Croatia as a Danube country

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Abstract: Among the three principal regional units of Croatia, i.e. the elongated and spacious Adriatic littoral (with numerous islands), the relatively small and narrow mountainous belt (“the Croatian transit doorway”) and the Pannonian/peri-Pannonian region, the latter is the largest and accounts for 54 percent of the surface area and 66 percent of the population of Croatia (1991 census). It is part of the Pannonian (or Carpathian) basin, or the central Danube basin, so that Croatia is simply by its position a Danube country. Its Danube character is also highlighted by the fact that the Pannonian/peri-Pannonian region of Croatia through the Sava and Drava Rivers is directly linked to the navigable Danube, which is the historical and ethnic eastern boundary of Croatia. Croatia is an old historical Danube nation and country, although it has nominally appeared as a state after the break-up of Yugoslavia, and its international recognition as an independent state (1992).

Introduction

With the exception of the Volga, located in the easternmost rim of the European continent and completely within the territory of the Russian Federation, the Danube is the longest, and through its transit significance, the second (after the Rhine) largest navigable river in Europe. It has a natural and historical role in connecting naturally, geographically, socially, politically and economically varying countries, primarily of Central Europe, southeastern Europe and the Black Sea, and across the Black Sea a wider area. The opening of the Main-Danube canal directly linked the Danube route to the Rhine, which created the most important navigable route on inland European waters. The Rhine-Main-Danube navigable route has outgrown its natural and historical framework, and influences a greater part of Europe traffic in transit.

In its course, the Danube passes through, or borders, the following countries: Germany, Austria, Slovakia, Hungary, Croatia, “Yugoslavia”, Bulgaria, Romania and the Ukraine. These are the so-called Danube countries, whose mutual relations are regulated by special treaties which establish their rights and obligations in relation to the use of the navigable Danube.

A location on the Danube, which links several countries with numerous populations and significant economic potential, gives the Danube countries great advantages, both economic and political, primarily those of with a European integration nature. Thus it is understandable that all Danube countries are interested in fully and freely using the advantage of their position on such an important transportation route.

However, the presence of Croatia as a Danube country is of interest to other European countries, because the Danube comes closest to the Adriatic Sea, and thus the Mediterranean, as it passes Croatian territory. Through the development of combined transportation along the Danube-Adriatic route, it is possible to avoid the longer (and potentially less secure) route across the Black Sea. The construction of a navigable canal from Vukovar (on the Danube) to Šamac (on the Sava) may also contribute to the closer (and possibly safer) Danube-Adriatic connection, as well as the use of the navigable part of the Sava River up to Sisak (located less than 150 km from the major port of Rijeka).

That Croatia is a Danube country is indicated by the fact that the Danube is its historical eastern state and ethnic boundary. Croatia has also been present in transportation activities tied to the Danube for a long time.
The Danube: historical and state border of Croatia

Although Croatia only appeared on the political map as a modern Danube country in 1992, the Croats as a people were present along the Danube since their arrival in the Danube basin in the seventh century. Evidence of this is their long and firm ties with the Danube, and the mention of the Danube in the Croatian national anthem (Lijepa naša domovino), written at the beginning of the nineteenth century (Klarić 1995).

In the pre-Ottoman period (until the sixteenth century), the current Croatian area along the Danube was an integral part of Croatia. From 1102 it was a part of the Hungarian-Croatian kingdom and organized as the Vukovar county with its seat in Vukovo, today's Vukovar. The eastern border of this region was on the Danube and Sava Rivers, which means that practically all of the Srijem region was part of Croatia, except for an eastern section which was a part of Hungary.

In the post-Ottoman period (from the end of the seventeenth century), the Croatian area along the Danube was once more liberated and organized as one of the administrative units of Croatia-Slavonia, i.e. the County of Srijem, with its seat in Vukovar. The county included part of eastern Slavonia and the region between the Danube and the Sava, usually known as Srijem.

When the Austro-Hungarian Empire fell at the end of World War I and Croatia, as part of the short-lived State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, composed of the South Slavic lands of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, joined the new state known as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1918, it came into this new state with its historical regions of Slavonia and Srijem in their historical borders on the Drava, Danube and Sava Rivers (Figure 1A).

The areas on the opposite, left, bank of the Danube were part of Hungary until 1920, when they were annexed to Yugoslavia by the Treaty of Trianon. These former Hungarian lands included the regions of Baranja (between the Danube and the Drava) and Bačka (between the Danube and the Tisza) (Klemenčić 1993).

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia created administrative-territorial units having territories intentionally unlike the borders of the historical provinces which initially entered Yugoslavia. Such administrative-territorial units were a means to implement Greater Serbian policies in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. This became particularly apparent with the formation of banates (banovine) in 1929, when the majority of Croatian territory along the Danube was incorporated into a banate with its seat on the left bank of the Danube in Vojvodina, i.e. Serbia. The short-lived Croatian autonomy within the framework of the Banate of Croatia (1939) once more included the Croatian area along the Danube, but without a larger part of the Croatian territory of Srijem, which remained within Serbia (Figure 1B).

When Yugoslavia was reorganized on a federal basis after World War II, a demarcation was made between the Republics and their borders were determined. These borders were not administrative, but

![Figure 1. Borders of Croatia with Serbia. (A) Borders with which Croatia entered into State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs (later Yugoslavia). (B) Borders of the Banate of Croatia, 1939. (C) Borders established in 1945; it was in these borders that Croatia was internationally recognized in 1992 as an independent state: the Republic of Croatia.]