

Going South: The Case of the Slovenians in the Territory of Former Yugoslavia

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Introduction

The scale of migration from East to West is as large and frequent as from the South to the North. The scale of migration in the opposite directions, from West to East and North to South, at least within the Europe, are smaller: Particularly in recent times migration in these directions are rarely permanent, and at least nowadays more or less considered as temporary (labour) migrations. Such is the case of Slovenians going south, i.e. migrating to the territory of former Yugoslavia.

This migration dates back at least to the 19th century and continued to the end of the 20th century. It was a form of internal migration by which numerous Slovenian migrants settled permanently and integrated quite easily into the receiving society. For them, the new society was not 'foreign' because it used to be the part of the same empire, state, kingdom, or federal republic, so it is very interesting to observe the particular need of the communities with larger number of members to organise themselves into the 'emigrant' associations. It is also interesting to see when and particularly why this need arose. It appears that these societies were originally

more or less intended for cultural exchange between a narrower and broader homeland, as they are nowadays, after the collapse of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, in order to maintain Slovenian national and cultural identity, and of course to strengthen the connections with the home country.

Slovenian emigration over time and space

Throughout history Slovenia has been a place of mass emigration to foreign countries all over the world. Slovenian emigrants have been missionaries in South America, some of them also in North America and Africa. Many Slovenian soldiers have left the homeland at different times and to serve in different places. Also some experts, like engineers, teachers, or doctors have found jobs abroad but most of the emigrants have been labourers, searching for new opportunities and a better life.

»The first wave of migration from the Slovenian ethnic territory was initiated in mid-19th century, and it was directed towards the USA, and in part to Brazil and Argentina. The second wave was in the period between the First and the Second World War. It was an economic

emigration, caused by the global economic crises that in a way can also be understood as political. The vast majority of tens of thousands moved from the Primorska region, which was at the time under severe pressure from the fascist government«. (Žigon 2001:6)

»The great depression in the 1930's resulted in huge migrations of Slovenians to some Western European countries like Germany and France, also the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg where mostly miners and workers in factories found the jobs at that time«. (Drnovšek 2012:25–41).

»Another wave of migration from Slovenia started after the World War II, in 1945, when thousands emigrated to USA, Canada, Australia and Argentina due to political reasons. And the last, even larger wave was in 1960's and 1970's when numerous Slovenians went to West Germany, France, Sweden and other developed European countries«. (Žigon 2001:6). They left mostly to work there, so it was again predominantly economic migration. A lot of Slovenians still live there, as they actually do all over the world, not just Europe. The estimated number of those who live abroad is about half a million, 'which would mean the fifth quarter of the Slovenian national body' (Žigon 2001:6). For a small nation of two million people this is for sure a huge number.

According to *Slovenija danes (Slovenia today)* Slovenian emigrant associations can be found in 27 foreign countries,¹ even in so distant – or a kind of 'exotic' for Slovenians – like for example Brazil, Uruguay, Venezuela, Mexico, Kenya or New Zealand. Many of them can be found across Europe, of course, and 44

of them in the territory of the former Yugoslavia. The Slovenians who live there represent a specific story of Slovenian expatriates – after Slovenia declared its independence and Yugoslavia disintegrated in 1991, once representing one of the several nations living in the same country they were almost overnight defined as citizens of foreign countries.

Historical background

The so-called Tito's Yugoslavia which is widely known was not the only state of south Slavs with the same name. There was actually one before – a state with several components, stretching from the Western Balkans² to Central Europe which existed during the interwar era of 1918–1941. The official name of its first formation was the State of Slovenians, Croats and Serbs; this was a short-lived (just a month long), internationally unrecognized state, which was formed at the end of October 1918 from the southern parts of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy after its dissolution.

After the merger of this state with the formerly independent Kingdom of Serbia the new state was formed in December 1918. For its first eleven years of existence, it was officially called the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenians (SHS). It was among the most poor and underdeveloped countries in Europe, only 14 percent of all inhabitants lived in towns, industry was undeveloped and provided work for only 200,000 workers; most of them were farmers working seasonally to earn some extra money, only 46 percent of all land were used for farming; and average life span did not exceed 45 years of age (Pirjevec 1995: 31–32). Then the name of

the kingdom was turned into the Kingdom of Yugoslavia; but Yugoslavia was anyhow its colloquial name from the very beginning. The common name for it, used to distinguish it from Tito's Yugoslavia, is the 'first' Yugoslavia.

The 'second', i.e. Tito's Yugoslavia, was formed during World War II, first as the Democratic Federal Yugoslavia in 1943, renamed the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia in 1946, and renamed again as the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY) in 1963. Its disintegration started in 1991 and with it the formation of the new independent states in the territory: besides Slovenia also Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia, Serbia, Montenegro, and

lastly Kosovo. The basic problem of SFRY has been the unsolved question of its identity – is it unitary state or federation (Gleni 2001: 328). Political elites, dominated more and more by the weak League of Communists of Yugoslavia, which has been divided by national, religion, political and even ideological lines, were not able to solve this question, which haunted Yugoslavia after its establishment in 1918. The country dissolved in the most terrible war in Europe after 1945. After the disintegration of Yugoslavia the domestic environment became for Slovenian migrants at once foreign, and the new search for their own identity started.



Fig 1 The Former Yugoslavia. After Slovenia declared its independence in 1991, the Slovenians living in other Yugoslav republics have been defined as citizens of foreign countries

Source: www.europe-atlas.com

Slovenian emigrant societies in the new states of the former Yugoslavia

Even after more than 20 years since the dissolution of the former Yugoslavia there has been a noticeable lack of studies of Slovenians in the area (and those that exist are more or less partial). So the Slovenian Migration Institute, Research Centre of the Slovenian Academy of Sciences and Arts started a three-year project in 2011 entitled 'Slovenian Labour Migration to the Countries of Former Yugoslavia: From Settlers to Transmigrants' – which refers to transnational occupation groups like diplomats and consular staff, humanitarian and development workers, correspondents, journalists, military and police staff, businesspeople and others. It is an interdisciplinary research project on the dynamics of employment-related migration from Slovenia to the countries of former Yugoslavia from the 19th century up to the present, concerned with the types of employment taken by Slovenians. Their influence on intercultural relations from a historical perspective, with an emphasis on newer employment-related and transmigrational lifestyles, is also taken into consideration.

The aim is to learn as much as possible not only about the employment dynamics and work organisation, but also about emigrant family dynamics, upbringing and education, leisure time activities, contacts with the homeland, the attitude towards ethnic or national identities and cultural heritage, establishment of social networks in the immigrant country and in Slovenia, as much as about the contacts with the immigrant environment and intercultural relations. To facilitate this research we

drew up a list of Slovenian emigrant associations in the area: there are ten registered in Bosnia and Herzegovina, sixteen in Croatia, fourteen in Serbia, three in Macedonia and one in Montenegro (in Kosovo, for now there is no Slovenian emigrant association). We asked each first to complete the questionnaire on the functioning of each association and its activities³ to get an impression about how they work and live, some of them even with the century-old tradition, most of them newly established after the break of Yugoslavia in 1990s. The study should be completed by the end of June 2014, so we can now only present an analysis of the preliminary results.⁴

At present, we've got the most comprehensive picture about the Slovenians in Bosnia in Herzegovina, partly because there are some books written about them with testimonies and life stories included,⁵ and partly because of a really quick and constructive response of practically all the Slovenian societies there, which gave us the opportunity to talk to the representatives of the Slovenian emigrant societies and to organise a working round-table⁶ about the current situation and future challenges that they are facing with. All together gave us the idea what to observe more precisely according to the practices they run, so also the majority of our field work on the project already has been done there.

Slovenians in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Slovenians have been leaving for Bosnia and Herzegovina for centuries and the oldest historical records concern a lonely traveller, travel writer, missionary or a nobleman fighting against Ottomans

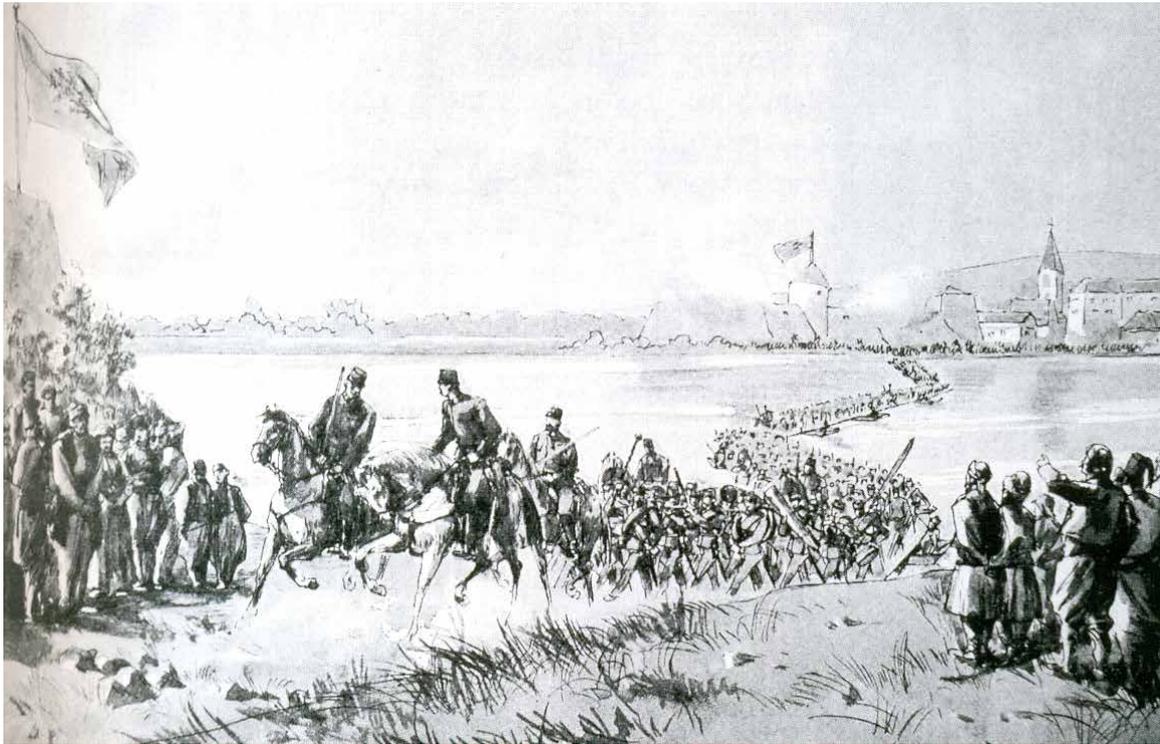


Fig 2 Slovene soldiers crossing the Sava river near Stara Gradiška, 1878. (Source: Jernej Andrejka, *Slovenski fantje v Bosni in Hercegovini*, Celovec 1904:23)

there which dates back to 16th century (Kržišnik-Bukič 2007:20). From the middle of the 19th century there were some seasonal workers going ‘down there’ mostly for logging, a doctor or two and just a few others – and that was it. More substantial arrivals of Slovenians in the area were connected to the Austro-Hungarian occupation of Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Congress of Berlin in 1878 and its administration at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century.

This Ottoman province constituted a mountain area so difficult of access that it was shut off not only from the empire to which it belonged, but also from Europe (Schevill 1991:393). The Great Powers decided that the province, a source of almost constant insurrection, should be entrusted to Austria to occupy and ad-

minister, on a provisional basis with the Sultan to retain sovereignty, at least on a paper. Of the two hundred thousand Austria-Hungary soldiers who occupied Bosnia and Herzegovina, nine to ten thousand were Slovenians. After them also came numerous civilians: labourers, merchants, craftsmen, various experts and even highly trained professionals like teachers, lawyers, judges, doctors, engineers, among them three thousand Slovenians. It is interesting to observe how because of that fact historical events in Bosnia and Herzegovina over the century also became a part of Slovenian oral tradition; there are still some old people that sometimes at the end the conversation say ‘Pa mirna Bosna! (With peace in Bosnia!)’, meaning ‘The end of words ... so shall be done and that’s it!’ At that time Slovenians settled in major towns

in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Sarajevo, Travnik, Tuzla, Zenica, Mostar, Banja Luka, Bihać, and other places. Due to their skills and abilities they had a special status in predominantly uneducated local society (they were also better paid), and it is presumed that this is the source of the myth about hard-working, diligent, honest and modest Slovenians, spreading gradually all around the territory of former Yugoslavia and surviving until today – despite the present depression of Slovenia's economy and huge political crises.

The next major wave of migration from Slovenia to Bosnia and Herzegovina happened in the 1920's when a lot of people moved from the territory which fell to Italy after World War I, namely the Primorska region on the south-west border of Slovenian ethnic territory. They mostly bought some land and settled permanently in the area, as did, for example, more than 50 families in Slatina, near Banja Luka. Mining has also been important 'business' for connecting Slovenia with Bosnia and Herzegovina (as practically the whole territory of the former Yugoslavia). After that forced migrations happened during the World War II, when due to Nazi ethnic cleansing in Slovenia many thousands from there were transported to Bosnia and Herzegovina and condemned to bare survival for several years.⁷ And finally, also after the war numerous Slovenian experts were sent there, this time in the name of brotherhood and unity to help with development plans and 'building up' a part of the new (Tito's) Yugoslavia. These migrations were not meant to be forced, but 'the chosen ones' had not much

opportunity to choose whether to go or not. Some of them returned home after time, but some started a new life there.

The fact is that no matter when or where or for what purpose Slovenians came to Bosnia and Herzegovina (and this could also be applied to Slovenians migrating to other parts of the former Yugoslavia), they were always well accepted by the local population.⁸ Their influence on the local society was substantial; they brought knowledge, progress and development to the new environment, new habits and customs – if we believe the testimonies even new fashion in clothing and the emancipation of women. Even nowadays this influence still exists in some ways since Slovenia as EU member state represents a bridge between the Western Balkans and the rest of the Europe.

We can imagine how the pleasure probably has been mutual – and this to such an extent that Slovenians, especially at the time of the second Yugoslavia, almost get assimilated. They integrated themselves quickly into the receiving society, probably because both languages, Slovenian and local (which can be Serb or Croatian or Bosnian), are very close. Also, although Slovenians were known for preserving their own language and culture (and traditionally very active in doing it), 'Balkan' way of life obviously had, or still has a kind of a charm and appeal to be accepted and adopted very quickly. And finally, the previously mentioned socialist 'brotherhood and unity' did its task very well. Disillusionment came with the collapse of the former Yugoslavia and the war that followed – and it brought to the Slovenes a new concern for the preser-



Fig 3 Slovenian expert Josip Bučar at the steelworks in Vareš in 1930's. (Source: Četrta stran trikotnika: Znameniti Slovenci in slovenska društva v Bosni in Hercegovini 1878–2000, ed. by S. Koblar, Ljubljana 2008:45.)

vation of language, culture, national identity, and reconnection with the homeland. The major work with all this has been done and still is being done by the Slovenian emigrant associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina.⁹ As we learned through the previously mentioned questionnaire they are very active in organising Slovene language courses and cultural events, they cooperate a lot with each other to be more effective with it, they also connect to other associations abroad, and of course Slovenia.

Conclusion

The fifth article of the Slovenian Constitution among others defines the concern of the Slovenian state for Slovenians living outside the country.¹⁰ In the spirit of this, after the Slovenian declaration of independence, the Slovenian Government set up the Ministry for Slovenians Abroad. It was subsequently replaced

with the Office of the Government of the Republic of Slovenia for Slovenians Abroad that works in the governmental framework. Among working bodies of the Slovenian National Assembly there is a Commission¹¹ that monitors the state of affairs of Slovenes living abroad. There are also civil society organisations that cooperate with Slovenians in foreign countries which help them maintain close contact with Slovenia: after the independence of Slovenia Svetovni slovenski kongres (Slovenian World Congress) and Izseljensko društvo Slovenija v svetu (Emigration Association Slovenia in the World) were established, and beside this Slovenska izseljenska matica (Slovenian Emigrant Association) as the main organization for supporting Slovenian emigrants – for the last twenty years also those in the territory of Former Yugoslavia – has been operating since 1951.

Slovenia's independence brought about major changes in the life of Slovenian emigrants in the new states formed from the former Yugoslavia. Many Slovenian emigrants and their descendants clearly value their ethnic identity; Slovenians are no longer mixed with Yugoslavs as an ethnic category, which was widely promoted by the former state of SFRY and before. Most emigrants in the area of former Yugoslavia belong nowadays to the second or third, somewhere even the fourth generation, which became very well integrated in the receiving society.

So Slovenian emigrant associations, together with the Slovenian governmental and non-governmental institutions face new challenges. The main one is the replacement of generations and concern for return to their roots and the preservation not only of their distinct national identity but also their language and cultural identity as their *differentia specifica*.



Fig 4 The 'Slovenian day in Slatina' 2013, traditional cultural event organised by Slovenian association Triglav Banja Luka, Bosnia and Herzegovina, with guests from Novi Sad, Serbia, and Novo mesto, Slovenia. Photo: M. Lokar

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Notes

- Slovenija danes* (<http://www.slovenija-danes.slovensi.si/>) is the main media for Slovenians outside the Republic of Slovenia. It provides them the key information about Slovenia and the activities of various associations and organizations of the Slovenians abroad; among them, there are also many churches, media institutions, schools, etc.
- Balkan is a Turkish word, meaning 'a chain of wooded mountains'. The practice of geographers and politicians is to accept the Danube river as the inland boundary of the Balkans (Schevill 1991: 13). On the other hand the area north of Sava river which was closely related to the historical events in the Balkans is by many historians also considered part of the Balkans. Under this definition major part of present day Slovenia has been considered as Balkans, even the area has been historically linked to the central European area.
- The questionnaire consisted of 58 questions; among them for example the question whether association has its own place to work, which sections it has, does it care about the archive, library, how it cooperates with the Slovenian embassy and in which fields, how the association is financed, how many members does it have, what is their background, age, education, and professional structure. There were also questions like if the association publishes the bulletin, brochures or books, if there is a poet or writer among members, maybe an artist, what kind of events does it organise etc. Last part of the questionnaire was on language: which language is spoken among members, Slovenian or local, how the school on Slovenian language is organised, for whom and how often, who are the teachers etc.
- In addition to the planned publication of the research results we hope for a potential influence of the results on various strategies that Slovenian government will have to establish regarding the all areas of the former Yugoslavia in the future.
- For example *Slovenci v Bosni in Hercegovini skozi pričevanja, spomine in literarne podobe: 1831–2007* by Vera Kržišnik-Bukić, *Četrta stran trikotnika: Znameniti Slovenci in slovenska društva v Bosni in Hercegovini 1878–2000*, edited by Stanislav Koblar, *Od prednikov do potomcev: Slovenci v Slatini in Banjaluki 1923–2008* by Vera Papež Adamič, *Vseeno kdaj, vseeno kje – vedno smo Slovenci/Bilo kad, bilo gdje – uvijek smo Slovenci* by Alenka Uduč, etc.
- It was held in Banja Luka in June 2012.
- Most of them returned home after the war.

- 8 It is also interesting how for example differences in religious affiliation – Slovenians are mainly Catholics, the locals are mainly Muslims and Orthodox (Catholics are in minority) – have never been the barrier for cooperation and friendly relations.
- 9 They are in Banja Luka, Breza, Dobož, Kakanj, Prijedor, Sarajevo (2), Tuzla, Vitez and Zenica, united in the organisation called Evropa zdaj (Europe Now). All together have more than four thousand members.
- 10 'In its own territory, the state shall protect human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall protect and guarantee the rights of the autochthonous Italian and Hungarian national communities. It shall maintain concern for autochthonous Slovenian national minorities in neighbouring countries and for Slovenian emigrants and workers abroad and shall foster their contacts with the homeland. It shall provide for the preservation of the natural wealth and cultural heritage and create opportunities for the harmonious development of society and culture in Slovenia. Slovenians not holding Slovenian citizenship may enjoy special rights and privileges in Slovenia. The nature and extent of such rights and privileges shall be regulated by law.' (Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia, 2001: 18–19)
- 11 Commission for Relations with Slovenes in Neighbouring and Other Countries.