

Original Scientific Paper

УДС: 930.1/.2 ЁКМЕЧИЋ М.

323.1

DOI: 10.5937/zrffp54-47360

# ON EKMEČIĆ'S RESEARCH METHOD AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE NOTIONS OF NATION AND NATIONALISM

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Received: October 25, 2023  
Accepted: September 24, 2024

## ON EKMEČIĆ'S RESEARCH METHOD AND UNDERSTANDING OF THE NOTIONS OF NATION AND NATIONALISM<sup>2,3</sup>

*Keywords:*  
Milorad Ekmečić;  
nation;  
nationalism;  
historical  
methodology;  
historiography.

*Abstract.* Research into the life and work of Milorad Ekmečić shows that this eminent historian dedicated a significant portion of his scholarly efforts to studying the emergence, development, aspirations, and goals of the South Slavs' national revival. In accordance with the Western European historiographical tradition, he often referred to this as "nationalism." Ekmečić's research interest in various aspects of the topic can be traced back to the early days of his academic career. Over the years, with accumulated experience, he delved deeper into the subject, approached it from various angles, and examined it from multiple perspectives. In his research, he acted not only as a historian of the past but also as an analyst of ideas and a philosopher of history. His insights into the origins, definitions, interpretations, and evolution of the concept of nation and nationalism significantly contributed to the study of this subject.

<sup>2</sup> This paper includes sections of the author's doctoral dissertation *Живот и дело Милорада Екмечића* (1928–2015) [*The Life and Work of Milorad Ekmečić* (1928–2015)] (Алексић, 2021) that have been altered, rewritten, supplemented, or translated to suit the needs of the paper.

<sup>3</sup> This study was supported by the Ministry of Science, Technological Development and Innovation of the Republic of Serbia (Contract No. 451-03-66/2024-03/200184).

One of the key issues addressed by Milorad Ekmečić in the context of studying the South Slavs' national revival<sup>4</sup> concerns the concept of nation, its understanding, and evolution. His scientific definition of the term "nation" seems to have primarily been influenced by rationalist philosophy of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. Ekmečić views the definition of a nation provided by the great German philosopher Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762–1814) as the simplest and most democratic; according to Fichte, a nation is a language and signifies a linguistic community (Екмечић, 1989, p. 383). Ekmečić's views on this matter are succinctly expressed in "Sudbina jugoslovenske ideje do 1914." ["The Fate of the Yugoslav Idea up to 1914"] (Ekmečić, 1974a, p. 18), where he says that it will always be the case that, among all possible definitions of a nation, the monolingual concept is the most democratic. This is because it is the only definition that, in an individual's mind, reduces national identity to the matter of linguistic comprehension among people.

This is also how French rationalists and educators understood a nation, and it later became one of the ideological foundations of the French Revolution. Serbian reformers from the late 18th and early 19th centuries shared this understanding. Quoting the works of Svetislav Šumarević (Шумаревић, 1936, p. 29) and Jovan Skerlić (Скерлић, 1966, p. 66), Ekmečić notes that Dositej Obradović was the first Serb to use the word "nationalist," understood as synonymous with "patriot." However, Ekmečić argues that among the Yugoslav peoples, religious identification took precedence over linguistic identification, and he provides several examples to support this claim. Discussing the historical mission of Dositej Obradović, Ekmečić asserts that Obradović's stance on the common language of the Yugoslav space—law and religion can change but gender and language never do—paved the way for the Serbian national revival. According to Ekmečić (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 53), Obradović got to the core of his relationship with other South Slavs, anticipating the idea of their mutual cooperation. However, the historical reality, shaped by various empires, religious beliefs, and

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the term "South Slavs" includes Bulgarians, while "Yugoslav peoples" refers specifically to the South Slavs who joined the Yugoslav state in 1918.

social systems, proved more powerful than the educators' efforts to establish a foundation for a future Yugoslav nation based on a shared language. Later in his career, Ekmečić emphasizes this reality, famously stating that for the Yugoslav peoples, religion became the defining factor of the nation, stronger than any elixir of unity (Екмечић, 2007, p. 383).

According to Ekmečić and the historians he cites,<sup>5</sup> the concept of nation during the Age of Enlightenment was limited to the upper echelons of society, including nobles, the military aristocracy, and the higher clergy. This is why, as Ekmečić observes, the Serbs greatly envied those fortunate peoples within the Empire who had their own upper class and were granted status as a recognized nation (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 43). Consequently, their aspirations and demands included building schools and educating officers and priests, as they realized national revival required a certain number of learned individuals who could read the world's literature and describe social processes or historical events in universally meaningful terms (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 44).

According to Ekmečić's writings, it is evident that the Croatian and Serbian elites of that era had distinct perceptions of the notion of nation. Citing historians like Jaroslav Šidak (Шидак, 1960, p. 1029), Valdemar Lunaček (1962, p. 161), Ferdo Šišić (1962, p. 161), Đuro Šurmin (1903, p. 5), Rudolf Horvat (1906, p. 16), and others, Ekmečić argues that, at that time, members of the Croatian Assembly did not conceive of a nation in the same way as did the later pioneers of the Croatian national revival. For them, the Croatian nation was limited to the ruling Roman Catholic class, characterized by a multinational identity and religious intolerance (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 60). Consequently, they strongly advocated the preservation of the Latin language. The foundation of the Croatian national movement was based on religious and state identity (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 60).

In contrast, the attitudes of the Serbian political elite were different, influenced by the history of the Serbs living in southern Hungary, which was the epicenter of the Serbian national idea in the late 18th century. The Serbs in this region did not have a recognized nobility or class assembly, and their social power in the Habsburg Empire rested with the middle class (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 60). Members of this social class played a significant role, serving as councilors of the Timișoara Council from August 26 to November 22, 1790. They drafted *Дело и план* [*The Work and the Plan*], the first Serbian national program in modern history, seeking autonomy within the Danubian Monarchy and the right to establish all official social classes as a necessary prerequisite for the state to recognize the Serbian community as a people (Екмечић, 1989, 1, pp. 60–61; Gavrilović & Pavlović, 1972, pp. 599–627). Ekmečić observes that many leading figures from the Serbian middle class were not originally Serbian—many

<sup>5</sup> Some of the historians Ekmečić cites include Fishman (1977, p. 35), Novak (1975, p. 86), and Radonić (Радонић, 1950, p. 669).

were Aromanian. Over time, they adopted the customs, language, and culture of the Serbian community and assimilated into it (Екмечић, 1989, 1, pp. 61–62).

This leads us to the development of modern national identity at the end of the 18th and the beginning of the 19th centuries. According to Екмечић, this process was considerably influenced by Josef Dobrovský, a leading Slavic scholar from Bohemia. Quoting Dobrovský's *Über die ältesten Sitze de Slawen in Europa und ihre Verbreitung seit dem sechsten Jahrhundert*, Екмечић asserts that it forever shaped the image of South Slavic peoples, which was later embraced by science. Dobrovský considered the Serbs to be a distinct Slavic group that migrated to the Balkans and settled in the territory of the Shtokavian dialect. He argued that Bulgarian and Croatian were dialects of Serbian, rather than separate languages (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 47). Jovan Rajić shared many of Dobrovský's views but did not fully agree with the idea of Serbian linguistic dominance among the South Slavs.

Екмечић considers Johann Christian von Engel's perspective on the history, migrations, and settlement of South Slavic peoples to be the most comprehensive. In his book *Geschichte von Serwien und Bosnien*, Von Engel attempted to answer four crucial questions:

1. What distinguishes the Serbs from other Slavic groups?
2. What are their oldest settlements?
3. What is the real origin of their name?
4. What route did the Serbs take from their ancestral homeland to the area they currently inhabit? (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 48)

According to Von Engel, the Serbs were Slavs who spoke a language distinct among a family of four Slavic languages: Serbian, Russian, Polish, and Czech. Their ancestral homeland was in Lusatia, and their name derived from their oldest settlement. The Serbs had migrated to areas including parts of Bulgaria, Serbia, Bosnia, Slavonia, Dalmatia, and Istria. Serbian was spoken throughout these regions, while Croatian was limited to the Kajkavian dialect area in Croatia and the Slovenian provinces (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 48).

Printing houses played a significant role in shaping national identity. Citing works by Vasilije Krestić (Крестић, 1980, p. 21), Lazar Plavšić (Плавшић, 1959, p. 276), and Stojan Novaković (Новаковић, 1900), Екмечић concludes that it took time for the art of printing and bookmaking to take root because, in the 18th and early 19th centuries, there was relatively little interest in the written word among the Serbs, especially those living south of the Sava and Danube rivers. Thus, Dositej Obradović lamented in 1810 that in Karađorđe's Serbia, no one cares about books (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 54). However, this was the situation only in the beginning. The situation was similar with printing houses in Croatia. A Zagreb-based printing house operated by Kaptol published a single newspaper in Latin. In 1774, the Viennese printer Tratner established a new printing house, which was later acquired by Bishop Maksimilijan Vrhovac. It experienced a slight upturn under the ownership of Anton Novosel, the brother-in-law of Bishop

Vrhovac. Citing Vjekoslav Klaić (1922, p. 24), Ekmečić notes that during 30 years of operation (1794–1824), this printing house produced approximately 200 books: 127 in Latin, 51 in Croatian, and 22 in German. The Croatian books were exclusively written in the Kajkavian dialect (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 55).

According to Ekmečić, the South Slavs' understanding and definition of the concept of nation were significantly influenced by German and French classical philosophy. Besides Johann Gottlieb Fichte, Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1804) was another prominent figure belonging to this school of thought. Von Herder believed that a nation is determined not only by language but also by other factors, including land as the primary heritage of people, laws as voluntarily accepted contracts, the family as the companion of the nation and respecting ancestral cults. However, for many members of the upper social class, it was challenging to reduce the concept of nation to these elements, as doing so would have meant departing from the centuries-old tradition in the Danube Region of equating the ruling class with the nation (Екмечић, 1989, 1, pp. 381–385). They were especially wary of the teachings of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, who emphasized the sovereignty of the people and the need to raise national consciousness (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 389). Von Herder also addressed this issue, believing that teaching history was the most effective method for nurturing the patriotic spirit. He argued that his approach was a result of natural historical development rather than a revolution (Екмечић, 1989, 1, pp. 389–390).

The earliest theories of nation echoed elite nationalism. Ekmečić's research indicates that, even after the Revolutions of 1848–1849, the understanding of these concepts remained divergent among the South Slavs and it developed differently as they underwent national revival. Differences were especially notable between Serbia, Montenegro, the Danube Monarchy, and the Ottoman Empire (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 597). The borders and distinctions between the Slovenes and Croats, the Croats and Serbs, and the Serbs and Bulgarians remained unclear. Additionally, the so-called millet system persisted, where the head of the church simultaneously represented a recognized people within the exclusive bounds of that religious organization. Ekmečić notes that in Dalmatia, young Catholic theologians and intellectuals, such as Mihovil Pavlinović, Luka Botić, and Natko Nodilo, actively participated in the Serbian national revival, advocating that the language they spoke should be termed Serbian (Екмечић, 1989, 1, p. 598). In the Danube Monarchy, Schwarzenberg, vice-president of the Supreme Imperial War Council, conveyed that the Slavonic nation, through its Ban representative, requested to be recognized as equal to the Croatian nation in supreme (imperial) announcements and not to be routinely bypassed (Екмечић, 1989, 1, pp. 598–599). In short, Ekmečić's research highlights the identity confusion that marked the mid-19th century, making it challenging to determine whether someone was a Serb, Croat, Slavonian, Dalmatian, Slovenian, or Bulgarian.

During this period, amid such an atmosphere, the Habsburg Monarchy conducted its first modern census. Quoting Karl Freiherrn von Czoernig an official responsible for publishing the results of the census in the *Black and Yellow Monarchy*, Ekmečić reveals that in 1857, it was difficult to explain the difference between the Serbs and Croats, as well as between the Kajkavian region of Croatia and the Slovenian ethnic areas. Consequently, using language as the main criterion for defining a nation, Karl Freiherrn von Czoernig divided the Yugoslav regions into areas of Serbian, Serbo-Croatian, and Slovenian speech. According to his categorization, the entire Shtokavian region was considered Serbian, while part of the Kajkavian Croatia, where the Shtokavian-dialect Serbo-Croatian was introduced, was labeled Serbo-Croatian. The remaining regions were designated as Slovenian, and an ethnic border between the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes drawn up in Istria. These demographic data were subsequently accepted by Habsburg statisticians, some of whom presented or published them on more than one occasion (e.g., Adolf Ficker, in 1860 and 1869).

During this period, new theories of nation emerged, in addition to the two offered previously (nation as a natural community of speakers of a language, and nation as a community of statehood and aristocratic orders). Ekmečić particularly emphasizes the ideas of Hungarian writer József Eötvös, his influences, and the impact of his theories. Instead of adopting the traditional liberal principle that a nation is a language community, with each nation having the right to independence, Eötvös introduced an alternative definition. According to him, a nation results from the blending of various races within a single state. He borrowed this theory (with some modifications) from French theorists of nation such as Auguste Thierry, François Guizot, and Joseph-Arthur de Gobineau, who believed in the inequality of human races. Eötvös contended that a nation is nothing more than an awareness that a large number of people are united, and this awareness exists in them as a result of certain memories of the past, their current position, and certain interests and feelings that stem from these (Екмечић, 1989, 2, p. 154). Eötvös made a distinction between the concepts of “political nation” and “genetic nation.” According to his view, the Kingdom of Hungary had only one political nation—the Hungarian nation. All other nationalities were classified as genetic nations, and they had the right to cultural and ecclesiastical autonomy within the Hungarian state. However, the state administration, the official language, and the right to assimilate non-Hungarian nations had to remain Hungarian. After the Austro-Hungarian Compromise of 1867, these ideas ceased to be solely the theories of a Hungarian thinker and became a political reality (Екмечић, 1989, 2, pp. 153–155). In discussing Eötvös and his views, Ekmečić draws upon his writings and the works of Thierry, Guizot, and Gobineau.

According to Ekmečić’s research, Eötvös’s ideas had a significant influence on South Slavic intellectuals, particularly in Croatia, and to some extent in Serbia. As adopted, three different versions of his ideas were advanced:



1. An identical theory, which distinguishes between political and genetic nations, as integrated in the ideology and program of the Croatian Party of Right;
2. A theory of nation as a community of language speakers that aspired to unite South Slavs under Croatian leadership;
3. A theory of nation as a community of language speakers that aspired to gather South Slavs under Serbian leadership.

The first theory was championed by the Croatian politician Ante Starčević. Ekmečić contends that in his works, such as *Ime Srb* (1852), *Bi-li k Slavstvu ili ka Hrvatstvu* (1867), and *Pasmina Slavoserbska po Hervatskoj* (1876), Starčević posits that a nation is a racial mixture and considers the Croats a superior, ruling race, and the Slavs (or Serbs) as racially inferior, due to their background as slaves in the Roman Empire. He embraced Gobineau's racist hypothesis that the name Serbian, or Serb, is not a national concept but a social one, derived from the Latin words *servus* or *sclavus*, meaning slave. He claimed that the Croats were not Slavs, but that they had descended from the Goths. Starčević even regarded Bosnia and Herzegovina's Muslims as the purest Croats because their blood was least mixed with other groups. The supporters of his Party of Right denied the very existence of the Serbian nation, whether "political" or "genetic," derisively interpreting the term "Slavo-Serbs" as "double slaves." They viewed the nation as a statehood community, so the entire population of Croatia and Slavonia was proclaimed Croatian, irrespective of their origin or ethnicity. Ekmečić notes that after the term "political people" was formalized by the Hungarian-Croatian Settlement of 1868, the theory of political people in Croatia and Slavonia became ingrained in the politics of the entire region and gradually permeated the vocabulary of all politicians, regardless of their affiliations.<sup>6</sup>

According to Ekmečić, proponents of the second version of the theory comprised a wide group of writers from the Danube Monarchy who advocated for a common Yugoslav literary language. They were mostly Croats, ideologically aligned with the People's Party. While recognizing their support for the Yugoslav idea, Ekmečić sees a weakness in their disagreement over the name of the bridge language of the South Slavs. Some advocated calling it Yugoslav, regarding it as a compromise solution, while others proposed that both Croatian and Serbian be used as its names, which would progressively render the issue irrelevant. According to Ekmečić, this theory dominated the Croatian cultural landscape until 1878, after which it gradually lost prominence (Екмечић, 1989, 2, pp. 159–160).

Ekmečić identifies the third group as Serbian liberal intellectuals, who believed that a nation is a community defined by language and origin and sharing

<sup>6</sup> In writing about Starčević and his political and ideological influences, Ekmečić refers to Starčević's writings (1894, p. 40), authors like Ivo Banac (1988, p. 89), Mirjana Gross (1972), and Vasilije Krestić (Крестић, 1969, p. 314), and also his own response to the criticism of *Istorija Jugoslavije* [*The History of Yugoslavia*], which he co-authored (Ekmečić, 1974b).



a common past and present, as well as mutual feelings and interests. The prominent proponents of this theory included Mihailo Polit-Desančić, contributors to the Belgrade newspaper *Vidovdan*, and Vladimir Jovanović. They advocated unifying with the Croats into a single state, firmly maintaining that Serbian was their shared language. They quoted Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, who argued that people who share a language also share a name, suggesting that all inhabitants of the Shtokavian area were members of the Serbian people, regardless of their religious affiliation (Караџић, 1896, p. 467).

Regarding the Slovenes, Ekmečić contends that they were significantly less influenced by Eötvös because their ties with Hungarian politics and culture were not very strong. Unlike the Serbian and Croatian regions, the primary issue concerning Slovenia was the relationship between religious identity and national identity, as well as secular considerations. The nation was considered a community defined by religion, ancestry, customs, territory, state, and economy. According to Ekmečić, the Slovenian understanding of nation did not favor the idea of Yugoslav unification. It aligned with the Slovenian national reality in the 1860s, when the Roman Catholic Church sought common ground with the nationalists (Екмеџић, 1989, 2, pp. 161–162).

The period between the end of Bach's absolutism and the Great Eastern Crisis (1860–1875) saw a gradual rise of national consciousness among the South Slavs through social institutions. In the second volume of *Стварање Југославије* [*The Creation of Yugoslavia*], Ekmečić discusses the activities of organizations such as singing societies, population registers, theaters, churches, reading rooms, libraries, printers, newspapers, and magazines. These efforts aimed to foster a sense of national identity and accelerate the transition from an elite form of nationalism to a mass-based one. However, according to Ekmečić, this transition to mass-based nationalism was still on the horizon in 1875, as the masses had not fully developed a sense of self-awareness (Екмеџић, 1989, 2, p. 173).

Following the Berlin Congress, there was a shift in the South Slavs' understanding of the concept of nation. Ekmečić contends that after 1878, older Balkan national movements, including the Serbian, Croatian, and Bulgarian, sought to expand the definition of nation beyond just language. In contrast, intellectuals in the younger Balkan national movements, such as the Albanian and Macedonian, continued to emphasize language as the defining feature of a nation. This distinction became particularly evident in the linguistic conflict between Macedonian and Bulgarian scholars. Citing the Italian jurist Pasquale Mancini, Ekmečić argues that, during this period, the prevailing idea in Western Europe was that a nation is defined by a combination of factors, including territory, race, language, customs, history, law, and social consciousness. This perspective, which had a growing impact on the national movements in the Balkans, highlighted the role of race in defining a nation. Ekmečić identifies Ernest Renan as a key figure in shaping this viewpoint, which was embraced by

some theorists and ideologues in the Yugoslav context, such as Jovan Bošković, Milutin Garašanin, Ante Starčević, and Jaša Tomić. He notes that there was still uncertainty regarding the precise meaning of the term "race" before the "discovery of the Dinaric race" around 1900 (Екмечић, 1989, 2, pp. 339–342).

In the second volume of *Стиварање Јујославије*, Ekmečić highlights the period between the Berlin Congress and the May Uprising as a time when national consciousness among Serbs and Croats was notably strengthened. This is evident from the fact that approximately 200 newspapers were published in Serbian and Croatian in 1894 (112 in Cyrillic, 84 in Latin, and 4 in both scripts). The period was also marked by the growing importance of coats of arms and flags, the emergence of large-scale political street protests, the proliferation of cultural, falconry, singing, firefighting, and sports societies, the establishment of major national magazines and publishing companies, and the rise of the Yugoslav intelligentsia. The Serbo-Croatian language was standardized according to Vuk Stefanović Karadžić's phonological principles. In 1889, the Croatian government tasked Ivan Broz with creating a new formal spelling system based on Stefanović Karadžić's rules, which took three years to complete. In 1899, *Gramatika i stilistika hrvatskoga ili srpskoga književnog jezika* [*The Grammar and Stylistics of the Croatian or Serbian Language*] was published, followed two years later by *Rječnik hrvatskoga jezika 1–2* [*The Dictionary of the Croatian Language*], compiled by Ivan Broz and Franjo Iveković. According to Ekmečić, standardization of the language was one of the greatest achievements of the period between 1878 and 1903. He notes that Stefanović Karadžić's principles were also employed in translating the Holy Bible, with certain adaptations to accommodate Roman Catholic pronunciation. Approximately 85,000 copies of this version of the Bible were printed between 1864 and 1899. However, Ekmečić points out that the Roman Catholic Church did not approve of the publication and attempted to suppress it. It only recognized translations of Catholic theology by Valentin Čebušnik, and refrained from recommending the whole Bible to its followers. Furthermore, supporters of Ante Starčević and the Party of Right opposed the common language of the Serbs and Croats, as evidenced by the works of Petar Kuzmić (1983) and Josip Marić (1911).

Ekmečić (Екмечић, 1989, 2, pp. 355–356) writes about Masonic lodges that existed before his time and had a significant impact on certain historical events, noting that their activities helped to raise national consciousness among the Serbs and Croats.<sup>7</sup> In both cases, the Freemasons were led by important figures. For instance, Mićo Ljubibratić played a prominent role in the Belgrade lodge "Svetlost Balkana" ["Light of the Balkan"]. However, it is important to note

<sup>7</sup> Ekmečić quotes Zoran Nenezić's *Masoni u Jugoslaviji (1764–1980)* [*Masons in Yugoslavia (1764–1980)*] (1984, p. 136) as the only source he used in writing about Freemasonry as an organization that helped to raise national consciousness.

that the Roman Catholic Church strongly opposed Masonic lodges and often regarded them with suspicion.

Ekmečić believes that petitions, letters, and agitation of one national government (movement, association, etc.) against another can be seen as tools for raising national consciousness. This was especially common in Macedonia, where Serbs, Bulgarians, and Greeks engaged not only in various forms of propaganda but also in secret armed activities to assert their historical and ethnic entitlement to the land. The situation was similar in Bosnia and Herzegovina, where the Serbian national movement opposed the Austro-Hungarian occupation government, which sought to denationalize the Serbs and create a distinct Bosnian nation (Екмечић, 1989, 2, pp. 356–359).

The presented information leads to the conclusion Ekmečić believed that the phase of elite nationalism in Southeast Europe lasted until the early 20th century. As theories of nation evolved, so did the Yugoslav intellectuals' understanding of the concept of nation. The transition from elite-type nationalism to mass-type nationalism required universal suffrage and widespread popular involvement in politics.

Writing about the evolution of the concept of nation, Ekmečić emphasizes that no new definition emerged between 1903 and 1914. He points out that Serbian radicals claimed the Serbs and Croats were one people with two faces. He cites a definition from Italian nationalists dating back to 1911, who viewed the nation as the highest form of human solidarity—an organized people living on a specific territory. He also references a definition provided by Russian Marxists in 1913, which describes a nation as a historically developed, stable community of peoples formed based on shared language, territory, economic life, and psychological traits that manifest in a common culture. He concludes that, aside from differences in their views on economic organization, there is no major difference between the two definitions; both express a striking similarity in idealizing the nation as the fundamental unit of future society (Екмечић, 1989, 2, p. 498). Importantly, he interprets both definitions as allowing for the possibility of small regional groups relatively easily rising to the status of nations. This happened in Yugoslavia after 1918, when divisions between different national movements prevented their unification, leading each nation to repeatedly experience panic over the fear of being besieged and absorbed by neighboring nations (Екмечић, 1989, 2, pp. 498–499).

European authoritarian nationalism also had an influence on the Yugoslav region. Ekmečić writes that, influenced by Italian nationalism and French social Catholicism, some intellectuals developed an awareness that national matters leave no room for compromise: only the right of the stronger prevails, violence is a legitimate means to achieve national interests, and excessive reliance on parliamentarism and democracy should be avoided. A circle of Bosnian-Herzegovinian Muslims formed who believed they could only be saved by embracing pan-Islamic

ideas; similarly, Starčević's followers adopted the theory of the supposed Gothic origin of the Croats (Екмечић, 1989, 2, p. 500).

Ekmečić reiterates the hypothesis that a key feature of early 20th-century definitions and ideas of the nation was the attempt to prove that one's race and people belonged to a special racial type. In this context, he discusses the classification of human races by the French anthropologist Joseph Deniker and his "discovery" of the Dinaric race, which was seen as a new factor that could unite the Yugoslav peoples. Based on his studies of Deniker's writings, Ekmečić describes his theory as one that united a large segment of the population of Southeast Europe along racial principles, with the Serbian language as a basis. He also discusses the racial research of other anthropologists (F. J. Gall, A. Weisbach, L. Hirschfeld), the differing opinions of Croatian anthropologist Niko Županić, who believed that Serbs and Croats were racially distinct, and the "mothers of Yugoslav science" (Ljubomir Stojanović, Vatroslav Jagić, Jovan Radonić), who argued the opposite (Екмечић, 1989, 2, pp. 503–506). He follows this with an account of the "search" for the superman (German: *Übermensch*), which only a few decades later found expression in eugenics. Ekmečić notes that, although the racist theories of Gobineau and Chamberlain were ultimately rejected, they still influenced some Serbian intellectuals. He cites an article by Dr. Lazar Marković (Марковић, 1913, p. 175) titled "О сексуалном питању" ["On the Matter of Sex"], in which Marković called for Matica Srpska to initiate efforts to improve the quality of the Serbian race, modeled on the activities of the German Society for Racial Hygiene. This would have included matchmaking, ostracizing individuals with various defects and men over 50 years of age, and prohibiting them from marrying (Екмечић, 1989, 2, pp. 507–508). Ekmečić emphasizes that serious scientists, notably Jovan Cvijić, warned about the potential abuse of racial research. Although Cvijić shared his generation's admiration for Deniker's view of the Dinaric race as superior, as a distinguished anthropogeographer, he held a different perspective. In this context, Ekmečić (Екмечић, 1989, 2, p. 509) quotes Cvijić's verdict on the Dinaric type as an unstable hero, who tends to get carried away without reason, create a commotion, make noise, and undertake great deeds, only to later make irrational turns, and move with faith in a state of irrational ecstasy.<sup>8</sup>

Ekmečić explores the foundations of the national identity of Muslims of Slavic origin and the Serbian language in several of his texts. He provides a wealth of details in his text titled "Улога ислама у социјалном и политичком развоју Балкана" ["The Role of Islam in the Social and Political Development of the Balkans"], published in the book *Срди на историјском раскрсју* [*Serbs at a Historical Crossroads*]. Delving into these issues, he discovered that, according

<sup>8</sup> Ekmečić based his views on Cvijić's teachings from the following works: Цвијић, 1966, pp. 351–352; Цвијић, 1927.

to official censuses, Muslims changed their ethnicity nine times between 1868 to 1995: initially Turkish until 1868, they next became Ottoman; they identified as Bosnian under Kalay, as unspecified from 1902 to 1918, as Yugoslav during the interwar period, temporarily as Croatian during the NDH (“Croatian flowers”), as unspecified again—though some intellectuals partially identified as Serbian or Croatian, as Muslims with a capital “M” from 1971 to 1993, finally adopting the ethnic term Bosniak, which they have retained to this day (Екмечић, 1999, pp. 329–330). He credits Marxist dogmas and Yugoslav communists with the origin of theories that emerged following the 1974 Constitution, which posited Bosnia and Herzegovina as a distinct area between Serbia and Croatia. Additionally, these theories suggested that Bosnia and Herzegovina was the homeland of Bosnian Serbs and Croats, rather than Serbia and Croatia, respectively. Commenting on these ideas, Екмечић remarks that it was as if like-minded individuals had been summoned to a closed meeting and, with a single stroke of a pen, nullified the principle of self-determination that had underpinned people’s struggle for liberation for the previous two centuries. For Serbian intellectuals, this revived the national ideology of “blood and soil” that had been dominant during the 1941–1945 war. The repeal of Article 5 of the 1974 Constitution of the SFRY, which allowed the population of parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina to change domicile and be officially recognized as citizen of one of the neighboring republics, provided the final constitutional touch to the creation of a new state (Екмечић, 1999, pp. 331–332). Екмечић clearly holds the Yugoslav communists responsible for creating a climate in which Bosnia and Herzegovina was increasingly viewed as a breeding ground for a new Muslim nation. Over time, the demographic growth of Bosnian Muslims and the quiet emigration of the Serbs (and Croats) from the region would make it the most numerous and dominant ethnic group.

Екмечић provides an in-depth analysis of the genesis of the concept of nation and its various interpretations in the article “Национални идентитет, синтетичке нације и будућност демократије” [“National Identity, Synthetic Nations, and the Future of Democracy”]. An extended version of this article was published in the collection *Дијалої йрошлосїи и садашњосїи* [*Dialogue Between the Past and the Present*].<sup>9</sup> In the article, he examines 20th-century theories of nation in an attempt to address the fundamental question: is a nation an organic phenomenon with a unique history of formation, or is it a construct?

Екмечић cites the eminent French historian Fernand Braudel to illustrate the perspective that a nation is a natural community, emerging from the long historical development of a social group in a specific area, with individuals sharing the same ethnic origin, language, customs, and laws. He brings into

<sup>9</sup> An abridged version of the manuscript was published under the same title in the *Књижевност* (*Literature*) journal in 2000 (Екмечић, 2000, pp. 523–530). A year later, this work was translated into German and published in Munich.

focus Braudel's *The Identity of France*, where this prominent representative of the second wave of the Annales School argues that the French nation emerged from all the historical events that have occurred on the territory of present-day France, from prehistory to the present. To demonstrate his agreement, Ekmečić (2002, p. 27) cites Braudel arguing against theorists who view the French nation as a product of the 18th-century Enlightenment:

"As if prehistory and history were not one and the same process, as if our villages were not already taking root in our soil in the third millennium before Christ, as if Gaul had not already traced the outline within which France would grow up, as if the expansion beyond the Rhine in the fifth century by the Germanic tribes—small groups of men but well able to keep themselves aloof from Gaul and its magic and who therefore preserved their own language—did not constitute, across hundreds and hundreds of years, a living feature of the present-day world! As if, what is more, the retrospective analysis of blood groups had not revealed in our own blood and our own lives, indelible traces of those far-off 'barbarian invasions', as if our beliefs and our languages did not equally come down to us from the dark ages of the most distant past." (Braudel, 1989, pp. 19–20)

Braudel's famous laconic answer to the question of what France is—that it is a difference (Екмечић, 2002, p. 29)—stems from this approach to understanding historical trends.

Following this line of thinking, Ekmečić draws a parallel with Yugoslavia, arguing that the lands inhabited by Yugoslav peoples are also a region of (unreconciled) differences. He points out that scientists have failed to accurately and precisely reconstruct the existing (historical) nations in the Balkans. According to him, only the nations created synthetically in the modern era are unequivocal, but even in these cases, the influence of mythology has obstructed the search for truth, turning it into an ugly political necessity rather than a scientific endeavor (Екмечић, 2002, p. 36).

According to Ekmečić, the philosophy of viewing nations as artificial and transitory phenomena was most succinctly expressed by British Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli, who described a nation as a work of art and time. Ekmečić argues that, before Disraeli, French rationalists such as Charles Montesquieu and Jean-Jacques Rousseau advanced a similar theory. Ekmečić sees the process of globalization and the advent of new technologies and means of communication as creating a favorable climate for popularizing and reformulating theories of nation as a construct. He cites Karl Deutsch and Ernst Gellner as the most fervent 20th-century supporters of this view. Referring to Deutsch's works *Nationalism and Social Communication* (1953) and *Study on the Construction of a Nation* (1963), he asserts that this distinguished political scientist considered nations to be mere coincidences, products of four historical conditions: a starting point,



events, intentions in specific situations, and deliberate interventions (Екмечић, 2002, p. 20).

Ekmečić believes that theories like Deutsch's flourished during the decolonization era, which coincided chronologically with the maturation of the concept of limited sovereignty in the politics of the two world superpowers during the Cold War. According to his interpretation, this atmosphere contributed to the popularization of the idea that nations are not sacred things created by nature and that the appearance of a great figure can be one of its basic historical assumptions (Екмечић, 2002, p. 20). He cites the British-Czechoslovak intellectual Ernest Gellner, who also worked within this line of reasoning and claimed that a nation was an artifact of man's convictions, loyalties, and relations of solidarity (Екмечић, 2002, p. 20).

Ekmečić considers it impossible to reconstruct exactly how the theory of nation as a construct, one that can be created and dismantled, emerged, but he is convinced that its inflation is related to the rejection of the idea that language is the essential characteristic of a nation. Although he acknowledges that some of these theories are several centuries old, he claims that before the onset of the Yugoslav crisis, there were no aspirations for them to ultimately prevail and form the basis of a new global order (Ekmečić, 2002, pp. 19, 20). Analyzing his writings, one notices that he was decidedly against such theories and continued to adhere to the view that a nation is a natural community of people who speak the same language. He points out that the concept of "people" and "nation" has existed since ancient times and has always had similar meanings, though not always identical. Ekmečić argues that today a nation is defined as a community of people with the right of sovereignty (Екмечић, 2002, p. 24). That is why in his text he addresses the following two questions to those who view nations as constructs:

- What was artificial about the creation of the nations that have been established so far, and how should this be interpreted?
- If artificial national consciousness has produced barbaric nationalism despite its original intent, what guarantees that the creation of an artificial consciousness tied to European identity through a new European civil society will not again fail to meet its previous humanistic aspirations? (Екмечић, 2002, pp. 22–23).

Based on his research, Ekmečić concludes that the increasingly frequent and aggressive promotion of theories of nation as an artificial community is actually an attempt to, paradoxically, synthesize new regional nations. Considering all the circumstances affecting this scenario, he notes that just as existing nations took centuries to develop an awareness of national identity, there are now attempts to artificially create new institutions, languages, and language standardization mechanism—all at an incredible speed, as if to compress several centuries of history into a few years. He considers this a distinctly undemocratic endeavor,



driven by US and German financial oligarchs seeking to create an improvised European regional system by disintegrating existing nations. He argues that the ideology of ending the nation state has been shaped by a policy aimed at freeing capitalism from constraints that previously hindered its development in the free market (Екмечић, 2002, p. 24).

Ekmečić addresses regionalization as a tool for dividing historical nations in his article “Регионализам између слободе и новог насиља” [“Regionalism Between Freedom and New Violence”], published in the journal *Дијалої прошлости и садашњости*. He discusses the topic thoroughly, providing ample examples from the European context. He suggests that this is not about ideology but rather about “pouring old wine into new wineskins,” i.e., recycling Christian socialist ideas or the ideas of Central European Christian socialist parties between the world wars. He insists that Germany’s ambition to control all the vital points on the European continent is driving the project of European regionalization and the division of historical European nations, with approximately 190 million people split into 283 mini-regions. Ekmečić argues that the federal principle of today’s German state is preparing the future Europe of the regions around Germany, echoing the French historian Jean Paul Bled, who said that the concept of the Reich has been Germany’s leitmotif throughout its history (Екмечић, 2002, p. 501). He thus believes that the efforts to replace the ideology of the nation state with that of regionalism are not a sign of political progress or greater freedom but rather the opposite (Екмечић, 2002, p. 508).

As an ardent promoter of national freedom opposed to the subjugation of regions, Ekmečić expresses his views in the article “Да ли су и мане део карактера нације?” [“Are flaws also a part of a nation’s character?”]. He insists that if a nation is aware of its mentality, virtues, flaws, and historical potential, it can preserve its consciousness as a basis for particularity and self-determination in a rapidly globalizing world. Comparing studies of English, Croatian, and Serbian mentalities, he concludes that flaws are integral to any nation’s character. Without flaws, a nation would remain ignorant about its historical development, much like a wolf falling asleep while believing itself heroic and on a path to the future (Екмечић, 2002, p. 93). He believes that examining the flaws of a particular collective is crucial for history as a science because, in his opinion, without awareness of a society’s flaws, it is impossible to produce conclusions based on measurements and statistical comparisons. Ekmečić holds that a nation’s character can be measured statistically only after it has recognized its flaws (Екмечић, 2002, p. 93). Apparently, he was guided by the well-known ancient Greek motto *γνῶθι σεαυτόν*, (*gnōthi seauton*)—“know thyself.”

Finally, in sketching and assessing the highs and lows of national identity development, Ekmečić views it as a period in human history that was not the result of a premeditated ideological project but rather the inevitable outcome of human progress from feudalism to the free market and democratic institutions

of the modern era. In examining nationality and the constructive principles of modernism, he concludes that if nationalism and historical nations disappeared, our world would also vanish, and a “post-national world” indeed qualify as postmodern (Екмечић, 2002, p. 93).

In an essay written in English in 1983 and published in *The European Heritage: Unity and Singularity*, later translated and reprinted in *Срби на источно-ријском раскрсћу*, Екмечић seeks to answer what was European about the Balkan national movements between 1970 and 1918. He observes that Balkan nationalisms (or national movements) are often perceived with a certain prejudice, as if they had been more toxic than nationalisms elsewhere. Contrary to this view, he argues that some basic formative features of nationalism are fundamentally identical in both the East and the West. While acknowledging their unique development dynamics, social foundations, and objectives, Екмечић contends that it is important to recognize that the fundamental features modern nationalism share are more significant to their existence than any peripheral differences. Nationalism must be understood as an integrative process leading to a fundamental social transformation of a nation. It is a process of social change toward a democratic society based on the principle of popular sovereignty. Whenever and wherever a process like this emerges, it should be seen as a sign of that society’s readiness to advance to a higher level of political organization (Екмечић, 1999, pp. 227–228).

Екмечић explores the dichotomy between the pen and the sword as a foundation for the history of European political ideology and Balkan national movements, examining the roles that culture and political violence played in national integration and the standardization of national languages on the Balkan Peninsula. He concludes that the sword was the primary tool of national revival in the Balkans. Observing the liberation of Balkan nations from a contemporary perspective, he rules out the possibility that culture was the decisive factor of integration in the region. Instead, the pen was replaced by the sword, and the language of political violence superseded the language of cultural development, in a process so natural that it resembled the transformation from an old agrarian society to a new urban one (Екмечић, 1999, p. 240).

Екмечић’s analysis of complex historical processes leads him to conclude that state-building in the Balkans essentially bears the mark of political violence. He argues that the state borders dividing the Balkan nations were artificially created through bloody wars and international peace treaties. No state demarcation line aligns with the ethnic history of the region, with the exception of a small stretch of the Danube between Romania and Bulgaria, which serves as a natural border between two ethnic communities (Екмечић, 1999, p. 240).

Екмечић’s findings lead him to posit that every national movement, based on its social dynamics, progresses through three consecutive stages: a) it begins as a quiet, socially harmless cultural movement led by an educated minority;

b) it then evolves into a powerful movement of the middle classes; c) finally, it becomes a broad-based movement of ordinary people, who inevitably become the social bearers of its political goals (Екмечић, 1999, p. 228).

Regarding the three-stage process, Ekmečić identifies a fundamental distinction between elite and mass nationalism. He notes that the division into three stages does not uniformly apply to the history of all national movements. Social development and the emergence of modern urban communities invariably provide the historical context that fosters the birth of national movements (Екмечић, 1999, p. 228).

In the same essay, Ekmečić addresses the question of when nationalism first emerged. He references historians d'Argenson, Johanet, and Milyukov, who argued that nationalism originated in France in the mid-18th century and later spread to other Western European countries. Specifically for Italy, Ekmečić cites the Italian historian Luigi Salvatorelli (1970), who proposed that the revolutionary wars of the late 18th century likely laid the foundation for the Risorgimento.

When did nationalism end? Ekmečić argues that classical nationalism in Western Europe reached its peak by the end of the Second World War, in 1945. During the 19th century, nationalism deeply permeated the spiritual life of entire nations. He recalls Leopold von Ranke's observation that Germans were still at war against Louis XIV of France, despite the fact that the king had been dead for two hundred years. According to Ekmečić, if nationalism did not disappear in 1945, in Western Europe it transformed into movements representing peripheral nations, such as the Basques, Corsicans, or Welsh. For Ekmečić, regional or "patois" national movements do not prove classical nationalism is still in existence. Contrary to many contemporary sociologists, he views this form of nationalism as a sign of historical degeneration. Ekmečić asserts that the culture which once nurtured the national spirit began to decline in Western European countries after 1945, with the traditional notion of nation-based "motherland" giving way to the regional concept of "matria" (Екмечић, 1999, p. 229).

In his essay, Ekmečić maintains his well-founded view that all Balkan nations tend to identify through religion, with Serbs, Croats, Albanians, and Greeks exhibiting this tendency more strongly than Romanians, Macedonians, Bulgarians, or Slovenians. As previously noted, the Serbian and Croatian national movements initially focused on linguistic and political unification, reflecting the idea that a linguistic community equates to an ethnic community. Over time, Ekmečić argues, this type of nationalism evolved into a sectarian, religious form, similar to what occurred in Northern Ireland and Lebanon. His research suggests that, at the turn of the 21st century, the nationalism present in Greece, and to some extent in Austria, resembled that of Eastern European countries, despite their different socio-political systems. This conclusion is supported by the ongoing dispute over Cyprus between Greeks and Turks, and studies

indicating that Austrian nationalism is driven by factors similar to those that fueled 19th-century classical nationalism (Екмечић, 1999, p. 230).

Екмечић attributes the intolerance pervasive in Balkan societies to the religious foundations of their nationalisms. He refers to such nationalisms as “judgment day nationalisms” due to their demand for complete control over their territories, excluding other ethnic groups, which becomes their primary political goal. Екмечић coined this term inspired by Winston Churchill’s assertion that the Irish national question could only be resolved on Doomsday given its religious basis (“Judgment Day Type of Nationalism”). Екмечић’s research indicates that the root cause of some modern religiously motivated national movements is the rural character of these communities, unable to develop a higher-level culture that could serve as an ideological basis for integration (Екмечић, 1999, p. 231).

Apparently, the changing social context at the turn of the millennium has led to the rejection of the classical philosophical idea—closest to Екмечић’s understanding of the concept of nation—that it is a community of language speakers. In “Шта је било европско у балканским националним покретима између 1790. и 1918. године” [“What Was European in the Balkan National Movements Between 1790 and 1918”], he suggests, in contrast to the title of the article, that future research should focus on what was not European in these movements. This primarily implies a re-examination of the role of religion and the politics of the great powers in the development of these nations, particularly considering the evident lack of democratic tradition in their national past (Екмечић, 1999, p. 257).

In conclusion, Екмечић’s works provide an explanation of various theories of nation and nationalism. He tells his readers about the convoluted history of these terms and introduces them to their creators, from 18th-century European rationalists to the modern ideologues of globalism. He presents their ideas, including the hypothesis that a nation is a natural community of language speakers, as well as the view that it is a social construct and that it can be both created and destroyed. Екмечић consistently supported the former hypothesis. He believed that the Shtokavian linguistic area was inhabited by a single nation divided by religion. This led to his well-known assertion that religion was the dividing line between the nations in this region.

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### О Екмечићевом методу изучавања и разумевања појма нације и национализма

#### Резиме

Милорад Екмечић је значајан део своје истраживачке енергије усмеравао ка проучавању појаве, развоја, тежњи и циљева националних препорода Јужних Словена, које је, у складу са западноевропском историографском традицијом, неретко називао национализмима. Нит Екмечићеве тенденције ка објашњавању појединих сегмената споменуте проблематике може се пратити од самих почетака његове академске каријере. Касније је са годинама и нагомиланим искуством само



додатно продубљивао, прилазио јој са разних страна и сагледавао из различитих перспектива. Том приликом није наступао само као проучавалац прошлости, већ и као својеврсни аналитичар идеја и филозоф историје.

Екмечић је путем резултата својих истраживања понудио широк дијапазон најразличитијих објашњења теорија нације и национализ(а)ма. Ходајући кривудама стазама историје ових појмова, прешао је дуг пут од раних европских рационалиста XVIII века до савремених идеолога глобализма. Презентовао је њихове идеје које су се кретале од теза да је нација природна заједница говорника истог језика, до оних које тврде да се ради о друштвеном конструкту који се временом може и створити и разорити. Екмечић је одувек заступао ову прву, „хердеровску тезу“, ценећи да је језик основни идентитетски параметар сваког етничког или националног колективитета. Зато је веровао да на подручју штокавског наречја живи један народ, подељен различитим конфесијама. Из тога је касније произилазила његова чувена мисао о религији као „вододелници нација“ на споменутом простору.

У општем одмеравању свих позитивних и негативних достигнућа процеса изградње националних идентитета, Екмечић је био становишта да је то један од дестилата људске прошлости који није настао по неком унапред створеном идеолошком пројекту, већ да је реч о природном резултату човековог успона од феудализма ка добу слободног тржишта и демократских установа. Националност, односно националну опредељеност, сматрао је конститутивним принципом модерности и поручивао да би „претапањем“ (и последичним нестанком) историјских нација кроз модел глобалистичког „мелтинг пота“ ишчезао свет какав познајемо, а са њим и историја кроз коју је стваран.

*Кључне речи:* Милорад Екмечић; нација; национализам; историјска методологија; историографија.



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