

SUMMARY

As a principal institution, the Institute of Social Sciences Ivo Pilar has conducted scientific research titled „Demographic and Social Sustainability of Croats in Vojvodina: Current Trends, Challenges and Perspectives“ in partnership with the Institute for the Culture of Vojvodina Croats. Based on the research findings, a monographic scientific edition was produced by several authors. The project itself and the publication were financed by the Central State Office for Croats Abroad and the Institute for the Culture of Vojvodina Croats in Subotica, Serbia.

The purpose of this research was to find, analyze, describe, interpret, and present key demographic, social and political circumstances, as well as pre-conditions and determinants of the sustainability of the Croatian community in the Vojvodina region (and wider Republic of Serbia). The main research goal was to define the principal elements for the self-empowerment of the Croatian community in the context of their improved quality and long-term sustainable integration into the Vojvodina/Serbian society, while at the same time successfully preserving their national, cultural, and social identity. Specific research goals entailed a causal analysis of the current state of the demographic and socio-political status of the Croatian community in the Vojvodina region. The demographic analysis of the population composition, current trends and relationships of Croats in Vojvodina followed a qualitative methodology. This included the analysis of available official population census/statistical data in a wider sense. Thus, the socio-political analysis of their status was based on the qualitative sociological inquiry of domestic (Serbian) and international legal frameworks and minority policies (on the national, regional and EU level), as well as relevant documents/reports/scientific publications and decisions which tackle the minority issue in general, but with special focus on Croats in Vojvodina and their minority status. Research findings and conclusions are presented in three chapters.



In the first chapter titled „Demographic Determinants of Croats’ Sustainability in Vojvodina“ Dražen Živić provides a short introduction to the qualitative and quantitative components of the demographic sustainability while emphasizing demographic characteristics and changes in Vojvodina after the Second World War. While providing a spatial context of negative demographic dynamics and the uneven distribution of Croats in Vojvodina, Živić points out how the general depopulation of Croats in Vojvodina is a half century long continuous process (1961 – 2011). He presents the most important and increasingly unfavorable structural characteristics of the Croatian population in Vojvodina (especially the demographic aging process) while analyzing current downward trends of bio-reproductivity (natural decrease) and negative demographic balance formation. Finally, Živić shows how in the future, the numerical figures of the Croatian minority communities in Vojvodina are predictably extremely adverse. The depth, longevity and ramification of negative demographic trends, processes, relationships, and structures all call for concern, and the current demographic situation is not and will not become a positive framework not only for the demographic, but also for the social sustainability of Croats in Vojvodina and the Republic of Serbia. In other words, the situation will not improve without a fundamentally positive transformation of the Croats’ social, political, economic, and national status in Vojvodina, and Serbia. The demographic revitalization of the Croatian community, even in case negative demographic trends do slow down, is not possible unless, so far, substantially bigger efforts are invested to improve the social, political, and educational status of the Croatian national minority. This needs to be done not only on the individual level, but also on the level of the collective. This, however, also requires having full freedom – without any pressures, and especially without consequences – to declare oneself as a Croat during the next population census announced in Serbia for October 2022.

In the second chapter titled „Serbian Transitional Justice Process and Croatian National Minority Status in Serbia and Vojvodina“ Sandra Cvikić discusses Serbian transitional justice process and Croatian national minority status since 1991. Even though it is limited in its scope and the availability of relevant data, this qualitative sociological analysis provides an insight into the way Serbian authorities enabled the Croatian national minority to exercise their rights and liberties in the last thirty years. Discourse of institutionally and scientifically produced knowledge about the Croatian national minority is therefore critically questioned in the context of the Serbian post-war transitional justice process and the process of European integration. This has enabled the author to provide an insight into how and to what extent the implementation of minority policies has



influenced Croats' status and exercise of their rights in Serbia. In its conclusion this qualitative sociological analysis draws attention to new post-modern models (transitional justice) of the state's post-war social reconstructions in which national minorities such as Croats are left on the society's margins, despite proclaimed minority politics which promise emancipatory flywheel and functional integration. The author points out how in such a context, the Croatian national minority can survive and plan its future development only if supported comprehensively (in social, cultural, economic, and political terms) by the home country. In this way, the Croatian state can empower Croatian minority communities socially and politically so that they can successfully negotiate their new relations and interests during the crucial period of Serbia's membership negotiations with the European Union.

In the third chapter titled „Croats in Serbia and Vojvodina: Basic Historical, and Sociographic Facts“, Tomislav Žigmanov provides a concise and clear illustrative and indicative overview of subjects and elements of the Croatian national minority's social sustainability in Vojvodina. The focus is on the relationships inside the Croatian community, on the establishment and development of minority institutional infrastructure, and political organization. Additional selected aspects of the Croatian national identity preservation are also dealt with in the context of its culture and education regarding Croatian language as well as public use of the Croatian language and scripture. Apart from the fact that Croats are unquestionably a local population in contemporary Vojvodina, their status, due to the historical, social, and political development of this territory (which sometimes entailed radical social and state changes) has continuously deteriorated to this day. In fact, today's alarming conditions of Croats thus relate not only to the community's relationship with others or official politics towards Croats, but also to internal Croatian disorganization and increasingly strong tendencies towards assimilation.

Croats have a long-standing population history in the territory of contemporary Vojvodina. However, never in the history of their survival/stay in Vojvodina was it put into question as it is today. Such circumstances are a product of thirty-years-long powerful direct and indirect socio-political processes defined by the impacts of the following: political and economic crisis in the socialist Yugoslavia (SFRY); rising Greater Serbia nationalism; disintegration of the state community; independence of former Yugoslav republics; and the wars in Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosovo (1990s). Far-reaching demographic, social, political, and economic process complexity and changes in the 1990s have years later made Vojvodina's Croats, both, as an ethno-demographic and as a na-



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tional community in Vojvodina (and in wider Republic of Serbia), almost unsustainable (both demographically and socially in the long run). Therefore, Croats' existence in Vojvodina must become a clear and longstanding strategic goal of all political and social actors in the Croatian national polity, and actors' activities must contribute to this goal regardless of their official basis of operation – at home or abroad. For this, necessary preconditions must be met which include the establishment of positively expressed public and minority policies (in Vojvodina, and in the Republic of Serbia, but also in the Republic of Croatia) with the aim to create real possibilities for social, political, economic, and demographic sustainability of Croats in this territory. This is not just a question of their numbers, but it is also a question of the preservation of national, linguistic, religious, cultural, and social identity.