State-Building and Democratisation on the Fringes of Interwar Poland and Yugoslavia. Prekmurje and Eastern Galicia from Empire to Nation-State[1]

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The outbreak of the First World War deeply affected the life of József Benkő. József was the son of István, a prosperous farmer who in 1913 opened a slaughterhouse and inn in the rural town of Muraszombat, situated in the south of Vas County in the Kingdom of Hungary. József helped his father run the family business, which was focused on the livestock trade, from a very young age. But József Benkő aimed much higher than his father, a former farmer, could have imagined doing. He dreamed of opening a meat processing factory and of exporting livestock and meat products on a large scale.

The war cut that dream short. In 1914, Benkő was drafted into the joint Austro-Hungarian army, yet he deftly managed to avoid the massacres on the front lines, serving in the hinterland as a bookkeeper in a military warehouse. He was demobilised in 1918 and safely returned to his hometown. However, in the region around Muraszombat, the collapse of state authority in autumn 1918 marked the beginning of uncertain political conditions and sporadic outbreaks of violence. A turbulent period ended only in August 1919 after the territory was occupied by the Yugoslav army. After five depressing years, a form of calm and normality finally returned to the region. Unsurprisingly, conditions for locals engaged in business activities had changed completely in the meantime. Before the war, István and József Benkő made a profit on the common market of the dual monarchy, selling livestock in Budapest, Graz and Vienna. However, with the Treaty of Trianon, the Benkő family became citizens of a socially unstable and economically impoverished Yugoslav polity. As they were officially registered as resident in the remote region of Prekmurje along the newly established Yugoslav – Hungarian border, József Benkő's entrepreneurial ambitions faced grim prospects once again.[2]

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[2] Branko Žunec, Josip Benko. Mit in resničnost. Murska Sobota 1993; Franc Gomboc, Jožef Benko. Tovarnar in gasilec, 1989–1945. Murska Sobota 2003; Ludvik Sočič, Josip Benko. Zbornik z gradivom simpozija Tešanovci, september 2005. Moravske Toplice 2006; Mitja Sunčič, Josip

In the immediate post-war years, József Benkő was just one among many of the ordinary inhabitants of the numerous linguistically and ethnically diverse territories caught up in a chaotic whirlwind of events instigated by the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire and the territorial reorganisation of East Central Europe. In the years that followed the collapse of the imperial administration and the army, numerous new boundaries were put in place across what, at that moment, ceased to be Austria-Hungary. The redrawing of borders was supposed to be based on the right to self-determination – an idea formulated by Woodrow Wilson and, separately, by Lenin – which should have meant that local communities had a say in the process and final outcome. In reality, however, the process of territorial parcellation was accomplished through the sometimes random and often arbitrary application of geopolitical, ethnographic, historical, strategic, economic, infrastructural and political criteria.[3] The actual delineation of borders was further complicated by the fact that, in many cases, new borders had to be drawn through linguistically and ethnically diverse regions, further fuelling already-existent and opposing nationalist claims over territory. On the ground, the creation of new state borders thus often went hand in hand with aggressive political agitation, physical violence and armed conflict.[4] Yet, when disagreements had been settled and treaties signed, the previously shared imperial space was divided between, on the one hand, internationally recognised successor states and, on the other, already-existent neighbouring countries that managed to enlarge their territories by annexing territories that were formerly part of Austria-Hungary.

The recent historiography has illustrated in depth the experience of people who lived in disputed regions and who were forced to cope with enormous transformations and sometimes existential challenges throughout the early interwar period.[5]

Benko, in: Barbara Šterbenc Svetina et al. (Eds.), Novi slovenski biografski leksikon. Drugi zvezek: B – Bla. Ljubljana 2017, 281–3.

[3] Volker Prott, The Politics of Self-determination. Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917–1923. Oxford 2016; Margaret MacMillan, Peacemakers. The Paris Conference of 1919 and its Attempt to End War. London 2003.

[4] Pieter M. Judson, The Habsburg Empire. A New History. Cambridge/MA 2016, 437–41; Peter Haslinger, Austria-Hungary, in: Robert Gerwarth / Erez Manela (Eds.) Empires at War. Oxford 2014, 73–90, 87–89.

[5] This topic has generated a growing field of literature. Among others, see Gábor Egry, Navigating the Straits. Changing Borders, Changing Rules and Practices of Ethnicity and Loyalty in Romania after 1918, *Hungarian Historical Review* 2 (2013), No. 3, 449–76; Tamas Revesz, For the "Freedom and Unity" of Carinthia? New Perspectives on the Military Remobilization in the Carinthian Borderland War (1918–1919), *First World War Studies* 7 (2016), No. 3, 265–86; Rudolf Kučera, Exploiting Victory, Sinking into Defeat. Uniformed Violence in the Creation of the New Order in Czechoslovakia and Austria, 1918–1922, *Journal of Modern History* 88 (2016), 827–55; Marco Bresciani, Lost in Transition? The Habsburg Legacy, State- and Nation-building, and the New Fascist Order in the Upper Adriatic, in: Maarten Van Ginderachter / Jon E. Fox

Aside from outbreaks of ethnic violence and armed conflict, the implosion of the common imperial space also divided regions that had been, for centuries, tightly knit into a dense network of social, cultural and economic relationships. Administrative units both large and small – crownlands, regions, counties, districts and municipalities – were broken apart. Often, the new post-imperial state borders cut across local communities that had functioned until autumn 1918 as distinct micro-worlds. As a result, with the creation of successor states, many locals could no longer use long-established commercial routes, communicate with state representatives as they used to do, or even bury their parents at the previously accessible parish cemetery – for they found themselves on the other side of a newly established border.[6]

However, the outbreaks of violence and challenges in adapting were not the only consequences of imperial collapse that affected the lives of people living in disputed border regions. In the immediate post-war period, many contested, occupied or annexed territories underwent a process of state-building. By building all the vital institutions needed for the proper functioning of a consolidated state, the governments of the recently established states strived to forge authority over the newly acquired territory. In often terrifying conditions of social precariousness and political instability, the process of constructing a web of state institutions was understood as a crucial prerequisite for the appeasement of the – often openly hostile – local population. One other important reason also encouraged the political elite to attempt to resolve the situation along the contested state borders. In peripheral border regions, a functional state administration and the subsequent consolidation of state power over the local population could retrospectively justify political claims that had brought about the occupation or annexation of "unredeemed territories" in the first place. State officials working on the ground thus spared no effort in establishing new administrative institutions and procedures, or in realigning existing ones with those of the new state. They also devoted themselves to establishing a chain of command that linked local and meso-level state offices with central ministries and administrative departments in the new capitals.

The task of administrative readjustment and unification took on immense proportions. In the countries that emerged from the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, the process of state-building required more than setting up and policing new borders and toppling the double-headed Habsburg eagles that adorned administrative buildings. New state institutions were forged on the bedrock of imperial

(Eds.), National Indifference and the History of Nationalism in Modern Europe. Abingdon, New York 2018, 56–80.

[6] For a good insight into the existential challenges of post-Habsburg communities living along the new Czechoslovak – Hungarian borders, see Peter Haslinger, Dilemmas of Security. The State, Local Agency, and the Czechoslovak-Hungarian Boundary Commission, 1921–25, *Austrian History Yearbook* 49 (2018), 187–206.

institutional legacies, yet in an irreversibly altered political environment. With the exceptions of Hungary and Austria, the newly created imperial successor states were patchworks of regions, each with different socioeconomic histories and incongruent administrative and legal traditions.[7] To make matters worse, all post-imperial states claiming to be nation-states that represented a single nation were in fact inhabited by linguistically and culturally diverse populations.[8] Last but not least, the consolidation of state control was further complicated by the notion of self-determination, which implied the right of citizens to participation in political life. Since autumn 1918, national councils and various local political initiatives mushroomed all over the former territory of the Habsburg Empire, signifying a democratisation of political life and, in the process, creating short-lived polities that, at a minimum, demanded that their expectations be heard by state authorities. Even though these ad hoc grassroots democratic movements were mostly unsuccessful in their attempts to influence the territorial and political reorganisation process in the post-Habsburg era, they often forced representatives of the new successor states to listen to and respect the aspirations of citizens demanding the democratisation of political life. As a result, in the post-war and post-revolutionary years, these newly emerged states' control over local populations could not be simply imposed from above. It had to be negotiated.

Hence, a process of the institutional (re)creation of polities based on a new principle of political legitimacy – that is, the notion of self-determination – and the implementation of the idea of democratisation were two overlapping and interdependent phenomena. In other words, the successor states that emerged after the First World War went through "double transformations" and "had to transform themselves from branches of a multi-ethnic empire to self-determined nation-states *and*, at the same time, from monarchical states, with either limited or no participation rights, into democracies"[9].

The post-1919 path of József Benkő illuminates how state-building and democratisation might have influenced the destinies of locals in the post-war years. As it turned out, Benkő successfully pursued his pre-war business ideas despite bleak prospects. In changing political, cultural and social contexts, he eventually managed to set up a meat processing factory and export meat products and livestock to foreign markets. His success had much to do with his acumen and solid pre-war

[7] Marie-Janine Calic, A History of Yugoslavia. West Lafayette / IN 2019, 72.

[8] For a provocative proposition about the successor states as little empires see Pieter M. Judson, "Where our commonality is necessary…". Rethinking the End of the Habsburg Monarchy, *Austrian History Yearbook* 48 (2017), 1–21, 19–21.

[9] Heidi Hein-Kircher / Steffen Kailitz, "Double Transformations". Nation Formation and Democratization in Interwar East Central Europe, *Nationalities Papers* 46 (2018), No. 5, 745–58, 745.

family foundations. Yet, at the same time, a "double transformation" also played a significant role in Benkő's rise from being the son of a prosperous farmer to a regional business baron. Benkő was very skilful in building his business successes on sophisticated manoeuvring within the institutional framework of the new post-war power structure, justified ideologically by two postulates: the primacy of the nation and democracy. Given that he belonged to a local Slavophone community, the Yugoslav authorities categorised him as a first-class citizen. This allowed Benkő to establish himself as a reliable local collaborator with the Slovene and Serbian political and social elites. By as early as 1923, the Slovene regional administration had appointed him as mayor of Murska Sobota, formerly known as Muraszombat. Symbolically, the shift in how Benkő wrote his name marked his transition from being a loyal Hungarian citizen to that of a Yugoslav compatriot: in the years that followed the Yugoslav occupation, József Benkő first became Jožef Benko, and soon after Josip Benko, a change that denoted his recent alliance with the Serbian political elite. In exchange, the Belgrade authorities provided him with numerous business concessions, including an exclusive privilege to export livestock from Prekmurje. Besides the economic success accommodated by the new Yugoslav "nation-state", the introduction of mass elections created a setting in which Benko, as a local entrepreneur and livestock merchant, could also become a successful regional politician. Building on a complex network of business relationships, he was first elected as mayor of Murska Sobota in the first post-war elections in 1927, and later became a representative in the assembly of the Drava Banovina in Ljubljana. Then, from 1931 to 1938, he was a member of the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, perhaps the pinnacle of his political career.

State-building and democratisation are two post-imperial phenomena that had long-term consequences for the lives of local populations in contested regions, despite being mostly overshadowed by outbreaks of violence. The aim of this article is thus to shift attention away from meticulous examinations of the verbal and physical violence that plagued the linguistically and ethnically diverse regions in the immediate interwar years. Instead, we will focus on processes of state-building and democratisation that were encouraged and enabled by the same imposing forces – the collapse of the Habsburg Empire, revolutionary outbreaks, and the post-war combination of national self-determination and state sovereignty, which formed the ideological cornerstone of the political order in East Central Europe.

In this article, and following Max Weber, we understand the state to be "a compulsory political organisation with continuous operations", in which the professional administrative staff "successfully uphold the claim to the monopoly of the legitimate use of force in the enforcement of its order"[10]. The process of state-building thus

[10] Max Weber, Economy and Society, Vol. 1. New York 1968, 54–56.

refers to the intentional construction or rebuilding of such an institution that "provided for the emergence of specialized personnel, control over consolidated territory, loyalty and durability, permanent institutions with a centralized and autonomous state that held the monopoly of violence over a given population"[11]. In other words, state-building encompasses "the processes and features of building the apparatuses of the state as well as the formal and informal institutions that make up a state"[12]. The notion of democratisation is understood as a process of expanding participation in decision-making and dismantling privileges, which is not limited to the political sphere but rather also encompasses other aspects of social life.[13] However, in the context of state-building, the aspect of political participation is of particular interest. Electoral reforms generally broadened the number of eligible voters in all post-imperial successor states in East Central Europe. But participation in decision-making was not necessarily extended to all political and administrative levels. Further, the relative levelling of social privilege did not necessarily include national minorities – precisely because different groups within a society often understood democratic principles differently, in line with their own interests. While national minorities demanded influence within the state, dominant national groups often sought to exclude minorities from political participation. Hence, state representatives as well as local interest groups often prioritised nation formation over democratisation. This attitude paved the way for state centralisation and the concomitant restriction of local self-government and, further, the violation of fundamental democratic principles.[14]

By choosing two peripheral, politically contested, but also ethnically and linguistically diverse, border regions as the objects of our analysis – Eastern Galicia in Poland and Prekmurje in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – the aim of this article is thus to analyse and compare processes of state-building and democratisation on the fringes of two successor states. The two regions are similar in many respects and are therefore suitable for comparison. At the same time, the comparison makes it possible to examine not only the developments in two different successor states, but also the respective legacies of the two separate entities within the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy, as well as different local dynamics. This article seeks to offer some preliminary answers to questions such as the following: how were state institutions established and societies democratised on the contested peripheries of newly estab-

[11] Charles Tilly, Reflections on the History of European State-Making, in: idem (Ed.), The Formation of National States in Western Europe. Princeton / NJ 1976, 3–83, 70–71.

[12] John Deak, Forging a Multinational State. State Making in Imperial Austria from the Enlightenment to the First World War. Stanford / CA 2015, 2.

[13] Arnold Gehlen, Demokratisierung, in: Demokratie und Verwaltung. 25 Jahre Hochschule für Verwaltungswissenschaften Speyer. Berlin 1972, 179–80.

[14] Hein-Kircher / Kailitz, Double Transformations, passim.

lished states? What was the reality on the ground in the peripheral regions populated by ethnically and linguistically diverse populations? How much of the state and its institutions were present in the immediate post-war years, and what does this imply about the extent of state capacity in recently established polities? What were the roles of imperial administrative legacies in these specific local contexts? Who could participate in decision-making on the local level, to what extent and how? What were the restrictions on democratisation? Finally, what was the level of democratic participation in the successor states compared with in the pre-war imperial era?

By presenting local and regional developments, this article will offer a more nuanced understanding of the historical processes of the creation, integration and consolidation of state institutions and apparatuses in post-Habsburg space in the early post-imperial period. Indeed, the study will also shed new light on the role of locals in the processes of state-building and democratisation.

Prekmurje and Eastern Galicia. An Introduction to Two Peripheral Border Regions

Prekmurje and the eastern part of Galicia shared significant geographical, socioeconomic and cultural similarities before and after the outbreak of the First World War. Both regions were defined primarily by their peripheral position within imperial and post-imperial spaces. From the perspectives of Budapest and Vienna respectively, Prekmurje and Eastern Galicia were two remote places, distanced from the minds and hearts of politicians and administrators in both capitals of the dual monarchy. Until its occupation by Yugoslav forces, the region that was later officially recognised as Prekmurje had been part of two counties in the Kingdom of Hungary – Zala and Vas – positioned directly on the imperial administrative border with the Cisleithanian half of the Empire, along the river Mur/Mura. Like Prekmurje, the eastern part of Galicia was a remote corner of the easternmost province of the Austrian part of the Monarchy that, despite its remoteness, received a certain amount of attention because of its location on the Russian border and as a political flashpoint.[15] The collapse of Austria-Hungary and the subsequent creation and alteration of state borders after autumn 1918 did not change the relationship of both regions towards their new administrative centres in Belgrade and Warsaw. In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Prekmurje was located at the far north-eastern corner of the state, while Eastern Galicia was at the south-east end of Poland, bordering Czechoslovakia, Romania and Soviet Ukraine. The relative geographical marginality ascribed to each region continued to define their positions within the context of

[15] Klaus Bachmann, "Ein Herd der Feindschaft gegen Rußland". Galizien als Krisenherd in den Beziehungen der Donaumonarchie mit Rußland (1907–1914). Wien 2001.

the internal political and administrative networks within their respective successor states.

Prekmurje and Eastern Galicia shared another essential feature: both were predominantly rural regions. In Prekmurje, most of the population worked in agriculture, while the two towns of Murska Sobota and Lendava, each with several thousand inhabitants, functioned as commercial hubs and administrative centres of the surrounding rural communities. The industrial sector – slaughterhouses, mills, and brick factories – was tiny, and employed only several hundred workers.[16] Geographically speaking, Eastern Galicia was a much larger region that contained several middle-sized cities and the Galician capital Lemberg/Lwów/Lviv, which had been one of the larger cities in the Habsburg Monarchy. However, the region's economic structure was similar to Prekmurje. Agriculture and large properties, which were in the hands of Polish aristocratic families, dominated the local economy. Except for the oil fields of Drohobych and Boryslav, the industrial sector was relatively tiny, and factories that processed and refined agricultural products – like distilleries, breweries, grain mills and lumberyards – played an important role.[17]

In addition, the societies in both regions were linguistically, ethnically and confessionally diverse. According to the official Hungarian and Yugoslav censuses, Prekmurje was populated by peoples categorised as Hungarians, Slovenes/Vends, Germans, and Jews, who were either mono-, bi- or trilingual, employing Hungarian, Slovene and German in their everyday communication. The Christian population belonged to Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist and Orthodox churches, with Jews present as well.[18] Similarly, the eastern part of Galicia was also defined by its multiethnic and multi-denominational population. However, national movements had gained a wider base among the local population than in Prekmurje, and social relations were increasingly understood through national lenses. Moreover, ethnic and religious dividing lines mostly coincided with social dividing lines in Eastern Galicia. While in the western part of Galicia Roman Catholic Poles made up the majority of the population, there was a Greek Catholic Ukrainian majority with a significant

[16] Rudi Čačinovič, Politični in socialni razvoj Prekmurja med obema vojnama, in: Bogo Grafenauer (Ed.), Prekmurski Slovenci v zgodovini. Murska Sobota 1961, 117–29; Maučec Matija, Prenaseljenost in sezonsko izseljevanje v Prekmurju, *Geografski vestnik* 9 (1933), 107–17.

[17] Klemens Kaps, Ungleiche Entwicklung in Zentraleuropa. Galizien zwischen überregionaler Verflechtung und imperialer Politik (1772–1914). Wien 2015.

[18] Damir Josipovič, Prekmurje in Prekmurščina / Prekmurje (Trans-Mura Region) and Prekmurian Language, *Anali PAZU* 2 (2012), No. 2, 92–102, 95; Attila Kovács, Številčni razvoj prekmurskih Madžarov v 20. stoletju, *Razprave in gradivo* 48–49 (2006), 6–36. For data from the first Yugoslav census in Prekmurje, see Gašpar Lipovšek, Prekmurje. Seznam občin v abecednem redu, razvrščenih po sodnih okrajih z navedbo raznovrstnih podatkov. Murska Sobota 1921.

Polish and Jewish minority in the east. The Polish minority in Eastern Galicia represented the upper class; the Polish gentry ruled over the rural Ukrainian population, while Poles and Jews predominated in the cities. Thus, social conflicts progressively overlapped with Polish – Ukrainian national antagonisms that appeared from the mid-nineteenth century onwards.[19]

Commonalities aside, Prekmurje and Eastern Galicia differ considerably in several important respects. Since the regions belonged to two separate entities within Austria-Hungary, they inherited two significantly different administrative and juridical traditions. While the area that became Prekmurje was an integral part of the Kingdom of Hungary in the dualist period, Galicia was a crownland that had been established as a result of the partition of the Polish – Lithuanian Commonwealth between Russia, Prussia and Austria in the late eighteenth century. In contrast to the future area of Prekmurje, Eastern Galicia was administratively integrated into the Cisleithanian part of the empire from the beginning of the dualist period to the end of the First World War.

More importantly, there were also major distinctions between the political cultures of both regions during the dualist period, which were later transferred to the new successor states as imperial legacies. In Cisleithania, there was a comparatively high level of democratisation and political participation before the war, culminating in the introduction of universal male suffrage for the 1907 parliamentary elections. This affected the political culture and practices of political life in Eastern Galicia as well, and it set the stage for national conflicts now linked with mass political mobilisation. Political participation at the regional and local level lagged behind these developments, but there too the pressure for democratisation increased.[20]

In comparison with Cisleithania, the democratisation process was much slower in the Kingdom of Hungary. Until 1918, only approximately 6 per cent of Hungarian citizens were entitled to vote, with individuals' suffrage rights dependent on property and education.[21] As a result, mass political mobilisation could not and did not take place in the predominantly rural territories of what later became Prekmurje.[22]

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[19] John-Paul Himka, Dimensions of a Triangle. Polish-Ukrainian-Jewish Relations in Austrian Galicia, in: Israel Bartal / Antony Polonsky (Eds.), Focusing on Galicia. Jews, Poles, and Ukrainians 1772–1918. London 1999, 25–48.

[20] Börries Kuzmany, Der Galizische Ausgleich als Beispiel moderner Nationalitätenpolitik?, in: Elisabeth Haid / Stephanie Weismann / Burkhard Wöller (Eds.), Galizien. Peripherie der Moderne – Moderne der Peripherie? Marburg 2013, 123–41.

[21] György Kepes, The Question of Universal Suffrage in Hungary after the First World War, 1918–19, *Parliaments, Estates and Representation* 40 (2020), No. 2, 201–17.

[22] In 1910, Géza Hartner was elected as member of the Hungarian Lower Chamber for the Muraszombat (Murska Sobota) constituency with 2,370 votes, see Ferenc Végváry / Ferenc Zimmer (Eds.), Sturm – féle országgyülési almanach 1910–1915. Budapest 1910, 286.

In addition, the region was also not a site of fierce nationalist struggles among competing national activists despite its multilingual and multi-ethnic character that usually provided fertile ground for such clashes. Indeed, in Muraszombat / Murska Sobota, a local administrative and commercial town in the south of the county of Vas, members of the local bourgeoise established a voluntary association named Vendvidéki Magyar Közművelődési Egyesület (the literal translation is: Hungarian Educational Association of the Vendic March). The association set itself the task of spreading Hungarian culture and the national idea among the local Slavophone population, categorised as Vendek (Vends) by the Hungarian authorities.[23] Yet the activities of the association – described in the post-imperial Yugoslav literature as employing a conscious policy of Magyarization among the local population – did not encounter opposition among local, educated Slavophone individuals.[24] As a result, the Slovene ethnolinguistic national activists who had agitated in Cisleithania were not able to gain much ground on the other side of the internal Austro-Hungarian border. Until 1918, the notion of "Sloveneness", which identified the Slavophone areas of western Hungary in Zala and Vas as an integral part of the Slovene national space, did not take root among the local Slavophones. A network of voluntary associations or any other kinds of institutions that could systematically cultivate and spread Slovene national thought simply did not exist in what later became Prekmurje. As a result, the local Slavic-speaking population remained politically inactive, and resistance to Magyarization efforts was limited to a few rural Catholic priests who had already cultivated contacts with Slovene national activists in Styria. By the end of 1918, they were unable to acquire any serious political power and influence.[25]

Experiences of War

The outbreak of the First World War dramatically affected both regions, yet in different ways and to different degrees. As an active war zone, Galicia suffered hostilities and destruction, espionage-related hysteria, multiple changes to the front line, as well as occupations and reoccupations. Large parts of Eastern Galicia were conquered by the Russian army twice during the war: from autumn 1914 to summer 1915, and from summer 1916 to summer 1917. The espionage hysteria of the Austro-Hungarian army (which suspected the Ukrainian population in Galicia of treason) and its repressive measures – as well as the politics of the Russian occu-

[23] The association's statute is in: László Mayer / András Molnár (Eds.), Források a Muravidék Történetéhez. Szöveggyűjtemény / Viri Za Zgodovino Prekmurja. Szombathely, Zalaegerszeg 2008, 158–62.

[24] Ivan Jerič, Zgodovina Madžarizacije v Prekmurju. Murska Sobota 2001.

[25] Jernej Kosi, The Imagined Slovene Nation and Local Categories of Identification. "Slovenes" in the Kingdom of Hungary and Postwar Prekmurje, *Austrian History Yearbook* 49 (2018), 87–102.

pation, which sought the permanent annexation of Eastern Galicia to the Russian Empire – intensified national conflicts in the region.[26] Moreover, developments during the war encouraged support for a united and independent Polish state among Galician Poles.[27] The establishment of a pseudo-independent Kingdom of Poland on the territory of Congress Poland, which had been under Russian rule before the war and was controlled by the Central Powers in November 1916, was one step in this process. By contrast, Galician Ukrainians, fearing possible absorption into a Polish state, pushed for the separation of "Ukrainian" Eastern Galicia from the western, Polish-majority half of the crownland.[28] From autumn 1917 onwards, as the front line marched into Russian territory, Galicia was no longer affected by hostilities. However, internal political conflicts grew. Difficulties with supplies in 1918 – the material expression of the imminent economic and political collapse of the Habsburg Monarchy – became increasingly apparent as the year went on.[29]

In contrast to Eastern Galicia, the territories that comprised the interwar Prekmurje were spared the scale of destruction wrought by modern warfare, remaining far away from the battlefields for the duration of the war. Yet, despite remaining far away from the battlefields, the population of what would become Prekmurje could not avoid involvement in the war effort. In truth, the war imposed great strains on local rural communities. In the countryside villages and towns, the wartime experience was characterised by a massive mobilisation both of women, children and the elderly on the home front and of men, young and old, in the Austro-Hungarian army.[30] Almost all male Hungarian citizens, with few exceptions, between the ages of 18 and 50 were called to arms. Many did not return or were seriously injured during military engagements.[31] The lack of agricultural workers and farm owners – many

[26] Mark von Hagen, War in a European Borderland. Occupations and Occupation Plans in Galicia and Ukraine, 1914–1918. Seattle/WA 2007; Alexander Victor Prusin, Nationalizing a Borderland. War, Ethnicity, and Anti-Jewish Violence in East Galicia, 1914–1920. Tuscaloosa/AL 2005; Christoph Mick, Lemberg, Lwów, L'viv, 1914–1947. Violence and Ethnicity in a Contested City. West Lafayette/IN 2016, 17–62.

[27] Piotr Szlanta, Der lange Abschied der Polen von Österreich, in: Helmut Rumpler (Ed.), Die Habsburgermonarchie 1848–1918, Vol. 11: Die Habsburgermonarchie und der Erste Weltkrieg. Part 1: Der Kampf um die Neuordnung Mitteleuropas. Wien 2016, 813–51.

[28] Harald Binder, Die Ukrainer von enttäuschter Staatstreue zum Kampf um Selbständigkeit, in: Rumpler (Ed.), Die Habsburgermonarchie, Vol. 11, Part 1, 853–85.

[29] Prusin, Nationalizing a Borderland, 58–60.

[30] On the Hungarian peasantry's experience and remembrance of the First World War, see Ignác Romsics, The Great War and the 1918–19 Revolutions as Experienced and Remembered by the Hungarian Peasantry, *Region. Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 4 (2015), No. 2, 173–94.

[31] The percentage of fallen soldiers in Prekmurje was higher (3,28%) than the average for the whole of Austria-Hungary (2,95%), see Gordana Šöveges Lipovšek, Prišo Je Glás. Prekmurci v Vojni 1914–1918. Padli in Pogrešani. Murska Sobota 2016, XXX.

of whom were conscripted – also profoundly changed the life of rural communities. In this predominantly agricultural region, the mobilisation of local male conscripts into military units placed many additional responsibilities on women, particularly in the domains of agricultural production and familial duties. In addition, while staying on the home front, the Slavophone inhabitants of the western parts of the Zala and Vas counties found themselves subjected to the vigorous expectations of the state administration in their everyday lives. As farmers and food producers, they had to cope with a set of harsh state interventions into the production, circulation and consumption of food and agricultural products, such as requisitioning and fixing upper limits on prices. At the same time, the state's wartime propaganda also addressed locals as patriotic and loyal Hungarian citizens. The inhabitants of Prekmurje were thus expected to contribute to the war effort on the home front in various additional ways: by buying state bonds, tending to the wounded, collecting precious raw materials, and actively participating in their local Red Cross branches. Despite their different characters and intensities, war-weariness still shaped developments after the end of the war in both regions.[32]

Times of Upheaval

When the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy emerged on the horizon, the slogan of the self-determination of peoples and the ideas pertaining to nation-based state-building gained popularity in both regions. The outcome of social and political ferment in these multi-ethnic territories, however, remained open and unpredictable even in the autumn of 1918. Certainly, the demands and expectations generally expressed among the local populations often overlapped with the particular and different state-building and nationalising programmes of political elites and activists.

Although emancipatory social demands and nationalising claims shaped post-war political transitions in Eastern Galicia and Prekmurje alike, the significance of these political discourses differed in each case. In war-torn Eastern Galicia, the idea of self-determination was closely linked with competing Ukrainian and Polish nationalist claims to the region, based on the relatively high degree of politicisation and nationalisation that had evolved before and during the war. In October 1918, both Polish and Ukrainian political activists prepared to assert their claims. A Polish Liquidation Committee – consisting of representatives of the Galician Polish Parties –

[32] For an overview of war effort in "Prekmurje", see Metka Fujs (Ed.), Prišo je glás. Prekmurci v vojni 1914–1918. Zbirka tematskih člankov in razprav. Murska Sobota 2017; Miklós Melega, Podnošenje žrtve i solidarnosti. Okrug Murska Sobota kao ratna pozadina (1914–1918), in: Branimir Bunjac (Ed.), Pomurje 1914–1920. Zbornik radova / Mura mente 1914–1920. Čakovec 2011, 59–82; Darja Kerec, Prekmurje leta 1917, *Studia Historica Slovenica* 18 (2018), No. 3, 811–25.

was established in Krakow and acted as the Polish interim government in Galicia during autumn 1918 (though its power was in fact limited to Western Galicia). At the same time, a Ukrainian National Council was established in Lviv / Lwów, the members of which were drawn from the ranks of Ukrainian deputies in the Reichsrat, and from members of the Galician Diet. When the Polish Liquidation Committee prepared for a takeover in Eastern Galicia, the Ukrainian National Council acted, and they seized administrative power during the night of 1 November 1918. The West Ukrainian People's Republic was subsequently declared, which in turn claimed sovereignty over territories populated predominantly by the Ukrainian speakers of the Habsburg Monarchy, that is, Eastern Galicia, Bukovina and Transcarpathia.[33] The proclamation of a Ukrainian state promised equal rights for all national and religious groups. Accordingly, it called on all national minorities to constitute themselves and send representatives to the Ukrainian National Council.[34] In contrast to the Habsburg legal framework, the Ukrainian authorities recognised Jews as a national minority. However, Poles largely boycotted this offer and no official Polish representative institution was ever created in the Ukrainian republic. Jews constituted their own national council,[35] but they were anxious to remain neutral in the Ukrainian – Polish conflict and thus avoided any involvement in Ukrainian state institutions.[36]

Compared with the state level, transitions at the local and regional levels were less organised. Although the Ukrainian National Council (as the highest legislative body) and a State Secretariat (as its executive body) acted as a central government, state-building at the local and regional levels was characterised by an interplay between bottom-up and top-down initiatives.[37] For example, local committees and national councils were formed in the provinces as in the core cities. These provincial councils and committees were supported by military personnel and members of the local intelligentsia, as well as by peasants from surrounding villages. In this way, local populations assumed an active role in the overall process of state-building in Eastern Galicia. Overall, local Ukrainian councils played an important role, seeking to empower the Ukrainian population that had previously been disadvantaged by

[33] Mick, Lemberg, 138–44; Torsten Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik. Zu den polnisch-ukrainischen Beziehungen und dem Problem der ukrainischen Staatlichkeit in den Jahren 1918 bis 1923. Berlin 2004, 127. For the text of the proclamation see Mychajlo Lozyns'kyj, Halyčyna v rr. 1918–1920. Viden' 1922, 42–43.

[34] Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, 173.

[35] Aside from several local Jewish councils, a Jewish National Council of Eastern Galicia convened in Stanislaviv in December 1918. See Natalja V. Čebotok, Deržavna etnonacional'na politika v Ukrajini u 1917–1921 rr. Diss. Kyjiv 2005, 132.

[36] Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, 173, 206–7.

[37] Stephen Velychenko, State Building in Revolutionary Ukraine. A Comparative Study of Governments and Bureaucrats, 1917–1922. Toronto 2011, 216.

Galician electoral regulations. Bearing in mind the social structure of the Ukrainian population, this also entailed empowering the rural masses. In hope of land reform, not only Ukrainian peasants but also the few Polish peasants in the region apparently welcomed Ukrainian rule: from their points of view, at least at the end of 1918, social considerations seem to have had a greater importance in the countryside than national considerations.[38]

All in all, one can speak of a democratisation at the local and regional levels insofar as the Galician class-based electoral system had been abolished for the local diet and municipal councils. Immediately after the takeover on 1 November, the Ukrainian National Council announced the liquidation of imperial Austrian administrative bodies and called for the new election of district commissioners and district national councils. In many municipalities, as well as at the district level, elections had already been held during the first days of November 1918. However, the electorate was not clearly defined – who was entitled to vote varied from district to district. On 16 November, the Ukrainian National Council issued an order that elections were to be held under universal and equal suffrage. But these regulations were not necessarily applied to the initial elections of the first days of November, when rural and urban municipalities as well as local cooperatives and associations sent delegates to the district national councils.[39] These delegates were usually elected by Ukrainian organisations. Accordingly, among the Ukrainian district national councils, members of the local Ukrainian political and cultural elites dominated, such as chairpersons from the national-cultural societies, or members of the local party organisations of the Ukrainian National Democrats. Still, it should be recognised that the share of peasants among the political elites increased under Ukrainian rule. However, most of the peasant delegates were rather wealthy peasants who often had previous political experience and had secured leading functions in cooperatives before the war. Compared with the revolutionary mood in the former Russian territories, the Galicians turned out to be much more conservative in their approach. Overall, in contrast to the pre-war period, Ukrainians dominated politics. But in several districts also Poles, Jews and Germans were represented in the district councils and participated in the work of district committees.[40] At the local level, there were sometimes several different councils and, often, their responsibilities were not clearly defined.[41]

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[38] Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, 172–3.

[39] Borys J. Tyščyk, Zachidno Ukraïn'ska Narodna Respublika (1918–1923). L'viv 2005, 160–90.

[40] Oleh Pavlyšyn, Orhanizacija cyvil'noï vlady ZUNR u povitach Halyčyny (lystopad – hruden' 1918 roku), *Ukraïna Moderna* (1999), No. 2–3, XXX–XXX; Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, 173–4.

[41] Tyščyk, Zachidno Ukraïn'ska Narodna Respublika, 170; Pavlyšyn, Orhanizacija cyvil'noï vlady, XXX.

Moreover, the competences of the new representative bodies and their relation to the state administration was not fully clarified either. According to the law on the provisional administration, dated 16 November 1918, a Ukrainian state district commissioner was the highest representative of the government administration at the district level and was designated by the state secretary of the interior. Since district commissioners had already been elected by the local population, they were confirmed by the state secretary. The central authorities appointed district commissioners only in a few districts. Similarly, municipal commissioners, whose powers resembled those of a mayor, had to be confirmed by the district commissioner, who had the right to designate someone else if he doubted the loyalty of the elected person towards the Ukrainian state. The role of the elected councils differed from district to district. While in some districts the district national councils had a consultative character, in other districts the state commissioner could not make any important decision without the consent of the council. In early 1919, Ukrainian authorities took on a legislative project to unify and specify these structures, but they did not reach a conclusion.[42]

The establishment of Ukrainian statehood progressed in Eastern Galicia over the following months. However, it was challenged by competing Polish claims. Starting from a Polish uprising in the capital Lviv / Lwów, and after the advance of Polish troops into the territory, an armed Polish – Ukrainian conflict for Eastern Galicia began in November 1918. Though uprisings and civilian involvement in the fighting had occurred in Lviv / Lwów and a few other cities, the Polish – Ukrainian conflict in the region was largely a continuation of the regular warfare of the previous months and years, including positional warfare between the Ukrainian Galician army and the Polish army, with both parties committed to complying with the Hague and Geneva Conventions. Compared with the hostilities in former Russian territories, the war in Eastern Galicia was less brutal. Nevertheless, both sides committed atrocities, and propaganda centred on those atrocities further poisoned Polish – Ukrainian relations in the region.[43] Moreover, Jews were often caught between the fronts. Although Jews declared themselves neutral in the Polish – Ukrainian conflict, the conflict parties repeatedly accused them of treason. The worst anti-Jewish pogrom, in which about 70 people were killed and over 400 wounded, took place in Lviv / Lwów after the city was taken by Polish troops in November 1918.[44] Because of the progress of the Polish army, the Ukrainian National Council and government moved to Stanisławów in the south of Galicia in December 1918. The war hampered Ukrainian state-building at the local as well as state level. Important reform projects,

[42] Tyščyk, Zachidno Ukraïn'ska Narodna Respublika, 190.

[43] Włodzimierz Borodziej / Maciej Górny, Der vergessene Weltkrieg. Europas Osten 1912–1923, Vol. 2: Nationen 1917–1923. Darmstadt 2018, 153–61, 385–9.

[44] Mick, Lemberg, 111–21.

and especially land reform, were delayed.[45] The Ukrainian National Council issued a progressive electoral law in April 1919 based on the principle of universal – male and female – suffrage through equal, direct and secret balloting, and this law was also focused on the concept of national-personal autonomy through the introduction of national electoral rolls.[46] However, parliamentary elections were never held because of the military situation. On the contrary, on 9 June 1919, the Board of the Ukrainian National Council and the State Secretariat temporarily handed over its constitutional powers to President Jevhen Petruševyč as an "authorised dictator". The war ended in a Ukrainian defeat and in the dissolution of the West Ukrainian People's Republic a month later, in July 1919.[47]

During the same period, a rather different set of developments can be traced in the western parts of the Zala and Vas counties in the Kingdom of Hungary. Here, in the short but eventful period between autumn 1918 and summer 1919, the flow of historical events ran faster than before. Yet, these developments were not accompanied by a massive outbreak of armed violence. Instead, instigated by notions of self-determination and widespread social and political instability, the rapid growth of political consciousness in autumn 1918 redefined the local political stage and created a foundation for the democratisation of local society. Unlike the period before the war, the right to participate in public matters was no longer understood as a privilege of the members of the educated and economic elites. Encouraged by experiences of war that contributed to the "widening of their worldview and the strengthening of their self-respect"[48], Slavophone and bilingual peasant soldiers who returned to their cities, towns, and villages were no longer afraid to openly articulate their demands and expectations before the rural public and its social and clerical authorities. As a result, a wider swathe of the local Slovene-speaking peasantry began to demand a rapid improvement in their own situation, be it either within Hungary or, at first in very rare cases, in another polity. In such an atmosphere, the local Hungarian elite became increasingly concerned with the triumphant activities and accomplishments of the Slovene national movement in the territories of the former Austrian part of

[45] Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, 203. On the land reform see Tyščyk, Zachidno Ukraïn'ska Narodna Respublika, 244–52.

[46] On the electoral regulations, see in detail Tyščyk, Zachidno Ukraïn'ska Narodna Respublika, 183–5; Lozyns'kyj, Halyčyna, 89–90. On the concept of national-personal autonomy and its implementation of regional compromises in the late Habsburg Monarchy, see Börries Kuzmany, Habsburg Austria. Experiments in Non-Territorial Autonomy, *Ethnopolitics* 15 (2016), No. 1, 43–65.

[47] Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, XXX.

[48] Ignác Romsics, The Great War and the 1918–19 Revolutions as Experienced and Remembered by the Hungarian Peasantry, *Region. Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia* 4 (2015), No. 2, 173–94, 183.

the dual monarchy; indeed, they lived right next to the former internal state border. Aristocrats and churchmen, state officials and civil servants, merchants and craftsmen – who identified themselves either as members of the Hungarian nation or as loyal Hungarian citizens – had to face the fact that Prekmurje's Slavophone Vends, who referred to themselves as Sloveni or Slovenci, could now demand the right to self-determination. These elites feared that the success of the movement would eventually lead to the annexation of the region by the South Slav state. By the end of 1918, this South Slav polity had only just begun to slowly emerge: first across the border in Styria, a former Habsburg crownland, and later, on the other side, in Međimurje, a territory previously subsumed within the Kingdom of Hungary via the Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia, which had been "liberated" – occupied – by Croatian volunteers in December 1918.[49]

The fears of the Hungarian inhabitants of the Vas and Zala counties grew stronger due to the active and organised propaganda of Slovene national activists and politicians. From autumn 1918 onwards, Styria's Slovene national councils, and Slovene national activists, began to publicly promote among Hungarian Slavophone peasants the idea of the annexation of Prekmurje to this newly founded South Slav state. By early November, for instance, several hundred peasants from Prekmurje participated in an event organised by the local Slovene National Council in the Styrian town of Ljutomer, where self-proclaimed representatives of Hungary's Slovenes read their demand to become part of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs, joining up with other Slovenes from formerly Cisleithenian crownlands.[50] In the autumn and winter of 1918–19, however, such ideas were supported only by a small minority of Slavophone peasants and only a few among the local Catholic clergy. This lack of broader support for such a territorial rearrangement was further demonstrated in late December when paramilitary units from Međimurje, guided by Captain Jure Jurišić, broke through the border on their own initiative. Without the state authorities knowing, they arrived in Murska Sobota and proclaimed the annexation of the region to the South Slav state. It did not take long before Hungarian regular units, with the support of local Slavophone volunteers, forced Jurišić and his units to run for their lives.[51] The "liberation" of Prekmurje was thus not backed by local Slavophone peasants, yet it did attract a chunk of the rural population who were, due to their physical vicinity to and kinship ties with Styria, well acquainted with the ongoing political and social circumstances there. Still, in general, the local population's "yearning" for Yugoslavia, if it existed at

[49] Miroslav Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci. Od narodne osvoboditve do nacistične okupacije (1919–1941). Murska Sobota 1984, 71–85.

[50] Klaudija Sedar, Prekmurje ob zgodovinski prelomnici 1919. Zbornik izbranih dokumentov ob 100. obletnici priključitve Prekmurja in združitve prekmurskih Slovencev z matičnim narodom. Murska Sobota 2019, 27–52.

[51] Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci, 88–92.

all, did not necessarily rest on nationalistic pillars. Much more than "the national", their concerns were of a social and pragmatic kind. Joining Yugoslavia promised improvements to the social status of the peasantry on the Hungarian side of the border. In comparison with Hungary, Styria's peasantry held many legal and political rights, was in general economically better off and paid lower taxes. Above all, a scent of land reform wafted in the air across the border: in December 1919, the Yugoslav regent Alexander vowed to put it into practice and a few weeks later he confirmed a provisional bill that dissolved all large estates in exchange for financial compensation. Unsurprisingly, the promise of land reform easily inspired the political imagination of modest local peasants in the densely populated Hungarian countryside, where social and economic relations were determined by the firm grip of a handful of aristocrats over most of the arable agricultural land.

Faced with territorial claims from the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the Hungarian government in Budapest was forced to intervene in local affairs. In December 1918, Oszkár Jászi, the minister of nationalities of the short-lived Hungarian People's Republic, formulated a political solution for the precarious political circumstances of a region shattered by revolutionary rhetoric on the one hand, and the nationalist claims of the Slovene national movement from abroad on the other. Jászi's plan would unite all the districts and municipalities with Slavophone populations in the Zala and Vas counties into a single administrative unit with a seat in Muraszombat / Murska Sobota and a government commissioner as head of the county administration. Such an administrative unit would serve two purposes: it would accommodate local expectations regarding the possibility of participating in the political process, and it would preserve the territorial integrity of the Hungarian state. The role of this government commissioner was assigned to the local-born university lecturer Bela Obal, who immediately endeavoured to gather support from the Slovenian-speaking population for the proposed territorial and administrative reorganisation. At one such public meeting, organised by Obal in Bogojina, and attended by local villagers, the local national council declared their right to self-determination and stated that they were Vends who wanted to live in Hungary as they had for the previous millennium. They added that they wanted to live with other Vends, inhabiting about 200 municipalities in the districts of the Zala and Vas counties, in a single administrative unit called Mura County. Yet Jászi's plan encountered opposition from the existing governing bodies of Zala and Vas counties, who opposed the transfer of their authority over county territories. [52]

An even more radical plan, formulated by a few local Catholic priests from Zala County, headed by Jožef Klekl, suffered the same fate a few weeks later. Their design staked claims to a particular political – territorial unit called Slovenska krajina,

[52] Ibidem, 82–85.

which would consist of Slovene and mixed Slovene – Hungarian municipalities in the Zala and Vas counties. Slovenska krajina would, internally, be completely autonomous and led by a Hungarian government minister, who would be accountable to the Hungarian parliament as well as to the parliament of Slovenska krajina. The Hungarian state would grant complete political and cultural autonomy to Slovenska krajina, while matters of foreign affairs, finance, the military, legislature, citizenship and the economy would remain in the hands of the Hungarian government. In addition, if Slovenska krajina were to eventually become subject to conflicting territorial claims, the Hungarian government was expected to defend the polity's internal autonomy at potential international negotiations regarding the state's future borders. State officials in Budapest did not immediately turn down Klekl. On the contrary, he was invited to Budapest to reconcile his and Obal's visions of Prekmurje's future, but with no success. Klekl's request to the Hungarian government to fight for the internal autonomy of Slovenska krajina, even if the region was to be ceded to Yugoslavia, turned out to be unacceptable to the other side.[53]

The proclamation of the Hungarian Soviet Republic on 21 March 1919 added yet another layer of complexity to the already-complicated political situation in what became known as Prekmurje. Soon after the change in regime, the representatives of the new government reorganised the local administration. Bela Obal remained in charge of Vas County as the people's commissioner, while Vilmos Tkálecz was named as his deputy, responsible for Slovenska krajina. A former major in the Austro-Hungarian army, and a local teacher before the war, Tkalec did not display too much enthusiasm either for the proletarian revolution or for Slovene national sentiments. He let his private interests guide his rule over the region; he was heavily implicated in illegal trade and smuggling over the state border with Austria. When it became clear to the central government that Tkalec was predominantly interested in making money for himself, and that he had in fact accumulated enormous wealth at the expense of the state, they tried to replace him. But Tkalec was faster. On 29 May, and with the help and support of several members of the local elite, and with the assistance of Hungarian counter-revolutionary aristocrats who had escaped to Austria and hoped to reclaim power from there, Tkalec proclaimed the independence of a new state, the Mura Republic (Murska republika / Mura Köztársaság), using the notion of "national self-determination" as its legitimising principle. Yet, as was often the case in the immediate post-war years, people were neither informed of nor asked for their opinion about the republic. Lacking popular support, the republic was crushed by units from the Red army on 5 June, a week after it was proclaimed a republic.[54]

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[53] Ibidem, 92–108.

[54] Julij Titl, Murska republika 1919. Murska Sobota 1970; György Feiszt, Revolucionarni pokret u Prekmurju od 1918. do 1919., in: Bunjac (Ed.), Pomurje 1914–1920, 345–52; Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci, 126–89.

In the meantime, far away from the various local and regional political upheavals, the actual future of the region and its population had been decided. By spring 1919, key decisions had been made at the Peace Conference in Paris. Based on supposedly objective ethnographic evidence prepared by Slovene experts among the Yugoslav delegation, and in exchange for promised interventions against the communist regime in Budapest, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes received permission to occupy the western parts of the Zala and Vas counties. Once again, and par for the course, people living in the region were left without a say in the matter. No one asked them about their demands and expectations, and, unlike other regions, no plebiscite on the future territorial affiliation of the region was planned.[55]

In the case of Eastern Galicia, the Polish – Ukrainian conflict resulted in Poland's military victory in July 1919. However, the status of the region remained uncertain. The Paris Peace Conference did not make a final decision on this matter. In this case too, the attitudes of the Allies were shaped by political considerations. In light of the Polish – Soviet War, the Allies authorised Poland to occupy Eastern Galicia in 1919, and they temporarily allocated the region to the Polish Republic, requiring a statute of autonomy and a plebiscite for the population of the territory from the Polish authorities. Notwithstanding repeated Ukrainian appeals to the League of Nations, which protested against the integration of Eastern Galicia into the Polish state, the Council of Ambassadors finally recognised the annexation of the region to Poland in March 1923. Even at this point, the draft law on regional autonomy was never implemented and a plebiscite was never held.

The Consolidation of the Successor States in Prekmurje and Eastern Galicia

The process of consolidating Yugoslav and Polish state power in Prekmurje and Eastern Galicia began in each case with a military occupation. Even though the legal status of Eastern Galicia was not definite until 1923, and Polish rule remained contested, the region was de facto incorporated into the nascent Polish state during the summer of 1919. The Polish government sought international recognition of the annexation and at the same time treated the territory like an integral part of the Polish state from the outset. However, state consolidation was not a smooth process.

[55] Árpád Hornyák, Hungarian-Yugoslav Diplomatic Relations, 1918–1927. New York 2013, 46–49. On the diplomatic activities of the Yugoslav delegation at the Paris Peace Conference regarding Prekmurje, see Andrej Rahten, Diplomatska prizadevanja Ivana Žolgerja za Slovensko Štajersko in Prekmurje, *Studia Historica Slovenica* 18 (2018), No. 2, 489–528; Uroš Lipuščeк, Prekmurje v vrtincu Pariške mirovne konference 1919. Vloga ZDA in kartografa Douglasa W. Johnsona pri določanju slovenskih (prekmurskih) mej. Petanjci 2019; Matija Slavič, Naše Prekmurje. Zbrane razprave in članki. Murska Sobota 1999.

Polish rule was met with acts of opposition from the Ukrainian side. Ukrainian activists who did not recognise Polish state institutions protested in particular against the conscription of Ukrainians into the Polish army, and they called for a boycott of the 1922 elections to the Polish parliament. After 1923, the situation calmed down, at least for a few years, and the local population largely accepted the political realities. However, violent opposition increased again, especially in the 1930s.[56] Similar dynamics can be observed in Prekmurje. Just a few days after the Yugoslav units occupied the western areas of the Zala and Vas counties in August 1919, in line with the conclusions of the Paris Peace Conference, the civil commissioner for Prekmurje took over the public administration of the region. Despite limited military confrontations along the border, the dissemination of revisionist Hungarian propaganda, and some instances of violent acts directed against the new authorities, the annexed territory remained in Yugoslav hands.[57] In July 1920, the Treaty of Trianon confirmed Yugoslav territorial acquisitions at the expense of the former Kingdom of Hungary, and thus gave the Yugoslav – Hungarian Boundary Commission a mandate to draw the border between the states.[58] After the commission finished its work in 1924 by laying down physical boundary markers that demarcated the definite border between the two states, both those in Hungary and most of the local Slavophone and Hungarian populations in Prekmurje accepted this new reality. The open confrontation with the Yugoslav state authorities gradually settled down and stopped in the mid-1920s.[59]

Clearly, problems with the consolidation of state power were not restricted to the cases of Eastern Galicia and Prekmurje. In general, both of the nascent Yugoslav and Polish states were created out of a union of several heterogeneous territories, and they thus faced similar problems. The Polish nation-state had been built on the ruins of the Russian, German and Austrian Empires. During the First World War, the idea of the formation of a "Kingdom of Poland" as an imperial satellite state had been floated. In view of the dissolution of the empires, an independent Polish Republic was instead proclaimed in November 1918. However, a united Polish state developed only gradually. The Polish Liquidation Committee in Krakow was one of several regional provisional institutions involved in Polish state-building. Hence, the recognition of the Warsaw government by the Krakow Committee in November 1918 was one important step towards unification. Moreover, the decision to hold elections for a Constituent Polish Parliament as early as in January 1919

[56] Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, 287–364.

[57] Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci, 91–95.

[58] David Cree, Yugoslav-Hungarian Boundary Commission, *The Geographical Journal* 65 (1925), No. 2, 89–110.

[59] Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci, 120–5.

played a significant role in consolidating the new state.[60] However, the election was restricted to certain territories because of the ongoing state-building processes in several regions and the armed conflict with Soviet Russia on Poland's eastern frontier.[61] Aside from resolving the war against the Red army, internal legal and administrative consolidation and unification became a major task for the new state.

Similar disparities marked the territorial – administrative composition of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Broadly speaking, in the first several years after the emergence of the new state – but also well after the actual implementation of the new administrative division prescribed by the 1921 Vidovdan Constitution – Yugoslavia was far from being unified and centralised. In fact, the state functioned as a patchwork of several different administrative and legal regimes. After the unification of the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs with the Kingdom of Serbia on 1 December 1918, the new government in Belgrade started to exert supreme authority over the former Austro-Hungarian territories that were included in the state. However, this authority was only nominal. In reality, the existing offices in the various regions continued to work almost independently. The only change in their everyday functioning was a new obligation to report to Belgrade and to implement received instructions. At least in the territory under the authority of administrative bodies in Ljubljana, it took years before the Yugoslav central ministries in Belgrade achieved the all-encompassing subordination of existing state offices and the establishment of a unified top-down bureaucratic hierarchy.[62] In fact, it was only during the 1930s that the Yugoslav bureaucratic apparatus was successfully unified after years of various administrative changes and reforms, and even then it occurred only during the royal dictatorship.

We can trace a similar development also in the field of law with regard to the implementation of new legal regimes. Although the Polish Republic had implemented a centralised administrative system as early as in 1920, legal differences between the various regions of the new state persisted. The 1921 Constitution established the legal framework, including guarantees for democratic participation and protection

[60] Andrzej Ajnenkiel, The Establishment of a National Government in Poland, 1918, in: Paul Latawski (Ed.), The Reconstruction of Poland, 1914–23. Basingstoke 1992, 133–43.

[61] In actual fact, the elections for a Constituent Polish Parliament took place only in the former congress of the Kingdom and Western Galicia in January 1919. In the former Prussian territories of Greater Poland, elections subsequently took place in April 1919, whereas the "eastern borderlands", which were the scene for the Polish – Soviet war that lasted until 1921, as well as Eastern Galicia, did not participate in the elections for a Constituent Polish Parliament. See Jacek Jędruch, Constitutions, Elections and Legislatures of Poland, 1493–1993. A Guide to their History. New York 1998, 270–1.

[62] Lovro Bogataj, Uprava v Sloveniji od prevrata 1918 do izvršitve vidovdanske ustave, in: Josip Mal (Ed.), Slovenci v desetletju 1918–1928. Zbornik razprav iz kulturne, gospodarske in politične zgodovine. Ljubljana 1928, 373–88, 387–8.

of minority rights. However, the former imperial laws remained in force in the respective regions – even if they were not consistent with the Polish constitution – until they were replaced by new laws. Thus, different legal frameworks in the former Austrian, Russian and German territories continued to exist side by side. Indeed, in several fields (for example, in social legislation), the Polish parliament quickly issued new, uniform laws. However, in other fields the progress of legal unification was relatively slow. A new criminal code, for example, was issued only in 1932, a commercial code in 1934, and the elaboration of a unified civil law code was not completed during the interwar period.[63]

In Yugoslavia, too, an all-encompassing universal legal regime did not exist during the interwar period. Instead, different systems of principles and rules regulated life in the various state regions. Such disharmony was a consequence of the separate historical developments of the Kingdom's heterogeneous regions before their unification in December 1918. The territories that had been amalgamated into the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had belonged to three countries when the First World War broke out: Austria-Hungary (with three separate administrative apparatuses, each with its own laws in Austria, the Kingdom of Hungary, and Croatia-Slavonia), the Kingdom of Serbia and the Kingdom of Montenegro. In addition, it was only in 1912 that the Ottoman Empire was ultimately defeated and expelled from several southern parts of soon-to-be Yugoslavia, leaving behind a unique legal tradition that continued to have an influence on everyday life in the southern areas of the state well after 1918. The formation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes thus brought together various, and in many respects different and unrelated, legal regimes. In the post-war years of reconstruction and political conflict among various nationalistic parties, but also between centralists and federalists, it was impossible to achieve the immediate unification of the law through legal and democratic means. Incongruent legal traditions thus existed side by side in different corners of the state until new state legislation was either successfully enacted in parliament or proclaimed by the king during the royal dictatorship.

As a result, throughout the 1920s, the territory of Yugoslavia was officially divided into six recognised legal sub-territories, namely: (1) Slovenia and Dalmatia, (2) Croatia and Slavonia, (3) Vojvodina and Međimurje, (4) Bosnia and Herzegovina, (5) Serbia, and (6) Montenegro. (Prekmurje, as will be explained below, was considered for these legal purposes to be part of Slovenia and Dalmatia.) The process of legal unification proved to be extremely slow. It reached its peak only around 1930, when the king disbanded parliament and used his dictatorial power to enact laws that had remained in draft form during the crisis-ridden parliamentary period.

[63] Helmut Slapnicka, Österreichs Recht ausserhalb Österreichs. Der Untergang des österreichischen Rechtsraums. Wien 1973, XXX.

New legislation was authorised in the following branches of law: criminal law (27 January 1929), criminal proceedings (13 July 1929), and civil litigation (16 February 1930). Yet, separated civil codes that traced their origins back to the pre-1918 era – such as the imperial General Civil Code (*Allgemeines bürgerliches Gesetzbuch*) in the case of Slovenia and Dalmatia – remained in force until the end of the interwar period, even though future Yugoslav legislators had been preparing for unification for years.[64]

Despite the unification processes being relatively slow in both cases, Eastern Galicia and Prekmurje even more so experienced many administrative changes in the post-war years. One of the most important changes in Eastern Galicia was the implementation of voivodeships in 1920 as the highest-level administrative subdivision. In fact, the implementation of administrative unification in the region by the Polish state predated Eastern Galicia's official incorporation into the Polish Republic. The former Austrian crownland of Galicia was divided into four voivodeships (one for Western Galicia and three for Eastern Galicia). Thus, Galicia, as an administrative unit known during the Habsburg period, no longer existed. The voivodeships were further divided into districts (*powiat*). In contrast to the voivodeships, the districts were based on previous territorial divisions and corresponded to the former Austrian districts. Remarkably, administrative structures did not change significantly at the local level, but they did at the middle administrative and state levels. Overall, the central state administration clearly gained importance in relation to structures of self-government. The voivode (head of the voivodeship) as well as the *starosta* (district captain) were representatives of the state administration, subordinated to the central government in Warsaw, and thus had far-reaching powers. Indeed, the Polish constitution created a three-stage, territorial structure for self-administration. However, a law on the self-administration of the voivodeship (including special regulations for the Eastern Galician voivodeships of Lwów, Stanisławów and Tarnopol) was never implemented.

Self-administration on the municipal level, and even more so at the district level, was restricted by rigorous and centralised state control.[65] While the central government in Warsaw exercised direct control over the regional and local administrations, the administrative staff did not significantly change in Galicia as compared with its make-up before the war, and it was comprised of mainly locals. A key factor was the fact that Polish had been the administrative language in Galicia already in the Austrian period, and most Galician officials had been Poles. Unlike many other border regions, including Prekmurje, the old elites in Galicia prevailed in

[64] Sergij Vilfan, Uvod v pravno zgodovino. Ljubljana 1991, 132–5; John R. Lampe, Yugoslavia as History. Twice There Was a Country. Cambridge 2003, 140–2.

[65] For the Polish example, see Franciszek Ryszka / Juliusz Bardach (Ed.), Historia państwa i prawa Polski. Warszawa 1962.

the interwar period, resulting in a significant continuity of the local and regional administration. Well-trained Galician officials were also deployed in other regions of the new state that lacked Polish administrative personnel.[66] Certain discontinuities among administrative personnel in Eastern Galicia were primarily a sign of mistrust towards "national minorities", that is, Ukrainians and Jews, and a result of competing Ukrainian and Polish state-building processes. Because of the uncertain status of Eastern Galicia, the question of the oath of allegiance was a big issue; to take the oath meant to recognise the legitimacy of the respective state. Officials who had taken the oath to the Ukrainian state or who had hesitated to take the oath to the Polish state prior to the official incorporation of the region in 1923 had great difficulties in being readmitted into the Polish civil service – especially if they were Ukrainians or Jews.[67]

In Prekmurje, the question of the region's administrative organisation and division came to the fore almost simultaneously with the beginning of the actual Yugoslav military occupation. Immediately behind the Yugoslav soldiers, Yugoslav officials started pouring into Prekmurje. They were sent there from two regional centres, Ljubljana and Zagreb, because Slovene and Croatian politicians and civil servants could not agree on which regional centre should govern the region. Prekmurje had indeed been regarded as Slovene from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, and Slovene diplomats in the Yugoslav delegation at the conference invested a lot of effort in convincing representatives of the Great Powers to redraw the existing state border in this part of Hungary along a supposed ethnic division between Hungarians and Slovenes.[68] Yet, from the moment when it became obvious that the Paris Peace Conference had decided to give the region to Yugoslavia, both the Provincial Government (*Zemeljska vlada*) for Slovenia in Ljubljana and the Provincial Government for Croatia and Slavonia in Zagreb strived to incorporate Prekmurje into their respective administrative authorities. Consequently, Slovene officials took over the administration only in the western part of the region, whereas the offices in the south-eastern part were acquired by Croatian officials and subjected to Croatian administrative bodies. After a complaint was sent from Ljubljana to the Ministry of Interior in Belgrade, however, the issue of competing and overlapping administrative jurisdictions was finally resolved by intervention from above. On 2 September, the Minister of Interior, Pribičević, decided that the region ought to remain one administrative unit, governed for the time being by the Office of the Civil Commissioner. The civil commissioner would be appointed by the Provincial Government

[66] Velychenko, State Building, 238–9; Werner Benecke, Die Ostgebiete der Zweiten Polnischen Republik. Köln 1999, 143–64.

[67] See, for example, the Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, city of Lviv (CDIAL), fond 146, opys 8, sprava 4,205; fond 179, opys 1, sprava 975; fond 151, opys 1, sprava 20; fond 151, opys 1a, sprava 342.

[68] Slavič, Naše Prekmurje, XXX.

for Slovenia in Ljubljana, which meant in real terms that a cohort of Slovene civil servants from former Cisleithanian lands took over the responsibility of setting up the new state administration on the acquired territory.[69]

The decision to give control over the region to the Slovene administration within the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes led to a radical reworking of both the administrative organisation and administrative practices in Prekmurje. The Slovene Provincial Government in Ljubljana decided to establish an occupational regime by invoking Paragraph 43 of the Laws and Customs of War on Land (1907). Written during the Fourth Hague Convention, this paragraph instructed the authority that occupied a given territory to establish public order on the basis of laws in force in the occupied country, "unless absolutely prevented" from doing so.[70] The Legal Department of the Provincial Government found the general lack of knowledge of the Hungarian language and Hungarian laws among Slovene officials a sufficient argument to claim that the civilian occupational regime could not use existing Hungarian legal codes to maintain public order and manage everyday life in Prekmurje. On 12 August 1919, the Provincial Government in Ljubljana thus nullified existing Hungarian laws and proclaimed that laws that had been in use in other territories under its authority would act as the only legal framework in Prekmurje as well.[71] The existing Hungarian administrative bodies were disbanded as a result. They were replaced with the ad hoc Office of the Civil Commissioner, with its seat in Murska Sobota, which acted as the highest representative of the provisional Yugoslav state institutions at the local level in Prekmurje. A deputy served under the civil commissioner, with an office in Lendava. Two years later, on 1 June 1921, a new administrative unit – a district – was introduced in Prekmurje with its seat again in Murska Sobota. As with the civil commissioner before, a district captain was also accompanied by a deputy in Lendava. By introducing the district – an administrative unit that, in terms of organisation and purview, drew its direct organisational inheritance from imperial Austria – Prekmurje was administratively unified with other parts of the territory under the authority of the Provincial Government in Ljubljana.[72] In summary, by 1919 Prekmurje had been placed under the control of Ljubljana, which governed over the region in the name of the central government in Yugoslavia on the basis of Hague Convention provisions. This situation made it possible to ignore, disregard and nullify the existing Hungarian administrative

[69] Bogataj, Uprava v Sloveniji, 376–7; Jernej Kosi, Summer of 1919. A Radical, Irreversible, Liberating Break in Prekmurje / Muravidék?, *Hungarian Historical Review* 9 (2020), 51–68, 55.

[70] At ⟨http://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hague04.asp#art43⟩, 20 October 2020.

[71] Vilfan, Uvod v pravno, 134; idem, Pravna Zgodovina Slovencev. Od Naselitve Do Zloma Stare Jugoslavije. Ljubljana 1996, 505–6; Milan Škerlj, Pravosodje v Sloveniji v prvih desetih letih po zedinjenju, in: Mal (Ed.), Slovenci v desetletju 1918–1928, 388–423, 395–7.

[72] Vilfan, Uvod v pravno, 131.

and legal framework in the region. In the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Prekmurje, a region composed of former Hungarian territories, came into contact with the Slovene administration in Ljubljana. In turn, the Ljubljana administration had based its practices and skills predominantly on the inherited Austrian imperial administrative and legal legacy as the framework underpinning its organisation and operation. By incorporating Prekmurje into the provincial Slovene administration in Ljubljana, two imperial legal and administrative regimes met within a new state. However, a paradox then emerged: former citizens of the Kingdom of Hungary, who still resided in Prekmurje's villages and towns after the Yugoslav annexation, had to become acquainted with the laws, administrative procedures, and the organisation of state institutions that had functioned within the other half of the former dual monarchy.

An important reorganisation of administrative bodies in Prekmurje happened in the years following the promulgation of the Vidovdan Constitution on 28 June 1921. The new constitution envisaged the abolition of regional semi-autonomous meso-level executive bodies that had had the right to enact legal decrees valid exclusively on the territory under their control. These bodies were now to be replaced with a conventional administrative pyramid in which the lower-level authorities had to report to the higher-level ones, and the central authorities were able to annul the decisions of the lower administrative bodies. From then on, the hierarchically organised state administration, which was subordinated to the Belgrade ministries, operated on three basic levels: at the state level (ministries of the central government), at the level of administrative region (*oblast*) and at the district level (*srez*). Central executive power remained in the hands of the king and the ministries. At the meso-level, administrative regions with up to 800,000 inhabitants were introduced, headed by prefects appointed by the king. Prefects were representatives of the state administration within the borders of an *oblast*, and as such were directly subordinated to the Minister of Interior and other ministries within the limits of their portfolios. On the lowest level, at least in the "Slovene regions", the district captains remained in place, yet with a new title: Chiefs of the *Srez* (*srezki poglavar*).[73] The Chief of the Srez was a representative of the government at the lowest level and reported to the grand mayor. Under the chief's supervision and authority, and thus on the lowest level of the administrative ladder, were municipalities that exercised local self-government considerably. Based on such a constitutional and administrative reorganisation, and after lengthy political debates and struggles in Belgrade, 33 administrative regions were introduced in 1922, including the territory

[73] Miroslav Stiplovšek, Državne ureditve na jugoslovanskem ozemlju Slovenije 1918–1929, *Arhivi* 18 (1995), No. 2, 18–29; Lampe, Yugoslavia as History, 131–4. See also Sabina Ferhadbegović, Prekäre Integration. Serbisches Staatsmodell und regionale Selbstverwaltung in Sarajevo und Zagreb 1918–1929. München 2008 (Südosteuropäische Arbeiten, 134).

of Prekmurje in the Maribor *oblast*, divided into two districts: Murska Sobota and Dolnja Lendava (since 1924).[74]

Democratisation and its Limits on the Fringes of the Successor States

The notion of national self-determination that took hold in 1918 implied a citizen's right to participate in political life. And indeed, the immediate post-war months had been shaped by democratic initiatives on the ground in both regions. But how did political participation develop after the administrative changes and the consolidation of Yugoslav or Polish state power? Compared with the pre-war period, one can speak of a certain degree of democratisation in both cases. Though Yugoslav and Polish constitutional provisions differed in some respects, voting rights were extended in Prekmurje as well as in Eastern Galicia – at least for parliamentary elections. However, democratisation had its limits in both regions.

Until the beginning of the 6 January Dictatorship in 1929, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was – at least on paper if not always in reality – a democratic constitutional monarchy that was plagued by highly controversial political practices and an aggressive political culture. The first provisional legislative body that covered the whole territory of the newly formed state convened for the first time in March 1919, when the central government issued a decree constituting a parliamentary body named the Temporary National Representation. One of the main tasks of the provisional parliament was to draft an electoral law for elections to the constitutional assembly. The Electoral Act was passed after a lengthy debate in September 1920. It enacted proportional representation and equal, direct, and secret electoral franchise for men over the age of 21, but it excluded women completely from the circle of eligible voters. In addition to women, the male population living within the Kingdom's borders and classified as members of German, Hungarian or Italian minorities were also not allowed to vote.[75] The 1921 Vidovdan Constitution defined the state as a constitutional, parliamentary and hereditary monarchy. Legislative power was in the hands of a unicameral parliament – the National Assembly of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – that enjoyed a fair measure of autonomy, considering parliamentary procedures. Because of the turbulent political life that defined the 1920s, the king called for elections to the National Assembly in 1923, 1925 and 1927. In 1929, after prolonged political turmoil, King Aleksander

[74] Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci, 29–33.

[75] Bojan Balkovec, "Vsi na noge, vsi na plan, da bo zmaga čim sijajnejša". Volilna teorija in praksa v prvi jugoslovanski državi. Ljubljana 2011, 9–26; Jure Gašparič, Izza parlamenta. Zakulisje jugoslovanske skupščine 1919–1941. Ljubljana 2015, 29–32.

I Karađorđević invoked his royal privileges and abolished parliamentary democracy, which marked the beginning of the period of the 6 January Dictatorship.[76]

From the perspective of possibilities for the local population to participate in the democratic process, the annexation of Prekmurje provided an extension of civil rights for former Hungarian citizens living in the region. Compared with the Hungarian period, both the percentage of the population with voting rights and the possibility to choose between different candidates significantly increased during the interwar period. Just a few months after the Treaty of Trianon was signed, male voters living in Prekmurje were able to participate in the elections to the Constituent Assembly – except for members of the local German- and Hungarian-speaking population who had the active right to opt for Austrian or Hungarian citizenship. While the actual voter turnout was initially very modest in Prekmurje, it considerably increased over the following years. In 1920, only 49 per cent of the voters attended the elections, while in 1923, approximately 70–80 per cent of eligible voters cast their votes. At the last election in the Kingdom of Hungary, which was held in 1910, voters could only choose between two candidates. However, numerous parties competed for voters in the interwar period: seven in 1920, ten in 1923, fourteen in 1925, and eight in 1927. On average, the most successful were the candidates of the Slovene People's Party, while representatives of the Liberal Party, Workers' Party, Peasants' Party and even the Serbian Radical Party also ran in the elections, albeit with minor success.[77]

Despite considerable opposition to the annexation from segments of the population, the Yugoslav authorities did not obstruct the participation of local candidates who had been politically active before the region was ceded to Yugoslavia. The most exposed and influential local politician continued to be the retired Catholic priest, Jožef Klekl. Klekl continued to mobilise the rural population under the flag of political Catholicism, and by the early 1920s he had become the local political leader of the Slovene People's Party, despite the Yugoslav gendarmerie regarding him to be an "unreliable element" at that time. In addition to Klekl, who was among the first advocates of a "Yugoslav option" in the region, former Hungarian nationalists and Slavophones who wished to remain in Hungary also ran for parliament. In 1925, for example, the industrialist and landowner Ferdinand Hartner – an adopted son of the last pre-war Hungarian deputy in the Budapest parliament for the Murska Sobota district, Géza Hartner – ran unsuccessfully on the list of the Party of Small Farmers as a deputy in the Murska Sobota constituency. His political fortunes, however, turned in the early 1930s when he won the mayoral election in Murska Sobota, a

[76] Gašparič, Izza parlamenta, 32–42.
[77] Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci, 150–54, 234–40.

position he retained even after the invasion of Yugoslavia by the Axis powers and the subsequent Hungarian occupation of Prekmurje in 1941.[78]

In the Polish Republic, the rights of democratic participation – at least in theory – extended even further than in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The 1921 Polish Constitution expanded democratic principles even compared with the Cisleithanian part of the Habsburg Monarchy in several aspects. As a result of the implementation of women's suffrage, the electorate was broadened at the state level and, in contrast to the Austrian Reichsrat, the upper house of the Polish bicameral parliament was elected rather than appointed. The electoral regulations of both chambers, the Sejm and the Senate, were based on the "five-adjective principle" of equal, secret, universal, direct and proportional balloting.[79] The broadening of the electorate, as well as proportional suffrage, promoted the representation of a broader spectrum of political parties. Moreover, the parliament was significantly strengthened in relation to the head of state. Contrary to the powers of the Austrian (and additionally the Yugoslav) monarch, the Polish president had a representative role.[80] While there were still barriers to political participation in practice – like widespread illiteracy that persisted into the early 1920s,[81] or the organisational deficits of the first parliamentary elections that facilitated the paternalistic efforts of traditional elites[82] – overall political participation increased at the state level. Whereas in the West Ukrainian People's Republic, parliamentary elections had been postponed, in Poland elections to the Constituent Polish Parliament had already taken place in January 1919. In Eastern Galicia, the elections to the Polish Sejm and Senate in November 1922 were the first general elections to take place after the dissolution of the Habsburg Monarchy and the first elections carried out under a system of universal male and female suffrage.

Still, these elections were highly controversial in Eastern Galicia. Indeed, the principle of proportional representation ensured some representation of minorities. However, other regulations undermined its effects and disadvantaged national minorities in practice. As in Austrian Galicia before, the specification of the electoral districts clearly advantaged Poles over Ukrainians: the number of delegates in proportion to the number of inhabitants was significantly higher in predominantly Polish districts than in predominantly Ukrainian ones.[83] Moreover, the incorpora-

[78] Ibidem, 322–325.

[79] Only the voting age differed. The voting age was 21 for the Sejm and 30 for the Senate.

[80] Jędruch, Constitutions, 273–8.

[81] Ibidem, 352–3.

[82] Stephanie Zloch, Polnischer Nationalismus. Politik und Gesellschaft zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen. Köln, Göttingen 2010, 50–51, 60–64.

[83] For example, one delegate per 45,000 inhabitants in Krakow compared with one delegate per 86,200 inhabitants in Stanisławów. After the electoral reform in 1935, the imbalance was even more

tion of Eastern Galicia into the Polish Republic had not yet been internationally recognised in 1922. From the Ukrainian perspective, Polish rule in Eastern Galicia was illegitimate and classified as a Polish occupation. Accordingly, leading Ukrainian politicians in Eastern Galicia agitated for a boycott of the elections to the Polish parliament in 1922, because participation in the elections would imply recognition of Polish rule. The boycott aimed to protest the annexation of Eastern Galicia to Poland, addressing the Polish as well as the international public. However, others argued that Ukrainians ought to exercise their rights as citizens and participate in the elections in order to ensure participation in decision-making, in particular on important issues such as land reform and the proposed autonomy of Eastern Galicia.[84] Finally, the major Ukrainian parties in Eastern Galicia supported the boycott. Agitation for the boycott sometimes even included threats and terror against Ukrainian activists participating in the elections.[85] The calls to boycott the elections seemed to have had an impact in that there was indeed very low voter turnout in the region in 1922,[86] limiting the representativeness of the elections. Consequently, the share of Ukrainian deputies was significantly lower in Eastern Galicia than in other Ukrainian-inhabited territories.

On the other hand, there were concerns about these elections also among Polish activists. While the Polish authorities in Eastern Galicia strove for Ukrainian participation in the elections in order to confirm Polish sovereignty in the region, classifying the elections as a substitute for a plebiscite in the region,[87] Polish nationalists – who had significant influence in Eastern Galicia – doubted the right of national minorities to take part in decision-making in a Polish nation-state. They also had reservations about Ukrainian or Jewish deputies in the Polish parliament.[88] Galician Ukrainians were particularly distrusted because of their relatively high de-

significant. For example, there was one delegate per 47,000 inhabitants in Krakow compared with one delegate per 197,000 inhabitants in Kolomyja, see Braunias, Fortentwicklung, 17–18. On Habsburg Galicia, see also Harald Binder, Galizien in Wien. Parteien, Wahlen, Fraktionen und Abgeordnete im Übergang zur Massenpolitik. Wien 2005, 187–90.

[84] See for example the brochure I. Levyc'kyj, Proč z vyboramy! Knyžka perša. L'viv 1922.

[85] Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, 349–50; Oleksandr Zajcev, Vybory 1922 roku u Zachidnij Ukraïni, *Ukraïna Moderna* (1999), XXX–XXX, 2–3.

[86] The voter turnouts in Eastern Galicia ranged from 52.7 per cent in the Lwów voivodeship to 32 per cent in the more rural voivodeship of Stanislawów, which was the lowest value throughout all of Poland. The average voter turnout in Poland was 67.9 per cent in 1922. See: Wybory do Sejmu i Senatu w roku 1922 i w roku 1928. Cz. 2. Warszawa 1929, 43–51; Główny Urząd Statystyczny Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej (Ed.), Rocznik Statystyki Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej. Rok wydawnictwa VI. Warszawa 1928, 455.

[87] Zajcev, Vybory, XXX.

[88] Heidi Hein-Kircher, Zum Wechselspiel von verpasster Konsolidierung, Demokratiekritik und Diskursen der Versicherheitlichung in der Zweiten Republik Polens (1918 bis 1926), *Totali-*

gree of politicisation and their aspirations for independence. Minority rights had been included in the new republic's constitution under pressure from the Allies at the Paris Peace Conference. While the electoral law of the West Ukrainian People's Republic enshrined the representation of national minorities, in Poland minorities received a certain amount of representation owing to their status as citizens with equal rights. Hence, the actual representation of minorities depended heavily on the level of political mobilisation, as the results of the 1922 elections had shown. Moreover, these equal rights were not recognised by all parties. Rival concepts of the Polish nation collided, extending from a political nation anchored in the constitution to historical – cultural or ethnic concepts of nation.[89] In particular, Polish right-wing parties classified universal suffrage as a threat to the traditional social order. However, they did not question women's suffrage – a new innovation – but only the political rights of people "alien" to the Polish nation. The political left, in contrast, supported universal and equal elections. Despite this, election results that conflicted with their political preferences would then function as triggers for dissatisfaction with the democratic-parliamentary system.[90] These attitudes paved the way for an increasingly authoritarian regime after Marshal Piłsudski's coup d'état in May 1926.[91] Although Poland remained a democratic, constitutional and parliamentary state on paper, political practices became increasingly repressive as the interwar period went on.

Parliamentary elections, however, are just one aspect of democracy. Another no less important aspect was political participation at the regional and local level. Shortly after the occupation of Prekmurje by Yugoslav forces, the civil commissioner invited several dozen local dignitaries to participate in a provisional consultative body, the National Advisory Committee. By encouraging the local elite to take part in a political discussion that considered the future of the region, the new Yugoslav administration wanted to reinforce the legitimacy of the new state apparatus in the eyes of the local population. At the meetings, which were also attended by civil servants and state officials, the members of the National Advisory Committee discussed the most pressing issues that worried the locals: the organisation of education, the regulation of municipal and state administration, economic issues and questions of food supply and land reform.[92] However, it soon became apparent that political

tarismus und Demokratie. Zeitschrift für internationale Diktatur und Freiheitsforschung 12 (2015), 97–117, 108–9.

[89] Zloch, Polnischer Nationalismus, passim; Marcos Silber, Ambivalent Citizenship. The Construction of Jewish Belonging in Emergent Poland, 1915–1918, *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts* 10 (2011), 161–83.

[90] Zloch, Polnischer Nationalismus, 40–41, 91–92.

[91] Hein-Kircher, Wechselspiel, 109.

[92] Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci, 21, 26–27.

participation and the level of democratisation offered would be much more limited within the local context compared with the national one. Because of the more or less justified fear that loyalty was lacking among the local population, the Provincial Government in Ljubljana decided to dismiss mayors and dissolve the existing municipal councils soon after the occupation of Prekmurje. Dismissed mayors were replaced by appointed mayors (*gerenti*) and members of municipal councils. The work of *gerenti* and municipal councils was supervised and, when necessary, directed by the civil commissioner (the equivalent of a district captain) who was appointed by the government in Ljubljana and confirmed by the Ministry of Interior in Belgrade. Yet, the municipal self-government was not entirely under the control of the state, and many heads of municipalities were appointed on the basis of proposals by local communities.[93] Such a system of appointments that curtailed the development of democratisation at the municipal level was in place until 1927 when the first municipal elections were held, albeit only in municipalities with a Slovene or predominantly Slovene population. In the following year, elections were also held in villages and towns with a Hungarian population. The results varied across municipalities and, to some extent, coincided with political alliances at the state level. In places with a predominantly Catholic Slovene-speaking peasant population, candidates of the Slovene People's Party (SLS) achieved the best results. In municipalities with an evangelical Slovene-speaking population, members of the Radical and Democratic Party also performed well alongside the SLS. In Lendava, the second largest town with a Hungarian majority, the most votes went to a local Hungarian banking official who had a monopoly over support from the Lendava Hungarian and Jewish communities. In Murska Sobota, Josip Benko, the aforementioned local industrialist and local representative of the Radical Party, was elected as a mayor.[94]

In the Polish Republic too, political participation was more limited at the regional and local levels. In fact, it even regressed compared with the former political system in Cisleithania. In contrast to the Austrian dual-track system of appointed state administration and representative (elected) self-administration, the Polish regional administration was dominated by the state appointees. Other than at the state level, no elections were held at the regional level. Indeed, the constitution provided for territorial self-administration with elected bodies at the voivodeship level. In order to earn the support of the Allies for the incorporation of Eastern Galicia, the parliament passed a law in September 1922 on the self-government of the voivodeships with special regulations for Eastern Galicia, that is, for the voivodeships of Lwów, Stanisławów and Tarnopol. These special regulations took into account the multinational character of Eastern Galicia and included components of national-personal

[93] Menjava gerenta v občini Rankovci. SI_PIŠK/0001/001/001/00003.
[94] Kokolj, Prekmurski Slovenci, 241–3.

autonomy. In the Lwów, Stanisławów and Tarnopol voivodeships, a two-chamber parliament would have been introduced, consisting of a Polish and a Ukrainian curia. However, the provisions of the law were never implemented.[95] Developments at the district level resembled those at the voivodeship level. District councils were appointed and strictly controlled by the district captain who was appointed, in turn, by the voivode. Municipal self-administration was also restricted by rigorous state control, especially by the district captain who was entitled to dissolve municipal councils.[96] And yet, mistrust against the non-Polish local population played a role as well. In the Eastern Galician territories, local elections were postponed for several years with reference to an outdated electoral law. As the regulations on local elections in Galicia were not replaced by a new law after incorporation into the Polish Republic, the class-based Austrian regulations were still in force, even though they were inconsistent with the principle of universal and equal elections as specified in the Polish constitution. However, as the principle of equal elections would have resulted in a loss of power for local elites and for the "Polish nation" in the predominantly Ukrainian-inhabited region, there was strong opposition to a new electoral law. In particular, the old Polish elites in Eastern Galicia, including the land-owning elite, exerted their influence in order to prevent reforms that would have challenged established hierarchies. As part of this effort, they argued that the dominance of Polish culture in the multi-ethnic border region was in danger. The argument in favour of Polish national interests thus served to override democratic principles. Because of these disagreements, legislative projects to harmonise the local electoral regulations were not implemented until the 1930s.[97] Meanwhile, either previously elected councils and mayors remained in office or they were replaced by provisional councils and mayors appointed by the district captain. Especially in Eastern Galicia, where many of the existing councils had been installed during Ukrainian rule, the dissolution of municipal councils by state authorities was a common practice. Although, at least in some cases, the appointed municipal governments apparently had been negotiated with the local communities,[98] appointed councils soon became the target of criticism. Consequently, local elections were finally held in Eastern Galicia in 1927, albeit based on a slightly adapted Austrian law that still privileged the upper

[95] Ustawa z dnia 26 września 1922 r. o zasadach powszechnego samorządu wojewódzkiego, a w szczególności województwa lwowskiego, tarnopolskiego i stanisławowskiego, Dz.U. 1922 nr 90 poz. 829, at ⟨http://prawo.sejm.gov.pl/isap.nsf/download.xsp/WDU19220900829/O/D19220829.pdf⟩, 7.5.2020; Braunias, Fortentwicklung, 19–21; Wehrhahn, Die Westukrainische Volksrepublik, 347–9; on the concept of national-personal autonomy see in detail Kuzmany, Habsburg Austria, XXX.

[96] Ryszka/Bardach, Historia państwa, XXX.

[97] Zloch, Polnischer Nationalismus, 104–6.

[98] See for example *Gazeta Kołomyjska*, 15 September 1923, p. 1.

classes.[99] The notice of local elections in 1927 raised hopes as well as scepticism among local political actors. The local Ukrainian newspaper *Pokuts'ke Slovo*, for example, welcomed local elections as a chance for more political participation for Ukrainians, and pointed to opposition against the elections by "Polish chauvinists", for whom the appointed commissioners were the mainstay in the eastern territories. However, the newspaper criticised the adoption of an Austrian law that favoured the wealthy and thus disadvantaged Ukrainians.[100] The election results finally confirmed fears that the old elites had prevailed.[101] Hence, in Eastern Galicia, universal and equal local elections took place for the first time as late as in 1933, that is, a time when political practice increasingly undermined democratic principles at the state level as well as at the local level.

Conclusion

The territorial reorganisation after the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire in autumn 1918 had similar effects on the two former Habsburg territories that came to comprise Eastern Galicia and Prekmurje. After times of upheaval, political and social demands and competing state-building programmes, both regions ended up on the fringes of nascent successor states, that is, the Polish Republic and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Nevertheless, the journeys of the two regions from empire to successor states differed in some respects. Similarities and differences can be traced back to the pre-war period, to war experiences and the dynamics of the immediate post-war months (which were shaped by local initiatives as well as by the balance of power in the region), and finally to the political developments in Poland and Yugoslavia. Although Eastern Galicia and Prekmurje had much in common – especially their peripheral position at the fringes of the empire, their ethnically and linguistically diverse population and their rural character – differences existed not least because the regions had belonged to the two separate constituent polities of Austria-Hungary and their different political, legal and administrative cultures. The higher degree of politicisation and nationalisation in Cisleithanian Galicia significantly affected post-war state-building processes. Moreover, the First World War was a catalyst for interwar social developments, and different war experiences clearly shaped the distinct transitions after 1918. While Prekmurje had been on the home front, Eastern Galicia was an important theatre of war that experienced large-scale violence and nationalisation campaigns. By 1918, politically active locals associated the slogan of national self-determination with demands for political

[99] The curiae system was extended by a fourth, general curia and women's suffrage. See *Nasz Głos*, 20 May 1927, p. 2–3.

[100] *Pokuts'ke Slovo*, 20 February 1927, p. 1, and 15 May 1927, p. 1.

[101] *Kolomyjs'ki Visty*, 24 September 1927, p. 3.

participation and expectations of social improvement in both regions. However, while in Prekmurje politically active locals who claimed to represent the voices of the community foregrounded social demands, in Eastern Galicia similar issues were often overshadowed by the intense process of nationalisation, which culminated in an armed Polish – Ukrainian conflict in the region.

Competing territorial claims and local political initiatives shaped the post-war months in the two border regions. In Prekmurje, as well as in Eastern Galicia, the local population made political and social demands and thus participated in state-building processes. However, in the case of Galicia, the Polish and Ukrainian political representatives of the pre-war period assumed a leading role. There, pre-war Polish – Ukrainian antagonisms continued after 1918 in an aggravated form. In Prekmurje, the Slovene national movement was only gradually gaining broader support and was mainly spread by Slovene activists from neighbouring Styria. Hence, the idea of the region's annexation to the state of South Slavs that was emerging right across the border was initially supported only by a minority of the local population, but it gained popularity not least due to expectations of land reform and lower taxation for peasants. Besides the different degrees of nationalisation in local politics, the political options within the two regions differed. In Prekmurje, one option that initially found support not only among the local Hungarian elites but also among large parts of the population was to remain part of Hungary – albeit under changed political conditions with greater autonomy for the region. In Eastern Galicia, in contrast, the option to remain part of a federalised Austrian state ceased to exist in autumn 1918. For local political actors, one alternative to joining a Polish nation-state – an alternative pursued by the local Polish elites – was the establishment of an independent Ukrainian state. The nascent West Ukrainian People's Republic lasted for several months, significantly longer than many other local state formations at that time. Attempts to establish an independent state in Prekmurje lasted only a few days. In contrast to many other local state-building attempts, the West Ukrainian People's Republic claimed the status of a nation-state, although it made far-reaching political concessions to national minorities. Moreover, according to available sources, a majority of the predominantly peasant populations did not openly oppose the Ukrainian option in the Eastern Galician case, or the Yugoslav option in Prekmurje. However, even though the redrawing of borders was supposed to be based on national self-determination, the people living in the region were actually left without a voice when the time arrived to make decisions on the international stage. There was no plebiscite in either region. Instead, decisions about the sovereign affiliations of Eastern Galicia and Prekmurje were based on military interventions by competing powers in the region, and on the foreign policy considerations of the Allies. Faced with the struggle against Soviet Russia in the East, and the communist regime in Budapest, the Allies finally permitted Poland to occupy Eastern Galicia and Yugoslavia to occupy Prekmurje.

Thus, the two regions finally became part of Poland and Yugoslavia respectively, that is, part of states that claimed to be nation-states and that were in fact inhabited by linguistically and culturally diverse populations. This diversity was particularly noticeable in border regions such as Eastern Galicia or Prekmurje. The representatives of the new state administrations were charged with the task of consolidating state power over this diverse population in the acquired regions. However, aside from the persistence of competing political claims, the patchwork of regions with different socioeconomic histories and incongruent administrative and legal traditions complicated the consolidation of state control in both cases. In Poland as well as in Yugoslavia different legal frameworks existed side by side and the process of legal unification took years or even decades, although in Poland a centralised administrative system was implemented earlier. While Eastern Galicia and Prekmurje both remained peripheral regions within the new states, the role of locals within the new state administrations differed significantly. These differences were closely linked to demographic structures among the populations and inherited administrative traditions within the two regions. While in Eastern Galicia the local Polish elites prevailed in the state administration even during the period of Austrian administration, in Prekmurje local elites and officials usually identified as Hungarians. Accordingly, Galician officials played an important role in the Polish state administration (not only in Galicia, but even in other Polish regions). In Prekmurje, by contrast, the new state administration was dominated by incoming Slovenian officials from former Cisleithanian territories. This created a paradoxical situation in which the new Slovene administration introduced the former imperial Austrian legal and administrative system into former Hungarian territories before the centralised structures of the Yugoslav state administration had been unified.

The consolidation of state control was further complicated by the notion of self-determination, which implied a citizen's right to equal participation in political life. Democratic initiatives on the ground shaped the immediate post-war months in both regions, and the new states had to respond to expectations about political participation. Indeed, the Polish Republic as well as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes positioned themselves as democratic, constitutional and parliamentary states. The Polish constitution went even further in some respects, introducing women's suffrage and strengthening the parliament's position in relation to the head of state. Compared with the pre-war situation, voting rights were extended in Eastern Galicia as well as in Prekmurje and social privileges were abolished – at least in theory. However, in practice, democratisation had its limits in the Polish as well as in the Yugoslav framework. On the one hand, political practices often undermined democratic principles. On the other hand, political participation at the local and regional levels was more restricted, and self-government, if allowed, was largely controlled by the state administration, or it existed only on paper. In many cases new mayors and municipal councils were appointed by the state authorities

in Prekmurje as well as in Eastern Galicia – though partly following proposals by local communities. Thus, locals participated in decision-making at the local level to a limited extent, and municipal elections were not held in either region until 1927. Moreover, the cases of the two border regions demonstrate that attitudes prioritising nation formation over democratisation paved the way for centralisation and the restriction of local self-government as well as for the violation of democratic principles. In Prekmurje, for example, in municipalities with a Slovene or predominantly Slovene population, municipal elections were held earlier than in municipalities with a predominantly Hungarian population. In Eastern Galicia, the implementation of the principle of equal elections (which was granted in the Polish constitution) was postponed, as this would have resulted in a loss of Polish elites' power in predominantly Ukrainian-inhabited areas. Indeed, the situation in the two regions differed significantly. While in Prekmurje concerns were focused on the possibility of the continued influence of Hungarians who had formed the local elite in the pre-war period, in Eastern Galicia, on the contrary, fears of a loss of power were present among the old elites, combined with fears of national minorities becoming stronger due to the democratisation of local political structures. However, the consequence was similar in both cases, namely, a restriction of local autonomy.

To conclude, the journeys of Eastern Galicia and Prekmurje from a common empire to the respective successor states exemplify the significance of local conditions and social structures in conditioning larger processes of state-building and democratisation. While in Eastern Galicia the war and incorporation into the Polish Republic intensified ongoing processes of politicisation and nationalisation and reinforced the established Polish political dominance in the region, the politicisation and nationalisation of the Slavophone population were rather new phenomena in post-war Prekmurje and they challenged the local Hungarian elites. Though both regions ended up on the fringes of new nation-states, the consequences for the local balance of power were quite different. While in Prekmurje the rural majority of the population became part of the new dominant national group, in Eastern Galicia it was the Polish minority that prevailed as the socially and politically dominant group. This also affected the relationship between social demands and national interests. Whereas in the former case the dismantling of social privileges in political participation was in the interest of the new nation-state, in the other case it ran counter to the interests of the nation-state. Moreover, social structures had an impact on local administration. While the Polish state relied heavily on the established administration in Eastern Galicia, there was a significant reorganisation of the local administration in Prekmurje. However, despite these local differences both Poland and Yugoslavia fostered political and administrative centralisation. In the multiethnic border regions, political participation at the local and regional level posed a potential threat to the ideal of the nation-state.

ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to reorient attention away from meticulous examinations of the verbal and physical violence that plagued linguistically and ethnically diverse regions in the immediate interwar years. Instead, we focus on processes of state-building and democratisation that were encouraged and enabled by the same imposing forces – the collapse of empire, revolutionary outbreaks and the post-war combination of national self-determination with state sovereignty as the ideological cornerstone of the political order in East Central Europe. By choosing two peripheral border regions as the objects of our analysis – Eastern Galicia in Poland and Prekmurje in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes – and by presenting local and regional developments, this article offers a more nuanced understanding of the historical processes of the creation, integration and consolidation of state institutions and apparatuses in post-Habsburg space in the early interwar period. Indeed, the study also sheds new light on the role of locals in the processes of state-building and democratisation. Following the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire, an end to the monarchy and a push for democratisation were on the horizon in Eastern Galicia, as both of the states competing for power in the region declared themselves to be republics adhering to democratic principles. The Western Ukrainian People's Republic and the Polish Republic both established in their constitutions general (male and female), equal, direct and secret elections. However, the question of the extent to which these democratic principles were put into practice in both states remains. This article will outline political structures and possibilities for participation, but also the limits to participation at the national and local level. In light of parliamentary elections not being held because of the military situation in the Western Ukrainian republic, or the postponement of municipal-level elections in Eastern Galicia within the Polish Republic, an actual push for democratisation seems questionable. While progress had begun to be made in some fields, in other respects democratisation was in fact regressive.