

Serbo-Croatian after the World War II – a (Non)Existing Language

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I. Yugoslavia

I.1 The Novi Sad Agreement (1954)

The new, communist Yugoslavia, whose “birth” dates back to November 1943, from the second session of the Anti-Fascist Assembly of the People's Liberation of Yugoslavia (AVNOJ) led by the Communist Party of Yugoslavia, led by Josip Broz Tito, guarantees equality of the four Yugoslavian languages: Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and the new Macedonian. Such a language policy had been in place for several years after the abolition of the monarchy and the proclamation of the Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia (1945).

The question of whether Serbs, Croats, Montenegrins, and the Slavonic Muslim population, mainly from Bosnia and Herzegovina, speak two or more different languages, or if they speak only variants of one common literary language – Serbo-Croatian, was once again opened by a survey in the journal *Letopis Matice srpske*, whose results stimulated a meeting of Serbian and Croatian linguists in December 1954. The meeting took place in Novi Sad and was organized by the Matrix Serbica (Matica srpska), which is headquartered there. Today, Croatian linguists, in particular, agree in their assessments that the real objective was to state the need to unify Serbian and Croatian orthography as well as professional terminology, i. e. the factual need to create one functional literary language. Finally, the need for unity was confirmed, the agreed conclusions of the meeting (the *Novosadski dogovor*) could be loosely interpreted as follows:

- 1) The language of the Croats, Serbs and Montenegrins is one language, so even the standard language that evolved around two centers, Belgrade and Zagreb, is unified, but with two pronunciation variants: Ekavian and Ijekavian;
- 2) In the case of the naming of this language on official occasions, it is always necessary to express both components (Serbian and Croatian) and thus to use the names *Serbo-Croatian*, or *Croato-Serbian*, or *Serbian or Croatian*, or *Croatian or Serbian* (“srpskohrvatski”, “hrvatskosrpski”, “srpski ili hrvatski”, “hrvatski ili srpski”);
- 3) Both pronunciation variants are equal;
- 4) Both graphical systems used – Latin and Cyrillic – are equal;

5) In this spirit, it is necessary to create a dictionary of the Serbo-Croatian language, terminological dictionaries and common orthography.¹

The agreement, although at first glance fair, still contained the seeds of future tensions and friction. Firstly, it did not address the status of the language standard in Bosnia and Herzegovina or Montenegro and, on the other hand, allowed the creation and spread of mistakes, that the Ijekavian variant of Serbo-Croatian is exclusively western, i. e. *de facto* Croatian, and that the Serbian variant, i. e. eastern, is only Ekavian. This, in turn, influenced both the language of the Croats, to which began to flow through the Ijekavian “channel” several Ijekavian as well as Serbian expressions (e. g. Serbian *bezbednost* (ek.)/*bezbijednost* (ijek.), “security”, but in Croatian it is *sigurnost*), and the language of Serbs outside Serbia (and perhaps also Montenegrins), who, in turn, feared that their language would be considered a “western variant” in view of the Ijekavian pronunciation, and would thus be exposed to Zagreb’s normative superiority, i. e. Croatian influence. On the other hand, the Novi Sad agreement actually acknowledged the pluricentric character of the language, which could be either western, i. e. the Croatian variant (exclusively Ijekavian), or eastern, i. e. the Serbian variant (mainly Ekavian).

1.2 Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language (1967)

The political disintegration in the second half of the 1960s as well as the dissatisfaction of a significant proportion of the Croatian professional and cultural public with the status of the Croatian language in Yugoslavia, resulted in the writing and publication of the “Declaration on the Name and Status of the Croatian Literary Language” (*Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika*), written in March 1967.² Its main objective was to achieve an amendment to the Constitution of the SFRY in the sense that it is clear that there are four constitutive languages in Yugoslavia: Serbian, Croatian, Slovenian and Macedonian. The declaration was signed by many Croatian cultural and scientific institutions. The immediate reaction from the central authorities was to reject it. One can say that the declaration was one of the impulses of the outbreak of the so-called Croatian Spring (1971), which meant an upsurge in Croatian national consciousness (or nationalism – depending on the point of view) against its stigmatization and the forced Yugoslav unity, for which Croats often saw Serbian assimilation policies. However, the process of unraveling mainly from the political causes of the maintained unity of Serbo-Croatian had already begun. The theoretical underpinning of the

articulation of Croatian law on its own existence was primarily prepared by linguist Dalibor Brozović (1970, 1997 [1971]).

II. Croatia

II.1 Memorandum of the Matrix Croatica on the Croatian Language (1995)

The official status of the language in Croatia, as defined in the 1990 constitution, was also confirmed in the revised constitution of April 2001. In addition to intra-Croatian disputes and exchanges of opinion, particularly in the 1990s, Croatian linguists, writers and other culturally active persons strongly demonstrated the desire to defend their own newly-acquired independent language from attacks from their Serbian counterparts. Evidence of these political clashes taking place in linguistics can be found in the “Memorandum of the Matrix Croatica on the Croatian Language” (*Promemorija o hrvatskome jeziku Matice hrvatske*), written in December 1995 (i. e. during the peace talks in Dayton and Paris on the end of the war in the territory of the former Yugoslavia, but mainly in Bosnia and Herzegovina). The Memorandum as a whole advocates in particular the right of the Croatian language to independence; it attempts to prove that the Croatian language is different from Serbian in all directions, although both languages are very close, and the analogy of Croatian vers. Serbian can be seen in such pairs as Dutch vers. German, Norwegian vers. Danish, Slovak vers. Czech. The text is divided into three chapters and does not have a specific author. According to the Memorandum, the Croatian language has included Shtokavian, Chakavian and Kajkavian dialects since the 14th – 15th century. Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, during his work on the contemporary Serbian literary language, was inspired by the Croatian literary language, its dictionaries and grammar manuals, which, according to the authors of the Memorandum, “Facilitated the expansionist efforts of the young Serbian state”. Unlike the approach of Serbian nationalist statements (see below), whose authors seemingly try to approach the whole issue scientifically, Croatian authors, on the contrary, rely on the views of “modern sociolinguistics”, and emphasize the important, if not fateful, role of cultural, historical, social, political, economic and psychological factors, and most of all the will of the speakers of the given language. Similar to the Serbian nationalist linguists, even these Croatian ones do not positively favor the glossonym *Serbo-Croatian*, because they represent a unit on which “the Great-Serbian administration and diplomacy of the first and second Yugoslavia persisted”. The Croatian nation defied such a name for its language and finally rejected it in 1967 with a well-known Declaration (see above). Part of the resistance against the real and presumed demands of the Serbs is often the repeated assertion that the Serbs

have their current literary language on the basis of the Shtokavian dialects since the 19th century thanks to Vuk S. Karadžić (previously they expressed themselves with various variants of the Church Slavonic language), whereas Croats have “for almost a thousand years, documented writings and literature in their native language”.

II.2 Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts on the Croatian Language (2007)

In January 2007, the Department of Philological Sciences at the Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (Razred za filološke znanosti HAZU) prepared a text with the lapidary name “Croatian Language” (*Hrvatski jezik*), which was published in the second issue of *Jezik* in April of the same year. Compared to the Memorandum, it is much more extensive and more detailed, in its own way it could be understood as a more comprehensive encyclopedia providing information on the history of the Croatian language. Attitudes and opinions are not fundamentally different to the Memorandum, and there are no obvious shifts in argumentation either. The period of narrow Croatian-Serbian language contacts is portrayed as permanent pressure by the Serbian authorities on the serbization of the Croatian language and thus the constant need to defend Croatian linguistic independence. The Novi Sad Agreement about common language (1954) is perceived in the text as a “dictate” (p. 47). Only the Declaration of 1967 is perceived as a turn in a positive direction for the Croats. The conclusion includes a chapter on the standard language and the claim that the relationship between Croatian and Serbian cannot be perceived in the same way as the relationship between different variants of English or German, since Croatian and Serbian were never unified, there was never a common Neo-Shtokavian basis for all South Slavonic languages, nor any initial common standard language on a Neo-Shtokavian basis, which would later develop independently in different territories.

III. Serbia

III.1 Declaration on the Serbian Language (1998)

In June 1996, a new law on the official language was prepared in Serbia, which entered into force in 1997. According to this new law the official language is Serbian, with Ekavian variant of pronunciation and is written in Cyrillic. Accordingly, Ijekavian Serbian lost its official position in the territory of the Republic of Serbia and the so-called Novi Sad era was finally ended. The law was also in contraction to the wording of the Constitution of the newly constituted Federal Republic of Yugoslavia of April 1992, which only mentions the Serbian language and Ekavian and Ijekavian pronunciations in Article 15 (“U Saveznoj Republici

Jugoslaviji u službenoj upotrebi je srpski jezik ekavskog i ijekavskog izgovora i ćirilčno pismo, a latiničko pismo je u službenoj upotrebi u skladu sa ustavom i zakonom”).

In August 1998, several Serbian linguists and other similarly-minded persons, grouped together as the so-called World Congress of Serbs, published the “Declaration on the Serbian Language” (*Slovo o srpskom jeziku*) in a Serbian national newspaper “Politika”, and also in the form of a brochure in the same year. The publication represents a wider text advocating the attitudes of a part of the Serbian philological and intellectual community, whose essence lies both in the understanding of the Serbo-Croatian linguistic area as essentially exclusively Serbian, and in the fact that the existence of other nations is not factually recognized in the area of the Shtokavian dialects (Croats and Bosniaks are referred to as “Serbs with Catholic or Muslim religion” (e. g. pp. 7, 10, 11), respectively, the Croatian language is considered to be a Zagreb variant of the Serbian literary language, and according to the Declaration true Croats are merely Chakavian). These attitudes are often sharpened by the views of V. S. Karadžić and other important Slavists of his time, which are now naturally obsolete. The Declaration returns to the widespread conviction among several Slavists in the 19th century (J. Dobrovský, P. J. Šafařík, J. Kopitar, F. Miklosich, V. S. Karadžić), for example, in the opinion that the Shtokavian dialects are Serbian dialects; therefore, today’s Shtokavian based standard language (i. e. the language of the Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins) is also objectively Serbian, regardless of whether someone likes it or not, since it is *de facto* Karadžić’s Serbian. The Declaration also declares the equivalence of the Ekavian and Ijekavian variants of Serbian as well as Cyrillic and Latin alphabets. The text of the Declaration is critical to glossonym *Serbo-Croatian* (and the other two-component names of common language), which, according to the Declaration, was forced upon Serbs by the Croats in order to gradually “appropriate” this Karadžić standardized modern Serbian literary language by making this composite – and its content – in order to subsequently split the separation of the Croatian language, and create the impression that something was divided that was previously united – according to the Croats against their will. Similarly, the Declaration criticizes attempts made to separate the languages of the Bosniaks and Montenegrins. The document was universally rejected by the professional Slavist public as being radically nationalistic, and also by Decision No. 2 of the Board for Standardization of the Serbian Language (*U odbranu dostojanstva srpske jezičke nauke*) in the same month that the text was published (Brborić, Vuksanović and Gačević, 2006, pp. 72–76). In response to criticism of this decision published by one of the signatories, M. Kovačević, their position was reiterated by the members of the Board in September 1998 (Decision No. 4 – *Spoj*

neznanja, izmišljanja i arogancije – *ibid.*, 79–81). Nevertheless, the argumentative substance of the Declaration is still shared by a relatively large number of Serbian professional and lay public.

III.2 Conclusions of the Novi Sad Scientific Conference “The Serbian Question and Serbian Studies” (2007)

Further proof of this is given by the declarative text of the “Conclusions of the Novi Sad Scientific Conference on the Serbian Question and Serbian Studies” (*Zaključci Novosadskog naučnog skupa “Srpsko pitanje i srbistika”*) of November 2007. The conclusions are divided into six chapters and their opinions are essentially identical to the spirit of the Declaration. The conference was organized by the Movement for the Restoration of Serbian Studies (*Pokret za obnovu srbistike*) with the support of the “Government of the Republic of Serbian Krajina in Exile” (*Vlada Republike Srpske Krajine u progonstvu*). There are 60 names below the Conclusions, but it is not clear whether all of the participants in the conference can be considered to be the intellectual kindred spirit of the Conclusions, although at the beginning of the first section of the Conclusions it is stated quite clearly that: “... the participants of the conference accepted this conclusion” (Milosavljević and Subotić, 2008, p. 139). The text is primarily concerned with the tasks of Serbian studies as a new, post-Serbo-Croatian science. This science should deal with the Serbian area both synchronously and diachronically, in the intentions of the Neo-Vukovite point of view. It is emphasized that the Shtokavian dialects are Serbian, refuting any other names used for the Serbian language, especially the term Serbo-Croatian language. According to the Conclusions, Croats surrendered their language in the 19th century and adopted the “Ijekavian variant of the Serbian language”, which is not unnatural from the point of view of world practice, but it is unnatural and unscientific to rename the adopted language of another nation. Glagolitic and Cyrillic are the origins of Serbian script, which other Slavonic nations also adopted, etc. (*ibid.*, pp. 139–142).

IV. Montenegro

IV.1 Language as a Homeland. A Declaration on the Constitutional Status of the Montenegrin Language (1994)

The preparatory phase of the separation and composition of the Montenegrin standard language took place in the 1990s and is linked to the extensive, often somewhat amateurish, publishing activity of Vojislav Nikčević (1935–2007). In 1994 a group of Montenegrins led by the

Montenegrin PEN Center adopted a Declaration on the Constitutional Status of the Montenegrin Language, which title is “Language as a Homeland” (*Jezik kao domovina. Deklaracija Crnogorskog PEN centra o ustavnom položaju crnogorskog jezika*), because the Montenegrins were the only nation on the territory of the former Serbo-Croatian language whose mother tongue bore the name of a foreign nation (see also Neweklowsky, 2010, p. 122). The declarers’ objective was that in the Montenegrin constitution the glossonym *Serbian* be replaced with *Montenegrin*. At that time, in 1995, there was also remarkable international support in the form of the “Resolution of the International PEN Center on the Montenegrin Language” (*Rezolucija Međunarodnoga PEN centra o crnogorskom jeziku*), which was prepared during the 62nd Congress of the International PEN Club held in Perth, Australia (see https://hr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Crnogorski_jezik). The final stage of Montenegrin language separation can only be seen under the conditions of an independent Montenegro, i. e. after 2006. That means the constitutional anchoring of the Montenegrin language (first realized in 2007), publication of the Montenegrin orthography (2009) and grammar (2010), and the introduction of the Montenegrin language as the main language as well as the language of primary and secondary schools (as of the 2011/12 school year).

V. Bosnia and Herzegovina

The specificity of Bosnia-Herzegovina standardization discourse can be found in the different views of the naming of the language of Bosniaks: there is competition between the adjective forms of *bosanski* “Bosnian” (derived from the toponym *Bosna* “Bosnia”) and *bošnjački* “Bosniak” (derived from the ethnonym *Bošnjak* “Bosniak”). The Bosniaks³ are clear about this – they prefer the first option. Proof of this can be found, among other things, in the names of their basic language and linguistic handbooks, and it is also mentioned in the 2002 Declaration on the Bosnian Language (see below). The Serbs and the Croats (or many of their linguists), on the contrary, tend towards the name *bošnjački*, because from a word formation point of view this adjective clearly refers to the Bosniaks, the only nation of Bosnia and Herzegovina that calls its language so. Their arguments are explained in detail in the First Decision of the Board for Standardization of the Serbian Language of February 1998 (*Bošnjački ili bosanski jezik; sat ili čas; jevrejski, hebrejski (jezik) ili ivrit* – see Brborić, Vuksanović and Gačević, 2006, pp. 61–71). The original idea was that the glossonym *bosanski* would cover the language of all the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, irrespective of their nationality. The motivation of such a designation was thus a shared space, “bosanski jezik” was to be a continuation of what was

called Bosnian-Herzegovinian standard language expression of Serbo-Croatian, respectively Croato-Serbian literary language (“bosanskohercegovački standardni jezični izraz srpskohrvatskog, odnosno hrvatskosrpskog književnog jezika”) in the times of the SFRY and especially after the constitutional changes in 1974, i. e., in fact the Bosnian-Herzegovinian regional variant of Serbo-Croatian (see Greenberg, 2005, pp. 52–54). But this idea was already condemned to failure. At the time of tense nationalism on all sides, it was inconceivable that the Croatian and Serbian inhabitants of Bosnia and Herzegovina would renounce the national naming of their languages, and accepted the “Bosnian language” without justification, which was promoted by the Muslim part of the B&H population (and this attitude still holds true today). In addition, in Muslim views of the Bosnian language, they saw nationalist attempts to impose their own concept of language on the non-Muslim population of B&H. Hence, the name *Bosnian* refers, in essence, only to the standard language of the Bosniaks.

V.1 Declaration on the Bosnian Language (2002)

The “Declaration on the Bosnian language” (*Povelja o bosanskom jeziku*) of March 2002 was an attempt by Bosniak intellectuals to explain and defend the right of the Bosnian language to exist and to the chosen name. The Declaration was made at the Institute of Bosniak Studies at the BCS “Revival” in Sarajevo (*Institut za bošnjačke studije BZK “Preporod”*), and justification was given immediately in the prologue: “Due to the increasingly frequent questioning of the Bosniaks’ right to name their language by its historical name, we, assembling at the Institute of Bosniak Studies in the Executive Committee of the Bosniak Cultural Society “Revival” in Sarajevo, hereby convey to the public that our common position on this issue – which we confirm with our signatures – is expressed in this Declaration on the Bosnian language”. The authors of the Declaration see the Bosnian language as a manifestation of the common language of the Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins, which is called by its name by each of these peoples. Serbian or Croatian non-recognition of the term *Bosnian* is seen as politically motivated and as a consequence of “surviving but not yet overwhelmed Serbian and Croatian paternalism and the negation of Bosniak national identity”. According to the Declaration, the preference of the term *Bosnian* does not in any way constitute efforts of unification or unitarization in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

V.2 Declaration on the Common Language (2017)

Symbolically, the most recent declaration was made in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, unlike all previous memoranda, declarations or conclusions, appeals to linguistic unity understood in an antinationalistic way. At the end of March 2017, the text of the “Declaration on the Common Language” (*Deklaracija o zajedničkom jeziku*) was published as a spontaneous conclusion to a series of expert lectures on Languages and Nationalisms (*Jezici i nacionalizmi*), which took place in Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro and Bosnia & Herzegovina during 2016. Inspiration from the book by Croatian linguist Snježana Kordić *Jezik i nacionalizam* (2010) is more than obvious. The basic idea of the Declaration is that the four post-Yugoslav nations previously speaking Serbo-Croatian speak one common language, but with four standard variants that are equal, and that the existence of these variants does not mean that they are four different languages. At the same time, this fact does not question the very existence of four nations or their statehood, religion or other identifying elements, nor does it block the possibility of naming these variants by various different terms. Each nation has the full right to codify its variant “freely and independently”. The authors of the Declaration then ask, among other things, to stop “unnecessary, absurd and expensive ‘translations’ of judicial and administrative practice” and to remove “all forms of language segregation and language discrimination from educational and public institutions”.

¹ The whole text see *Novosadski dogovor (1954)*. [online] Available at: <http://govori.tripod.com/novosadski_dogovor.htm>.

² The original text with comments e. g. *Deklaracija o nazivu i položaju hrvatskog književnog jezika: građa za povijest Deklaracije*, 1997. Zagreb.

³ In the days of Socialist Yugoslavia, Bosniaks were called Muslims, S-Cr. *Muslimani* (sg. *Musliman*), for which the unusual orthographic designation (with a capital letter M in Serbo-Croatian) is first encountered in the writings of the Yugoslav communists of the Second World War, for example in the Resolution founding to AVNOJ of November 1942 and later AVNOJ documents. Their final recognition as the sixth constitutive Yugoslav nation (in addition to the Serbs, Croats, Slovenes, Montenegrins and Macedonians) did not take place until the second half of the 1960s. The attempt to change this ethnonym rarity for a more common expression led political representatives of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims to revitalize the name *Bošnjak* (in English: *Bosniak*), whereas the commonly used *Bosanac* (in English: *Bosnian*) was to remain primarily to describe the inhabitants of Bosnia in the regional sense, regardless of national or religious preferences, but also to fulfill the function of naming the citizen of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

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Abstract: After the Second World War, Serbo-Croatian was formally declared on the basis of the so-called Novi Sad Agreement (1954). Its demise is connected to the demise of the Yugoslav Federation (1992). The sociological, historical, political and ideological reasons of the rejection of this glossonym (and with it the rejection of the common language) were clearly the decisive factor, but they were not always the same. The Serbs, Croats, Bosniaks and Montenegrins had specific reasons for this. These reasons can be revealed, inter alia, by analyzing a number of declarative, proclaiming, explanatory, defending, shorter or longer texts on the language generated by all the above-mentioned national communities which used Serbo-Croatian as their first (mother) tongue after 1990. The most recent Declaration on the Common Language (2017) is unique in this sense.

Key words: Serbo-Croatian Language; Standardization of Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian and Montenegrin Languages.

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