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Slovene Ethnolinguistic Nationalism as Rhetoric and Practice in Post-Imperial School Administration in Prekmurje¹

In July 1919, the Yugoslav delegation at the Paris Peace Conference received permission to occupy segments of two western counties of the Kingdom of Hungary: Vas/Železna and Zala. In early August 1919, Yugoslav forces therefore crossed the state border and acquired control over the Hungarian region, in accordance with the demarcation lines drawn in Paris. A year later, the Yugoslav territorial acquisition was confirmed by the Treaty of Trianon. Except for a short interruption during World War II, the area has since been under Slovene administrative control and officially recognized as Prekmurje (in Hungarian, *Muravidék*).

Parts of Vas/Železna and Zala were a rather small “land grab” in comparison to other, sometimes enormous, territorial demands that representatives of newly created states put on the table in Paris. But given the circumstances, the occupation of Prekmurje was a great success for Slovene members of the Yugoslav delegation: in early January 1919, when the delegation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes began to convene in Paris, even the majority of Yugoslav diplomats and experts from different parts of the recently established South Slav state had never heard of Prekmurje. It was not included in the preliminary list of territories claimed for the new polity and was only later outlined on the map that depicted Yugoslav territorial expectations – at the insistence of Slovene delegates, who strove to acquaint other members of the delegation with this small fragment of Hungary. In the months following January 1919, Slovene experts hastily gathered ethnographic, linguistic and historical ev-

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idence, creating a seemingly convincing scholarly substantiation for their claim that the majority of the inhabitants of Prekmurje were without doubt of Slovene nationality and origin.²

In 1919, however, the notion of Slovenes populating western parts of Hungary was far from a new invention of contemporary diplomats and experts. In Cisleithanian intellectual circles – and, most of all, among middle-class Slovene national activists living in the Cisleithanian crownlands – belief in the existence of Hungarian Slovenes had been gaining ground since the mid-nineteenth century. In ethnographic studies, travelogues, newspapers and journal reports, the public could acquire many enlightening pieces of information on the supposed Slovenes living on the “other side” of the river Mura/Mur. Thus, the most informed Cisleithanian Slovene nationalists always described Slavophone Hungarians from Vas/Železna and Zala as members of the Slovene nation and imagined this Hungarian region as the easternmost part of Slovene national territory. Slovenes regarded local Slavophones on the other bank of the river Mura/Mur as compatriots, even though few Slovene national activists actually crossed the border and visited this remote and rather underdeveloped Hungarian region in the decades before the collapse of Austria-Hungary. There were, however, strong reasons for adherents to the nationally framed Slovene worldview living in Imperial Austria in the late nineteenth century to believe in the “Sloveneness” of Catholic and Evangelic Slavophone communities in the aforementioned counties. After all, local Slavophones described themselves either as (Hungarian) Slovenes or as “Sloveni”, and cultivated the local Slavic literary language that they called the “old Slovene language”, the “Slovene language” or “our language.”³ Following the premises of Slovene

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- 2 On the negotiations over Prekmurje at the Paris Peace Conference, see Rudi Kyovsky: *Trianonska pogodba in slovensko-ogrska meja* [The Treaty of Trianon and the Slovene–Hungarian Border]. In: Janko Liška (ed.): *Revolucionarno vrenje v Pomurju v letih 1918–1920* [Revolutionary unrests in Prekmurje, 1918–1920]. Murska Sobota 1981, pp. 236–259; Bogo Grafenauer: *Slovenska Koroška v diplomatski igri leta 1919* [Slovene Carinthia in the diplomatic game in 1919]. In: Janko Pleterski (ed.): *Koroški plebiscit* [The Carinthian plebiscite]. Ljubljana 1970, pp. 295–378; Andrej Mitrović: *Razgraničenje Jugoslavije sa Mađarskom i Rumunijom 1919–1920* [Boundary delimitation of Yugoslavia with Hungary Romania 1919–1920]. Novi Sad 1975. On the Paris Peace Conference, see Margaret MacMillan: *Peacemakers. The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War*. London 2001; Volker Protz: *The Politics of Self-Determination. Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917–1923*. Oxford 2016.
- 3 Jernej Kosi: *The Imagined Slovene Nation and Local Categories of Identification. “Slovenes” in the Kingdom of Hungary and Postwar Prekmurje*. In: *Austrian History Yearbook* 49 (2018), pp. 87–102.

ethnolinguistic nationalism, the use of the same, or almost the same, ethnonym and the designation of the local literary language as Slovene were understood as objective markers of Slovene national belonging.⁴ At the Paris Peace Conference, Slovene members of the Yugoslav delegation responsible for the “case of Prekmurje” thus simply followed the pre-war arguments of Slovene nationalists and amassed “objective evidence” that should have persuaded the decision makers of the righteousness of Yugoslav territorial claims. Working tirelessly, day and night, for months, they were eventually successful – but only after the outbreak of the Hungarian revolution and the promise of Yugoslav forces potentially contributing to its suppression encouraged the Supreme Council to show more understanding for the additional Yugoslav territorial demands.⁵

Soon after Yugoslav forces crossed the border in early August 1919, the Slovene central executive in Ljubljana established an ad hoc office of civil commissioner in charge of public administration in Prekmurje. The commissioner, who had his office in Murska Sobota (in Hungarian, *Muraszombat*), was subordinate to the Slovene Provincial Government in Ljubljana, which retained exclusive authority to assign and dismiss officials in the region. Unsurprisingly, the government began replacing Hungarian administrators with Slovene ones immediately after the occupation, transferring the latter from their posts in the former Cisleithanian crownlands to Prekmurje. At the same

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- 4 On ethnolinguistic nationalism, see Tomasz Kamusella: *The History of Normative Opposition of ‘Language versus Dialect’. From Its Graeco-Latin Origin to Central Europe’s Ethnolinguistic Nation-States*. In: *Colloquia Humanistica* 5 (2016), pp.164–188; idem.: *The Politics of Language and Nationalism in Modern Central Europe*. Basingstoke 2009. Following Tomasz Kamusella’s notion of ethnolinguistic nationalism, I regard Slovene ethnolinguistic nationalism as a rhetoric and practice that draws on the idea of the postulated Slovene nation being associated with the Slovene-speaking population. It emerged in 1848, when the Carinthian priest Matija Majar emulated contemporaneous expressions of German nationalism that dominated the public debate and claimed that the usage of the Slovene language was a distinctive cultural feature of Slovenes, that is, of people densely inhabiting Habsburg lands between the upper Adriatic and western Hungary. As the very first Slovene nationalist activist, Majar built his concept of a separate Slovene population upon the linguistic classification of Slavic languages devised by Bartholomeus/Jernej Kopitar; see Jernej Kosi: *Kako je nastal slovenski narod* [How the Slovene Nation Was Created]. Ljubljana 2013. On the emergence of the Slovene national movement, see also Joachim Höslér: *Von Krain zu Slowenien. Die Anfänge der nationalen Differenzierungsprozesse in Krain und der Untersteiermark von der Aufklärung bis zur Revolution 1768 bis 1848*. Munich 2006.
- 5 Matija Slavič, the member of the Yugoslav delegation responsible for Prekmurje, later vividly described the exhausting process of preparing the material that was later used to substantiate the annexation. See Matija Slavič: *Naše Prekmurje* [Our Prekmurje]. Murska Sobota 1999.

time, the Slovene government in Ljubljana began sending experts to the occupied territory in order to gather information on social, cultural and political circumstances in the region.⁶ Lacking reliable and verifiable information, Slovene politicians and public servants who worked in Ljubljana sought precise observations about the state of affairs in Prekmurje. It was, after all, without a direct railway connection to other Slovene territories; as such, it was a very remote and almost inaccessible area far to the east of the national heartland.

About a month after the occupation, the Higher School Council in Ljubljana, the leading administrative body responsible for the school network under the control of the Slovene National Government, sent Franjo Cvetko to Prekmurje. Cvetko, a head teacher from the neighboring East Styrian village of Vučja vas, departed on a mission to assess the existing situation and report in detail on the organization of the school network in the region. In a series of documents dispatched to Ljubljana in the following weeks, Cvetko meticulously described the cultural circumstances and social conditions in local schools and evaluated the competence of the existing teaching staff (see below). In addition, he suggested the measures that should be taken in Prekmurje's schools, focusing first and foremost concerning the language of instruction.⁷ Given that in autumn 1918, the Slovene language was declared the official language of the territory under the control of the Slovene government, Cvetko proposed an immediate dismissal of teachers who were fluent only in Hungarian or German and their replacement with Slovene speakers from the former Cisleithania. His proposal was certainly quite common in a post-1918 Central European transitional period marked by the triumph of the "principle of nationality." It also corresponded with the prevalent discourse spread by Slovene politicians, national activists and journalists that described the annexation of Prekmurje as the redemption of Slovene brothers who

6 Miroslav Kokolj: *Prekmurski Slovenci od nacionalne osvoboditve do fašistične okupacije 1919–1941* [Slovenes in Prekmurje from National Liberation to Fascist Occupation 1919–1941]. Murska Sobota 1984, pp. 19–33. On measures taken against Hungarians in Prekmurje, see Attila Kovács: *Številčni razvoj prekmurskih Madžarov v 20. stoletju* [Demographic Trends of the Prekmurje Hungarians in the Twentieth Century]. In: *Razprave in gradivo: revija za narodnostna vprašanja* [Treatises and Documents, Journal of Ethnic Studies] 48–49 (2006), pp. 6–36.

7 The Archives of the Republic of Slovenia (henceforth: ARS), SI AS 53, 20, *Prekmurje 20/49, Višji šolski svet v Ljubljani* [Higher school council in Ljubljana] (henceforth: *Prekmurje 20/49*), *Šolske razmere v Prekmurju* [School Conditions in Prekmurje] (henceforth: *School Conditions*).

had suffered for centuries under the Hungarian yoke. What is much more surprising, however, is Cvetko's attitude towards the local literary Slavic language, which was traditionally used as an unofficial auxiliary language of instruction in several elementary schools in Prekmurje. Cvetko claimed that this local Slovene should be prohibited in schools as well. Instead, the official Slovene national (standard) literary language should be the exclusive language of instruction in Prekmurje. However, such a linguistic transformation could only happen if the local Slavophone teachers, fluent in the local Slovene but with a very limited knowledge of standard literary Slovene, improved their poor language skills. A cohort of "native" local Slovene teachers should, Cvetko concluded, take courses in the standard Slovene national language and pass a test of fluency to continue teaching in Prekmurje elementary schools.

Cvetko's stance on the "school question in Prekmurje" gained many vocal supporters among Slovene officials, school experts, teachers and journalists. In their eagerness to re-educate their supposed local Slovene compatriots, both pupils and local teachers, it turned out that Slovene school authorities did not want to waste more time than necessary. Preparations for school reform along the proposed lines thus began even before the Treaty of Trianon (1920) confirmed the annexation of Prekmurje. But why such a hurry? Why was it so important to start transforming the linguistic image of Prekmurje immediately after acquiring the region? By presenting several illuminating and telling fragments from newspaper articles, administrative reports and official measures employed after the occupation and annexation of Prekmurje, I argue that Slovene officials who came to Prekmurje regarded monolingual Slovene schools as an essential tool for the dissemination of Slovene national ideas and the socialization of pupils into members of the Slovene nation. The Slovene administrators' zeal regarding the transformation and the reestablishment of local schools was rooted in the pre-1918 rhetoric and practices of Cisleithanian Slovene ethnolinguistic national activists. Having experienced the late Imperial Austrian "national struggles" as conflicts over the use of language, Slovene officials believed proficiency in the standard Slovene national language to be a necessary precondition for identification with the Slovene nation.⁸

8 As I seek to demonstrate in the following pages, the Slovene post-war makeover of the school network in Prek-

Local literary Slovene language or Prekmurje dialect of the standard Slovene national language?

Cvetko wrote his report after four short trips to Prekmurje in the early autumn of 1919. His accounts later formed the core of state policy concerning the incorporation of local schools into the broader framework of educational institutions controlled by the Slovene government. In particular, politicians and public servants in Ljubljana followed his line of reasoning with regard to the language of instruction and the question of the future employment of local Slavophone or bilingual teachers. What was it then that Cvetko proposed and how did he substantiate it?

The starting point of Cvetko's proposition was an "ethnographic fact." According to his "findings" – which, as it soon turned out, did not correspond with the actual linguistic situation in the region – all children in Prekmurje were Slovenes. They were fluent in a variation of the Slovene language similar to the vernacular spoken by their compatriots, the so-called *Prleki*, who lived in *Prlekija*, the territory between the rivers Drava and Mura in neighbouring (Slovene) Styria. The language of Prekmurje children was, Cvetko claimed, pure and utterly comprehensible to every Slovene speaker. In Cvetko's opinion, even discussing the existence of a special "Prekmurje dialect" was thus meaningless, as there was no such idiom in Prekmurje. In other words, Cvetko believed that a distinctive regional Slovene language of Prekmurje did not "de facto" exist.⁹

While Cvetko hailed the impeccable language skills of Slovene-speaking Slovene children in Prekmurje, he could not hide his contempt for the local teachers. Many of them were non-native "foreign-born Hungarians", who, according to Cvetko, either were not able to communicate in Slovene or had a tremendously poor knowledge

murje corresponds with the notion of "transformation" as a "more or less enduring process which is set in motion long before a remarkable 'turn' takes place and which ends with a certain, sometimes even significant, temporary distance to this moment." Florian Kühner-Wielach, Sarah Lemmen: Transformation in East Central Europe. 1918 and 1989. A Comparative Approach. In: European Review of History. Revue européenne d'histoire 23 (2016), pp. 573–579, here: p. 575.

9 ARS, SI AS 53, 20, Prekmurje 20/49, School Conditions (4–13 September).

of it and should thus be laid off. Yet he also considered teachers born in Prekmurje or of Slavic origin to be of questionable character. They were presumably incapable of holding Slovene classes due to their insufficient language skills. They spoke

worse than the common folk, and one cannot talk of grammatical knowledge. Despite that, the Higher school council could keep them where they are, or possibly transfer them to other positions, but under the condition or, better said, with a downright categorical demand that they immediately start learning proper Slovene and, in a year or two, take a complementary exam in Slovene or else be dismissed [T]hese people have been infatuated only with noble Hungarian, and when it comes to our Slovene literature they are utterly ignorant. Because they are our people and because they have a number of children to take care of, they should not be laid off; that would be inhumane. It would be graceful if we reached out a helping hand.¹⁰

Because local schoolteachers were raised and educated in pre-war Hungary, they were, contended Cvetko, “soaked with Magyar spirit and emotions and speak only Prekmurje Slovene, some of them very badly.”¹¹ By pejoratively describing domestic educators as Magyars (*Madžaroni*), Cvetko implicitly claimed these pro-Hungarian Slavophone locals could not be trusted, for they had accepted Hungarian identity at the expense of their own original, presumably Slovene, ethnicity. For this reason, Cvetko continued, the schools in Prekmurje that had only one class and a single teaching post should be taken over by “our younger teachers, that is, by Slovene personnel from the former Cisleithanian regions. In schools with several classes and more than one teacher, however, a local teacher could remain if “our Slovene teacher” were appointed beside him to serve as a translator and his personal educator. Local teachers left in their posts should be subjected to the strict control of the newly assigned schoolmaster or school supervisor.¹²

10 Original: “slabše kot narod, o kakem slovničnem znanju, pa se sploh ne da govoriti. Kljub temu bi jih mogel višji šolski svet obdržati na njihovih mestih, eventualno tudi premestiti, a pod pogojem, oziroma z neizprosno kategorično zahtevo, da se takoj lotijo učenja pravilne slovenščine ter položijo čez en ali dve leti dopolnilne izpit iz slovenščine sicer se odpuste iz službe. /.../ ker ti ljudje so bili zaverovani samo v nobel madžarščino, in so glede naše slovenske in leposlovne literature pravcati ignorantje. Ker so naši ljudje in z ozirom na to, da imajo mnogi kopico nepreskrbljenih otrok jih ne kaže odpustiti to bi bilo nehumano. Dobro delo usmiljenosti bo, če jim segnemo pod pazduho in jim pomagamo.” ARS, SI AS 53, 20, Prekmurje 20/49, School Conditions (4–13 September).

11 ARS, SI AS 53, 20, Prekmurje 20/49, School Conditions (21 September).

12 Ibid.

Although, as mentioned above, Cvetko did not acknowledge the existence of a specific regional Slovene idiom, he simply could not avoid the question of the local literary Slovene that had already been present in printed and scripted writings in Prekmurje for at least two centuries. He somehow had to address the fact that the local Slovene was the unofficial auxiliary language of instruction in many Prekmurje elementary schools with Slavophone pupils, the language of religious instruction in schools and the language of liturgy in local Evangelic churches. Yet, as already mentioned, a general intolerance towards the linguistic peculiarity of the region underlay his proposal regarding the use of the local literary Slovene language in schools. The language of instruction in Prekmurje, he claimed, should be the standard Slovene national language from the former Cisleithanian lands, because “with the proper, that is our literary, Slovene, we would culturally elevate and assimilate the local common folk – who are, after all, a branch of our trunk.”¹³

Cvetko’s line of reasoning was not surprising. As a former Cisleithanian teacher in schools with Slovenian as the language of instruction, his world view was heavily influenced by the fundamental ideological assumption of Slovenian ethnolinguistic nationalism. Since 1848, Slovene national activists had postulated that members of the Slovenian nation were speakers of the Slovenian language who densely inhabited a rounded territory. In other words, the Slovenian language was understood as the only objective marker of Slovene national identity. Therefore, proponents of Slovene ethnolinguistic nationalism believed that the nourishment of a proper Slovenian national language in its standardized form contributed to the facilitation of Slovenian national identity. Only one official written form of standardized language could thus be tolerated in Slovenian schools. Dialectical particularities and digressions that were not incorporated into the standardized Slovenian written language had to be eradicated, as they could undermine national homogeneity.

The majority of contemporaneous reports on Prekmurje published in Slovene newspapers in the former Cisleithanian regions echoed Cvetko’s argument. In *Učiteljski*

13 Original: “S pravilno t.j. našo književno slovenščino bi ondotni narod najprej dvignili kulturno ter ga asimilovali sebi – saj je veja našega debla.” Ibid.

tovariš [Teacher's Comrade], for instance, a newspaper devoted to the education of Slovene teachers and the development of the teaching profession in the Slovene language, an anonymous author called upon the Higher School Council to supply schools in Prekmurje with textbooks in the proper Slovene language, "and not in some 'dialect of Prekmurje.' The common folk's opinion is that children acquire the knowledge of this dialect at home, whereas in school they should learn proper Slovene."¹⁴ The daily newspaper *Jugoslavija*, published in Ljubljana since the autumn of 1918, reiterated a similar point of view: "The language of instruction, it goes without saying, must be the Slovene language, that is, literary Slovene. There is no need or reason to introduce the dialect of Prekmurje to schools."¹⁵ But Slovene newspapers also published some slightly different opinions. In an article in the newspaper *Murska straža* [The Watch on the Mura], printed in the nearby Styrian town of Radgona, an author well acquainted with circumstances in Prekmurje argued for a different tactic. He also identified the linguistic homogenization of Prekmurje as the goal of school reform. Yet, drawing on the supposed pre-war experiences of Styrian Slovenes in accepting the standard Slovene language, he claimed that the linguistic measures should be introduced gradually, in order not to upset the locals. He opined that the use of school books in the dialect of Prekmurje should be permitted in local schools, because the people of Prekmurje – the *Prekmurci*

lived culturally and politically separated from us for centuries. Other Slovene regions were in close contact with one another and in general shared the same past. And precisely this is the reason why, for instance, Styrian Slovenes readily adopted the common literary language. Meanwhile, the Hungarian Slovenes were separated from our development. The dialect thus meant more to them than it meant to us; what we saw in our literary language they saw in their dialect. They had their own writers, their own literature. They still maintain this *consciousness* even today – after the liberation. /.../ It is true that the common folk in general express positive feelings about unification with Yugoslavia. But their idea of Yugoslavia is slightly different from ours, for we instilled a gener-

14 Original: "/n/e pa morda v kakem 'prekmurskem' narečju. Ljudsko mnenje je, da se otroci tega 'narečja' nauče doma, v šoli se naj uče pravilne slovenščine." Položaj šolstva in učiteljstva v Prekmurju [The Condition of the Educational System and the Teaching Staff in Prekmurje]. In: Učiteljski tovariš [Teacher's Companion], 8 October 1919, p. 2.

15 Original: "Samoumevno mora biti učni jezik slovenski in to pismena slovenščina. Prav nikake potrebe in nikakega vzroka ni, da bi uvajali v šole prekmurski dialekt." Iz Prekmurja [From Prekmurje]. In: Jugoslavija [Yugoslavia], 11 October 1919, p. 1.

al national consciousness and a deeper political worldview in the common folk. People of Prekmurje (nationally conscious circles excluded) are still afraid of the Styrians, Carniolans, Serbs, etc. This fear will steadily disappear, but the levelling of education demands time and proper means. One such means would be keeping the dialect in schools, while simultaneously introducing the common literary language. The people will gradually feel the need to abandon the dialect for a public purpose, but the fact is that they do not feel it yet, because they *cannot* feel it.¹⁶

Immediately after annexation, the majority of the educated Slavophone inhabitants of Prekmurje held a different view of the Slovene literary language prevailing there than the "Cisleithanian" Slovene journalists or the incoming Slovene administrators and teachers. They did not regard it merely as the Slovene dialect of Prekmurje or as a non-standard variant of the official (national) Slovene language. On the contrary, the local Slavophone intelligentsia perceived their Slovene language as a unique phenomenon, a distinct Slavic literary language which was different both from the Croatian language and the vernaculars further south and from the Slovene language and the vernaculars used across the river Mura in the former Cisleithanian crownlands. Indeed, many locals in Prekmurje described the latter language as "kranjski" (Carniolan), "štajerski" (Styrian) or "slavski" (Slavic) and not as "slovenski" (Slovene), employing the term "slovenski" exclusively for their own spoken and literary language.¹⁷

The notion of the individuality of the Prekmurje Slovene literary language or the "old Slovene language" was rooted in its distinctive origins and its continuity of usage. The local Slovene literary tradition had been developing at least since the early 18th

16 Original: Prekmurci so "živeli dolga stoletja kulturno in politično ločeni od nas. Vse ostale slovenske pokrajine so imele ozke stike med seboj in v splošnem isto zgodovino, in baš to je vzrok, da so n. pr. štajerski Slovenci brez težkoč sprejeli skupni književni jezik. Medtem pa so bili ogrski Slovenci odtrgani od našega razvoja in jim je bilo narečje več kot je nam; oni so videli v njem tisto, kar smo mi videli v našem književnem jeziku. Imeli so svoje pisatelje, svojo književnost. To zavest imajo še danes – izza osvobojenja. /.../ Res je, da se ljudstvo po večini veseli združenja z Jugoslavijo, toda njegov pojem Jugoslavije je malo drugačen kot je naš, ki smo vsled lepega prosvetnega razvoja vcepili ljudstvu občenarodno zavest in globlje politično naziranje. Prekmurci (izvzeti so v resnici narodnozavedni krogi) še se vedno boje Štajercev, Kranjcev, Srbov itd., kar bo jim sicer polagoma minilo, toda za prosvetno izenačenje je treba časa in dobrih sredstev. Eno teh sredstev je, da se jim deloma pusti narečje v šolah, da pa se z druge strani smotreno uvaja skupni književni jezik. Ljudstvo bo sčasoma samo čutilo potrebo, da se v javnosti opusti narečje, toda dejstvo je, da te potrebe zaenkrat ne čuti, ker je *ne more* čutiti." Narečje v prekmurških šolah [The dialect in Prekmurje schools]. In: Murska straža [The Watch on the Mura], 4 October 1919, p. 1.

17 Kosi: The Imagined Slovene Nation, pp. 95–100.

century, building upon local Slavic vernaculars. It emerged as a result of liturgical necessity among local Protestants but was soon also adopted and cultivated by Catholic writers. However, the language did not stay limited to religious content, nor was it spread exclusively in printed form. Right up until Prekmurje became a part of Yugoslavia, many handwritten texts were also written in the language. For a time after 1868, it was also the language of textbooks in Catholic schools, while from the early 20th century on, it was the language of a newspaper and a series of educational books and booklets for a broader readership, edited by a Catholic priest named Jožef Klekl.¹⁸

The perceived linguistic exclusiveness of the region went hand-in-hand with the established local collective identifications. Despite what nineteenth- and twentieth-century Slovene national activists from Cisleithania believed, by 1919, the majority of the educated Slavophones of Prekmurje certainly did not identify as members of the Slovene nation. The Slovene national category of identification, which Slovene national activists devised and propagated in Cisleithanian crownlands during the 19th century, was almost completely unknown in Prekmurje. Until the annexation, the Slovene national movement simply could not take root in the region, due to the local social composition and institutional differences that regulated the political and cultural landscape in the Kingdom of Hungary. Before the outbreak of the World War I, standardized written Slovenian language was recognised as an official language in the Austrian half of the Dual Monarchy – it was used in schools and offices. School books and newspapers in Slovenian language that freely circulated in Cisleithania were a crucial medium for spreading the message of Slovene ethnolinguistic nationalism among the Slovene-speaking population from the middle of the 19th century onwards. In the Austrian crown provinces of Styria, Carinthia, Carniola and the Austrian Littoral lived a relatively small, but nevertheless politically and culturally engaged educated class (lawyers, priests, teachers, merchants, etc.) – a Slovenian nationalist elite that actively

18 On the Prekmurje Slovene literary language, see Marko Jesenšek: Poglavlja iz zgodovine prekmurskega knjižnega jezika [Chapters from the history of the Prekmurje Slovene literary language]. Maribor 2013; Marc L. Greenberg: Prekmurščina med slovanskimi jeziki [Prekmurje language among Slavic languages]. In: Marko Jesenšek (ed.): Prekmurska slovenska slovnica – Vend nyelvtan [Prekmurje Slovene Grammar – Vend nyelvtan]. Maribor 2013, pp. 401–412; Martina Orožen: Prekmurski knjižni jezik [Literary Prekmurje Slovene]. In: *ibid.*, pp. 413–428; Vilko Novak: Slovar stare knjižne prekmurščine [Dictionary of the Old Literary Prekmurje Language]. Ljubljana 2007, pp. V–VIII.

propagated the Slovene ethnolinguistic discourse. At the same time, the enactment of municipal autonomy in Cisleithania created an institutionalized space of political conflict in which social and cultural demands could be articulated by nationalist rhetoric and, in this way, used to mobilize rural population under a national flag. All that was missing in pre-1919 “Prekmurje.”

As a consequence, by 1918, less than a dozen Catholic priests from parishes close to the Styrian-Hungarian border actively sympathized with the ethnolinguistic idea of Slovenes who spoke a particular Slavic language, namely Slovene, and who densely populated the area from the very north of the Adriatic Sea to the westernmost patches of Hungary.¹⁹ The understanding of Prekmurje as a historical, ethnographical and linguistic part of Slovene territory, which the Slovene experts promoted and argued for at the Paris Peace Conference, was thus not shared by the majority of local, predominantly rural and barely literate Slavophones in 1919.²⁰ They held a very different perception of collective belongings and specific linguistic preferences, and in fact mostly responded to the imported idea of “Sloveneness” with suspicion and, in many cases, outright rejection. Instead, they persisted in expressing the established loyalties and identifications that had been shaped and disseminated before the 1919 annexation by the Hungarian nationalizing state and the local Catholic and Lutheran Slavophone clergy. Immediately after the occupation, the educated Slavophones did not share with incoming Slovene officials and teachers the notion that the Slovene standard language was a sign of adherence to the Slovene nation either. On the contrary, they regarded the introduction of the “new” official Slovene standard language – perceived as an emblem of national identity by the Slovene government – as a sign of administrative intrusion at best or symbolic violence at worst.²¹

19 Ivan Jerič: *Zgodovina madžarizacije v Prekmurju* [History of Magyarisation in Prekmurje]. Murska Sobota 2001, pp. 42–50.

20 According to Hungarian statistical data, in 1910 the rate of literacy in “Prekmurje” stood at 61–62 %. Miha Štampah: *Šolstvo in pismenost v večjezičnem prostoru med rekama Rabo in Muro od 1870 do 1910: diplomsko delo* [Education and Literacy in the Multilingual Area between the Rivers Raba and Mura from 1870 to 1910: Graduation Thesis]. Lendava 2016.

21 On the role of the Hungarian state and the local Catholic and Lutheran clergy in shaping collective identifications in pre-1919 “Prekmurje”, see Kosi: *The Imagined Slovene Nation*, pp. 95–102.

Removal, re-education and re-education of the local teachers in the first years after annexation

To his meticulously written assessment of school affairs in Prekmurje, Cvetko attached a spreadsheet that provided the civil servants in Ljubljana with a condensed and multifaceted overview of his findings and recommendations. In this document, the future path of Prekmurje teachers – the implicit common theme of the entire report – came to the fore in an unambiguous way. Starting with the school network's organizational dimension, Cvetko listed school locations in the first column of the spreadsheet, thus delivering an insight into their territorial dispersion. The second column of the report revealed the founders and financial backers of every single elementary school. In 1919, schools in Prekmurje were financed by the municipalities, by churches (Catholic and Protestant) or by the state itself. The third column defined the number of grades. Schools had between one and four grades, the exception being the state school in Murska Sobota (*Muraszombat*), which had five. The fourth column focused on school attendance. On average, each school was attended by a few hundred pupils, with only 50 enrolled in Predanovci (*Rónafő*) and as many as 520 in Turnišče (*Bántornya*). In the following column, the headmaster listed all the teachers employed: in the autumn of 1919, there were 124 in total in Prekmurje. In the next column, these teachers were categorized according to their "nationality." The spreadsheet reveals that Cvetko labelled the majority of teachers either as Hungarians (59) or as Slovenes (57), but there were also four Slovaks, two Germans, a Serb and a "Hungarian Serb" who taught in the region.²²

The last two columns contained the most interesting data, however, for they somehow sealed the destiny of the existing teaching staff. The penultimate column described each teacher's "knowledge of Slovene." Only six of the 59 teachers categorized as Hungarians were considered to be qualified in Slovene. Beside 53 Hungarians, five Slovenes and one German were also evaluated as being unable to speak Slovene. Interestingly enough, the Slovak's and Serb's knowledge of Slovene proved to be sufficient, which was also true in the case of one German. Cvetko's

22 ARS, SI AS 53, 20, Prekmurje 20/49, 236/1919.

overview of the local schools ended with a column euphemistically titled “Suggestions” or “Remarks.” In this column, Cvetko “suggested” or “remarked” that teachers capable of communicating in the Slovene language—regardless of their nationality—should keep their posts, while all those with an insufficient command of Slovene should simply be dismissed.²³

Unlike the merciless views on the local teaching staff and the general intolerance towards Prekmurje’s linguistic distinctiveness that Cvetko expressed in length in the written report, his “Suggestions” and “Remarks” showed greater empathy for the local teachers, and also for the broader expectations of the local elite regarding the continuing usage of local literary Slovene in schools. In the spreadsheet, the local Slavophone teachers were not evaluated from the viewpoint of their loyalty to the new regime, nor was their competence in standard Slovene language assessed. On the contrary, their future destiny depended merely on their ability to continue teaching in local schools with Slavophone pupils by using the local Slavic vernacular.

On 30 October 1919, the Higher School Council issued the decree that put an end to the period of uncertainty and conclusively regulated the question of language in Prekmurje schools. It seems that a decision made by civil servants in Ljubljana somehow reflected the linguistic reality on the ground. The decree unsurprisingly proclaimed standard literary Slovene the language of instruction in all Prekmurje schools, where supposed Slovenes represented the majority of enrolled pupils. Yet the officials also left the door open for necessary compromises. In those schools where teaching in the Slovene national language was not possible due to a lack of appropriate teaching staff, the decree allowed the use of “Prekmurje Slovene” or the “dialect of Prekmurje.” Still, the pupils educated in schools where local Slovene was used were expected to acquire a satisfactory level of knowledge of standard Slovene pronunciation, writing and reading by the time they finished their schooling. The decree also made standard Slovene a compulsory course in places where the population was prevalingly Hun-

23 Ibid. The exception to the rule were four Hungarian teachers in schools with predominantly Hungarian pupils, who were expected to stay and later learn Slovene. In fact, in the subsequent months, many Hungarian teachers were indeed fired or decided to leave Prekmurje. As a result, as late as March 1920, Prekmurje still lacked 53 teachers. Kokolj: *Prekmurski Slovenci*, p. 28.

garian and/or German and hence the language of instruction was either Hungarian or German.²⁴

It seems, however, that there were also other, very practical reasons for their tolerating local literary Slovene in schools. The general circumstances in the post-war period dictated a gradual approach, for the all-embracing lack of material and human resources in war-torn Yugoslavia hindered more ambitious ideas for a radical alteration of existing conditions. From the annexation onwards, the Slovene Provincial Government in Ljubljana constantly requested that the central authorities provide funds necessary to hire teachers, restore school buildings and deliver necessary teaching materials and textbooks – mostly to no avail.²⁵

The local authorities nevertheless followed many of Cvetko's suggestions: they introduced a number of measures and, in general, took responsibility for a gradual linguistic re-education and political realignment of local Slavophone teachers. As early as the late autumn of 1919, for instance, the civil commissioner asked the teachers who had not departed or been fired to notify the Prekmurje school council whether they wished to retain their teaching positions. The case of Ivan Benkovich, the headmaster in Dokležovje, sheds light on the procedure that followed. In November, Benkovich sent his answer, written in Prekmurje Slovene, to the Local School Council in Murska Sobota. He formulated it as a request, stating he would like to keep his post. In his letter, Benkovich revealed that he was born in 1862, that he was Catholic and that his mother tongue was "Prekmurje Slovene", while he was also fluent in Hungarian and even understood a little German. Enclosed with his application was a written statement, delivered by the specific demand of the Local School Council, in which he pledged to acquire the necessary knowledge of standard literary Slovene in the next twelve months. Only two weeks later, headmaster Benkovič – no longer Benkovich – received a positive reply. The civil commissioner informed him that since December 2, he had already been employed once again in his old teaching post.²⁶

24 Ibid., p. 289.

25 See for instance ARS, SI AS 53, 20, Prekmurje 20/49, 14806/1919, Ureditev prekmurskih osnovnih šol [The Regulation of the Prekmurje Elementary Schools], 24 December 1921.

26 Regional Archives Maribor (henceforth: RAM), sig. 1133004/1, p. 43.

Benkovič assured the authorities he would soon obtain the official certificate of fluency and indeed began to learn the standard literary Slovene. In 1920, the authorities organized language preparation courses for the Slavophone teachers in Murska Sobota. Yet local teachers needed to travel outside of Prekmurje in order to take an oral examination to verify their competence. The assessment took place before special committees in either Maribor (in the former Styria) or Ljubljana (in the former Carniola). There, the candidates had to prove not only sufficient fluency in standard Slovene grammar and proper pronunciation, but also a knowledge of the most important works from the canonical corpus of national literature, especially those commonly present in Slovene school readers. Ironically, while preparing for the exams, they were to use textbooks otherwise used by pupils in the upper grades of elementary schools.²⁷

Slovene officials wanted to intertwine the process of learning the proper Slovene language with the attempts to politically re-educate local teachers who remained in Prekmurje. The civil commissioner even contended that the language courses should take place in Ljubljana or its surroundings. This would enable the teachers to

recognize Slovenes as their sincere friends, admire our marvellous homeland and get to know our capital, with all of its ancient and modern attractions. Without thinking, the love for their new homeland, Slovenia, will anchor in their hearts; they should know it!²⁸

While treating local teachers practically in the same manner as their pupils, the civil commissioner believed the course ought to have a sort of “nationally enlightening” component, for this was the only way the teachers would learn standard Slovene with enthusiasm. He also believed that the prevailing broader political and cultural circumstances in Prekmurje were not encouraging for the cultivation of national sentiments. If such courses took place in Murska Sobota, he contended, the participants would stay in touch with Hungarians and “Magyarons” and use only Hungarian to commu-

27 RAM, sig. 1133004/6, 281.

28 Original: “/s/poznali v Slovencih svoje iskrene prijatelje, bi se divili naši prekrasni domovini in spoznali bi našo prestolnico z vsemi njenimi starinskimi in modernimi zanimivostmi. Ne vede se jim bo usidrala v njih srcih ljubezen do nove domovine Slovenije, naj jo le spoznajo!” ARS, SI AS 53, 20, Prekmurje 20/49, Prekmurje: ureditev šolstva; počitniški tečaj [Prekmurje: The Organization of Educational System; Holiday Course].

nicate with one another. Furthermore, the local Hungarian intelligentsia would expose the teachers to Hungarian nationalist rhetoric. For that reason, the success of the course would not be certain. In the civil commissioner's words:

Above all, the course taking place in Murska Sobota would miss the key moment – the moment of nurturing love for the motherland and sensing Slovene, and at times also Yugoslav, mutuality, the feeling that Prekmurje is merely a twig on the green Slovene branch growing from the majestic Slavic trunk. Just as Hungarians did all they could to suppress Slovene consciousness among teachers in Prekmurje – and unfortunately also among the majority of priests – we have to do all we can to purify them of the Hungarian spirit, tear them out of national unconsciousness and convert them to worthy members of the Slavic nation. Only a nationally aware teacher can stir national consciousness and love for the kinfolk and homeland among the youth. Every teacher can read, write and calculate, even a Magyar; but only a teacher permeated with love for his kinfolk and homeland can teach in a nationally conscious way.²⁹

The process of linguistic and ideological adaptation was in any case gradual. From the report the School Council of Prekmurje sent to the Higher School Council in Ljubljana in July 1921, it is possible to discern that more than a year and a half after the latter body had issued the first decree related to teaching, a large number of Prekmurje's teachers had still not managed to successfully pass the Slovene language exam. In Slovene schools, there were as many as 75 teachers that lacked the required certification, while there were 25 in Hungarian schools and two in German ones. Consequently, by the end of 1921, new authorities began to employ harsher re-education measures. In November 1921, for instance, 20 teachers from Prekmurje were replaced with teachers from "Slovenia", a term which in this case denoted the former Cisleithanian territories under Yugoslav rule. The teachers from Prekmurje were sent across the River Mura to other Slovene territories to learn the language

29 Original: "Vrhu tega bi tečaj v Murski Soboti popolnoma pogrešal glavni moment – moment vzgoje domovinske ljubezni in čuta slovenske in pri tem in onim tudi jugoslovanske vzajemnosti, čuta, da je Prekmurec mladika na zeleni slovenski veji, ki raste na mogočnem slovanskem deblu. Kakor so Madžari storili vse, da so zatrli čut slovenske zavednosti prekmurskih učiteljev – žal tudi v pretežni meri večini duhovnikov – tako moramo mi storiti vse, da jih očistimo madžarskega duha, iztrgamo iz narodne nezavednosti in jih spreobrnemo, da postanejo vredni člani slovanskega naroda. Le narodno zaveden učitelj zamore vzbujati v mladini narodno zavest in ljubezen do rodu in domovine. Čitati, pisati in računati uči vsak učitelj, tudi madžaron; ali narodno zavedno vzgojevati zamore le učitelj, ki ga prešinja ljubezen do rodu in domovine." Ibid.

and be resocialized in the new post-Hungarian social and cultural reality. Nevertheless, not all teachers who were ordered to leave Prekmurje consented to depart. As a consequence, the authorities stopped their pay checks. In response, at least one of the teachers, Aleksander Kurz, left for Hungary rather than agreeing to transfer out of Prekmurje.³⁰

Gradual transformation of schools in Prekmurje as a continuation of pre-war Slovene nationalists' rhetoric and practice

A few weeks before the occupation of Prekmurje actually took place in early August 1919, a concerned Slovene citizen published an article on Prekmurje Slovenes in the Styrian Slovene newspaper *Murska straža*. He claimed that Slovene compatriots on the Hungarian side lacked any political or economic organization. The sole role of the schools scattered across the region had been "to teach pupils Hungarian and raise them to become loyal renegades."³¹ There were very few nationally conscious educated locals in Prekmurje, the author continued, and Slovene national consciousness had hence been better preserved among peasants, regardless of their continual subjection to Hungarian and in some places even to German influence. When it came to Slovene awareness, the situation in Prekmurje was terrible:

Of approximately 100,000 Slovenes living in Prekmurje, the majority are nationally and politically indifferent, even though the common folk express lively natural intelligence. Schools, offices and the fierce pressure from above created a large number of renegades that had since forever been the strongest pillar of Hungarian exploiters, who had built splendid palaces in Budapest and elsewhere out of Prekmurje Slovene's spiritual and material abandonment.³²

30 RAM, sig. 1133004/6, 15131, Seznam učnih oseb, ki se iz službenih ozirov zamenjajo iz Prekmurja v Slovenijo in obratno [The list of teaching staff who will be transferred due to professional reasons from Prekmurje in Slovenia and vice versa].

31 Original: "Šole so imele doslej edino razlogo, da nauče deco madžarskega jezika in jo vzgoje za zveste renegate." Prekmurški Slovenci [Prekmurje Slovenes]. In: *Murska straža*, 21 June 1919, p. 1.

32 "Od približno 100.000 Slovencev, ki žive v Prekmurju, je največji del narodno in politično indiferenten, čeprav kaže ljudstvo živo prirodno inteligenco. Šole, uradi in silni pritisk od zgoraj je ustvaril veliko število renegatov, ki so bili vedno najmočnejši stebler madžarskih izkoriščevalcev, kateri so iz duševne in gmotne zapuščenosti prekmurskega Slovenca zidali sijajne palače v Budimpešti in drugod." Ibid.

While describing the grim national oppression supposedly taking place in neighbouring Prekmurje, the author repeated the tropes that had been invented and spread by national activists throughout the Late Imperial Austrian era. When discussing rural communities on the language frontier, nineteenth-century Cisleithanian nationalists often uncovered the “national indifference” of locals and the role of schools in their presumed denationalization.³³ The post-war temporal and spatial transfer of these tropes to Prekmurje thus should not come as a surprise: the region bordered the former Lower Styria, a stage of vicious pre-war “national struggles” between German and Slovene national activists who fought – most of the time with words – for the hearts and souls of the “indigenous” Lower Styrian population. By mentioning “national indifference” and the role of schools in turning Prekmurje Slovenes into renegades, the author vividly illustrated a certain continuity in the Slovene nationalist worldview and rhetoric that obviously had not vanished with the collapse of Austria-Hungary.³⁴

The mental patterns of the pre-war Slovene national activists must also have steered the Slovene administrators, who began forming the new Yugoslav authority in Prekmurje several weeks later. Indeed, many of the officials, civil servants and teachers who proposed and implemented measures in schools after the region was given to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes at the Paris Peace Conference came directly from the neighbouring Slovene Styria, across the river Mura. Such was, for instance, the case of Srečko Lajnšič, the first civil commissioner in Prekmurje and a former district prefect in the Styrian town of Maribor/Marburg. Another such case was that of the headmaster Cvetko, whose report on the existing schools in Prekmurje strongly influenced the decision makers in Ljubljana. In the first years after the annexation, the Yugoslav government transferred to Prekmurje several dozen teachers and

33 Pieter Judson: *Guardians of the Nation: Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria*. Cambridge (MA) 2006; Pieter M. Judson: *The Habsburg Empire*. Cambridge (MA) 2016, pp. 302–309.

34 On the pre-1918 rhetoric, practices and consequences of ethnolinguistic nationalism in Lower Styria, see Janez Cvirn: *Das “Festungsdreieck.” Zur politischen Orientierung der Deutschen in der Untersteiermark (1861–1914)*. Vienna 2016; Filip Čuček: *Svoji k svojim. Na poti k dokončni nacionalni razmejitvi na Spodnjem Štajerskem v 19. stoletju* [Each to Their Own. On the Road to the Final National Delineation in Lower Styria in the 19th Century]. Ljubljana 2016; Karin Almasy: *Wie aus Marburgern “Slowenen” und “Deutsche” wurden*. Bad Radkersburg, Graz 2014; Pieter Judson: *Nationalist Emotion as Fin-de-Siècle Legal Defense? A 1908 Trial in Celje/Cilli*. In: *Acta Histriae* 21 (2013) 4, 735–747; Martin Moll: *Kein Burgfrieden: Der deutsch-slowenische Nationalitätenkonflikt in der Steiermark 1900–1918*. Innsbruck, Vienna, Bozen 2007.

officials from the former Austrian Littoral, where they had been laid off by the Italian authorities that now occupied the territory. As veterans of the pre-1918 Slavic–Italian animosities, they too were familiar with the ethnolinguistic nationalist discourse and consequently considered schools crucial for preventing the locals living at the language frontier from sympathizing or even identifying with the “national enemy.”³⁵

In this sense, the significance ascribed to the language of instruction in Prekmurje encapsulates the continuity between pre-war Slovene Cisleithanian nationalist activities and the post-war transformational efforts of the new Slovene government in Prekmurje. The lack of understanding of the tradition of local literary Slovene – so often expressed by the new Slovene administrators – was grounded in the fact that by the time Austria-Hungary collapsed, the notion of the (standard) Slovene literary language as the national language of Slovenes had already been firmly established in the (former) Cisleithanian crownlands. In the second half of the nineteenth century, Cisleithanian Slovene national activists embraced the idea of preserving and cultivating the Slovene language, declaring its usage in all spheres of life the most crucial prerequisite of national survival. In addition, Cisleithanian promoters of Slovene ethnolinguistic nationalism regarded the individual’s ability to fully express himself in Slovene as a patriotic duty. Many Slovene linguists, writers, poets and journalists thus contributed to the invention of the modern Slovene literary language. Building on the tradition of sixteenth-century Slovene written by Carniolan Protestants and purifying the literary norm of lexical and grammatical influences regarded as German, these Slovene members of the Austrian educated middle class established the highest and most developed form of the Slovene national language that was used in the public as well as private spheres, and in communication with government offices. The Austrian government further facilitated the cultivation of the written Slovene language and its placement on the pedestal of Slovene national symbols by officially recognizing it as a common language of the Slavophones in the Austrian Littoral, Styria, Carniola and Carinthia.³⁶ By 1900, the literary Slovene language was thus already in use as one

35 Andrej Vovko: Nekateri vidiki življenja primorskih priseljencev v Prekmurje med svetovnjima vojnama [Some Aspects of the Life of the Primorje Immigrants to Prekmurje Between the Two World Wars]. In: Dve domovini – Two Homelands 24 (2016), pp.187–204.

36 On the role of the Austrian state in the creation of a special Slovene “ethnic category” and the recognition of the

of the official languages in state offices and in courts, as a language of instruction in many schools, as a regimental language in the army, and as one of many possible languages of daily use declared in decennial censuses. In addition, due to successful national agitation, by 1914 the idea of the Slovene language as a distinctive indicator of Slovene nationality had gained considerable, though uneven, support among the Slavophone population living in those regions.

For this reason, many Cisleithanian Slovene national activists found the circumstances that they encountered in Prekmurje difficult to accept. After their post-war transfers to Prekmurje, many Slovene officials from the former Cisleithania thus often acted and spoke as if they were on a “civilizing mission”, demanding locals become fluent in the national literary language and adopt a higher level of imported Slovene national culture. Unsurprisingly, the officials’ hostile attitude towards the cultural peculiarities of Prekmurje provoked strong reactions among the local educated Slavophones. To the vast majority of educated locals, the idea of “Sloveneness” that had been invented on the other side of river Mura long before 1919 meant almost nothing. They also did not share the idea that standard literary Slovene was the national language of Slovenes and continued to use and express sympathies for their local literary Slavic language. However, regarded as “unredeemed Slovene brothers” by the nineteenth-century Slovene national activists, many local Slavophones persisted in expressing utterly different loyalties and notions of self-belonging for years, if not for decades, after partition from the Kingdom of Hungary.³⁷

At the end of the day, the verdict of the late-nineteenth-century national activists that schools were sites where pupils ought to be forged into compatriots proved correct. In the long run, Yugoslav schools with Slovenian language of instruction in interwar Prekmurje contributed to the diminishment of bilingualism, traditional loyalties and

Slovene language as a national language of Slovenes, see Rok Stergar and Tamara Scheer: Ethnic Boxes: The Unintended Consequences of Habsburg Bureaucratic Classification. In: Nationalities Papers 46 (2018), pp. 575–591.

37 Kokolj: Prekmurški Slovenci, pp. 286–295. Janko Liška: Porajanje in rast narodne zavesti prekmurških Slovencev [The Emergence and Growth of National Consciousness among Prekmurje Slovenes]. In: Janko Liška (ed.): Revolucionarno vrenje v Pomurju v letih 1918–1920 [Revolutionary Unrest in Prekmurje, 1918–1920]. Murska Sobota 1981, pp. 260–300, here: pp. 273–279.

local categories of identification. The new school curricula inhibited the cultivation of pre World-War-I collective identifications and contributed to the extinction of the two-centuries-old tradition of the local literary Slavic language. However, on the basis of an analysis of the efforts to “Slovenize” education in Prekmurje, a clear distinction can be identified between a relatively rapid act of political and ideological transition of education agenda on the one hand and a gradual transformation of the existing school network on the other. The normative and ideological transition of education – from the Hungarian to the Yugoslav (Slovenian) system – passed smoothly. Reforms began immediately after the arrival of the Yugoslav authorities. In line with the expectations of the new school administration – based on the premises of ethnolinguistic nationalism – unfit teachers were dismissed. Upon a report by Cvetko and similar views of other education experts sent to Prekmurje by the Ljubljana regional government, in the autumn of 1921 the organisation of the local school network was finally unified with the rest of the “Slovene territories” of Yugoslavia by decrees. Schools were successfully “Slovenized” – but on paper only.

In reality, the process of Slovenization of education was much slower and was not fully completed until the end of the interwar period. In the gradual process of transformation, both the imported Slovene teachers and the re-educated local teachers did indeed become agents of nationalization in Prekmurje. Approximately ten years after the annexation, some former pupils that had been educated in standard literary Slovene in Prekmurje schools were already publicly denouncing their parents’ traditional loyalties and identifications and instead identifying as proud members of the Slovene nation and loyal citizens of Yugoslavia.³⁸ In this sense, the “Slovenian School” accomplished its task. However, the post-1919 transition aspirations, which from the outset focused on the language of instruction and also on keeping only loyal and reliable staff in classrooms, were not entirely successful. Although Slovene was the only official language of instruction, teachers in primary schools still used the local dialect in the first post-1919 decade. Standard Slovene was often simply not understood by pupils in Prekmurje. The most stubborn proponents of the local Slovene literary language were Lutheran pastors and Catholic priests.

38 See, for instance, Kokolj: *Prekmurski Slovenci*, pp. 336–340.

Lutheran religious instruction in schools in Prekmurje was conducted in the local written tradition until the Axis attack on Yugoslavia in 1941, a practice guaranteed to the Lutheran Church in Prekmurje by King Alexander. The same was the case with Catholic religious instruction. When the authorities ordered that the Catholic textbook for primary schools in the local Slovene dialect be replaced by an edition written in standardized Slovene, the Prekmurje clergy revolted. A political scandal erupted, and the issue of language in Prekmurje schools was debated in the Belgrade Parliament. The conflict between the state school administration and local Catholic priests ended only after the intervention of the Bishop of Maribor, who in 1927 ordered those books in the “Prekmurje dialect” could no longer be used. However, among the local Catholic clergy, final acceptance of the new language did not prevail until the mid-1930s, when a younger generation of priests – locals who had been educated in Slovene seminaries after the Yugoslav annexation – began to work in Prekmurje.³⁹ Similarly, the transformation of the “hearts and minds” of local Prekmurje Slavophone teachers was not entirely successful, despite the re-education efforts. When Prekmurje was occupied by the Hungarian army in April 1941, the older generation of local teachers immediately began to cooperate with the new leadership of the Hungarian Education Department for Prekmurje. During World War II, the Hungarian occupation administration used means to organize education in Prekmurje similar to those the Yugoslav administration had used twenty years earlier: the Slovene teachers were dismissed, the local teachers of the older generation who expressed loyalty to the Hungarian administration were left in place, and Hungarian teachers were brought in to fill the vacancies. In Prekmurje schools, Hungarian replaced Slovenian as the language of instruction.⁴⁰

39 Miroslav Kokolj, Bela Horvat: Prekmurski šolstvo. Od začetka reformacije do zloma fašizma [Schooling in Prekmurje. From the Beginning of the Reformation to the Collapse of Fascism]. Murska Sobota 1977, pp. 324–333.

40 *Ibid.*, pp. 381–388.

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Zusammenfassung

Slowenischer ethnolinguistischer Nationalismus als Rhetorik und Praxis in der postimperialen Schulverwaltung in Prekmurje/ Übermurgebiet

Der Beitrag argumentiert anhand einiger aufschlussreicher und aussagekräftiger Fragmente aus Zeitungsartikeln, Verwaltungsberichten und offiziellen Maßnahmen, die nach der Besetzung und Annexion von Prekmurje eingesetzt wurden, dass slowenische Beamte, die nach Prekmurje kamen, einsprachige slowenische Schulen als ein wesentliches Instrument für die Verbreitung slowenischer nationaler Ideen und die Sozialisierung der Schüler zu Mitgliedern der slowenischen Nation betrachteten. Der Eifer der slowenischen Verwaltungsbeamten bei der Umgestaltung und Wiedererrichtung der lokalen Schulen wurzelte in der Rhetorik und Praxis der ethnolinguistischen slowenischen Nationalaktivisten vor 1918. Da die slowenischen Beamten die spätkaiserlichen österreichischen „Nationalitätenkämpfe“ als Konflikte um den Gebrauch der Sprache erlebt hatten, hielten sie die Beherrschung der slowenischen Standardsprache für eine notwendige Voraussetzung für die Identifikation mit der slowenischen Nation.

Abstract

Slovene Ethnolinguistic Nationalism as Rhetoric and Practice in Post-Imperial School Administration in Prekmurje

By presenting several illuminating and telling fragments from newspapers articles, administrative reports and official measures employed after the occupation and annexation of Prekmurje, I argue that Slovene officials who came to Prekmurje regarded monolingual Slovene schools as an essential tool for the dissemination of Slovene national ideas and the socialization of pupils into members of the Slovene nation. The Slovene administrators' zeal regarding the transformation and the re-establishment of local schools was rooted in the pre-1918 rhetoric and practices of Cisleithanian Slovene ethnolinguistic national activists. Having experienced the late Imperial Austrian "national struggles" as conflicts over the use of language, Slovene officials believed proficiency in the standard Slovene national language to be a necessary precondition for identification with the Slovene nation.

Keywords: ethnolinguistic nationalism, elementary schools, language policy, post-imperial transition, Prekmurje, Slovenia, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes