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NATIONAL MINORITY PROTECTION AS TRANSFER OF POLITICAL CULTURE IN THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA

Abstract: The notion of national minority protection in interwar Europe is often perceived merely as an obligation imposed on the countries of the "New Europe" established in practice by the "Little Treaty of Versailles." This article approaches national minority protection from the perspective of creating a new framework as a "transnational cultural space" by reshaping and transferring the concepts of minority, ethnic, cultural, and religious diversities. In doing so, a novel framework of European political culture emerged in exploring and defining the rights of individuals and groups symbolized in education in the mother tongue, the legalization of cultural associations, and personal, non-territorial, and territorial autonomy. The research encompasses an analysis of works by experts in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the practical application of policies meant to ensure the rights of national minorities, and the scope of the system itself and the reception of the new concept among members of the "Yugoslav nation" and their fellow citizens who were members of "non-Yugoslav" communities. I analyze the context of the cultural transfer imposed by the Great Powers and the process of mutual exchange and construction of new practices. They were transformed by emulating other countries, reshaping the discourse on national minorities, and through assimilation policies or population transfer.

Keywords: national minority protection, national minority rights, interwar Europe, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, political culture.

The Paris System and Minority Rights Protection in Interwar Europe

The dissolution of the Russian, Austro-Hungarian, and German empires ushered in the principle of national self-determination, making the national minority protection a matter of high political importance. The ideas of national minority protection in interwar Europe are commonly characterized as an obligation imposed on the states of "New Europe" at the Paris Peace Conference and established in practice by the "Little Treaty of Versailles" between the victorious great powers and restored Poland (1919).[1] The pivotal article of the agreement states: "Poland accepts

1 On minority rights, see Mark Mazower, "Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe," *Daedalus* 126 no. 2 (1997), 47–63; Caroline Fink, "Minority Rights as an International Question," *Contemporary European History* 9 no. 3 (2000), 385–400. For the Paris Peace Conference and the questions of self-determination, sovereignty etc. see Peter Hilpold, "Minderheitenschutz im Völkerbundsystem," in *Zur Entstehung des modernen Minderheitenschutzes in Evropa*. Handbuch der europäischen Volksgruppen, Band 3, Hrsg. Christoph Pan, Beate Sibylle Pfeil (Wien: Springer Verlag, 2006), 156–189; Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment. Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford:

and agrees to embody in a treaty with the Principal Allied and Associated Powers such provisions as may be deemed necessary by the said Powers to protect the interests of inhabitants of Poland who differ from the majority of the population in race, language and religion."[2]

The agreements accounted for fourteen countries in Central-Eastern Europe, excluding the great powers, while Germany only partially accepted obligations in specific areas and for a limited time. All agreements included fundamental rights, such as the right to life and liberty, equality before the law, religious and cultural freedoms, the use of language in the public and private sphere, and the right to establish certain cultural and educational organizations. Inspired by the "Polish treaty," this approach extended protection to 25 million Europeans – national minority members from the Central and Eastern parts of the continent.[3] Between June 1919 and July 1923, several minority treaties involving Poland, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia)[4], Romania, Czechoslovakia, Greece, Austria, Albania, Bulgaria, Finland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Hungary, and Turkey, were signed.[5]

In addition to the concept of minority protection, the Paris system also sanctioned forced population transfers, border delineations along "supposedly clear ethnic, national and religious lines" and the transfer of the protection system from the "purely national to the international level."[6] Consequently, following the collapse of Austria-Hungary in 1918,

Oxford University Press, 2007); Larry Wolff, *Woodrow Wilson and the Reimagining of Eastern Europe* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2020).

2 Quoted in Theodore S. Woolsey, "The Rights of Minorities under the Treaty with Poland," *The American Journal of International Law* 14 no. 3 (1920), 393.

3 Around nine million people in Western Europe were left out, see Olena Palko and Samuel Foster, "Contested minorities in the 'New Europe': national identities in the interwar eastern and southeastern Europe," *National Identities* 23 no. 4 (2021), 307. On types of treaties and multilateral agreements on specific regions, see Umut Özsu, *Formalizing Displacement. International Law and Population Transfers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 36.

4 The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was the official name of the state until 1929, when it was renamed Yugoslavia. In this text, out of convenience, I will use the term Yugoslavia for the entire interwar period.

5 Peter Hilpold, "The League of Nations and the Protection of Minorities – Rediscovering a Great Experiment," *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law Online* 17 no. 1 (2013), 92. On the problems of self-determination and "free choices of the peoples", see Leonard V. Smith, *Sovereignty at the Paris Peace Conference of 1919* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 143.

6 Eric D. Weitz, "From the Vienna to the Paris System: International Politics and the Entangled Histories of Human Rights, Forced Deportations, and Civilizing Missions," *The American Historical Review* 113 no. 5 (2008), 1314. See also Volker Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination: Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 222. The "Convention Concerning the Exchange of Greek and Turkish Populations" (1923)

its successor states, like Czechoslovakia, Poland and Yugoslavia, faced questions of legitimacy and "bitter disputes about who belonged to these 'minorities' and who would thus be entitled to claim minority rights."[7] The leaderships of these countries, bound by the treaties, viewed them as a source of national humiliation and a clear indication of the paternalistic, pseudo-colonial attitude of the great powers. The primary concern was that the treaties would serve as a means of foreign interference in internal affairs, allowing the great powers to maintain a superior relationship with the "immature" states and potentially challenge their newly established borders.

The attempts of Lithuania, Poland, and Czechoslovakia in the 1920s to establish "universal standards of minority rights" all failed.[8] Despite the discontent among countries, the treaties lacked an effective mechanism to enforce minority rights and protect their proclaimed cultural rights, implying that the treaties could simply become a method of gradual assimilation.[9]

The idea itself, however, was becoming something more – a field of exchange, imitation, and adoption. The concept of protecting national minorities can also be viewed as the creation of a new European framework – in other words, a "transnational cultural space" by determining, reshaping, and transferring the meanings of the concepts of minority, ethnic, cultural, and religious distinctiveness and thereby establishing a new framework of political culture.[10] These processes did not only af-

was seen in the interwar period as an alternative to respecting national minority rights, see Matthew Frank, *Making Minorities. Population Transfer in Twentieth-Century Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 94.

7 Tara Zahra, "Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis," *Slavic Review* 69 no. 1 (2010), 101. For the quote, Ibid, 105.

8 Tara Zahra, "The 'Minority Problem' and National Classification in the French and Czechoslovak Borderlands," *Contemporary European History* 17 no. 2 (2008), 148. There was also concern that "irredentist" countries were hiding their territorial aspirations behind the defense of minority rights, see C. Fink, "Minority Rights," 393–394. Especially disconcerting was that not even the defeated Germany was a part of the minority protection treaties, see L. V. Smith, *Sovereignty*, 160–161.

9 David J. Smith, Marina Germane, Martyn Housden, "'Forgotten Europeans': transnational minority activism in the age of European integration," *Nations and Nationalism* 25 no. 2 (2018), 528.

10 On the notion of cultural transfer, see Wolfgang Schmale, "What is Cultural Transfer", in *Cultural Transfer Europe-Serbia: Methodological Issues and Challenges*, ed. Slobodan G. Markovich (Belgrade: FPN and Dosije Studio, 2023), 21. On the intention of the political elites in Versailles of "changing the political culture, and of empowering certain ethnic minorities with substantial cultural rights in an attempt to create a shared universalist political allegiance," see Liliana Riga, James Kennedy, "Tolerant majorities, loyal minorities and 'ethnic reversals': constructing minority rights at Versailles 1919," *Nations and Nationalism* 15, no. 3 (2009), 464. For

fect the countries of Central and Eastern Europe but the continent as whole. Numerous discussions were initiated on the rights of individuals and groups to belong to the nation through its cultural characteristics and their implementation in the fields of education (the right to schooling in the mother tongue), culture (primarily the legalization of cultural associations), and personal, non-territorial, and territorial autonomy.[11]

When the system was first successfully applied, during the settlement of the Swedish-Finnish dispute over the Åland Islands (1920), the issue of minority rights surfaced throughout the European continent, including countries that had not formally assumed this obligation. The analysis must, therefore, be carried out in the context of the transfer understood as simultaneously imposed by the victorious powers in the first phase but also the process of exchange and construction of new practices. These practices underwent transformations through the emulation of practices from other countries and by shaping the discourse on national minorities and the policies involving assimilation or population transfer.

The well-known interwar study by Carlyle McCartney, *National States and National Minorities* (1934), supported the dichotomy of Western political and Eastern cultural nationalism at the level of international politics. However, this view has been relativized in recent decades by pointing out various similarities and overlaps of the "Western" and "Eastern" models.[12] In short, minorities were the "problem of the whole of Europe."[13]

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the creation of the "transnational sphere of experimentation", see V. Prott, *The Politics*, 222; For the rising "body of knowledge" on minorities and the importance of the transnational associations, see Stefan Dyroff, "*Avant-garde* or Supplement? Advisory Bodies of Transnational Associations as Alternatives to the League's Minority Protection System, 1919–1939," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24, no. 2 (2013), 203.

11 An example could be the founding of the European Congress of Nationalities (1925–1938) by two Estonian Germans, Ewald Ammende and Pauls Schiemann, together with their Russian countryman Mikhail Kurchinskii and a Slovene from Italy, Josif Vilfan. The organization was trying to become a mediator between minorities and state representatives until it feell under the influence of the German policies during 1930s when its liberal members were marginalized, see D. J. Smith, M. Germane, M. Housden, "'Forgotten Europeans' transnational minority activism in the age of European integration", 526–527. The Congress had representatives from twenty minority groups: Germans, Jews, Catalans, Ukrainians, Hungarians, Russians, Poles, Czechs, Bulgarians, Basques, Lithuanians, Slovenians, Sorbs, Belarusians, Danes, Greeks, Swedes, Galicians, Croats, and Romanians, see Ferenc Eiler, "The Congress of European Nationalities and the International Protection of Minority Rights, 1925–1938" in *Populism, Memory and Minority Rights. Central and Eastern European Issues in Global Perspective*, ed. Anna-Mária Bíró (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2019), 241.

12 V. Prott, *The politics*, 235; T. Zahra, "The 'Minority Problem'", 147.

13 Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and Mona Bieling, "Sovereignty and Homogeneity: A History of Majority-Minority Relations in Interwar Western Europe," in *Sover-*

Research suggests parallels between the models of Mussolini's Italy and Primo de Rivera's Spain, which both violated minority rights "in ways similar to interwar Poland," while the Czechoslovak example seems closer to the practice of Liberal Italy and Republican Spain (1931–1936). The same can be said of pre-1934 Estonia and Belgium.[14]

The Case of Interwar Yugoslavia

When approaching national minority research in interwar Yugoslavia, I would agree that generally speaking, their situation was "...tolerable, although far from good. At the same time, it was on the then European average, sometimes even surpassing in quality the situation of national minorities in many other countries."[15] In its minority policies, interwar Yugoslavia predominantly used the "accommodation" approach, where the differences between the imagined majority and minorities were created and maintained by the state, respecting the status of the minorities which was legally approved and reproduced.[16] The actual implementation of proclaimed laws largely depended on the balance of power.[17] Due to

eignty, Nationalism, and the Quest for Homogeneity in Interwar Europe, ed. Emmanuel Dalle Mulle, Davide Rodogno and Mona Bieling (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2023), 106. The "western minorities" included the Basque, Catalan, Breton, Flemish and Galician communities, see Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, "Home-rule versus non-territorial autonomy? Western European national movements and their views on the minority question, 1919–1939," *Nations and Nationalism* 29, no. 2 (2023), 483.

14 Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and Mona Bieling, "Sovereignty," 119. On the other hand, the only home-rule statutes in interwar Europe were those established for Catalonia (1931), the Basque Country (1933), and Galicia (1936), see Núñez Seixas, "Home-rule," 488.

15 Zoran Janjetović, "National Minorities in Yugoslavia 1918–1941", *Review of Croatian History* 8, no. 1 (2012), 74.

16 On the framework of the 'assimilation', 'accommodation', and 'exclusion' models, see Harris Mylonas, *The Politics of Nation-Building: Making Co-Nationals, Refugees and Minorities* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 21–22; Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs: Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 39. On the other hand, in some cases, aspects of all three approached could be applied to a specific minority, such as in the Albanian case, in which the policies vacillated between assimilation and exclusion, see H. Mylonas, *The Politics*, 159–163; Edvin Pezo, *Zwangsmigration in Friedenszeiten?: Jugoslawische Migrationspolitik und die Auswanderung von Muslimen in die Türkei 1918 bis 1966* [Forced Migration in Peacetime?: Yugoslav Migration Policy and the Emigration of Muslims to Turkey 1918 to 1966]. (München: Oldenbourg, 2013). The ongoing nation-building inside the minority groups was one of the consequences of the state-minority relations, see Emmanuel Dalle Mulle and Mona Bieling, "Sovereignty," 109.

17 Ljubodrag Dimić, *Kulturna politika u Kraljevini Jugos*laviji [Cultural Politics in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia], Vol. 3 (Beograd: Stubovi kulture, 1997), 7.

regional differences and the importance of geopolitical concerns, the local and regional aspects of minority protection were extremely important and often prevailed over the country's statewide minority policy. Reflecting the typical interwar discourse, the Yugoslav political elites established an image of respected minority rights, dismissing all complaints as baseless.[18]

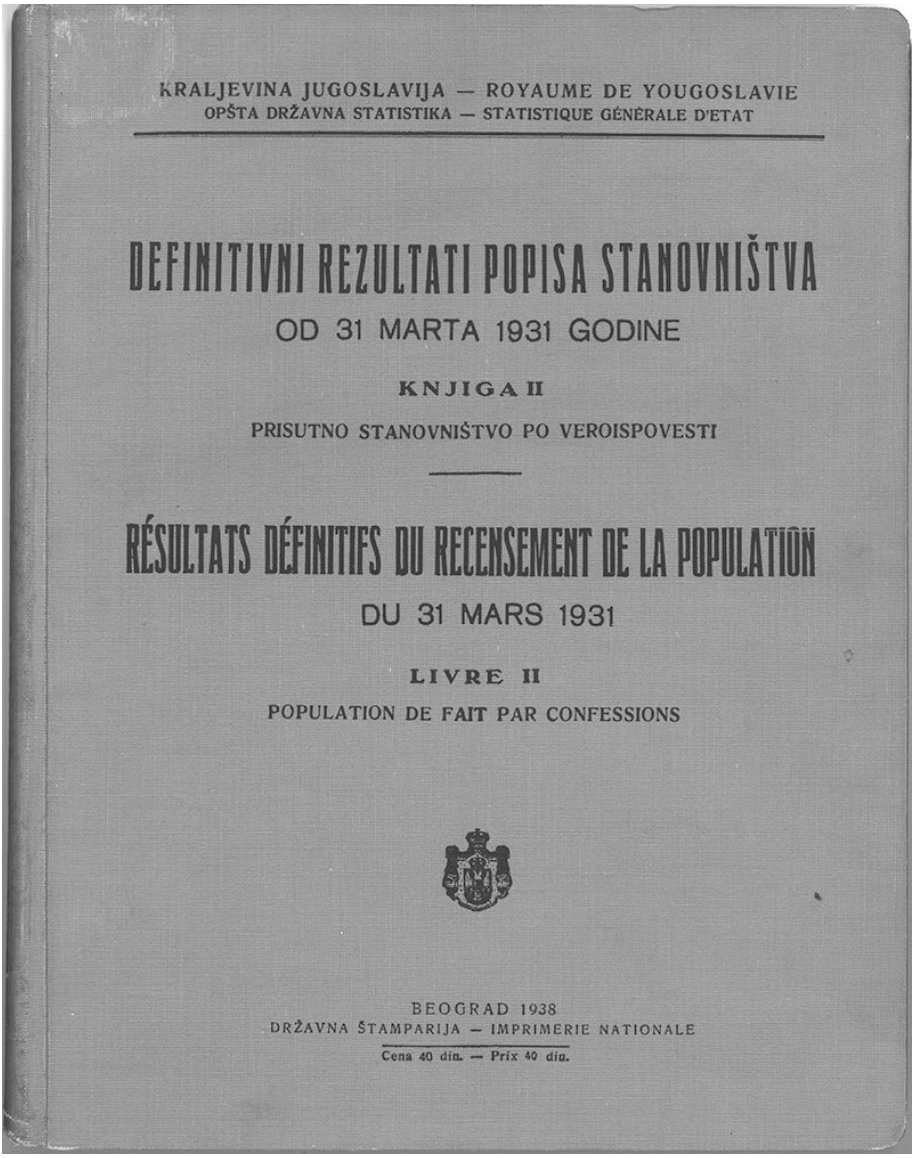
Yugoslav experts believed that international treaties violated the country's sovereignty. "One of the most difficult conditions was the obligation stipulated in Article 51 of the peace treaty with Austria that our country accepts in advance and without restrictions all regulations imposed by the powers regarding the protection of minorities. Our delegation understood this as a breach of sovereignty because giving 'carte blanche' contradicts the very concept of sovereignty."[19] This remark, written by Ilija Pržić, professor at the Faculty of Law in Belgrade and one of the leading interwar Yugoslav experts on national minorities, similar to other examples, summarizes the dissatisfaction of the political, cultural, and educational elites with their country's minority protection obligations.[20] Article 51 "was one of the most difficult provisions" for the Yugoslav state in the Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and the new Kingdom.[21]

18 See, for example, Arhiv Jugoslavije [Archives of Yugoslavia, henceforth AJ], Zbirka Ilije Pržića [Ilija Pržić Papers], 398–1, Manjine u Jugoslaviji. Rasprava i materijal o istom predmetu [Minorities in Yugoslavia. The Discussion and Materials on the Issue]. "During 1921–1938, 35 minority petitions were submitted to the League of Nations against the Yugoslav authorities, 12 by the Hungarians and 11 by the Bulgarians", see Srđan Micić, "Minority Petitions Against Yugoslav Authorities Before the League of Nations," *Tokovi istorije* 28, no. 3 (2020), 32.

19 Ilija Pržić, *Zaštita manjina* [Protection of Minorities] (Beograd: Geca Kon, 1933), 112.

20 On Pržić and his importance, see Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva: nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* [Emperors' Children, Kings' Stepchildren: National Minorities in Yugoslavia 1918–1941] (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2005), 137–142. For a general overview of national minorities in Yugoslavia, see Ibid; Slobodan G. Markovich, "Ethnic and National Minorities in Serbia and Yugoslavia," in *Minorities in the Balkans. State Policy and Inter-Ethnic Relations (1804–2004)*, ed. Dušan T. Bataković (Beograd: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2011), 89–108.

21 S. Micić, "Minority Petitions,", 29. On the tedious negotiations and the Yugoslav resistance to the commitments, see Zoran Janjetović, "Pitanje zaštite nacionalnih manjina u Kraljevini SHS na konferenciji mira u Parizu 1919–1920," [The Issue of Protecting National Minorities in the Kingdom of SCS at the Peace Conference in Paris 1919–1920] *Istorija 20. veka* 18, no. 2 (2000), 31–43; Livia Kardum, "Pitanje jednakosti velikih i malih država na primjeru zaštite nacionalnih manjina u St. Germainskom mirovnom ugovoru 1919. godine," [The Question of the Big and Small States Equality Based on the Protection of National Minorities in the Treaty of Saint-Germain Signed in 1919] *Međunarodne studije* 8, no. 3–4 (2008), 69–80.


KRALJEVINA JUGOSLAVIJA — ROYAUME DE YOUGOSLAVIE
OPŠTA DRŽAVNA STATISTIKA — STATISTIQUE GÉNÉRALE D'ETAT

DEFINITIVNI REZULTATI POPISA STANOVNIŠTVA
OD 31 MARTA 1931 GODINE
KNJIGA II
PRISUTNO STANOVNIŠTVO PO VEROISPOVESTI

RÉSULTATS DÉFINITIFS DU RECENSEMENT DE LA POPULATION
DU 31 MARS 1931
LIVRE II
POPULATION DE FAIT PAR CONFESSIONS

BEOGRAD 1938
DRŽAVNA ŠTAMPARIJA — IMPRIMERIE NATIONALE
Cena 40 din. — Prix 40 din.

Cover page of the census conducted in 1931 in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: Résultats Définitifs du Recensement de la Population du 31 mars 1931, *livre II:* Population de fait par confessions. *Belgrade : Imprimerie Nationale, 1938.*

After 1918, the new state adopted the concept of the "three-named nation" of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes; after 1929 and the promulgation of Yugoslavism, an ideology that advocated the existence of one, indivisible, Yugoslav nation, around 12–13% of Yugoslavia's citizens were categorized as members of national minority groups.[22] During the early

22 Z. Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 65.

years of the country's existence, most publications about minorities focused on establishing and legitimizing new borders and the question of whose ancestors had "arrived first," often accompanied by theories about the "true origins" of certain minority members. These publications were especially abundant until the beginning of the 1920s and, besides border issues, were used to justify future minority policies.[23]

This paper will focus on the status of the national minorities in Vojvodina (mostly using educational policies that applied to the Hungarian and Romanian communities as examples), Yugoslavia's northeastern province and part of Austria-Hungary until 1918.[24] The most numerous national minorities in Vojvodina included Germans, Hungarians, and Romanians. More than 500,000 Germans, around 460,000 Hungarians, and almost or just over 230,000 Romanians made up the majority population in certain borderlands and wielded social and economic power in their areas.[25]

In his writings on the national minorities of Vojvodina, Senator David – Daka Popović, one of Yugoslavia's leading experts on national minorities in the interwar period, concluded that although the situation may seem insignificant from the point of view of the "entire nation," it was, nevertheless, a matter of great concern at the regional level.[26] Popović

23 Zoran Janjetović, "Nacionalne manjine u očima srpske elite 1918–1941," [National Minorities in the Eyes of the Serbian Elite 1918–1941] in *Srbi i Jugoslavija. Država, društvo, politika* (Beograd: Institut za noviju istoriju Srbije, 2007), 129–141.

24 For a contemporary overview of the German minority in Yugoslavia, see Daka Popović, *Banat, Bačka i Baranja. Savremeni, nacionalni, politički i društveni problemi* [Banat, Bačka, and Baranja: Contemporary National, Political, and Social Issues] (Novi Sad: Knjižara Slavija, 1935). For a general overview, see Petar Kačavenda, *Nemci u Jugoslaviji 1918–1941* [Germans in Yugoslavia 1918–1941] (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 1991); Branko Bešlin, *Vesnik tragedije: nemačka štampa u Vojvodini 1933–1941. godine* [Herald of Tragedy: German Press in Vojvodina 1933–1941] (Novi Sad: Platoneum, Novi Sad – Sremski Karlovci: Izdavačka knjižarnica Zorana Stojanovića, 2001); Mariana Hausleitner, *Die Donauschwaben 1868–1948. Ihre Rolle im rumänischen und serbischen Banat* [Danube Swabians 1868–1948. Their Role in Romanian and Serbian Banat] (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2014); Caroline Mezger, *Forging Germans: Youth, Nation, and the National Socialist Mobilization of Ethnic Germans in Yugoslavia, 1918–1944* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).

25 For the mentioned data, see *Statistički pregled Kraljevine Jugoslavije po Banovinama. Izdanje pretsedništva ministarskog saveta* [Statistical Overview of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia by Banovinas. Published by the Presidency of the Ministerial Council] (Beograd: Državna štamparija kraljevine Jugoslavije, 1930). A detailed analysis of the census can be found in Z. Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 65–67. The numbers changed over the next ten years, and by the census of 1931, there were 499,969 Germans, 468,185 Hungarians, and 130,255 Romanians in Yugoslavia, see Z. Janjetović, "National Minorities," 65.

26 AJ, Ministarstvo prosvete Kraljevine Jugoslavije [Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia] 66–72–195, Elaborat senator Dake Popovića o manjin-

emphasized that while the national minorities in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia accounted for around 12–13% of the population, this seemingly low number belied the fact that these minorities often constituted the majority in the borderlands, wielding significant social and economic power. This situation frequently gave rise to more radical practices in the borderland regions, underscoring the importance of their analysis in the regional context.[27]

Minority protection also became an obstacle to the imagined nationalization of Vojvodina. "As a nation, we have a natural right to strengthen our culture ethnographically and economically in all areas where we consider it necessary. We admit that in Vojvodina, where previously, due to Germanization and Magyarization, our people were ethnographically and economically quite weak, since the Liberation, we have not done as much as we could and should have done. However, we also believe that it is the last moment to seriously and systematically begin this national undertaking. In the field of national strengthening, our task would be to strengthen Vojvodina ethnographically, economically, and culturally and give it a Serbian, Yugoslav, and Slavic character through colonization and the agrarian policy, professional and economic organizations, cultural and educational institutions, and schools."[28]

This paper looks at the standards of national minority protection in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia through its role in reshaping local and regional policies after the *ethnic reversal*.[29] The concept of ethnic reversal highlights that after border changes or the dismantling of previous states,

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skom problemu (1934) [Senator Daka Popović's Report on the Minority Issue]. See also Dušan Fundić, "An Uncomfortable Relationship: The Serbian Right Wing and the "National Minorities" Question", in *The Serbian Right-Wing Parties and Intellectuals in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, 1934–1941*, ed. D. Bakić (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies, 2022), 326–327.

27 T. Zahra, "The 'Minority Problem'," 165. The German-speaking communities are an illustrative example in the case of interwar Yugoslavia. While those living in Slovenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, especially their urbanized parts, had enjoyed a privileged position until 1918, those in former South Hungary were vulnerable to Magayrization, see D. Popović, *Banat,* 33–34. For an example of regional policies in the Yugoslav context and the case of Albanian and Turkish minorities, see Dušan Fundić, "Albanian and Turkish National Minorities in the Yugoslav Radical Union's Local Policy" in *Right-Wing Politics in Interwar Southeastern Europe: Between Conservatism and Fascism*, eds. Dragan Bakić, Dušan Fundić and Rastko Lompar (Belgrade: Institute for Balkan Studies SASA, 2023), 289–312.

28 Fedor Nikić, „Za nacionalizaciju Vojvodine", [For the Nationalization of Vojvodina] *Letopis Matice srpske* 314, br. 3 (1927), 327–328.

29 "Consequently, the drawing of new borders and states – and the introduction of majoritarian democratic politics – resulted in what we term 'ethnic reversals': 'formally dominant minorities' suffered status decline, while previously 'mi-

political power mostly shifted into the hands of those who had not previously held it. Following such reversals, questions about political power at the local and regional levels, as well as the necessity for agrarian reform in the case of Yugoslavia, became significant.[30] Therefore, it is particularly important to focus on the issue of the local and regional implementation of minority rights. While the central government was primarily driven by geopolitical challenges and international obligations, at the local level, the driving force was the intention to complete the ethnic reversal process.

How does the Yugoslav treatment of minorities compare to the rest of Europe? Juxtaposing it with the Czechoslovak laws, often considered the most liberal in Europe, albeit "inconsistently applied," significant similarities emerge, especially with those in the Czechoslovak borderlands. They involved land colonization of the countryside and preventing German-speaking children "from attending schools in their mother tongue if it was judged that they are of Czech origin."[31] Yugoslav governments applied similar practices. Some sources confirm the Yugoslav-Czechoslovak exchange in the process of formulating minority policies. Information on the number of primary and secondary schools where teaching was in a language other than "Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian" was passed on by the Ministry of Education to the Czechoslovak diplomatic representatives in Belgrade to help shape Czechoslovakia's approach towards the German and Hungarian schools at home.[32]

Immediately after 1918, the primary objective of educational policy in the northeastern regions was the complete reversal of the outcomes of the former Hungarian system.[33] Vojvodina was designated as a Serbian territory within the former Habsburg Monarchy, even though in 1918, Serbs did not constitute the absolute population majority in any of Vojvodina's historical regions.[34] In the words of Fedor Nikić, an interwar

noritised majorities' found new political powers.", Liliana Riga, James Kennedy, "Tolerant majorities,",461.

30 On the acceptance of the treaties in Yugoslavia, see I. Pržić, *Zaštita manjina*, 111–114, 120–129. Pržić was Yugoslavia's leading expert on national minorities, for more see Z. Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 137–142.

31 E. Dalle Mulle and M. Bieling, "Sovereignty", 111.

32 Anđelija Miladinović, „Školsko pitanje i Rumuni u jugoslovenskom Banatu 1919–1929: problemi manjinskog školstva u Kraljevini SHS", [The School Question and Romanians in the Yugoslav Banat 1919–1929: Problems of Minority Education in the Kingdom of SCS] *ACTA PANNONICA. Časopis za istoriju, društvene i humanističke nauke*, br. 5 (2023), 20.

33 Biljana Šimunović-Bešlin, „Faculty of Law in Subotica – „Northern Star" of Higher Education in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia," *Istraživanja. Journal of Historical Researches*, no. 29 (2018), 151.

34 Biljana Šimunović-Bešlin, *Prosvetna politika u Dunavskoj banovini 1929–1941* [Educational Policy in the Danube Banovina] (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet u Novom

law professor and an ardent supporter of integral Yugoslavism: "It was said on one occasion, during a discussion on this [minority] issue, that we should not be and must not be another Austria-Hungary. That is true, but we should not and must not ***favor*** national minorities in violation of the Treaty, the Constitution, and the laws of the land and our state and national interests."[35]

From the early 1920s, the state had taken steps to remove the "consequences of Magyarization" from its educational institutions. In practice, this meant that a child's national identity was determined based on their name and surname, influencing their chances of enrolment in schools. This practice, known as "name analysis," typically determined a future pupil's national identity based on the name and surname of their grandfather. It is important to note that, in Yugoslavia, children with Slavic, German, and Romanian surnames were not allowed to attend Hungarian schools. This policy was likely influenced by the rivalries from the Great War and potential Hungarian territorial claims.[36] The practice persisted until Milan Stojadinović's government took office (1935–1939), serving as an ideological justification for reversing the process of Germanization and Magyarization in former Austria-Hungary.[37]

Members of the Hungarian minority with Slavic-sounding surnames often complained that their children were automatically made to attend schools in the official "state language." Local schools typically justified this practice by describing it as "understandable" because, for instance, the appellant's surname was common in the area and all "of his people speak Serbian." This suggests that individuals with Hungarian names and Yugoslav surnames were considered "clearly Magyarized." The school's reply was, more often than not, supported by the Minis-

Sadu, 2007), 9–22; See also Šandor Mesaroš, *Položaj Mađara u Vojvodini 1918–1929* [Hungarians in Vojvodina 1918–1929] (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu, 1981); Branislav Gligorijević, "O nastavi na jezicima narodnosti u Vojvodini 1919–1929," [On teaching in Nationalities Languages in Vojvodina 1919–1929] *Zbornik Matice srpske za istoriju*, no. 5 (1972), 55–83.

35 Fedor Nikić, „Upotreba jezika nacionalnih manjina", [The Usage of National Minority Languages] *Letopis Matice srpske* 316, br. 3 (1928), 334. Nikić also led an "institute for the research of the position of national minorities," see B. Šimunović-Bešlin, "Faculty", 155–156.

36 Eniko Šajti, Mađari u Vojvodini 1918–1947 [Hungarians in Vojvodina 1918–1947] (Novi Sad: Forum, 2011), 97.

37 For a contemporary account as part of the described discourse, see Dimitrije Kirilović, *Pomađarivanje u bivšoj Ugarskoj: prilog istoriji srpskih škola* [Magyarization in former Hungary: for a contribution to the history of Serbian schools] (Novi Sad: b.i., 1935). Yugoslav authorities also showed an interest in the process of Magyarization of names in Hungary, see the reports in AJ 66–71–184, Ministarstvo inostranih dela – Ministarstvo prosvete, 30 September 1936.

try of Education.[38] The Hungarian minority was perceived as "irredentist": "The political shortcomings, equally important, were not rectified; instead, the Minister of Education, in a decision dated 20 September 1921, specifically ordered that Germans, Jews, and members of other non-Slavic nationalities could continue to enroll and attend Hungarian school sections if there was no school in their area and did not speak the official state language. This was a perilous and serious error in our educational policy, as it allowed Hungarians to carry out the Magyarization of non-Slavic nationalities in our country. This is highly dangerous because the Hungarian minority is the only one with irredentist tendencies in Vojvodina."[39]

The fear of "interference of other states in internal politics" and concerns about minority rights shaped the new local policies that included rectifying the "mistakes of Magyarization" in the early 1920s in the case of the Romanian minority.[40] Even in this instance, mitigated by the war-time alliance and the dynastic marriage between King Alexander I Karadjordjević and Princess Maria of Romania, the *Convention on the Establishment of Minority Schools of Romanian and Yugoslav Banat* was not agreed until 1933. Available sources indicate that the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Ministries of Education of both countries struggled to convince regional educational institutions to agree to its introduction.[41]

After the delineation of the two countries in the 1920s, Romanian teachers started leaving the Yugoslav territories for Romania. One of the reasons for this choice was the requirement to learn the official state language within a year. However, the language-learning issue spilled over into the next decade, and not knowing the official language was often tolerated due to practical issues. On the other hand, the enrolment of minority pupils was made difficult, and the education of teachers was reluctantly allowed by the state.[42]

38 For indicative examples, see AJ 66–4–9, Gladić – Kraljevska banska uprava, 6 March 1936; AJ 66–4–9, Petljanski – Kraljevska banska uprava, 5 April 1936.

39 Fedor Nikić, "Nekoliko pitanja iz naše prosvetne i školske politike u Vojvodini," [Several questions regarding our educational and school policies in Vojvodina], *Letopis Matice srpske*, god. 103, knj. 321, sv. 2 (1929), 258. Nikić also claimed: "The existence of minority departments is based on reasons of political expediency and tolerance, absolutely contrary to our vital state and national interests," Ibid, 260.

40 A. Miladinović, „Školsko pitanje", 19.

41 For the text of the convention, see AJ 66–5–12, Ministarstvo Prosvete – Ministarstvo inostranih poslova, 25 March 1935. On the implementation of the convenction, see AJ 66–5–12, Ministarstvo inostranih poslova – Ministarstvo prosvete, 15 May 1934, Primena Konvencije o uređenju manjinskih osnovnih škola u Banatu.

42 Z. Janjetović, *Deca careva*, 242–243.

The different approaches towards the two minorities are often visible when analyzing documents issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the Ministry of Education. For instance, when investigating "The Usage of the State Language among the National Minorities" in June 1933, the Ministry of Internal Affairs focused on the "Hungarian evasion of using the state language," underlining that such a situation was "more visible now than in the previous years." All of Europe was seeing a wave of propaganda for revising the peace treaties, which changed the minority stances on using the state language. Notably, the analysis primarily focused on the Hungarian minority, not mentioning the Romanian case.[43] An additional reason for the government's more lenient stance towards the Romanian community was the fact that the "Romanians have not managed to politically affirm themselves to this day."[44]

The Convention agreed on 10 March 1933 marked an important step in regulating the lives of the Yugoslav community in Romania and the Romanian community in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Between 1933 and 1935, both sides reluctantly and carefully worked on the implementation of the Convention.[45] Although the Convention was only partially implemented until World War II reached Yugoslavia (1941), it still serves as an example of a more harmonious approach to minority policies in interwar Europe.[46]

Concluding remarks

"All German attempts to expand the rights of minorities were vigorously resisted by numerous states, especially those bound by treaties on the protection of minorities. Other countries, which are not bound by treaties on the protection of minorities, often accuse the governments of the obliged countries of 'lacking international spirit' because they do not ensure the rights that the minorities are asking for... If the protection of minorities is a question of civilization, why don't the old countries lead by example, and how can they demand that the Jews in Poland and Romania be given the rights that are denied to the minorities in their own countries? If the answer is that minorities do not exist in all countries, one can ask whether this is true... If we take the most centralized country,

43 AJ 66–72–195, Ministarstvo unutrašnjih poslova – Ministarvo Prosvete, 12 June 1933.

44 AJ, 66–72–195, Elaborat senator Dake Popovića o manjinskom problemu (1934).

45 Gligor Popi, *Jugoslovensko-rumunski odnosi 1918–1941* [Yugoslav-Romanian Relations 1918–1941] (Novi Sad: Filozofski fakultet u Novom Sadu, Institut za istoriju, 1984), 302–313.

46 D. Fundić, "An Uncomfortable Relationship," 337.

France, as an example, we will also find Bretons and Basques, the Flemish and Alsatians there... That is also the case in Germany and Italy, Spain, Belgium, and Great Britain."[47]

The Kingdom of Yugoslavia, like many other countries in interwar Europe, saw the protection of minority rights as a burden and an unfairly imposed obligation. The newly formed Kingdom sought loyalty from its minority citizens, who struggled to accept the new reality that had often disrupted the previous regional and local balance of power, which was now completely changed. Arrangements made at the Paris Peace Conference came into question, especially during the 1930s, when minorities began to be viewed as security risks and obstacles to the nationalizing projects of states. The defeated countries of World War I aimed to use the protection of minority rights as leverage for their territorial ambitions. The dynamics of state-minority relations were often shaped by the geopolitical context and regional circumstances. Even though the system had not functioned as imagined even before the early 1930s, the idea of minority protection was present in much of the European continent, serving as a field of exchange and a transnational cultural space that established a new framework of political culture.

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47 I. Pržić, *Prava manjina*, 316.

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