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Konrad Siekierski

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Konrad Siekierski

Completing the Story

Armenians in Other Countries of Post-Socialist Europe

This chapter provides a brief overview of the modern Armenian presence in five countries: Albania, Lithuania, Macedonia, Serbia, and Slovakia, which is not covered by separate contributions to this volume, but where Armenian diasporic structures exist. It offers basic information on the host states, recapitulates the history of Armenian settlement there, and describes the shape and activities of local Armenian diaspora in the post-socialist period. This chapter is not designed as a complete research paper, but has rather a cursory descriptive character, which often reflects a deficiency of existing sources.

The countries discussed here show some general similarities in their demographic and socio-political characteristics. For instance, except for Albania, they all (re)appeared on maps as separate states as a result of the dissolution of communist regimes in East-Central Europe: Lithuania was previously a part of the USSR, Slovakia part of Czechoslovakia, while Serbia and Macedonia were parts of Yugoslavia.¹ Lithuania and Slovakia joined the European Union in 2004, while Albania, Macedonia and Serbia are candidates for membership. In terms of their territory and population, the five countries are of small to middle size. Regarding Albania, the figures are: 28,748 sq. km and 2,800,000 people (Population 2012: 71); Lithuania: 65,300 sq. km and 3,043,000 people (Results 2011: 155); Macedonia: 25,713 sq. km and 2,023,000 people (Statistical 2014: 67); Serbia: 88,361 sq. km (or 77,453 sq. km without the partially recognised, de facto independent, Republic of Kosovo) and 7,187,000 people (Ethnicity 2012: 14); and Slovakia: 49,035 sq. km and 5,397,000 people (Population by Nationality n. d.). Since the fall of the communist regimes, these countries have experienced a decline, or at best stagnation, in terms of population size, a trend caused mainly by mass labour emigration. This decline has reached the highest rate in Lithuania, where the population diminished in the period 1989–2011 by one fifth, followed by Albania, the population of which shrank in the same period by more than one tenth. The countries considered here have a significant share of ethnic/national minorities, which in Lithuania account for 16% (Results 2011:155), in Serbia for 17% (Ethnicity 2012: 15),² in Slovakia for almost 20% (Population n. d.), and in Macedonia for 35% of the total number of inhabitants

1 However, their road to freedom differed significantly: from the 'velvet divorce' of the Czech and Slovak Republics, through mass demonstrations and Soviet troops intervention in Lithuania, to war in former Yugoslavia.

2 This data excludes the population of Kosovo.

(Statistical 2014: 67). Only Albania, at least in official statistics³, is an ethnically homogenous country, with 2% of the population belonging to minorities (Population 2012: 71). During the last twenty five years all five countries have experienced some tensions between the dominant/titular nations and the most numerous of the minorities. These tensions range from disputes over linguistic rights and certain social marginalisation issues of Poles and Russians in Lithuania, to problems with the Hungarian minority as well as hate speech and attempts at ghettoisation directed towards Roma in Slovakia, to Greek and Macedonian complaints about violations of their rights in Albania, and to armed conflicts of various intensity in Macedonia and Serbia.

The tiny Armenian populations in these countries, while obviously exposed to the general socio-economic hardships their host societies have experienced in the transitional, post-socialist period, and met in some cases with unwelcoming immigration regulations, in general have not faced discriminatory policies aimed directly against them. Many recent Armenian migrants, who tried to make their living there, did not stay long due to the aforementioned difficulties (some of those who lived there under communism also left after the change of regime). Most of those who stayed, however, are well integrated into their host societies. The last 25 years have also seen Armenian diasporic structures (re)established in all five countries, reaching various levels of internal consolidation and public recognition.

Armenians in Albania

In Albania, the modern history of the Armenian settlement started in the second to third decades of the 20th century (Albania 2003; Baxčinean 2010: 604; Vickers, Pettifer 1997: 206). It has been suggested, however, that the medieval Saint Nicholas church in the village of Armen (in the vicinity of Vlorë) was built according to the canons of Armenian architecture, which points to much earlier Armenian-Albanian contacts (Dita n.d). Two soldiers, Hayk Baljyan and Levon Bodikyan, who deserted from the Turkish army during the Balkan Wars (1912–1913), are usually the first Armenian settlers in Albania to have been mentioned by name (Albania 2003). In the 1920s the Albanian government declared its willingness to invite some twenty families of Armenian refugees from the Ottoman Empire. In the next decade there were around 120 Armenians in the country, including six families in Tiranë (Tirana), five in Vlorë, five in Durrës, two in Shkodër, and individuals or single families in Korçë, Gjirokastër, and Lushnjë (Baxčinean 2010: 605–606). In that period, no Armenian community organisation, church, or school operated in Albania, however a number of individuals did manage to achieve considerable professional success and high positions in society (Baxčinean 2010: 606).

3 The provisions and results of Albania's last population census were highly contested by ethnic minorities in the country (Krasniqi 2012), and as much as 14% of Albania's population did not declare their "ethnic and cultural affiliation" in the census (Population 2012: 71).

Armenians were particularly renowned as physicians and dentists: in the 1940s five out of fifteen of Albania's dentists were Armenians (Albania 2003) and King Zog's personal doctor was Mokin Poturljan (Vickers, Pettifer 1997: 206). Local Armenians participated in the wider diasporic network, in particular by studying in Armenian educational centres in Venice, Vienna, and Greek cities (Baxčinean 2010: 606; Dita n. d.). Within Albania, they integrated mostly into the Orthodox part of society (Vickers, Pettifer 1997: 206)⁴.

Armenians are said to have supported local communist partisans during the Second World War, and later some of them were close to the new regime, including Manvel Asdurian who served as a personal dentist to the country's dictator Enver Hoxha. Supposedly, it eased the Armenians' situation when forced Albanisation was implemented: for example they were allowed to keep their surnames unchanged. However it did not save them from a ban on community organisation and confiscation of Armenian literature by secret police (Baxčinean 2010: 607; Vickers, Pettifer 1997: 206). From 1968 onwards, as a result of Hoxha's isolationist politics, Albanian Armenians lost all possibilities to maintain ties with Soviet Armenia and Armenians in other countries.

The situation changed in the early 1990s with the fall of the communist regime. In 1990 a liturgy dedicated to the memory of the Armenian Genocide victims was officiated in the Catholic church in Tirana, and in 1991 the Armenian Cultural Association was created in the capital by Emil Asdurian (Albania 2003). Later, in 1997, the Armenian Association of Albania was registered. In the early 1990s, links were reestablished with the Armenian community in Thessaloniki (Greece), from where the first Armenian educational materials were sent to Albania. In 1993 the community was visited by the archbishop Gyut Naggashian, the head of the Armenian Apostolic Church's Diocese of Paris, which was the first event of this kind in the history of Armenian settlement to the country (Baxčinean 2010: 609).

Armenians in Albania enjoy neither the status of a national minority nor of a linguistic minority – two categories created by Albanian legislation. According to various estimates, at the turn of the century there were 400–800 Armenians in the country, mostly the descendants of early 20th century immigrants (many of mixed origin resulting from a high degree of interethnic marriage), some from the post-Soviet exodus from Armenia (Albania 2003; Baxčinean 2010: 609; Vickers, Pettifer 1997: 206). Most likely this number has diminished significantly in recent years due to a high rate of emigration. Unfortunately, officially published results of Albania's Census of 2011 include no data on Armenians (Population 2012).

Among the most distinguished contemporary Armenians born and/or working in Albania are composer Hajg Zaharian, particularly known for his film scores; doctor, actress, and screenwriter Anisa Markarian who gained recognition with her role in the movie *Vajzat me kordele të kuqe*; doctor Emil Asdurian; and professor of chemistry Xovasar Çakmakxhian (Albania 2003; Dita n. d.; Baxčinean 2010: 609–610; Vickers, Pettifer 1997: 206).

4 Albania is a religiously diverse country, with 56% of the population currently declaring themselves Sunni Muslims, 10% Catholics, 7% Orthodox and 2% Bektashi (Population 2012: 71).

Armenians in Lithuania

In Lithuania, the pre-modern Armenian settlement shall be perceived as a part of the history of Armenian colonies in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which at the time of its highest territorial expansion in the 15th century spread from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea. In the 18th century, within the borders of the Commonwealth, Armenian colonies were located in 22 towns and counted around 6,000 people in total (Zaharkevič 2013: 21). Armenians were a well-established minority granted with special legal status and played an important role in the country's trade, crafts, manufacturing, and state administration (particularly as advisors and translators). Although the historical Armenian presence in the territory of modern Lithuania (northern part of the Duchy) never reached the scale and importance of the Armenian colonies in such towns as Lviv or Kamyanets-Podilskyi (located in the territory of modern Ukraine), the Armenian settlement in Vilnius, the capital of Lithuania, was acknowledged in written sources as early as the 16th century, and may stretch back even further. The Armenian population in Vilnius and surrounding territories is also documented in 19th century Russian censuses (Tichomirow this volume). In the same century important figures of Armenian descent lived and worked in Vilnius, including publisher and archaeologist Jan Honory Krikor, and painter and University of Vilna professor Jan Rustem.⁵

A new wave of Armenian migration to Lithuania (at the time the Lithuanian Soviet Socialist Republic) started after the Second World War, reaching its peak in the late 1980s/early 1990s. The USSR population census of 1959 registered 471 Armenians in the Republic; in 1970 this number was 508; in 1979 it increased to 955; and the 1989 census gives a number of 1,655 (Ambrozaitienė et al. 2013: 155). Similarly to other Baltic states, in Lithuania Armenians functioned in Soviet times as a part of the Russian-speaking minority and had limited contact with the respective titular nations; a situation which has gradually been changing in recent years (Davidjants this volume, Tadevosyan & Poghosyan this volume).

In the early 1990s a new wave of Armenians escaping from the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and disastrous economic situation in their homeland reached Lithuania. Nonetheless official statistics of independent Lithuania show a gradual decrease of the Armenian population, a trend that corresponds with the general demographic crisis in the country. According to the data of the 2001 and 2011 Population Censuses, 1,477 and 1,233 Armenians, respectively, were living in Lithuania (Ambrozaitienė et al. 2013: 155). Other sources agree that in the first decade of the 21st century there were around 1,400–2,500 Armenians (Žamakočyan et al. 2010: 129, 236); the latter number also includes people who for various reasons did not disclose their Armenian origins during the census, particularly those of mixed ethnicity.⁶ Nevertheless, Lithuania is quite a unique case among the countries

5 In various sources Rustem is also referred to as being of Greek or Turkish origin.

6 It is estimated that the number of mixed Armenian – Lithuanian/Russian marriages reaches 50% or even exceeds it (based on the author's personal communication with an activist of the Lithuanian Armenian diaspora, 2014).

covered in this volume, as the discrepancies between official statistics and other estimates, including those by local Armenian organisations, are significantly lower than anywhere else.

Thanks to meticulous analysis prepared by Statistics Lithuania, we have a detailed picture of the Armenian, Armenia-born, and Armenian-by-citizenship population of Lithuania. The table below summarises the findings of the 2011 population census.

Table 1: Armenian population in Lithuania (Ambrozaitienė et al. 2013: 111–114, 121–124, 157–159).

Data of 2011 population census	Armenians in Lithuania	Armenia-born people in Lithuania	Citizens of Armenia in Lithuania
Total	1233	661	241
Male	747	428	137
Female	486	233	104
Under 20-years-old	236	53	39
20–39-years-old	286	175	68
40–59-years-old	499	320	107
Older than 59	212	113	27
Urban population	1070	553	194
Rural population	163	108	47

The most numerous clusters of the Armenian population in Lithuania are located in the cities of Vilnius (435 people in 2011), Klaipėda (166), Kaunas (110) and Visaginas (67) (Ambrozaitienė et al. 2013: 160–163). 575 participants of the 2011 census declared Armenian as their mother tongue (Ambrozaitienė et al. 2013: 164).

As for the issue of legal status, in 1991 the right to receive Lithuanian citizenship was granted to all residents of the country, and currently 99% of them enjoy this status (Ambrozaitienė et al. 2013: 120). Some Armenians, who came later to Lithuania, have lived there for years obtaining only work permits or temporary residency, before they were able to receive permanent legal status (Zenian 2001).

Regarding minority rights in Lithuania, the basic feature of the country's policy is that

No legal or official difference between national minorities and other minorities is made [...]. Lithuania was the first country in central and eastern Europe to pass a Law on National Minorities (1989). The law secures the right of minorities to receive support for activities for participation in cultural life, access to information and the establishment of cultural organisations (Laaksonen 2010: 99).

In 1995 the Council of National Communities was created in Lithuania. It serves as advisory board to the governmental Department of National Minorities and Lithuanians Living

Abroad, which, among other functions, distributes state funds to minorities through the allocation of project-based grants. Besides, the Council publishes the journal *Tautinių bendrijų naujienos*, which covers various activities of Lithuania's minorities. The Armenian diaspora takes part in the Council's work and since 2000 its Chairman and Vice-chairman has been Ruslan Arutiunian (Harutyunyan).

There are a number of Armenian organisations registered in Lithuania: the Armenian Community in Lithuania – Garun (Garun Lietuvos Armėnų Bendrija) established in 1988, the Armenian Union in Lithuania (Lietuvos Armėnų Sąjunga) established in 1994, the Vilnius Region Armenian Community (Vilniaus Apskritis Armėnų Bendruomenė), the Kaunas Armenian Community (Kauno Armėnų Bendrija) established in 1994, the Kaunas Region Armenian Community (Kauno Apskritis Armėnų Bendrija), the Klaipėda Armenian Community – Van (Klaipėdos Armėnų Bendruomenė Van), the Visaginas Armenian Community (Visagino Armėnų Bendrija) established in 2002, and the Šiaulių Region Armenian Community (Šiaulių Apskritis Armėnų Bendruomenė) established in 2001 (Armānie 2011; Kauno n. d.; Žamakočyan et al. 2010: 130–131; Rekvizitai n. d.). Armenian Sunday schools operate or used to operate in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, and Visaginas (Žamakočyan et al. 2010: 132; personal contact with Armenian diaspora activist, 2014). In Kaunas, at the initiative of school members, the Kaunas Armenian Ensemble – Hayrenik (Kauno Armėnų Ansamblis Hayrenik) was created in 1999, which since then has participated in many local and international folk festivals (Kauno n. d.). In 2009 the Congress of Baltic Armenians was established, with Ara Tunyan, a leader of the Armenian Union in Lithuania, as its President.

Legal regulations regarding religious denominations implemented in Lithuania differ from those for ethnic/national minorities. Lithuania has a four-tier system of recognition, based on the Law on Religious Communities and Associations, adopted in 1995. In this system, the highest status is reserved for 'traditional' religious communities, followed by those which are 'state-recognised', 'state-registered' and 'state-unregistered', with two first groups granted with a range of privileges and exemptions (Corley 2001). The Armenian Apostolic Church belongs to the third group. It has two parishes registered – in Vilnius (since 1994) and Kaunas. In the 2011 census, 138 individuals in Lithuania indicated their affiliation to the Armenian Apostolic Church (in 2001 only 30 people chose this option) (Ambrozaitienė et al. 2013: 167). Since 2006 the church has been open in Vilnius in the adapted 18th century former cemetery chapel, transferred to the Armenian community in 2001 and renovated with private funds in 2005–2006. The church is occasionally served by the Armenian Apostolic priest from Riga, Latvia. In the vicinity, a space for community gatherings and leisure has been created (Suren 2011).

In recent years two khachkars (cross-stones) were erected in Lithuania: one in 2001 on the Hill of Crosses, the country's famous pilgrimage place; another – in 2004 in Kaunas. Next to the former, each year on the last Sunday of May a pan-Baltic Armenian gathering takes place on the occasion of the Independence Day of the First Armenian Republic (28 May).

The Armenian diaspora in Lithuania is also active in addressing pan-Armenian issues, such as the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict (for example, in 2012 protests were organised

against the Azerbaijani officer Ramil Safarov's release from a Hungarian prison) and the Armenian Genocide (its official recognition at state level took place in Lithuania in 2005).

Among Armenians living today in Lithuania there are a number of artists, scientists and sportsmen. *Hay Spyurk Hannagitaran (The Encyclopedia of the Armenian Diaspora)* lists Armen Babayan, Mikayel Saghoyan, Rafik Baghdasaryan, Ara Tunyan, Aghasi Hayrapetyan, and Maksim Grigoryan, among others (Harowt'yownyan, Harowt'yownyan 2003: 330). From the young generation, Marat Sargsyan is a recognised film director and former TV host. From the world of sport, a renowned figure in motor sports was Sergey Simoyan (died in 1997), and in weightlifting the achievements of Suren and Eduard Mkrtumyan are worth mentioning (Harowt'yownyan, Harowt'yownyan 2003: 330).

Armenians in Macedonia

According to information provided by the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, "The first Armenians in Macedonia were the Balabanov (Balabanyan) brothers from Van who settled in Štip in the 17th century" (Makedoniayi 2013). Members of this family became important figures, including Manyoil Balabayan – Štip's mayor, Aleksandar Balabanov – philologist and literary critic, Kosta Balabanov – historian, screenwriter, and honorary consul of Japan in Macedonia, and Ĵasminka Balabanova Namičeva – architect and Armenian community activist. Another renowned Macedonian Armenian family are the Tavitjans – popular contemporary musicians. Garabet Tavitjan has gained fame as a drummer of the 'Leb i Sol' rock band, and his sons Diran (piano) and Garo (drums) are among the country's most acclaimed jazz players. A considerable number of Armenians are also recognised in Macedonia as highly qualified doctors (Asatryan 2009; Ermenci n. d.).

In the 19th century, Armenians educated in Vienna, Venice, and other academic centres belonged to the emerging local intelligentsia. In the early 20th century Armenian refugees from the Ottoman Empire reached the territory of today's Macedonia (since 1918 part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, later Yugoslavia). As a result, only in Skopje their number was 438 in 1929 and 443 in 1935, while others settled in Tetovo, Štip, Prilep, Kočani and elsewhere (Ermenci n. d.).

Nowadays the estimated number of Armenians in Macedonia is 60 families or 300 individuals, mostly concentrated in Skopje, with a few families residing in Prilep (Makedoniayi 2013)⁷. They are neither recognised as one of the country's national or linguistic minorities⁸, nor separately mentioned in the results of Population Censuses held in

7 In addition to written sources, the information provided in this section is based on the author's personal communication with a Macedonian Armenian diaspora activist, 2014.

8 The Macedonian Constitution speaks about "the Macedonian people, as well as citizens living within its borders who are part of the Albanian people, the Turkish people, the Vlach people, the Serbian people, the Roma people, the Bosniak people and others" (Constitution n. d.: 10).

1953–2002, despite the fact that even such tiny populations as Ruthenians (24 people in 2002) or Austrians (35 people in 2002) are presented by the State Statistical Office with their own records (Statistical 2014: 67).

There are two Armenian organisations in the country: the Armenian-Macedonian Friendship Club (Društvo na makedonsko-ermensko prijateljstvo i sorabotka), created in 2004 and headed since then by Jan Vrteski and Armine Piloyan Vrteska, and the Armenian Union in the Republic of Macedonia (Ermenska zaednica vo Republika Makedonija), established in 2006 and led by Jasminka Balabanova Namičeva. In 2010, at the initiative of the former organisation, an Armenian Saturday school was opened in Skopje. It existed for two years during which 27 children, youth, and adults learned the basics of the Armenia language. In 2011 ten Macedonian Armenian children (half of them pupils of the Saturday school) participated in the Ministry of Diaspora of RA painting contest *Motherland: This is How I See You*. Furthermore, Internet sources dating from 2008–2009 informed about plans to erect a khachkar (cross-stone) in Skopje, organise an Armenian-Macedonian Business Forum, as well as celebrate with a series of cultural events the 100-year anniversary of writer William Saroyan's birthday (Asatryan 2009, Gradonačalnikot 2008). All these initiatives, announced by the Armenian Union, remained unrealised, however. In general, recent years have witnessed a decline in Macedonian Armenian community activities. One of a few initiatives which still gather together a few dozen Armenians is an annual commemoration of the Armenian Genocide held in Skopje in the church of St. Clement of Ohrid – a central temple of the Macedonian Orthodox Church (Ermenci n. d.).

It is quite telling for Macedonian Armenian diaspora demographics that among children participating in the aforementioned painting contest only one was of Armenian origin, and nine of mixed Armenian-Macedonian origin (among whom seven had an Armenian mother and Macedonian father) (Hayrenik' 2011). In general, except for a few newcomers from Armenia and Syria, the Armenians in Macedonia are the descendants of Genocide refugees or even earlier migrants, most of them are members of mixed Armenian-Macedonian families, and only a small number still know the Armenian language (in its Western version).

Armenians in Serbia

The history of the Armenian settlement in Serbia stretches back to the 13th century. It is usually acknowledged that the first written source confirming this fact is the inscription on the walls of the Vitovnica monastery, dated 1218. The inscription says: "In the name of the Father and Son and the Holy Spirit, me – Blato the son of Babug built this church in the name of the holy father Akop and Saint Apostle Peter for the memory of myself and my parents. The church was blessed in the Armenian year 667". The next Armenian trace in Serbia is a part of the Serbian national myth of the Kosovo battle in 1389. According to local tradition, five thousand Armenian troops refused to fight against Christian Serbs and deserted from the Ottoman army. They found refuge in the mountains near the town

of Sokobanja, where they built a monastery dedicated to Archangels Gabriel and Michael, popularly known as Jermenčić. The monastery was destroyed and rebuilt time and again throughout the centuries and it serves as a place of worship to the present day (Simonân 2006).

The Armenian colony in Belgrade (Beograd) formed in the 16th–17th centuries. In 1521, members of the Bagratuni Armenian royal dynasty settled there, and soon were joined by Armenians from Crimea, Erzurum (Karin) and the Nakhichevan region. The Armenian cemetery was established in Belgrade in the late 16th century and no later than in the middle of the next century the Armenian church was built. Today, nothing is left of these structures, and only a few Armenian tombstones from this early period can be found on the territory of the city's castle. In the second decade of the 18th century there were from 80 to 200 Armenians in Belgrade, mostly craftsmen and merchants. When the Habsburg Empire temporarily seized power of Belgrade, in 1732 the first Armenian Catholic clergymen came to the city from the Venetian Mekhitarist Congregation. In 1739, facing reconquest of the city by Turks, most Armenians moved north to Novi Sad, following the example of thousands of Serbs who under the leadership of Orthodox clergy escaped to the Vojvodina and Slavonia regions. There, within a few years the Armenian Catholic church of St. Gregory the Illuminator was built. A century later, on the eve of the Spring of Nations, the Armenian colony of Novi Sad counted around 30–40 houses, and a number of Armenian families played important roles in the life of the city. However, the turmoil of the European Revolutions of 1848 caused a severe decline in the community. The last Armenians of Novi Sad emigrated or passed away in the first decades of the 20th century, and the only keepers of Armenian heritage in the city were, until the early 1960s, the Mekhitarists from Vienna. In 1963, the St. Gregory church – the only Armenian temple in Yugoslavia – was demolished by order of the communist regime (Simonân 2006).

At a time when the 'old' Armenian community was about to vanish in Novi Sad, the Armenian labour migrants from the Erzurum region, followed by refugees from the 1915 Armenian Genocide in the Ottoman Empire and the 1922 Great Fire of Smyrna, reached Serbia and established themselves in Belgrade, Niš, Aleksinac, Knjaževac, Kruševac, Zaječar, Negotin, and Valjevo. In the latter town the Tehlirian family settled down, including Soghomon Tehlirian, who in 1921 in Berlin shot dead Talaat Pasha – a Turkish leader responsible for the extermination of Armenians. In 1936 the Union of Armenians in Yugoslavia was registered in Belgrade and at about this time the Armenian House was opened, where meetings and classes in the Armenian language and history took place (Simonân 2006). After the establishment of Josip Broz Tito's communist Yugoslavia, in 1952 The Union was disbanded by the state, and the Armenian House was nationalised. At that time there were around 2,000–2,500 Armenians in the country, most of whom migrated in subsequent years to Canada, the United States, and elsewhere (Hovakimyan 2003: 354; Klarić-Žak 2006).

In the 1990s a new wave of Armenian migrants escaping the war in Karabakh and the disastrous situation in Armenia reached Serbia. The exact scale of this influx, as well as the total number of people of Armenian descent currently living in the country is disputable. Estimates to be found in Armenian sources from the beginning of the 21st century vary

from 200–250 (Hovakimyan 2003: 353, Simonân 2006) to 1,500 individuals (Klarić-Žak 2006). The Ministry of Diaspora of RA gives a current number of around 500 people (personal contact, 2014). Importantly, in Serbia's population census of 2011, for the first time ever the Armenian nationality and Armenian language were registered.⁹ 222 people declared themselves as Armenians and 156 indicated Armenian as their mother tongue.¹⁰ While at first sight these results seem to support the more conservative figures from the estimates quoted above, examples from other countries demonstrate that official statistics usually present only a partial picture of diasporic demography. Most Serbian Armenians live in Belgrade, the rest in Novi Sad, Valjevo, Vrnjačka Banja and other places (Hovakimyan 2003: 354; Klarić-Žak 2006).

Based on Serbia's 2009 Law on National Councils of National Minorities, twenty minorities have established their councils, which – being subsidised from the state budget – are to “legitimately represent members of their respective minorities in matters of culture, education, the media, and official use of language” (Purger 2012). Armenians are not included in this number, although it seems that they meet the requirements, being a group which has lived in the country for centuries, is differentiated from the host society by cultural, religious and linguistic characteristics, and has its own voluntary organisations. They are surely a very small minority, so the issue of them being not “sufficiently representative” (The Law 2002) may be the reason. However, if there is any customarily accepted threshold (the law does not specify it), it has to be low: Serbian Jews have established their council despite being a community of only 582 people as registered in the 2011 census (Religion 2013: 13).

The Armenian Apostolic Church and Armenian Catholic Church are absent in the country, and in times of need for religious services Armenians usually turn to the Serbian Orthodox Church. One such occasion is the annual commemoration of the Armenian Genocide on April 24, when community members gather in the church of Saint Archangel Gabriel in Zemun (a district of Belgrade). Next to the church stands a khachkar (cross-stone), erected in 1993, dedicated to the victims of the 1988 earthquake in Armenia, including the crew of a Yugoslav humanitarian plane, which crashed before landing in Yerevan (Hovakimyan 2003: 355; Klarić-Žak 2006; Simonân 2006). Since 1993, there has also been an Armenian cross-stone in Novi Sad, marking the place where the St. Gregory church used to stand (Hovakimyan 2003: 356).

9 The 2011 census was the first which formulated the questions on ethnic/national affiliation and mother tongue as open ended. As a result, four new groups (Armenians, Šopi, Banjaši, and Torlaci) and three languages (Armenian, Bunjevački and Montenegrin) were registered (Ethnicity 2012: 11; Religion 2013: 13).

10 Data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia: personal contact, 2014. In official publications of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, these numbers were included into a collective category of ‘Other’.

According to data of the Ministry of Diaspora of the Republic of Armenia, there are four Armenian organisations in the country: the Armenian-Serbian Friendship Club (Klub srpsko-jermenskog prijateljstva), the Union of Armenians in Serbia (Jermenska zajednica Srbije), the Armenian Women's Centre – Armenka (Jermenski ženski centar Armenka), and the Armenian Centre for Development of Science, Economy and Culture. However, they currently keep a rather low profile. For example *Haykakan Spyurk Taregirk* (*The Armenian Diaspora Yearbook*) mentions only two events in 2011: the meeting of the community representatives with Armenia's president Serzh Sargsyan, and a tribute payed in Belgrade and Novi Sad to the victims of the Armenian Genocide (Hakobean 2012: 212).

The Armenian Serbian Friendship Club was established in 1990 in Belgrade at the initiative of the Director of the Symphony Orchestra of the Serbian Broadcasting Corporation, Vardges Paronian. In 2003 the Club counted more than 800 Armenian and Serbian members. In 1995, the Union of Armenians was reestablished in Belgrade. Since then it has operated a Sunday school, where classes in the Armenian language, history and music take place (Hovakimyan 2003: 354). The Armenian Women's Centre was established in 2002 by Gohar Harutyunyan (Sekulić) and has combined the organisation of cultural events, the commemoration of the Armenian Genocide, or protests against the assassination of Armenian journalist Hrant Dink in Istanbul, with the support of Armenian and other nationality women who are victims of family violence in Serbia (Klarić-Žak 2006; Supervizor 2008; U Beogradu 2007). Gohar Harutyunyan's personal story may serve, perhaps, as a telling example of hardships experienced by some post-Soviet Armenian migrants in their destination countries, who have become 'prisoners' of their unregulated legal status. Harutyunyan spent 21 years in Serbia, having to apply each year for a residence card, being denied Serbian citizenship, and threatened by expulsion from the country. In 2013, when she was about to temporarily leave Serbia in order to ask for readmission, she died of cancer (Mladenović 2013).

Armenians in Slovakia

The Armenian diaspora in Slovakia is a creation of the recent, post-socialist period, although individual families of Armenian merchants and craftsmen settled there before, perhaps as early as the 17th century (Sargsyan 2003). At the beginning of the 1990s there were no more than 100 Armenians living in Slovakia, a number which ten years later increased to 400–500 (Žamakočyan et al. 2011: 168). This wave of migration came from Armenia and other countries of the former USSR, and the newcomers settled mostly in Bratislava, some also in Košice, Žilina and Trebišov (Žamakočyan et al. 2011: 168). Unfortunately, according to the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic, "data on Armenian ethnicity, Armenian as the mother tongue or the most frequently used language, and the Armenian Apostolic Church are not available" (personal contact, 2014). Statistics that can be retrieved from the Data-Cube of Slovakia's 2011 Census give a number of 109 Armenia-born inhabitants of Slovakia

(55 male and 54 female), half of whom lived in Bratislava (Obyvateľstvo n. d.). In previous years, according to Eurostat, there were 145 Armenia-born individuals in Slovakia in 2003, 261 in 2005 and 63 in 2009 (Population by Sex n. d.). At the end of 2009 there were 27 citizens of Armenia included into statistics on immigrants to Slovakia (International n. d.).¹¹

The Armenian diaspora in Slovakia started to take its institutional shape in 1999 at the initiative of the entrepreneur and NGOs activist Ashot Grigoryan (who himself moved to Slovakia in 1993). It became officially registered as the Armenian Community in Slovakia (Arménska komunita na Slovensku) in 2002. According to its founder and current leader, the Community is particularly active in presenting Armenian culture in Slovakia, strengthening economic and political relations between Armenia and Slovakia, and lobbying for the recognition of the Armenian Genocide (Žamakočyan et al. 2011: 169). The achievements towards this latter goal are significant indeed. In 1999 a concert dedicated to the victims of the genocide took place in Slovakia's National Theatre in the presence of the country's political elite, after which the Turkish ambassador in Slovakia was called back to Turkey (Žamakočyan et al. 2011: 169–170). Five years later, on 30 October 2004, the Parliament of Slovakia recognised the events of 1915 and subsequent years as genocide. The text of the parliamentary resolution was later carved out in the Armenian, English, and Slovak languages on the khachkar (cross-stone) standing on the bank of the Danube River in Bratislava. Since then Turkey has demanded, to no avail, to have the monument dismantled, while the Armenian community sets up annual commemorations of the adoption of the act and of the genocide itself at this spot (A. Grigorian 2014; Bratislava 2005; Turkey 2007; Žamakočyan et al. 2011: 170–171). In 2011, Slovakia went a step further by adopting, as the first country in Europe, the law which has criminalised the denial of the Armenian Genocide and introduced a punishment of up to five years' imprisonment for such an act.

Many Armenians in Slovakia run their own businesses and the Armenian Community is active in the sphere of the economy and trade, including the organisation of six Armenian-Slovakian Business Forums in 2002–2011 (Žamakočyan et al. 2011: 172). Since 2010 the Armenian Chamber of Commerce (Arménska obchodná a priemyselná komora) has operated in Slovakia, having as its aim the development of commercial links between the two countries (Arménska n. d.). In Slovakia there also live a number of distinguished Armenian artists, among them tenor Gurgén Ovsepian, the soloist of Slovakia's National Theatre.

Regarding the religious life of the Armenian diaspora in Slovakia, an important event took place in 2013 when one of Bratislava's Catholic churches was leased to the Community at the expense of renovating and maintaining it. Armenian Apostolic priests from the Czech Republic and Austria are to conduct services in the church (Slovakian 2013).

¹¹ A remote, mountainous, Slovakian-Ukrainian border area is a gate to the EU zone for some illegal migrants, including Armenians. According to the statistics of the Border Monitoring Project Ukraine, the Border Guard detained 24 Armenian citizens attempting to enter Slovakia in 2010, 2 in 2011, and 4 in January-June 2012 (Statistics, n. d.).

Finally, it has to be mentioned that the headquarters of the Forum of the Armenian Associations of Europe (FAAE) is located in Bratislava, and since 2008 Ashot Grigoryan has been the President of this pan-European organisation, which gathers institutional members from 21 countries. Since its inception in 2001, the Forum has organised a number of conferences and thematic workshops (of Armenian writers, lawyers, etc), and been engaged in various lobbying and protest actions, mostly related to the Armenian Genocide and Karabakh conflict (Forum n. d.; Žamakočyan et al. 2011: 173–175).

Conclusion

The Armenian diasporas in the five countries discussed in this chapter – Albania, Lithuania, Macedonia, Serbia and Slovakia – comprise only a tiny part of the Armenian diasporic network that spans over six continents. As such they have escaped scholars' notice, despite the fact that each presents a promising case for research, be it a newly emerged and resilient Armenian minority in Slovakia, or a fading diaspora with a long and rich history in Serbia. Such research, once they appear, can enhance our understanding of personal and group identity strategies in today's nation-states as they increasingly become, in Zygmunt Bauman's words (2011: 428), "*the collection of diasporas*" (italics in original).

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