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Ex-Yugoslavs in Finland: Statistics, geographical distribution, and formal organizing

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After the dissolution of the socialist Yugoslavia, the number of immigrants from the ex-Yugoslav republics in Finland increased, and it still continues to grow. These people are now members of Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, and Montenegrin diaspora. The goal of this article is to map them according to the statistics, geographic distribution, and formal organizing based on an analysis of official statistics, various documents, and media presentations, as well as interviews with actors related to these diasporas.

The Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia existed for almost 50 years. Due to its dissolution in 1991 and the civil wars, a large number of its residents were forced to leave the country for good. The inflow of immigrants from the ex-Yugoslav republics to Finland rapidly increased since the 90s. They now belong to different national diasporas, i.e. Bosnian, Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian, Macedonian, and Montenegrin. This article presents some results of my ongoing research financed by the Finnish Cultural Foundation, aiming to map the aforementioned diasporas in terms of statistics, geographical distribution, and formal organizing. The article is based on an analysis of official statistics and various documents, as well as media presentations. It is complemented by data collected through interviews conducted with various actors related to these diasporas in 2016.

Unfortunately, the data on Macedonian and Montenegrin diaspora are still missing.

According to the statistics from the Finnish Population Register Centre, a total of 6,613 citizens of Yugoslavia's present successor states inhabited Finland at the end of 2015. The number keeps increasing over the years. In 2011 there were 5,314 registered citizens of Yugoslavia's successor states, whereas four years later the number was 6,613. Nevertheless, it can be assumed that the actual number is much higher as the statistics do not register those who hold Finnish citizenship. Since dual citizenship was not approved in Finland until June 2003, many had to choose between the old and the Finnish one. In addition, the statistics register 164 citizens of former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (1992–2003), and 3,296 of former Serbia and Montenegro (2003–2006). The explanation to that is found in the practice of registering foreign citizens in Finland. According to Alastalo et al., foreign citizens in Finland are registered according to the documents they hold at the time of their arrival in Finland. It is then they are granted a temporary residence permit. After a year, in case they stay in Finland, they become permanent residents. However, the data on their home country mostly remain the same if they themselves do not initiate an update. By looking at the numbers related to the mother tongue of these foreign citizens in Finland

one could guess that many are Albanians presumably from Kosovo as 8,912 stated Albanian as their mother tongue.

Bosnian citizens are the most numerous and include a group of 1,639 people. However, Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina estimated that already in March 2013 the number was 6,044, which is believed to be closer to the actual number. Similar data is offered by the Embassy of Bosnia and Herzegovina in Stockholm in charge for Bosnian citizens residing in Finland.

Half of today's citizens with Bosnian origin in Finland immigrated thanks to the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). A first group of 112 persons arrived in Finland in October 1992. One part of it was the prisoners from Omarska and Keraterm concentration camps; the other included the prisoners from Trnopolje concentration camp. These concentration camps in north-western Bosnia and Herzegovina were established and run by Bosnian Serb military and police forces in 1992. Prisoners were mostly Bosniaks originally from Prijedor and Kozarac, towns located near the aforementioned concentration camps. Not long after their family members joined them. More groups of people from Bosnia and Herzegovina followed, also supported by UNHCR. A group of wounded men came first and was followed by the groups of people exiled from Banja Luka, the second biggest city in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Finally, a bigger group of prisoners from the concentration camps in Serbia, originally from eastern Bosnia, arrived. Simultaneously, their family members came to Finland from all over the world as they were forced to leave areas that did not belong to Bosnia and Herzegovina. Around half of those people come from Kozarac and its surroundings, while one fourth is from Banja Luka area, and another from eastern Bosnia and Herzegovina.

A closer insight into the arrival of Bosnians to Finland in the first half of the 1990s was provided by a female respondent originally from Prijedor. Together with her mother and brother she was transported from a concentration camp to Spain, where they were waiting to hear news about her father:

After we came to Spain we heard that father had been released from the concentration camp and moved to Karlovac in Croatia, and that he got to go to Finland. [...] We had no intention to move further. But when father came to Finland he had to sign a paper, and, hence, promise he would stay there until a medical treatment was over, like all other concentration camp prisoners. They (Finns) did not want to start the

treatment before patients signed they would stay until the program was over. So, we had to come to Finland for family reunion, and we did in February 1993.

Other half of the total number of Bosnians in Finland (around 3,000 persons) came in the last 15 years, mostly looking for a job opportunity. They were followed by their families. Another female respondent further illustrated this situation:

I came in 2005 [...] with my parents and brothers. My parents were looking for a job, so we lived in Denmark and Switzerland earlier [...]. My uncle and his family live here, too. They have received the papers recently. [...] I have one more cousin here, and some other relatives. [...] My father works here. He knows no Finnish, but he got a job immediately, after only a year. [...] And mom added some more education. She was a nurse in Bosnia, but she never got to work because the war started when she was about to look for a job. Now she has an extra education and she works, not with a stable job but she works anyway.

The largest number of Bosnian citizens in Finland lives in Turku and its neighbouring municipality Raisio. Besides, they live in Helsinki, Närpes, Vaasa and Mikkeli region, as well as Tampere and Oulu.

The first association of Bosnians in Finland was formed in Mikkeli in 1992, and was active until 2001. It is still registered, but with only one annual meeting as an activity. Besides, there are a few more registered, but inactive associations in Helsinki and Turku. In 2002 the Bosnian Cultural Center in Finland (*Bosanski kulturni centar u Finskoj* or *Bosnialaisten kulttuurikeskus Suomessa*) was established in Turku as the central organization in charge of preservation and fostering of Bosnian culture and integration of Bosnian citizens in Finland. It has between 200 and 300 registered members, and its regular weekly activities take place in facilities in both Turku and Raisio, owned by the Municipality of Turku and shared by different associations during the week. The Center's work is financed by the state (one third), the Municipality of Turku (one third), and the members (one third). Part of the Center is the football club Bosnia which competes in the 4th regional league, and has both senior and junior teams. Traditional Bosnian dance association for children, and a women's association are also a part of it. Furthermore, the Center organizes occasional field-trips for its members, as well as five annual gatherings aiming to mark important religious and national holidays (e.g. Bayram, Bosnian Independence Day). Some-

times, these gatherings include concerts of Bosnian musicians who get to visit and perform in Finland due to these occasions. The Center has a close collaboration with Džemat Turku, an association in charge of organizing religious activities and religious teaching in Bosnian. Together with Džemat Tampere, Džemat Närpes, and Džemat Helsinki, it is a part of the Islamic Community of Bosniaks in Finland (*Islamska zajednica Bošnjaka u Finskoj* or *Suomen Bosnialainen Islam yhdy-skunta*) established in Helsinki in November 1995.

In 2015, there were 735 Serbian citizens registered in Finland. The Serbian Embassy in Finland informed me that 297 have dual citizenship. There is no exact data on Serbian diaspora, but estimations are that it is relatively young and does not include many members of the second and third generation. Most of them live in the capital area, as well as in Tampere, Turku, and Oulu, with few smaller groups in the central part of Finland. They gather around the Serbian-Finnish Society (*Srpsko-finsko društvo* or *Serbialais-suomalainen seura*) established in Helsinki in 2001, with the aim to develop cultural ties and nourish friendship and cooperation between Finnish and Serbian people. The head of the association explained that the member list includes 180 people mostly residing in the Helsinki area, though not all of them were active every year. The association possesses no facilities, so members meet on different locations. Their membership fees are the source of financing of the association's work. Apart from two regular annual meetings, since 2011 members are active in organizing a Helsinki based movie festival the Days of Serbian Movie (*Dani srpskog filma* or *Serbian elokuvapäivät*). Its organization is supported by the Serbian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the City of Helsinki. Additional financing comes from the ticket sale.

As for Croatian citizens, 407 were permanently living in Finland in 2015. More information was provided by the Croatian Ambassador in Finland:

Second and third generation make maximum 20% of aforementioned number. So, the number is so small that I know them all personally. [...] People who have lived here longer than 30 years make a very small group. [...] The first one was a musician who came in 1968 to perform here. He got married to a Finnish singer, and stayed. [...] Those who came in the times of old Yugoslavia are around 10, perhaps even less. Others came with refugee waves in the 90s or later, looking for a job. I think that

80% of all registered persons are younger than 30, and they all came to study. Those that came 10 years ago as newly graduated students are now in their thirties. Some stayed, established themselves, and started families; others got Ph.D. titles and moved away. [...] My impression is that the younger generation decided to stay. Those are people that found jobs in Finland. Besides, there is still an interest among Croatian people to move to Finland. We get e-mails here of that kind on daily basis.

Croatian citizens mostly live in the Helsinki area and university cities such as Turku, Tampere, and Joensuu. Formally, their joint activities are channelled through the association of Finns and Croats in Helsinki. The Ambassador explained that the association works independently from the Embassy, even though a certain communication between them does exist. It was established by two Finnish architects some 20 to 25 years ago aiming to gather Finns and Croats, as they were fans of Croatia themselves. The Ambassador explains it further:

My impression is that those days were a sort of golden age of the association. People gathered more often, and their interest was bigger. Those were times when Croatia had to be established and promoted as an independent state here. Therefore, the approach was different then. [...] I have a feeling that things are not done now as much as they were before.

The number of 124 Slovenian citizens living permanently in Finland was registered in 2015. However, the Embassy's representative claims that the number keeps growing as more people from Slovenia come to study and live in Finland every year. There are no data about the second generation, but estimations are that its members are well integrated. For the most part, Slovenian citizens live in Helsinki, but there are some registered in Lahti, Lohja, Tampere, and Rovaniemi.

In 1999, the Finnish-Slovenian Society (*Društvo Finsko-Slovenskega prijateljstva* or *Slovenia-seura*) was established. As most members are Finns delighted by Slovenian country and culture, the language of the society-organized meetings and events is Finnish. Thus, the association with greater significance for Slovenian citizens in Finland was established in 2010 as the Association of Parents of Slovenian Children in Finland (*Združenje staršev Slovenskih otrok na Finskem*). It is intended for Slovenian citizens and especially their children who would like to meet and speak Slovenian. Its foundation

was initiated by a former Slovenian Ambassador and his wife, and therefore, at first, all the meetings were held at the Slovenian Embassy in Helsinki. Since the closure of the Embassy in 2012, meetings have been organized by parents on voluntary basis. The importance of this association is explained on its official Internet presentation:

Our children grow mainly in families where only one parent (or grandparent) is Slovenian. They do not have the opportunity to attend schools or courses in Slovenian language. Distances to other (few) Slovenian children are great, so are our gatherings rare occasions where they can meet and talk with their peers in Slovenian. [...] We think it is very important for our children not to forget their roots. We invite all Slovenians to meetings, even those who are in Finland only temporarily, on travels or study.

Ex-Yugoslavs moved to Finland for various reasons. During the times of socialist Yugoslavia their arrival was mostly initiated by marriage or employment. With the dissolution of the state, Finland became a destination country for refugees, especially from Bosnia. In the last two decades they arrived for studying or employment, as well as marriage. Evidently, Bosnian citizens are the largest and most formally organized group. Their organizing could be explained by, as Lagerspetz argues, the "compensatory function" of such organizations, i.e. they offer a substitute for the lack of other networks. For the labour and family immigrants, these organizations are a place for the affirmation of a cultural identity, and for creating connections with people with the same cultural and linguistic background.

An interesting issue worth further scrutiny is certainly a growing number of people from Kosovo, a former Yugoslav province, statistically invisible as to their citizenship, yet largely present in terms of recorded mother tongue. Another concern to be explored in the future relates to the reasons behind a lack

of "Pan-Yugoslav" formal organizing despite the language proximity, shared experience, and informal networking of Ex-Yugoslavs in Finland.

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