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THE ROLE OF DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS IN IDENTITY CONSTRUCTION: THE CASE OF THE WESTERN BALKANS (BOSNIA AND HERCEGOVINA, NORTH MACEDONIA, MONTENEGRO)

The article discusses the interdependence of politics and demography using the example of post-Yugoslav countries. In addition to objective factors (such as natural population growth and decline, migration), the ethnic structure of the population is affected by various subjective and situational circumstances. A characteristic example can be found in the Western Balkans, where after independence and a change in political systems, the identity is being built in a unique way in each country. At the same time, the topic of demographic evolution is present everywhere in public and political rhetoric. One could argue that population censuses are becoming objects of political competition. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, for example, the size of ethnic groups is significant since the party system and the state itself are built on ethnic principles, where the demographic composition has shaped the unique political identity of Muslims/Bosniaks in relation to Orthodox/Serbs and Catholics/Croats. In Montenegro, it is important whether residents classify themselves as Montenegrins or Serbs; the independence of the Montenegrin language from Serbo-Croatian is also a sensitive issue. In Slovenia, the most monoethnic country of the former post-Yugoslav republics, the legal status of non-Slovenes is not equal, and there is a public debate about the status of representatives of the ethnic groups from former Yugoslavia who have settled in the Republic of Slovenia. The controversial issues of ethnostatistical registration of the population in Serbia, North Macedonia and Croatia persist on the social and political agenda.

Keywords: *The Balkans, identity construction, statistics, censuses, demographic evolution*

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