

ETHNIC STRUCTURE OF SLOVENIA AND SLOVENES IN NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

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Slovenes belong among the less numerous nations of the world and of Europe, and the Slovene language is among the less widespread languages. However, Slovene communities are historically recognized and acknowledged, ethnically and culturally vital, and spatially stabile. Of the some 2.5 million Slovenes and persons of Slovene ethnic origin, almost one third live outside Slovenia. Identification according to ethnic background is very difficult, especially among the second and later generations of emigrants, because the most recognizable sign and simultaneously the symbol of Slovene ethnicity, the language, has often already been replaced by the language of the area in which they live. However, the culture and consciousness of belonging has preserved. About 1,800,000 Slovenes live in Slovenia (during the 2002 census, 1,632,000 people identified themselves as Slovene. Because of the methodology used for this census, the number of members of most ethnic groups dropped significantly. The ethnicity of some 200,000 people was not established at all because it was unknown, they did not wish to identify themselves by ethnicity, etc. We therefore give, if possible, estimates for the number of individuals in ethnic minorities.), and the rest live in neighbouring countries as members of minorities and as immigrants in various countries around the world. Autochthonous Slovene minorities live in the border areas of all the neighbouring countries. In Italy, Slovenes occupy 1,500 km² of the territory in Friuli-Venezia Giulia, where between 83,000 and 100,000 Slovenes live according to Slovene estimates, and 52,000 according to official (Italian) estimates. About 10,000 Slovenes live in the Friulian plain outside the region of autochthonous settlement. For several centuries the area belonged to the Aquileian Patriarchate and the Counts of Gorizia, mostly to the Habsburgs from the 15th century to 1918, and after 1918, to Italy. The Slovene minority in Austria occupies about 2,600 km² of the territory in southern Carinthia and Styria, where according to official Austrian data from the 2001 census, about 13,000 Slovenes live, and according to Slovene estimations, around 45,000. More than 5,000 Slovenes live outside the autochthonous area, mostly in Vienna and Graz. After the fall of the Principality Karantanija, the area was under the dominance of the Franks, and then under the Habsburg Monarchy for almost a millennium until its collapse in 1918. The current border was set by the plebiscite in October of 1920. In Hungary, Slovenes occupy about 100 km² of the territory in Porabje and Železna županija. According to official data of the 2001 census, there were about 2,500 Slovenes, while according to Slovene estimates, about 5,000 Slovenes live in Hungary (around 2,000 Slovenes live scattered elsewhere across Hungary). From the 11th century on, the area was under Hungarian rule, and the current border was set by the Trianon Peace Treaty in 1920. In the period between 1948 and 1990, this border was closed because of the »Iron Curtain« while connections with other areas of Slovene settlement were almost interrupted. The autochthonous Slovene minority in Croatia altogether numbers several hundred people who live in five small and separate areas. The majority of Slovenes in Croatia are emigrants and their descendants. Emigration, which totaled more than a fifth of the Slovene people, took shape in five phases: an economic phase until World War I, a predominantly political phase in the period between the two World Wars, deportees during World War II, deportees and refugees immediately following World War II, and economic emigration after 1960. According to estimates, the most citizens of Slovene origin lives in the United States (300,000), Germany (50,000), Canada (30,000), Argentina (30,000), Australia (25,000), Croatia (25,000), Serbia (10,000), Austria, Italy, France, Sweden, Brazil, and elsewhere. »Zdomci« or guestworkers represent a special type of emigration: temporary but as a rule long-term emigration that has left a visible impact on the external appearance and

function of Slovene regions. According to the 1991 census (the 2002 census no longer included this category of the population), there were almost 53,000 »zdomci,« mostly living in Germany, Austria, Switzerland, and Italy.

The location of Slovene territory at the contact of the Slavic, Germanic, Romance, and Finno-Ugric peoples influenced the culture, language, and identity of this area and its population. In its ethnic structure, the Slovene population dominated in all periods but was almost never homogenous, with the exception of a decade or so following World War II. Frequent changes of political borders and mass migrations – regardless of their causes – introduced great cultural dynamics into the Slovene space and its periphery that resulted in the presence in Slovenia of ethnic minorities, ethnic groups and immigrant communities on the one hand and various Slovene emigrant communities dispersed throughout the world on the other. This situation defined the fundamental dimensions of the Slovene national question in the spatial, political, and cultural-lingual sense and greatly helped Slovenia create a system for the protection of minorities that is almost beyond compare elsewhere while still in the period of its partial autonomy in the framework of the former Yugoslavia. Slovenia's minority policies are important not only in terms of ensuring human rights, political peace, and international reputation but also contribute substantially to the development in particular of bordering peripheral areas.

Major changes in the ethnic structure of the population of Slovenia

The exposed geopolitical location of Slovene territory and its position between much more populous neighbours gave it great strategic significance in almost all historical periods. For this reason, the pressure on this territory has always been very strong and the sequence of various governing powers fostered the change of political borders and of the ethnic structure of the population, which changed a great deal in the last century.

According to the last census taken the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in 1910, the population of the territory of today's Slovenia included 82% Slovenes, almost 10% Germans, 2% Italians, and 1.5% Hungarians. In the current territory of autochthonous settlement of Slovene minorities in neighbouring countries, there were 110,000 Slovenes in Austria, 120,000 in Italy, and about 6,000 in Hungary. At the same time, this was also a period of the large Slovene exodus when almost half a million people left Slovene territory between 1870 and 1914. The population structure began to change rapidly after the disintegration of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy when the German and Hungarian populations – previously the majority populations in the Monarchy – became minorities in the new country of Yugoslavia. The number of Germans in particular dropped rapidly, and of the prewar 106,000 Germans, 42,000 were left in 1921, and only about 29,000 ten years later. The number of Hungarians dwindled more slowly. Both communities grew smaller partly because of emigration but even more so because of an objective or solely »statistical« change of identity. On the other hand, the number of the Italians increased because Italy occupied western Slovenia following the Treaty of Rapallo that resulted from the British-Italian London Agreement. Slovenes moved away from the region in great numbers, fleeing from the aggressive fascist administration of Mussolini's Italy, and some were even forcefully deported. At least 40,000 Slovenes left. The number of members of the Slovene minority in Austrian Carinthia dropped rapidly and heavily due to the oppressive measures of the Austrian authorities; in 1923, they numbered about 35,000, while the Nazi census in 1939 counted 42,000. The number of Slovenes in Hungary also decreased. Further radical changes followed, particularly during World War II and in the following decade. Along with the considerable number of victims among the Slovene population due to the fighting, deaths in concentration camps and the postwar mass executions took up to 80,000 people. More than 20,000 Slovenes settled in different countries as refugees and displaced persons, mostly in Argentina, Canada, Australia, and the United States. During the war, the Italians deported about 15,000 Kočevje Germans to the territory of the wartime Third Reich in Posavje where more than

40,000 Slovenes were deported from their homes in the German part of occupied territory. After the war, almost the entire German population left Slovene territory in fear of reprisals and because of deportations. The majority of Italians (about 22,000) in Slovene Istria also left in the decade after World War II because of strong Italian propaganda on one hand and poor economic prospects on the other. As a result, Slovenia became ethnically quite homogenous (in 1948, about 97% of the population was Slovene), but not for long. Although the permanent and temporary emigration of the Slovene population (over 30,000) continued primarily for economic reasons in the period after World War II, the number of immigrants soon outnumbered the number of emigrants after the rapid industrialization and social modernization. Slovenia became an immigration country and society with all the characteristic features of social relationships and processes. The number of members of various Yugoslav nations increased while the proportion of Slovenes dropped to 88% in 1991 and 83% in 2001. Today, more than 50,000 Croats, about 45,000 Serbs, 40,000 Bosnian Muslims, and 6,000 Albanians live in Slovenia. Among the autochthonous communities, there are 10,000 Hungarians, almost the same number of Romany, and about 3,000 Italians, and these three groups have special minority status and protection. According to the 2002 census, there were 2,258 Italians, 6,243 Hungarians, 3,246 Romany, 499 Germans, 181 Austrians, 28 Jews, 6,186 Albanians, 2,667 Montenegrins, 3,972 Macedonians, 38,964 Serbs, 35,642 Croats, 10,467 Muslims, 21,542 Bosnian Serbs, 8,062 Bosnian Croats and a number of other very small communities, altogether more than thirty different ethnic groups. In the 1990's, the number of immigrants from non-European countries also began to increase: Chinese, Indian, Pakistani, etc. Although their numbers are very modest, an increasing trend is quite distinct.

In the areas of autochthonous settlement of Slovene minorities in neighbouring countries, the steady numerical drop in the minority communities is primarily due to assimilation and partly to emigration from peripheral rural and border areas as well. For this reason, the spatial expansion of the settlement area along with the decrease in the number of minority communities and the dwindling of their relative number in areas of autochthonous-traditional settlement is a characteristic phenomena.

Formal and actual situation of minorities in Slovenia and of Slovenes in neighbouring countries

Efforts to solve the problems of minorities, minorities in Slovenia as well as Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries, have been a constant in the internal and foreign policies of Slovenia. Thus, already in the period of postwar Yugoslavia – even while the echoes of World War II and its consequences were still resounding – the foundations for the protection of minorities were established. Thus, of course in accordance with the starting points of diplomatic achievements between Yugoslavia and neighbouring Italy and Hungary, the Hungarian and Italian minorities were granted legal protection, which was on a substantially higher level in Slovenia than in Croatia and Serbia, particularly if we consider the quite modest number of their members. After independence, Slovenia further increased the legal standards of protection, in spite of the fact that the situation of Slovenes in Italy and Hungary is legally and actually considerably poorer. Slovenia therefore did not merely adhere to the principle of reciprocity. Minority protection covers several levels and spheres; those of key importance are:

- (1) representation: guaranteed mandates in parliament and positions for councillors in municipalities; on the basis of special additional voting rights, every member of a minority therefore has two votes in elections;
- (2) bilingualism: consistent bilingual topography and bilingualism in official institutions and documents in the area of traditional settlement;
- (3) education: Italian and bilingual Slovene-Hungarian elementary and secondary schools in areas of autochthonous settlement;

◀ *Figure 1: Indigenous Slovene minorities in neighbouring countries.*

- (4) media: full financial support for minority newspapers, radio stations, and television channels (Italian) or programs (Hungarian);
- (5) culture: a special fund from the national resources is devoted to minority cultural organizations;
- (6) economy: limited financial support exclusively for entrepreneurship among the minority population is available.

Although the policies described above are consistently implemented, both minorities have substantial problems originating in their low numbers and peripheral locations. The minorities share the fate of the entire region. In particular, the situation of the Hungarians settled along the Slovene-Hungarian border is quite poor due to the structural problems of this demographically threatened region, and the minority is continuously dwindling as its young people move away. The autochthonous Romany community, which also receives special care from the state, has different problems, mostly socioeconomic. In spite of substantial efforts, it is still a marginal community. Other groups of the population such as the small German, Austrian, and Jewish communities and the numerically superior communities of the ethnic groups from the former Yugoslavia that developed through immigration largely since the 1960's do not have any special minority rights as the Italians and Hungarians do. However, the constitution and the legislation enable them to protect their interests, especially in the field of cultural articulation and creativity. Slovene cultural, communication, and media space is quite open and, for example, offers numerous possibilities for the flow of information in foreign languages via cable television networks.

The Slovene minorities in neighbouring countries have a substantially lower legal status. Bilingualism is a more sporadic phenomenon linked to settlements with a larger proportion of the minority Slovene population. Representation in government is not guaranteed. Cultural life and the media are indeed financed, but far from completely. The media, especially the electronic media including the broadcast of Slovene programming in the minority area, is substantially more modest, to a much larger degree subject to the laws of the market laws, and due to the pattern of settlement, largely inaccessible. In spite of limitations, minority education works well, especially secondary education. The actual situation of the Slovene minority is still not too bad. The somewhat larger Slovene communities, especially in Italy and Austria, enable a strong institutionalized network of political, cultural, and business associations that allow the members of the minorities to carry out important functions in the border areas. The ethnic diversity of the population of Slovenia and the bordering areas of neighbouring countries, especially in the period of the open border, has contributed significantly to solving the regional problems of peripheral areas.

The role of minorities in the open European space

In the period of classical development of the European nation-states in the 19th and 20th centuries, ethnic minorities were an undesired phenomenon, especially in peripheral areas. Territories acquired militarily or diplomatically were often populated by members of minorities that the authorities tried to get rid of in various ways or at least greatly reduce their size. Although specific protection of minorities already existed, the effect of this protection was very modest. Borders were guarded, and minorities were always subject to assimilation efforts. Although the negative attitude toward ethnic minorities persisted even in the developed and democratic countries of Europe, in general the awareness of the importance and role of the minorities in border areas changed substantially. On the declarative level – but unfortunately not much more than that – great attention was devoted to the minorities while the granting and implementation of special rights for the members of ethnic minorities remained an internal matter of countries and the subject of bilateral intergovernmental relations.

With the opening of borders and increased cross-border cooperation, the minorities gained some very real opportunities. Because members of the minorities are usually bilingual, are familiar with the legal and economic systems, the habits, mentality, and various peculiarities of both countries, and can easily establish contacts on both sides of the border, they soon proved to be not only the bearers but also the initiators of cross-border cooperation. Thus, Slovenia's western border with Italy, after the adoption and ratification of the Osimo Agreement that allowed the border population to cross the border more frequently and to develop various forms of economic activity, became one of the most dynamic border regions with a high frequency of border crossings and numerous economic consequences. The border area ceased to be a peripheral region as the cooperation that began in the fields of politics and culture continued in the economic sphere. Agricultural production sought new market routes and methods of marketing and improved the technology of production. Industrial companies looked for optimal locations, which led to cooperation in the field of large and small industrial production. Huge progress was recorded especially in commerce (cross-border shopping on a massive scale) and later the commercial network and services in general expanded. On the Slovene side, a number of service companies and the entertainment industry with a chain of casinos were established on the basis of the heavy cross-border traffic. These were followed by insurance companies and a great upswing in banking, even though Slovenes in Italy already had considerable economic power because of banking. Carinthian Slovenes similarly developed strong small businesses, cooperatives, and also the banking sector. In the countryside, agriculture also plays an important role. Members of the Slovene minorities and to a somewhat lesser extent the Italians in Slovene Istria thus contributed significantly to the presence of Austrian and Italian companies in Slovenia. Today, the expansion of companies that have established themselves in Slovenia into other countries of southeastern Europe are in the foreground of interest, and in this context the minorities are seen in the role of bridge.

Pursuing their plans for expansion, these companies are already recruiting residents of Slovenia originally from the countries of the former Yugoslavia who know in detail how to do business in these areas and have contacts with relatives, friends, and other people there. Most of the second generation, the descendants of these immigrants, also have suitable qualifications and can undertake even the most demanding negotiations. The Slovene population as well has enough experience to undertake similar functions due to the experience of at least three or four generations who lived in the former Yugoslavia.

The unified European economic space, including to an ever larger degree its communications space, is becoming increasingly recognized and uniform due to the increasing mobility of the population and the unification of standards and norms and is therefore ready for establishing contacts. Having people with good local knowledge will soon no longer be necessary, and bridges will be established without them. In this context we encounter the crucial question: where will the opportunities for the members of the minorities be and what will be their role? Undoubtedly, the unhindered cross-border flow of information, activities, services, and goods will strengthen communication of minorities with areas of their »parent« nations. Undoubtedly, new horizons and searches for social and spatial functions will open in the peripheral (contact) areas, as will questions of ethnic development for both the minorities and the larger entities.

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