Although the Serbs of the NDH were not officially classified as non-Aryan, the greater part of the minority Serbian population was considered to form a component of the general Asiatic-Balkan racial ‘counter-type.’ The Ustashe held the view that the Serbs of Croatia and Bosnia and Herzegovina were a people of diverse ethnic-racial origin that only possessed a united national consciousness through adherence to the Serbian Orthodox Church. The absence of a defined legal status for the Serbs enabled the Ustasha regime to pursue a more flexible policy toward them. The autochthonous Serbs of the NDH were officially classified by the regime as ‘Greek-Easterners’ (grčkoistočnjaci). Serbs from Serbia proper found living on the territory of the NDH were classified separately, as Serbians or Srbijanci. In accordance with the theory that the Serbian Orthodox Church was the chief nurturer of a Serbian identity in Croatia, the Ustasha regime first set out to dismantle that institution on the territory of the NDH. On 18 July 1941 the regime banned the official use of the term ‘Serbian Orthodox faith’ (srpskopravoslavna vjera) and replaced it with the appellation ‘Greek-Eastern faith’ (grčkoistočna vjera), arguing that the term ‘Serbian Orthodox’ was incompatible with the Ustasha state. In conversation with Archbishop Stepinac in 1941, Pavelić had described the Serbian Orthodox Church in Croatia as a ‘political organization.’

The regime also banned the use of the Cyrillic script on the territory of the NDH (25 April 1941). This prohibition was primarily motivated by the regime’s policies of linguistic purism. In response to interwar unitarist attempts to fashion an artificial ‘Yugoslav’ or ‘Serbo-Croatian’ language,
the Ustashe established the ‘Croatian State Office for Language’ (Hrvatski državni ured za jezik), the aim of which was to purge the Croatian literary language of Serbian and, indeed, all foreign lexical influences, as well as to reintroduce the traditional Croat etymological spelling system. The Ustasha policy of linguistic purism was part and parcel of the regime’s aim to prove Croatian national individuality. The Law Decree on the Croatian Language, on its Purity and its Orthography (14 August 1941) stipulated that the language of the Croats was ‘not identical with any other language, nor is it a dialect of any other language.’ As Pavelić remarked to the Sabor in late February 1942, under Serbian rule,

the most vulgar, the worst, ugliest Balkan words had become a component part of the Croatian language...Our beautiful language...our cultured language, in the truest sense of the word [our] noble language—for the entire Croatian people, the peasant and the worker, are a noble nation—this language became an ordinary jargon, [spoken by] the drift of human society in night time coffee-houses.

The Serb-Vlachs

The Serbs in the NDH were officially classified as a religious minority, but Ustasha ideologists and nationalist intellectuals also defined the Greek-Easterners in an ethnic-racial sense. In line with the tripartite ethnic-racial classification outlined in Lorković’s study of Croatian ethnic history from 1939, the NDH’s ideologists and academics defined the Greek-Easterners as the descendants of: 1) nomadic Orthodox immigrants of various ethnic-racial origin (Vlach, Gypsy, Tzintzar, Bulgarian and Greek), who had served as Ottoman auxiliaries; 2) Catholic Croat converts to Orthodoxy; and 3) ethnic Slavic-Serbian settlers. The Ustashe did not attempt to precisely determine which Greek-Easterner was of Vlach, Gypsy, Serbian-Slavic or Croatian origin, since this clearly would have been a logistical impossibility.

Although linguistically indistinguishable from Croats, the NDH’s Serbs had not, the Ustashe argued, managed to assimilate into the Croatian nation as other immigrants had done due to their different faith and

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5 On the language question in the NDH see Samardžija, Hrvatski jezik u Nezavisnoj Državi Hrvatskoj, 13–81.
6 Ibid., 33.
7 Pavelić cited in Košutić, Hrvatsko domobranstvo, 92.