



## DEPOPULATION IN THE WESTERN BALKAN COUNTRIES

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### **Abstract:**

The paper defines the term of the Western Balkans. It analyzes population trends and some parameters of the age structure of population. Depopulation is evident on the whole territory of West Balkan. In this paper special attention is paid to the last decade of the 20th and early 21st century, because at the time, new borders between countries in Balkan have been established. With border changes, political changes and other transition processes occurred. Using data from different statistical institutions of the Western Balkans and the well-known statistic and mathematic methods, the comparable relative numbers were obtained. The paper tries to explain differences between the genders and between countries of the Western Balkans. The results are presented in graphs and maps.

**Keywords:** *Western Balkans countries, depopulation, ageing, migration.*

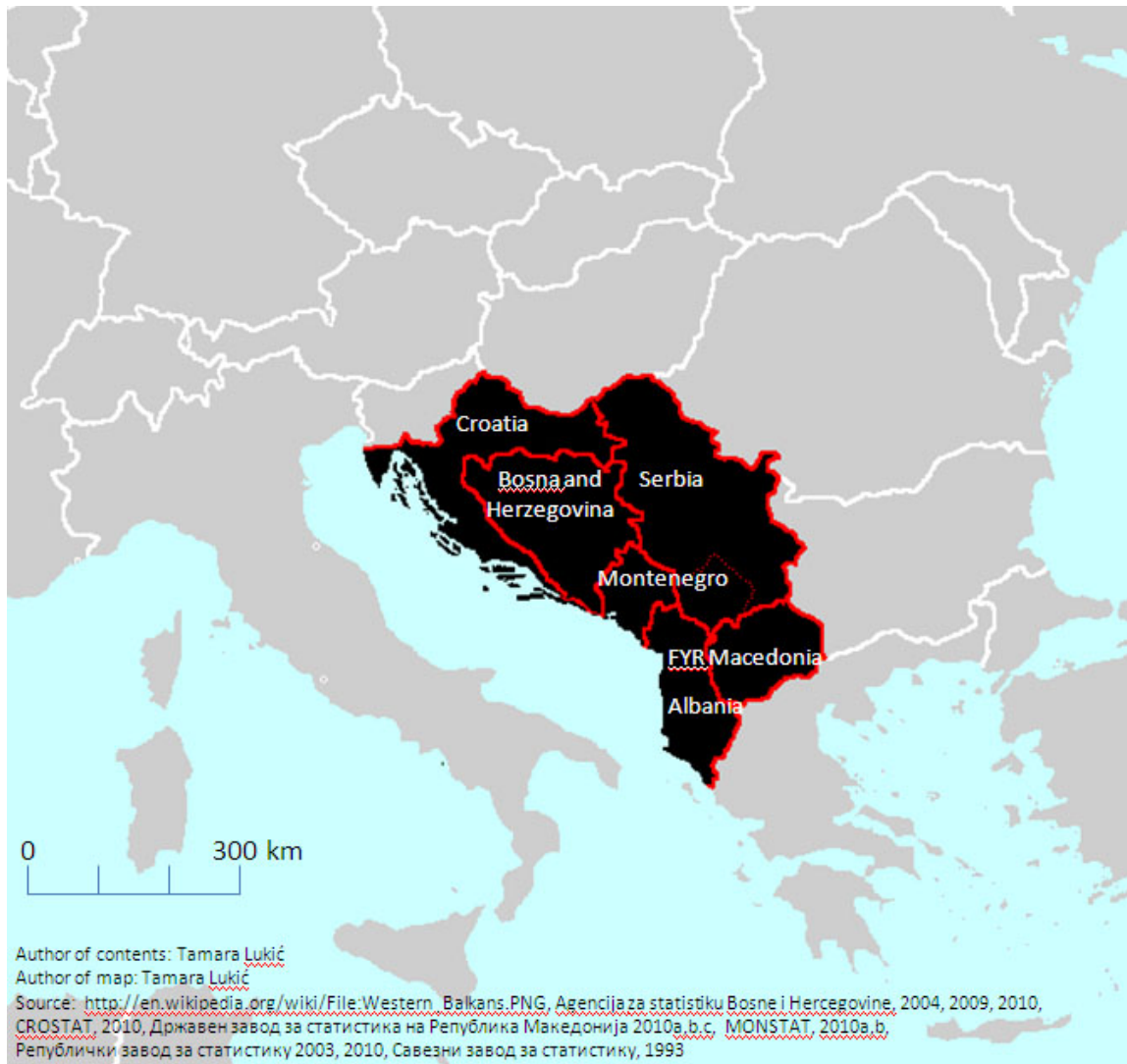
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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

From the end the First World War to the beginning of the last decade of 20th century, all the Western Balkan countries, except Albania, belonged to the same country (Banac, 2009). This means that, until the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most of today's Western Balkan countries developed in the same political system. Decomposition of Yugoslavia started after the census 1991 (Burg, Shoup, 2000) and finished 2006, when the Montenegro proclaimed independence from State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (Fawn, 2008), (Macek-Macková, 2011). Since the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, there have been three wars in the “former” Yugoslavia, taking place in Slovenia, Croatia, and Bosnia-Herzegovina; with further conflicts situated within each of these conflicts (Hudson, 1999, 71).

Study area, the West Balkan (Map 1) is political determination that relates to the six Balkan states which do not belong to European Union (Delević, 2007). It is the term, which is the first time used on the meeting in Thessaloniki 2003. Foreign ministers and ministers responsible for Justice and Home Affairs who periodically meet within the framework of a EU-Western Balkan forum discuss issues of common concern, review progress of the countries of the region in their road to Europe, and exchange views on major developments in the EU (EU, 2003). The Western Balkan countries cover 2.1% of European territory. The share of population in total number of European population is 2.9% (Department of Economic and Social Affairs Population Division, 2009).

During the last decade of 20th century and in the beginning of the 21st century, economic and political situation on the West Balkan was changing dramatically. Hence, paper is focused on the mentioned period. It tried to make correlation between mentioned changes and depopulation in the Western Balkan countries. Particular attention is given to the gender characteristics. The paper tried to explain whether the war made the gap between gender numbers on the territory of the West Balkan.



**Map 1.** Geographic position of the Western Balkan countries in Europe

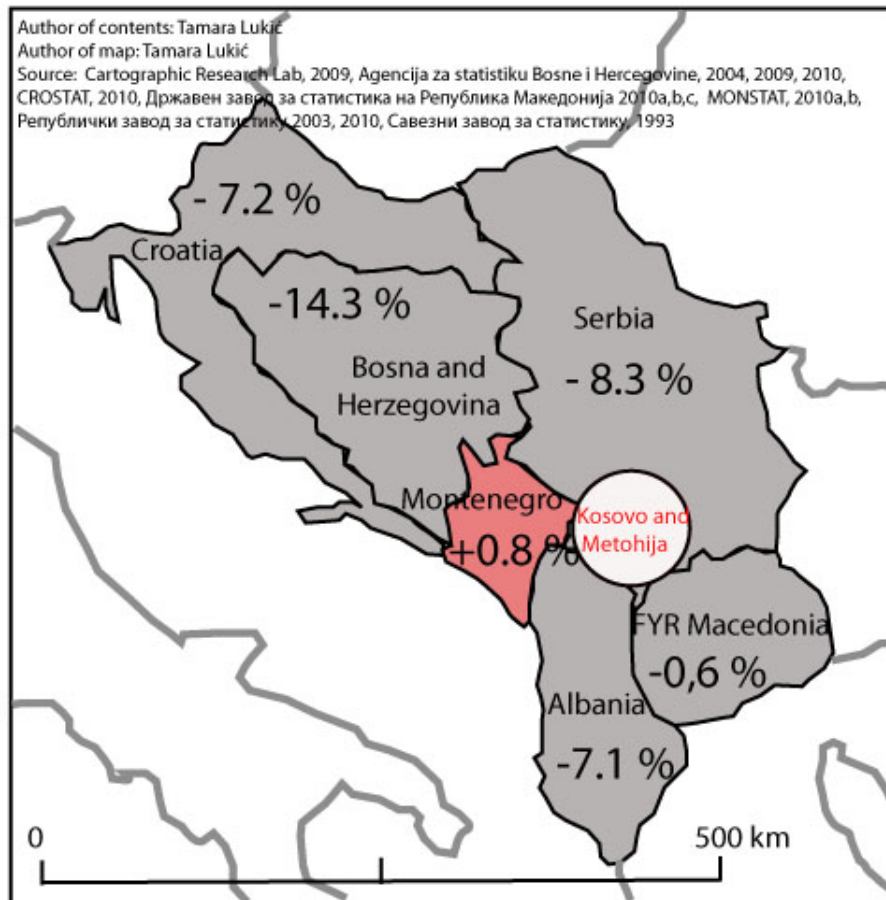
## 2. METHODS AND MATERIALS

Using data from different Statistical Offices of the countries of the West Balkan and well known statistic and mathematic methods, the relative numbers were given. They allowed comparison between the Western Balkan countries. The results have been presented in graphs and maps. Six countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia) have been observed in the paper. In 2008, South Serbian Province, Kosovo and Metohija, proclaimed independence. International recognition of Republic of Kosovo is not completed. Republic of Kosovo has not already organized census. From 1981, all published data for Kosovo and Metohija represents assessments. Therefore, this territory is avoided. Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina has published data which have been obtained from the Institute of Statistic of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Republic Institute of Statistics of Republika Srpska and the District Brčko of Bosnia and Herzegovina. All of these entities are parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina Federation and they have their own statistical institutions. For comparison three years have been chosen. The first year is the census year in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the whole Western Balkan countries the census was organized in 1991, except Albania where the census occurred in 1990. The next censuses were in 2001 or 2002, e.g. in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, except Montenegro and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Montenegro organized census in 2003. Bosnia and Herzegovina did not organize the census in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, but its Agency for Statistics has done the assessment. All the Western Balkan countries have done assessments for 2007, 2008 or 2009, and all of them will organize new censuses.

To illustrate the age structure of the Western Balkans countries, the old age index has been used. The old age index is the result of the division of two age groups: older than 60 and younger than 19 years. If the old age index is less than 0.40, “the population is young”. If the value is above this number, it could be said that “the population indicates aging” (Rančić, 1980, 190). If it is over 1.00, old population has overbalanced the number and portion of young population. This indicates the adverse relation on age structure and it has negative consequences on its reproductive and active potential (Živić, Pokos, 2005, 211).

## 3. RESULTS

During the respected period, from 1991 to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, population number decreased in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Foreign Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in Serbia. Population number most fell in Bosnia and Herzegovina, twice as Croatia, Albania and Serbia. The smallest decrease was recorded in FYR Macedonia. Assumptions for the years before the census (2007-2009) only in Albania and FYR Macedonia expect a symbolic increase in population (Table 2). Except Albania, all Western Balkan countries have until 1991 belonged to the former Yugoslavia. During civil wars in the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, violence was mostly evident in the border regions of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Serbia (Lim et al, 2007). According to the share of gender in the total population, it is not visible that the war has disrupted gender structure (Table 2). Besides the wars, the population is affected by natural change and migration.



**Map 2.** Movement of population number of the Western Balkan countries between two last censuses

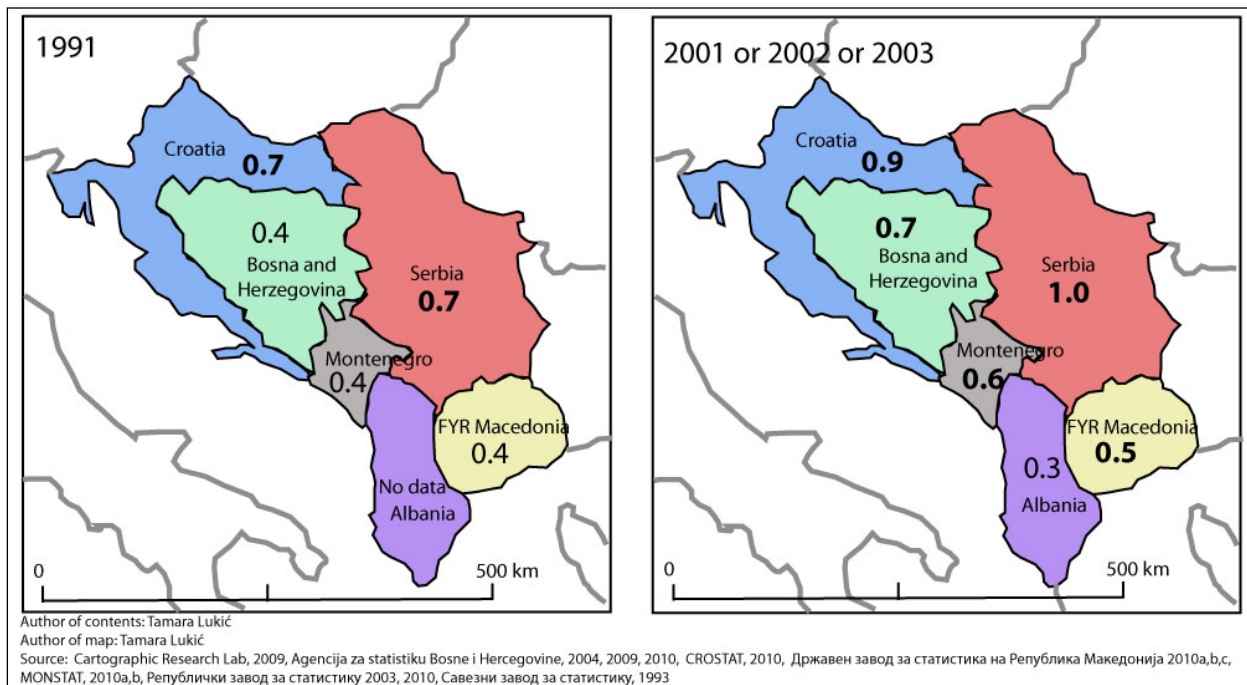
### 3.1. Age structure

The results of natural movement of population are best seen in the age structure of population. For example, old age index has discovered the following facts. In 1991, populations of Croatia and Serbia have “indicated aging”. Other countries were on the edge between “young population” and “population which indicates aging” (Map 3). In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, all the Western Balkan countries, except Albania, have “population which indicates aging”. The age index of Serbia was the highest, 1.0.

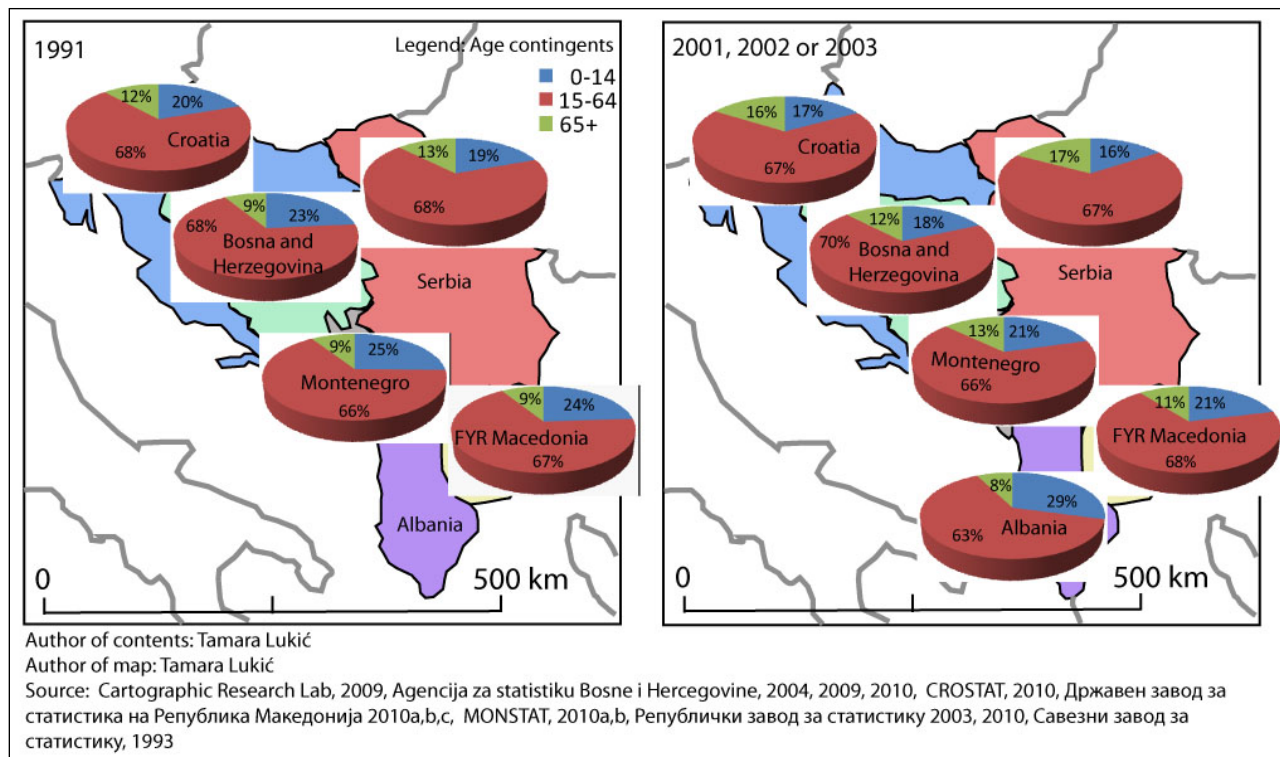
In 1991, the age contingent 0-14 had a range of 19% in Serbia to 25% in Montenegro. The oldest population (65+) has the same share (9%) in three of 5 ex Yugoslav countries. Croatia and Serbia have bigger share of the oldest population (Map 4). In that historical moment, there were more youth in compare to the old population. The last census has shown the following facts. Share of young population decreased in all ex Yugoslav countries. On average, in most states it fell by 3%, except in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was reduced for 5%. Share of old population increased for 3-4%. Although data on the age structure of Albania in 1990 were not found, the latest census data show a significant difference between this country and the countries of ex Yugoslavia. Specifically, the proportion of elderly in Albania in 2001 is lower than in any

other country of the Western Balkans, according to census 1991. The share of youth in Albania at the beginning of the 21st century is 8-13% higher than other Western Balkan countries.

The different distributions of populations in the three age intervals not only indicate a variation in the ageing path among countries, it also provides important information on what the key policy issues may be in the future. Demographic development will be a limiting factor for overall development (Dyson, 2010). In the future, depopulation decline may initiate some problems (Dinić, 2005). Reducing the number of working-age people produces lack of manpower (Pinilla, Ayuda, and Sáez, 2008). The share of pensioners is getting bigger (Hewitt, 2002). Therefore pensions must be less. The need to care for elderly people will be more needed (Kupiszewski et al, 1998), (King, Vullnetari, 2006). Health care costs will be higher (Van Doorslaer et al, 2007). Single life will be more frequent. There were also be problems of family sustainability.



**Map 3.** The old age index in Western Balkan countries according to the two last censuses



**Map 4.** Age contingents of the Western Balkan countries, according to the two last censuses

### 3.2. Migrations

Emigration is very important depopulation factor on the territory in Western Balkan countries. After 1990s, the majority of emigrants from the Western Balkan countries left their homes because of political and societal disintegration and its consequences, as well as result of the economic restructuring, which has led to significant shrinking and in some cases to the elimination of formerly important industries (Hoffer, 2011, 179). Migrants differ by where they have moved, whether it is one of the Western Balkan countries, or some outside it.

Information about migrations, which started in the time of secession of Yugoslav Republics, can be found in the numerous literature sources. During the 1990s, in Croatia, there were 19172 refugees from Serbia, and 233125 Croatian refugees in Serbia (Đurđević et al, 2005). There is a small number of refugees from Macedonia (377 persons) and Slovenia (375 persons) in Montenegro. Movements of the inhabitants of ex-Yugoslavia's republics were happening even after 1996. According to the UNHCR data, in 1996, there were 722897 persons who lived out of their place of permanent residence and were from some of the republics but moved to some other republic. Certain number of refugees returned to their homes in Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina when the political situation quieted down. Some of them received the citizenship by some republics, and there were those who moved to the third country, European or overseas (Bubalo-Živković et al, 2010).

United Nations has divided the net migration rates in the Western Balkan countries 1990-2010 on the two parts. In the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, only Serbia and Montenegro have positive net

migration rates. In the first decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century only Bosnia and Herzegovina has positive net migration rate. Except Serbia and Montenegro, in the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century net migration rates were negative and higher in comparison to the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Table 1).

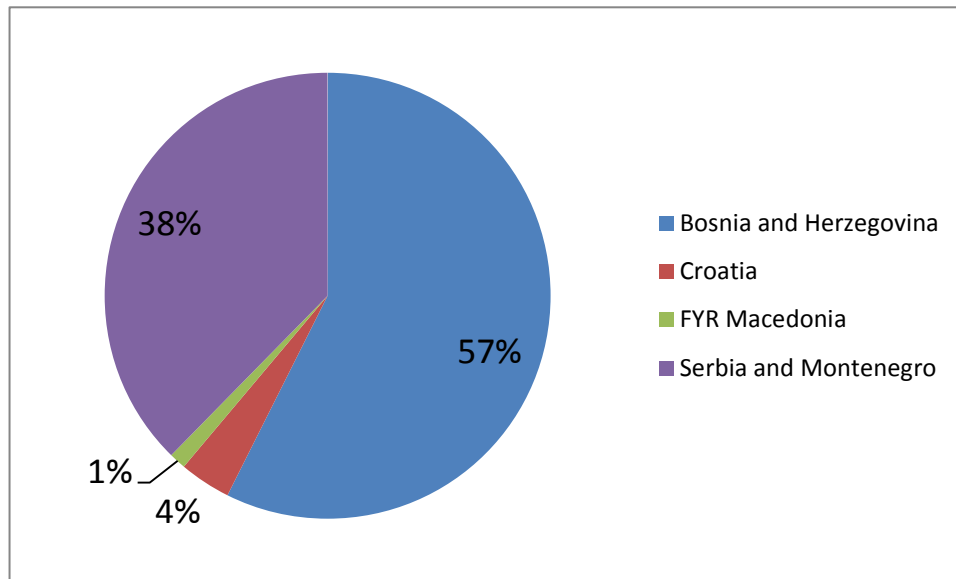
Migrations abroad or to some other countries perhaps are with added intensity when compared to migrations within republics, and that is specific for certain republics (Bubalo-Živković et al, 2010). From 1996 to 2005, according data of UNHCR (2006), 6.216.142 people left the Western Balkan countries. This data is not consistent with data of population movement trends (Graph 1).

**Table 1.** Net migration rates in the Balkan countries, 1990-2010 (net number of migrants per 1000 population)

| Country                | 1990-2000 | 2000-2010 |
|------------------------|-----------|-----------|
| Albania                | -21.8     | -5.6      |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina | -18.8     | 1.4       |
| Croatia                | -0.2      | -0.1      |
| FYR Macedonia          | -1.8      | -1.0      |
| Montenegro             | 4.8       | -8.8      |
| Serbia                 | 3.1       | -3.4      |

Source: United Nations, 2009, Chizzali, 2011, 166





**Graph 1.** Country of origin of emigrants in the period 1996-2005

*Source: UNHCR, 2006, Bubalo-Živković et al, 2010*

#### 4. DISCUSSION

Depopulation is a process that has been present on the European continent for a long time (Eberhardt, 1993). Its manifestations are often identical or similar to those in the countries of the Western Balkans. Young people emigrate and the remaining population is ageing. Fertility rates are low. Economic activity is scarce. Living standards tend to be low. In short, depopulation is part of a vicious circle of economic and social decline (Crauser, 2001). Findings of fact will be interpreted by looking at each country.

Albania has never belonged to ex Yugoslav Republics, but value of population number between two last census decreases (7.1%) and it is very similar as Croatia or Serbia (Map 2). Albania is very rare country in Europe with positive natural increase (Sardon, 2002). Although data of age categories in 1990 were not found, the aging index is calculated using data from the last census in Albania. According to him, Albania in 2001 was still a young country (Map 3). In 2001, Albania had the lowest proportion of older population compared to other Western Balkan countries. Almost one third (29%) of Albanians were less than 19 years old. In the other Western Balkan countries, this figure was not registered even a decade earlier (Map 4). Positive natural increase could not replace negative migration rates. Negative migration rates during the 1990s which continued, although with less intensity, into the present decade as a result of the opening of frontiers after the fall of the communist regime (Chizzali, 2011, 164). The main destinations of the migration waves are Greece, Italy, Germany as well as Turkey, France and Belgium (King, Vullentari, 2003), (Geiger, 2007). Between the two censuses of population men are more likely to migrate (Sardon, 2001), which resulted in a change in the gender structure (Table 2).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina population number decreased for 21.2%. Up to 200.000 people were killed and disappeared in the War (Bassiouni, 1995), (Boyle, 1997), (Thomas, 1993), (Kenney, 1995), (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 1993), (Tabeau, Bijak, 2005). According to the censuses, the population of Bosnia and Herzegovina was reduced by 14.3% (Map 2). Up to December 2007, exactly 2.140.544 people were noticed as refugees (Humanitarian Issues Working Group UNHCR, 1997), (Tabeau, Bijak, 2005). Some of refugees returned to the country. Others moved in to the neighbor countries as well as in the countries of the West Europe, Canada, United States, and Australia etc. Between 1996 and 2005, according UNHCR Annual Statistics (2006) and Bubalo Živković et al (2010), more than 3.5 million people left Bosnia and Herzegovina (Graph 1). This data, in fact, does not match data that is related to reduction of the total population. It illustrates massiveness of migrations in the observed period. Whereas return migration by refugees and internally displaced persons has been recorded since late 1990s, today, low income and lack of economic development prospects in many parts of the country are key factors challenging sustainable return and have become major "push factors", for the young and highly skilled (Dimova, Wolff, 2009). According data of Agency for Statistics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, war did not violate gender structure (Table 2).

War situation between two last censuses in Croatia initiated depopulation (for 7.2%). Croatia is the only country presenting a population mean age higher than that in the EU27, but total fertility rate is the lowest, even below that of the EU27 (Chizzali, 2011, 164). After Serbia, Croatia is the oldest country in the region. Since 1991 value of age index was above 0.4, the Croatian population indicates aging. Age index of Croatia has overbalanced the number and portion of young population (Map 3). More than 400.000 Croatian labor migrants in Europe, which constitute a large pool for potential return migration (Božić, 2007). The immigration of a foreign labor force poses a number of challenges to the country, whereas emigration plays only a marginal role in migration issues. Croatia's geographical position makes the country an important transit location for irregular migrants. The grow of certain economic sectors, such as tourism, light industry and agriculture in some parts of the country, as well as the shipbuilding industry, resulted in a demand for unskilled labor which attracts labor migrants from the neighboring countries (Hoffer, 2011, 184-185).

Decrease the population number in Foreign Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is the lowest (-0.6%) between Western Balkan countries. From 1991 to 1993, FYR Macedonia gained its independence by peaceful (Craven, 1995, 203, Daftary, 2001, 291, Štiks, 2006). The transition has affected negatively the population growth and migration trends. Except Albania, FYR Macedonia is youngest country in the region (Map 3), but it can be also be described as aged (Map 4). In 1991 age index was on the age of ageing (0.4). Last census has indicated "slowly" aging (0.5). Albanians, as national minority, of FYR Macedonia have positive and significant influence on the natural increase (Babuna, 2000, 80). It was not strong enough to rejuvenate the population, but it certainly slowed the aging. The second highest national unemployment rate in the region coupled with a weak economy has led to FYR Macedonia being one of the countries in the region where emigration is still important phenomenon. It is also one of the transit countries in the region, mainly for irregular migration.

Montenegro is the only nation in the Western Balkans, where the population increased "symbolically", for 0.8% (Map 2). Positive natural increase of Montenegro is result of positive

natural increase of some national minorities, as Albanians and Roma (Budisavljević, 2002). In addition, important factor is the migration. The most recent influx of Roma came after the conflict in Kosovo in 1999. Some Roma from Kosovo used Montenegro only as a transitional stop on their exodus to the west, but many have stayed, especially in cities such as Podgorica (Šístek, Dimitrovová, 2003, 176). In Montenegro the labor force inflow from other parts of the territory of the former Yugoslavia (Pavlov et al, 2008). This concerns regular and irregular migrant workers and responds to labor market shortages resulting from both a revival and restructuring of the economy. This development is more or less confined to the coastal parts of the country, whereas the northern and central areas are those most lagging behind and with a high correlation between joblessness and poverty (Hoffer, 2011, 186).

The population number of Serbia is observed without Kosovo and Metohija Province, because 2002 there was no census in it. From the last decade of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Serbia went through different social and economic phases. Some have followed one another, and some were taking place simultaneously. Political crisis, for example, was permanent. The primitive state centralization, unreasonable policies with the international community as act of defiance, war conflicts with the republics of former Yugoslavia, and finally with NATO resulted in the isolation of the state, criminalization of society and the drastic impoverishment of the population and followed by continuous violations of human rights (Stepanov and Lazar, 2002, 137). Richer population has started to escape. From 1996 to 2005, 38% of total emigrants from ex Yugoslav Republics, which belong to the Western Balkan, were from Serbia (Graph 1). During the observed period, many people from ex Yugoslav Republics came to Serbia, passed through Serbia or they left from Serbia (Kovačević et al, 2010, 66) (Table 2). As well as in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Montenegro, female were more numerous than males, but the gap, in favor of women, increased.

**Table 2.** Population number and gender shares in Western Balkan countries, from the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

| Country                                    | Year                 | Total population | Women    | Men      | Women (in %) | Men (in %) |
|--|----------------------|------------------|----------|----------|--------------|------------|
| Albania                                    | 1990                 | 3286500          | 1600500  | 1686000  | 48.7         | 51.3       |
|  | 2001                 | 3069275          | 1538832  | 1530443  | 50.1         | 49.9       |
|  | 2009                 | 3194417          | 1595370  | 1599047  | 49.9         | 50.1       |
| Bosnia and Herzegovina                     | 1991                 | 4377033          | 2193238  | 2183795  | 50.1         | 49.9       |
|  | 2002                 | 3828397          | 1960127  | 1868270  | 51.2         | 48.8       |
|  | 2007                 | 3447153          | 1762907  | 1684246  | 51.1         | 48.9       |
| Croatia                                    | 1991                 | 4784265          | 2465642  | 2318623  | 51.5         | 48.5       |
|  | 2001                 | 4437460          | 2301560  | 2135900  | 51.9         | 48.1       |
|  | 2008                 | 4434508          | 2296486  | 2138022  | 51.8         | 48.2       |
| FYR Macedonia                              | 1991                 | 2033964          | 1006612  | 1027352  | 51.1         | 48.9       |
|  | 2002                 | 2022547          | 1007170  | 1015377  | 49.8         | 50.2       |
|  | 2009                 | 2052722          | 1023907  | 1028815  | 49.9         | 50.1       |
| Montenegro                                 | 1991                 | 615035           | 309104   | 305931   | 50.3         | 49.7       |
|  | 2003                 | 620145           | 314920   | 305225   | 50.8         | 49.2       |
|  | 2009                 | 630095           | 319635   | 310460   | 50.7         | 49.3       |
| Serbia                                     | 1991                 | 8118917          | 4126623  | 3992294  | 50.8         | 49.1       |
|  | 2002                 | 7498001          | 3852071  | 3645930  | 51.4         | 48.6       |
|  | 2009                 | 7320807          | 3760759  | 3560048  | 51.4         | 48.6       |
| Total without Kosovo and Metohija Province | 1990 or 1991         | 23215714         | 11701719 | 11513995 | 50.4         | 49.6       |
|  | 2001 or 2002 or 2003 | 21475825         | 10974680 | 10501145 | 51.1         | 48.9       |
|  | 2007 or 2008 or 2009 | 21079702         | 10759064 | 10320638 | 51.0         | 49.0       |

Source: Agencija za statistiku Bosne i Hercegovine. 2004. 2009. 2010. CROSTAT. 2010. Државен завод за статистика на Република Македонија 2010a.b.c. MONSTAT. 2010a.b. Републички завод за статистику 2003. 2010. Савезни завод за статистику. 1993

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Depopulation is evident on the whole territory of West Balkan, especially in the last decade. Trend of population number differ in every single country. There is no one uniform explanation. The following facts are common for all countries. Different institutions are focused on the different population phenomenon. They have collected different data. Hence, data are not comparable, nor compatible. There has occurred a discrepancy from the planned concept of interpretation of the work results due to limitations because there was no census of the population in Kosovo. In addition, censuses of all Western Balkan countries have not been carried out at the same time; there is no data for Albania on age structure, so the index of aging could not have been calculated, or the age contingents of the 1991. Different migration data, in various literature sources were performed by different methodologies which certainly prolonged the comparison.

There are two factors which affect on the depopulation: negative natural increase, which is consequence of bad age structure, as well as migrations. Migrations were provoked by civil conflict, which was accompanied by increase in mortality rates and decrease in fertility. Countries in the Western Balkans have traditionally been source of labor migrations to destination in Europe and overseas. Large outflows occurred in the 1990 s after the collapse of the Communist regime in Albania and the dissolution of Yugoslavia. Emigration from the region is no longer primarily related to war, conflict and human rights abuses, but is a consequence of a deterioration of the economy and a lack of appropriate jobs, especially for medium to highly skilled workers. Most countries in the region are experiencing a gradual transition from unstable migration patterns and large scale outflows to lower and more stable migration rates (International Organization for Migration, 2009).

Consequences of depopulation will be reflected in the following economic and social phenomena. Production of goods for “the third time” will be on the rise. Some sectors of the economy, like tourism, will turn over old, and will develop spa tourism, cruises etc. Reform of the pension system is unavoidable, for example as follows, raising the retirement age for state pension or reducing the amount of state pension. Pensions will be less and many will turn to additional pension insurance. Pensioners will have a growing political influence. The need to care for elderly people will affect the conversion of surplus school in nursing homes; accelerate the construction of nursing homes, as well as the removal of architectural barriers, encouraging home delivery of goods. Successors will be richer, but will wait longer heritage. Emphasis will be on lifelong learning and work at home.

Current global responses to adverse demographic trends in the modern world can be applied to the Western Balkans in the forms of different measures. For example, states can apply measures to extend life expectancy, or measures that restrict access to birth control, or measures to increase immigration, or measures that seek to increase the fertility of positive incentives. European policy wants to support local authorities in areas affected by depopulation by helping the Structural Funds. Specifically, funds are helping small and medium enterprises, rural cooperatives, protect regional nature and culture, develop skills and support equal opportunities. Western Balkan countries want to integrate into the European Union. For them, union experiences initiate inventions of political and financial solutions to fight against depopulation.

The results of this study can be used in university teaching which addresses the problems and the development of Europe, the Western Balkans, and Southeast Europe. They as indicators of age represent scientific basis for the different topics of new researches. In the regions of the Western Balkans new censuses are organized, and with their results these can be compared. With that comparison the picture of depopulating processes, their scope, intensity etc. would be completed. Special studies would be based on the desire to complete information about possibilities to reduce the intensity of the process of depopulation methods applied in the region. The results of the research open topics for research of other sciences, and related to the theme of mutual influence of the depopulation process among the countries of the Western Balkans.

#### **Acknowledgements**

*This paper is part of the project No. 114-451-1861/2011-02 financed by the Provincial Secretariat for Science and Technological Development of the Vojvodina Province, Serbia. Also thanks to PhD Dubravka Spevec, University of Zagreb, for the data which she provided.*

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