the EU, but with the opposition of the Serbian part of the country. According to the presented results, the share of the Muslim population increased to 50.11 % and the Serbian and Croatian population decreased to 30.78 % and 15.43 %, respectively. On the other hand, in the Herzegovinian-Neretva canton itself, the Bosnian population, according to the 2013 census, constituted 41.44 % of the total population, the Croatian population — 53.29 %, and the Serbian population — only 2.89 %.

¹² At the same time, when analysing the ethnic structure based on the 2011 census in Croatia for the Split-Dalmatian County, which directly borders the canton in question, it should be noted that the share of the Muslim population in its individual municipalities often does not exceed 0.5 %, while the highest the share takes place in the Podgora commune — it amounts to 1.63 % of the total population. In a comprehensive approach, the share of the Bosnian population for the entire county is 0.31 %.

¹³ Such a complicated ethnic structure in the canton was reflected in the country's constitution [3], but also translated into relations between the state and individual religious groups [2], typical of the Balkan countries, which is visible in Serbia and Romania [23], new social norms [16], the identification and identity issues of local minorities [20], but also on the education system in BiH. Self-government authorities at the level of cantons, individual cities and even schools are responsible for education. The current education system is messy in terms of the curriculum. It happens that there are two schools in one building, Bosnian and Croatian. Each of them has a different curriculum. This is most often reflected in teaching recent history. This system was introduced in 1997 as a transitional system. It was supposed to change by the end of 1998. However, the constant distrust between nations and a strong need to preserve cultural distinctiveness led to a situation in which this system is present in education to this day. In 2012, a hearing was held in a court in Mostar concerning the discrimination of students on national and religious grounds (Catholicism v. Islam) by applying different requirements to them in schools in Stolac and Čapljina. The ruling issued an order to merge the Bosnian and Croatian classes into multinational classes. However, the sentence has not been enforced and students continue to study in separate schools, even though they are often located in one building. According to official sources, there are 34 educational institutions of this type in the territory of BiH, and due to the ethnic structure of the inhabitants, they are the most numerous in the Herzegovina-Neretva canton.

¹⁴ Divisions among the population are also visible in Mostar. In the city, which is divided by the Neretva River that separates the Croatian part of the city from the

Bosnian part, antagonisms are still visible. The use of symbols of faith serves as a way to emphasize one's right to occupy territory [8]. On the occasion of the celebration of the year 2000, a cross was built on Mount Hum, visible from every part of the city. Its construction met with protests from the Bosnians. They demanded that the cross be removed because, in their opinion, its construction was contrary to the culture of Islam. This demand, however, was rejected by the bishop of the Mostar district. There was also a fight related to the height of churches and mosques, because for centuries the rank of the temple was closely related to its height. Both dominant communities started to use higher and higher religious buildings. However, in 2000, the Catholic Franciscan Church was rebuilt with a soaring tower, which became the tallest building in the city, thus emphasizing the dominant religion. However, the different approaches of both religious groups to the state continue, which shows their attitude to the contemporary COVID-19 restrictions introduced by the government [4; 14]. And the competition for symbolic appropriation / division of the common space is still going on [9; 19].

¹⁵ **Economic and political problems.** The main economic problem of both BiH and the Herzegovina-Neretva canton was the high level of unemployment. According to various estimates, depending on the definition of the shadow economy, it is between 35 and 45 % of the total working age population. The situation is even worse among young people. As many as 52.27 % of people aged 16 to 24 remain unemployed. The unemployment level in the canton is similar. In 2012, it was 40.83 % for the general population and 74.52 % for people aged 16 to 24 [27].

¹⁶ Such a high unemployment rate and the almost trouble-free possibility for Bosnian Croats to obtain a passport from the Republic of Croatia prompts many of them to look for a job outside BiH. Many of them go to neighbouring Croatia, where, despite the economic crisis, it was much easier for them to find employment. At the same time, after Croatia joined the EU, BiH citizens who had a Croatian passport had an opportunity to work in the EU. Many member states announced that they did not plan to introduce any restrictions on Croatians from taking up employment. However, bearing in mind that Bosnian Croats take up work in Croatia, their presence increases unemployment in a given area, resulting in economic problems. What is not met with too friendly reception by the local population.

¹⁷ The territory of BiH, through the Dayton Accord, became a smaller version of Yugoslavia in the early 1990s. There are still antagonisms between its inhabitants and a lack of trust is visible. This situation is effectively used by politicians whose programs are largely based on nationalisms. This situation translates directly into relations with neighbours, both with Serbia and Croatia. Every attempt at understanding inside BiH is perceived from the very beginning as an attempt to violate the integrity of the country and, consequently, as a betrayal of the national idea. This allegation appeared, inter alia, in the case of a reform of the national security system. After the end of hostilities, there were three independent police forces on the territory of the country: Bosniaks, Croats and Serbs. However, as a result of the introduction of the administrative division in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the emergence of the Brčko District, fifteen independent police formations were created, one in each of ten cantons in BiH, one federal in BiH, one in Republika Srpska, one in Brčko District, State Agency of Investigation and Protection and Border Guard. Only the last two were subordinate to the central government, the remaining thirteen were dependent on the ministries of

internal affairs operating at the local level and the cantons. Moreover, they did not cooperate with each other, as evidenced by the prohibition of the police from entering one canton from another without special permission. However, nationally, the police of the BiH Federation could not operate in Republic of Serbia, and vice versa [21].

¹⁸ At the beginning of February 2014, there were riots provoked by the political and socio-economic situation. The ignition points that influenced the start of the riots were, among others the closure of the Zenica factory in the center of the country and the frustration caused by the paralysis of power institutions that are focused on fuelling conflicts and ethnic divisions. The riots were also caused by the inefficiency of the executive and legislative power, which, through the excessive expansion and dilution of competences, generates the administration that puts a heavy burden on the central budget, which complicated the economic situation in the canton. As a result of the riots that took place, among others, in Mostar, public property was destroyed, government buildings were burnt. Also in this case, differences in the intensity of the protests were noticeable. The riots took place only in the territory of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, while in Republic of Serbia, despite the equally bad situation, the demonstrations took on a peaceful character.

¹⁹ **Conclusions.** When analysing the situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, it is not difficult to notice that the full integration of the region will not take place within the next decade, and maybe even longer. The situation in BiH since the end of the war is not conducive to deepening cooperation between its regions. Children, and then youth, are taught different, often contradictory, approaches to the events of the first half of the '90s in schools.

²⁰ The economic situation of the canton's population in the analysed period was characterized by high unemployment, which favoured migration decisions. On the other hand, it caused an increase in dissatisfaction with the competition of cheaper labour in the areas of migration of the inhabitants of the canton.

²¹ The competence disputes between the various levels of government, republican and even local administration have still not been fully resolved. Including security-relevant powers for the police services.

²² The position taken by Croatia on this issue is the argument supporting the integration of this region. It is the country with the strongest support for BiH's integration with the EU. At the same time, it is still difficult to decide whether it is merely a political action aimed at implementing one's own policy, or whether it is actually striving for integration in the region.

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The impact of ethnic and religious diversity in the Herzegovina-Neretva canton on the socio-economic situation of inhabitants in 2005-2015

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Аннотация

The break-up of Yugoslavia at the end of the 20th century showed the importance of national and religious diversity for the peaceful existence of the region. The war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) and the peace that followed, showed how difficult it is to coexist in a nationally and religiously divided society. The aim of the analysis is an attempt to show the impact of ethnic and religious diversity and conflict in the area of the Herzegovina-Neretva canton in Bosnia and Herzegovina on the economic situation of its inhabitants in the analyzed period. The research was conducted based on the analysis of existing data, decision-making processes and literature analysis. The undertaken analysis confirmed that the main reasons leading to the political crisis in the studied Herzegovina-Neretva canton include the cultural, ethnic and religious mosaic. The novelty of the research undertaken is the indication of the impact that the conflict had on the economic situation of the inhabitants of the canton and its neighboring regions. Ethnic and religious mosaic and the related conflict led to an increase in unemployment and economic migrations. It had a negative impact on the level of education and contributes to the lack of clear solutions in terms of the competences of many cantonal and government services.

Ключевые слова: Bosnia, Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Yugoslavia, canton, economy, ethnicity, Islam, religion, Catholicism

Дата публикации: 05.12.2021

Ссылка для цитирования:

Tomasz W. , Jan A. W. The impact of ethnic and religious diversity in the Herzegovina-Neretva canton on the socio-economic situation of inhabitants in 2005-2015 // Псковский регионологический журнал – 2021. – Том 17. №4 /2021 С. 16-25 [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://prj.pskgu.ru/S221979310016951-9-1> (дата обращения: 21.02.2024). DOI: 10.37490/S221979310016951-9