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NATION-BUILDING AND POPULATION CENSUSES AS ETHNODEMOGRAPHIC ENGINEERING: THE CASE OF THE WESTERN BALKANS (SERBIA, CROATIA, SLOVENIA)

Ethnic identity and demographic processes, cultural assimilation and ethnic mimicry have been closely linked with politics and ideology throughout history. Political motivation often influences the collection of data on ethnicity and vice versa. The results of ethnostatistical studies can directly impact interethnic relations in terms of claims to participation in government bodies, the creation of regional autonomies, the official use of languages, territorial boundaries, etc. Due to the influence of political and other social circumstances, a phenomenon known as ethnic transfer arises. Ethnostatistics in the former Yugoslavia is a striking example of the politicization of census questions, which was especially prominent at certain historic periods. In addition to changes in the self-identification of individuals and entire groups, statistical results were also influenced by changes in the counting and classification methods of ethnic groups. Ethnocultural data in Yugoslav and post-Yugoslav censuses are recorded through the prism of answers to three groups of questions: national/ethnic affiliation, native language, and religion. This study focuses on the first group of responses, which concerns the situation in Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia. Questions about native language and languages in the Balkans in general, as well as questions about religious beliefs, are highly politicized and require separate analysis (see, in particular, Martynova 2022).

Keywords: *The Balkans, nation building, identity, statistics, population censuses*

Author Info: **Martynova, Marina Yu.** — Dr. of History, Professor, Head of the Department for European Studies, the Russian Academy of Sciences N. N. Miklouho-Maklay Institute of Ethnology and Anthropology (Moscow, Russian Federation). E-mail: martynova@iea.ras.ru ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7280-7450>

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