

Bunjevci Croats within the framework of Hungarian federalism at the end of World War I

Domagoj Tomas* 

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek, Osijek, Croatia

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Received: March 5, 2025 • Accepted: June 12, 2025

Published online: August 1, 2025

© 2025 The Author(s)



ABSTRACT

Due to the precarious circumstances in which the entire Austro-Hungarian Monarchy found itself during World War I, Hungarian intellectual circles intensified their deliberations on the future position and internal structure of Hungary (the Land of the Crown of St. Stephen) to ensure its possible survival within its historical borders even after the end of the war. These deliberations led to two specific federalist proposals for the territory of the former Kingdom of Hungary, presented at the end of 1918. The first proposal was the draft by Oszkár Jászi, Minister of National Affairs in the government of Mihály Károlyi, entitled “Keleti Svájc” (Eng. “Switzerland of the East”) and the other was a proposal by Miksa Strobl entitled “Az új Magyarország mint keleti Svájc (27 teljes sölógárnú kantonnal)” (Eng. “New Hungary as Eastern Switzerland (with 27 self-governing cantons)”), published in the newspaper *Új Magyarország*. Both proposals rest on the principle of ethnofederalism, i.e., an attempt to do justice to the emancipation efforts of the national minorities on Hungarian territory. The article analyzes the probable position of the Bunjevci Croats within the framework of these proposals, taking into account the circumstances, i.e., the end of World War I and the emergence of new international relations that would shape the political architecture of Central and Southeastern Europe in the post-war period.

KEYWORDS

Bunjevci Croats, Hungary, federalism, World War I

* Corresponding author. E-mail: dtomas@ffos.hr

INTRODUCTION

In this paper, I will analyze the relationship between Hungarian federalism and the national question of the Bunjevci of Bačka¹ during World War I, focusing on specific Hungarian federalist proposals presented in 1918. In doing so, I will attempt to answer the question of the position of the Bunjevci of Bačka within the framework of these proposals and research the overall reception of the proposals.

Hungarian federalist proposals in World War I have been mentioned and analyzed in Croatian, Hungarian, Slovakian, and Serbian historiographical articles and syntheses (Ladislav Heka,² Dinko Šokčević,³ Katarina Čeliković,⁴ György Litván,⁵ László Szarka,⁶ Miroslav Michela,⁷ Kristijan M. Jerić⁸ and others), but without a more detailed analysis of the position of the Bunjevci of Bačka within the framework of these proposals.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE BUNJEVAC QUESTION

At the very beginning, it is necessary to begin with the question of the national affiliation of the Bunjevci of Bačka, which has led to differences of opinion and public polemics from the period of the 19th century until today, both within the scientific community and in broader social circles, especially among Croats and Serbs, and to a certain extent among Hungarians. While Croatian historiography generally categorizes them as a sub-ethnic group within the modern Croatian nation, Serbian historiography commonly considers them as a separate nation or as part of the Serbian nation. Nevertheless, Serbian historian Andrej Mitrović, in his study on the territorial demarcation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes with Hungary and Romania, unequivocally classified the Bunjevci and Šokci as part of the Croatian population, despite the fact that in the 1919 census ordered by the Serbian military administration in southern Baranja, the Bunjevci and Šokci were categorized by census takers under the label “Catholic Serbs”.⁹ As for the Hungarian official academic views on the issue of the national identity of the Bunjevci of Bačka, they have changed over time. Thus, according to Eric Beckett Weaver’s analysis, in the late 19th and early 20th century Hungarian encyclopedias and ethnographic records, they are most commonly listed as “Catholic Serbs”¹⁰ and only sometimes as a

¹In this paper, I will focus exclusively on the Bunjevci of Bačka, although the Bunjevci identity occasionally appears in some settlements further north in the Hungarian Danube region, around Kalocsa and Budapest. See more in: [Skenderović \(2017a\)](#), pp. 61–72.

²[Heka \(2014\)](#), pp. 113–170.

³[Šokčević \(2015\)](#), pp. 73–83.

⁴[Čeliković \(2019\)](#), pp. 282–293.

⁵[Litván \(2006\)](#).

⁶[Szarka \(1990\)](#), pp. 49–65; [Szarka \(2021\)](#), pp. 211–219.

⁷[Michela \(2010\)](#), Supplement, pp. 53–82.

⁸[Jerić \(2019\)](#), pp. 59–82.

⁹[Mitrović \(1975\)](#), pp. 130–131.

¹⁰[Beckett Weaver \(2011\)](#), pp. 84, 88.

distinct South Slavic ethnic group, while in the late 20th and early 21st century, they are classified as a sub-ethnic group of the Croats.¹¹

In the second half of the 19th century, the intellectual elite of the Bunjevci of Bačka were divided on the issue of their national movement goals. While the influential circle around Bishop Ivan Antunović clearly advocated the Croatian national identity, a large part of the social elite of the Bunjevci of Bačka were Hungarian loyalists, while a smaller part of their intellectual elite (e. g. Ambrozije Šarčević) advocated the Serbian national-linguistic ideology, which was shaped by Vuk Stefanović Karadžić.¹²

Predominantly, theories of nation and nationalism offer different interpretations of the emergence of nations, from primordialism and perennialism, which see the origins of nations in the complete or predominant continuity of pre-modern social structures, to classical modernism, which perceives the nation exclusively as a modern constructivist phenomenon with no continuity with pre-modern collective identities. In addition to such interpretations, some authors, such as Anthony David Smith, offer a somewhat more complex view of the phenomena of nation and nationalism. In his theory, Smith emphasizes nationalism as an exclusively modern phenomenon, while he sees the nation as a modern superstructure of pre-modern ethnocultural identities. His views on these phenomena seem balanced and well-argued, so they will also serve as an analytical framework in this article.¹³

The ways of building modern nations in Europe also differ in terms of the strength and stability of the political structures (government, central state institutions, state borders, etc.) within which they are built, as István Bibó and Petar Korunić have discussed. Thus, the Western European (“from state to nation”) type of modern nation-building differs significantly from the Central European and South-Eastern European (“from nation to state”) type. The stability of political structures is a characteristic of Western Europe, while Central and South-Eastern Europe are characterized by the instability of their political structures due to various internal and external factors (e.g., Ottoman conquests).¹⁴ Miroslav Hroch systematically explained the three stages of development (A, B, and C) in building small nations, emphasizing the crucial role of intellectuals, which was particularly dominant in the initial stage¹⁵ and whose role is also highlighted by Bibó.¹⁶ Among the Bunjevci of Bačka, the members of the Catholic clergy stood out the most as intellectuals in the process of building this small nation, in chronological order Bishop Antunović, then Pajo Kujundžić, and finally Blaško Rajić.

Alongside Hroch, Pieter M. Judson has more recently developed an interesting concept of national indifference, which can serve as a theoretical tool for explaining the process of national emancipation within Austria-Hungary. Judson argues that, unlike nationalist activists who condemned national indifference, people in real life – due to a combination of various circumstances – could exhibit a much more complex identity than the monolithic definitions envisioned by nationalist activists. Such identity configurations could stem from highly

¹¹Ibid, pp. 106–107.

¹²Vuković (2014), p. 202.

¹³More in: Smith (2003), pp. 199–201.

¹⁴Bibó et al. (1995), pp. 18–24.; Korunić (2006), pp. 133–140.

¹⁵Hroch (2006), pp. 53–62.

¹⁶Bibó et al. (1995), pp. 49–50.

pragmatic reasons, such as existential threats, the desire for upward social mobility in culturally and linguistically heterogeneous environments, and similar factors.¹⁷ Judson therefore concludes that, for many people, nationality was important in some particular situations, while in others it was quite unimportant or irrelevant – that is, it was just one among several forms of loyalty, such as religious, local, regional, or imperial patriotic, that shaped an individual's identity. He also explains that different types of identity affiliation were not necessarily mutually contradictory.¹⁸ Finally, Judson argues that the nationalization of the masses in Austria-Hungary was still an incomplete process by the time of the First World War,¹⁹ and this conclusion, in this case, would also apply to the Bunjevci of Bačka.

Although they were associated with the Croatian national identity through their Catholic faith and the Neo-Shtokavian Ikavian dialect,²⁰ the Bunjevci of Bačka were in an unenviable position regarding most of the territory where the modern Croatian nation was formed in the 19th century. Their position concerning the rest of the Croatian ethnic territory in the period of national integration was marginal, and they also lived outside the area of Croatian political autonomy within Hungary. Therefore, as a marginal ethnic and political element in the “long” 19th century, they were exposed to strong Magyarization through the education system, and the circumstances of the census in Hungary did not suit them, nor did the way of processing the data collected in these censuses.

In the official census statistics²¹ of the “long” 19th century, they were included in the *Other* category as speakers of the Bunjevac language (a separate census category compared to Croatian) for various reasons. Nevertheless, the French historian Catherine Horel assigns them collectively as the “Catholic Serbs”²² by nationality without further detailed explanations and a clear argumentation that would confirm the basis for her categorical position on this issue. On the other hand, Robert Skenderović, in his major work on the history of Danube Croats,²³ offers several well-founded arguments that confirm the direct, continuous, and intense ties of the Bunjevci Croats from Bačka with Croatian national identity. Šokčević uses similar arguments and reaches the same conclusions.²⁴ Therefore, this article refers to the people of the Bunjevci of Bačka during World War I also as the Bunjevci Croats, although there will certainly be differences of opinion on this issue in historiography, especially in Croatian and Serbian historiography, in the future.

¹⁷Judson (2023), pp. 29–30.

¹⁸Judson (2023), p. 30.

¹⁹Judson (2016), pp. 331–332.

²⁰More in: Todosijević (2002), pp. 59–72.

²¹See: *A Magyar Szent Korona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása. Első rész*, Budapest, 1912, pp. 176–183.

²²Horel (2023), pp. 66–67, 114–115, 501, 505.

²³More in: Skenderović (2017b), pp. 9–16.

²⁴More in: Šokčević (2021), pp. 160–163.

(ETHNO)FEDERALISM IN HUNGARY

The forms of federal organization of states already existed in pre-modern history as feudal autonomy, but in the “long” 19th century, they took on new features. The advocates of the processes of national integration and emancipation put their collective rights at the center of their concern with modern nations. Among the mechanisms by which their national rights were to be guaranteed and regulated, the expansion of existing cultural autonomies or the emergence of new ethnic-territorial autonomies within the existing state framework, and sometimes complete national emancipation with the emergence of separate nation states, were most frequently highlighted as ultimate goals.

Such views also led to the emergence of ethnofederalism; a specific federalist concept based on the ethnic distribution of the population. Ethnofederalism emerged primarily in complex multinational states as a possible solution to national issues while preserving existing state borders and political structures.

It is how ethnofederalism emerged in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy as a whole, but also in its Hungarian part. The concept of Hungarian federalism was propagated in proposals mainly by intellectuals who were themselves supporters of the movement within the Hungarian national revival and/or the holders of power in Hungary. Among them is the chronologically first proposal by Ignjat Martinović (1794), which referred to the possible territorial reorganization of Hungary itself, while later Miklós Wesselényi (1843) and József Eötvös (1865) proposed the reorganization of the entire Austrian Empire (Habsburg Monarchy) according to the principle of ethnofederalism. Finally, at the end of World War I (1918), Oszkár Jászi and Miksa Strobl, guided by the principle of ethnofederalism, presented their visions for the reorganization of Hungary, which are explained in more detail in this article regarding the position of the Bunjevci Croats and their reactions to these proposals.

However, ethnofederalism was not the only a concept proposed as a solution to the complex national question in Austria-Hungary at the beginning of the 20th century. Austro-Marxists Karl Renner and Otto Bauer offered a non-territorial concept of national personal autonomy as a theoretical solution, which also served as an implicit critique of the ethno-territorial approach to the national question. However, this concept did not gain traction in Hungary at the time and was therefore not considered among the Bunjevci of Bačka either.

PAJO KUJUNDŽIĆ AND “SOLID GOLD” OF OSZKÁR JÁSZI

As one of the bearers of the Croatian national idea among the Bunjevci of Bačka, Kujundžić followed the events in Hungarian intellectual circles. In 1896, he published a short discussion in Hungarian on the Bunjevac question,²⁵ i.e., the issue of educating the Bunjevci in their language. In the article, he argued for the need to reform the education system based on the premises of the Hungarian Nationalities Law of 1868, which basically offered this possibility. He was also

²⁵Kujundžić (1896).

familiar with the ideas of the Hungarian sociologist Oszkár Jászi, who offered a possible solution to the national issues in Hungary. Therefore, Jászi's lecture, which he had given at the Galileo Circle²⁶ in Budapest in 1911 and which was published in Hungarian in 1912,²⁷ was translated and published in Croatian by Kujundžić under the pseudonym Stari Rodoljub, first in *Neven*²⁸ and then as a separate volume in 1914.²⁹ Together with the translation of Jászi's lecture, Kujundžić also provided a short introductory commentary, i.e., an interpretation of the lecture, and he supplemented some of Jászi's ideas with editorial notes in parentheses.

As an intellectual from the Bunjevac Croat circles, Kujundžić considered the solutions proposed by Jászi for national (and economic) issues in Hungary to be acceptable and desirable, but he was not close to Jászi's views on religious issues because Kujundžić, as a Catholic priest, assumed the dominant position of Catholic moral values and the application of the social teachings of the Catholic Church defined in papal encyclicals. Jászi, on the other hand, as a liberal politician, rejected the role of God's providence and the influence of the supernatural in social issues. Precisely for this reason, Kujundžić highlighted the objections he faced from Catholic ranks for promoting Jászi's ideas ("they turn against us: why honor an unbeliever so much"³⁰), but he also readily replied that he would like "if we could have read this in the edition of Sveti Stipan or the speeches of the university youth of Sveti Mirko".³¹ Finally, Kujundžić affirmed the need to provide the Bunjevci Croats in the Subotica region³² with education in their language while describing Jászi's ideas as "solid gold" several times and concluded:

"With this settlement we give our people this solid gold, from which you can make as many ducats as you like... Take it and read it! Take it and learn it by heart!!"³³

At the very beginning of the lecture, Jászi mentioned the linguistic injustice experienced by the Bunjevci of Bačka using the example of Subotica, highlighting the example of the Kolo mladeži (Eng. Youth circle).³⁴ He offered the possibility of solving the national question in

²⁶Galileo Circle (Hun. Galilei Kör), an association of atheistic and materialistically oriented students in Budapest between 1908 and 1919.

²⁷Čeliković (2019), p. 284.

²⁸Before Jászi's lecture, an article was published in *Neven* in which the unsigned author, probably the editor and publisher Mirko Ivković Ivandekić, analyzes the position of Bunjevci regarding statistics in censuses and the application of legal provisions on language rights, with the announcement of the publication of Jászi's lecture ("Pa kako stojima mi sotom statistikom?", *Neven*, 6th December 1913, p. 2). Jászi's lecture was published in the form of excerpts in the following issues of *Neven* in several parts: Oszkár Jászi, "„Narodnosno pitanje i budućnost Ugarske", *Neven*, 20th December 1913, p. 2; *Neven*, 27th December 1913, p. 2; *Neven*, 3rd January 1914, p. 2; *Neven*, 10th January 1914, p. 2; *Neven*, 17th January 1914, pp. 1–2; *Neven*, 24th January 1914, pp. 1–2.

²⁹Jászi (1914). It can be found in Croatian translation in *Neven* and as a separate volume edited by Stari rodoljub [Pajo Kujundžić].

³⁰Ibid, p. 4.

³¹Ibid.

³²Ibid, p. 5.

³³Ibid.

³⁴Ibid, p. 6.

Hungary through the cultural and educational autonomy of minorities, which implied the right to education, administration, and justice in the mother tongue.³⁵

Kujundžić's reception of Jászi's ideas from this lecture was not the only one among the South Slavic peoples on the territory of Hungary, as a separate volume with the same title had already been published in 1912 in Novi Sad in the Serbian language and Cyrillic script³⁶ and previously in the newspaper *Branik*.³⁷

HUNGARY AS THE “SWITZERLAND OF THE EAST”

World War I was a tectonic upheaval that considerably changed the views of individual intellectuals on political, social, and cultural issues. Hungary, as part of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, was on the side of the defeated Central Powers at the end of the Great War, so the unfavorable political circumstances surrounding it gave rise to several proposals for preserving Hungary's territorial integrity and unity in moments of dynamic political events that would decide its political future in the autumn and winter of 1918. Among these proposals were those of Oszkár Jászi and Miksa Strobl, based on the principle of ethnofederalism. On the other hand, the disintegration processes triggered by the national emancipation of the non-Hungarian peoples in Hungary, which included the southern Slavs (Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes³⁸), were even more forceful.

Jászi's proposal for the territorial reorganization of Hungary after World War I in November 1918 under the name “the Switzerland of the East” shows that he had meanwhile recognized that, in view of the changed political circumstances in Europe, the demands of the non-Hungarian peoples could no longer be satisfied by the cultural educational autonomy alone, but by ethno-territorial autonomy. In practice, therefore, he attempted to reconcile the Hungarian demand for the continued existence of historical Hungary as a political framework on the one hand, and the realization of the right to self-determination of the non-Hungarian peoples in Hungary on the other.

As Minister of Nationalities in the Hungarian government of Mihály Károlyi,³⁹ Jászi then proposed the possibility of establishing 14 cantons: six with a Hungarian majority (two with a clear Hungarian majority, one with a Hungarian majority and a German minority, three with a Hungarian majority and a Romanian minority), three with a Romanian majority (two with a Romanian majority and a Hungarian minority, one with a Romanian majority and a German minority), two Slovak–Hungarian with a German minority, one Slovak, one Ruthenian with

³⁵Ibid, p. 10.

³⁶Jasi (1912).

³⁷*Branik*, political newspaper of the Serbs in southern Hungary, published from 1885 to 1914 as the official newsletter of the Serbian People's Liberal Party.

³⁸Over the centuries, the Croats preserved their autonomy and the elements of pre-modern statehood through the central institutions of the Kingdom of Croatia and Slavonia (parliament, ban, language – municipal rights), the Serbs fought for temporary autonomy in the revolution of 1848 (Serbian Vojvodina and Tamiški Banat, 1849 – 1860), and the Slovenes (Prekmurje) were without any tradition of political and cultural autonomy within Hungary.

³⁹Mihály Károlyi was the head of the government of the Democratic Republic of Hungary, created during the Chrysanthemum Revolution, which began on October 31, 1918.

Hungarian and Romanian minority and one mixed German–Hungarian–Serbian. In Jászi's proposal, the Bunjevci of Bačka were not mentioned and the territory where they lived was divided between three cantons, based in Budapest, Szeged, and Timisoara, although László Szarka indicates in his article that the Timisoara canton was proposed to be German–Hungarian–Serbian–Bunjevac⁴⁰

Strobl took it up a notch in applying the principles of ethnofederalism when he proposed Hungary as “the Switzerland of the East” at the end of December 1918. Strobl's proposal envisaged a territorial reorganization into 27 smaller cantons, only eight of which were to have a clear Hungarian majority. Within the 27 proposed cantons, Strobl also foresaw the organization of six urban cantons comprising large cities (Budapest, Pozsony, Kassa, Debrecen, Szeged and Kolozsvár). According to the proposal, the other 13 cantons mainly followed the linguistic borders. Strobl intended a separate canton for the Bunjevci of Bačka, which would include the area of northern and western Bačka with the towns of Subotica and Sombor, as well as the southern part of Baranja,⁴¹ where the most numerous of the Southern Slavs were the Šokci Croats, while there were almost no Bunjevci at all. Of the territories that were more densely populated by the Bunjevci, only the area around the town of Baja would not belong to this canton. A separate canton for the Bunjevci of Bačka in Strobl's proposal, separated from the Serbian canton,⁴² indicates that Strobl did not see them as “Catholic Serbs” which, according to Beckett Weaver's analysis, was still prevalent in the Hungarian academic community at the time, but as a community with a separate national identity.

However, neither Jászi's nor Strobl's proposals came to fruition in practice, as the non-Hungarian peoples on the territory of Hungary decided definitively in favor of self-determination at the end of 1918 and rejected any possibility of compromise with the Hungarian federalist proposals. These proposals did not even have a significant effect on the Bunjevci Croats. Kujundžić, who was familiar with Jászi's earlier work and his proposals for possible concessions to the non-Hungarian peoples in Hungary, died in the meantime in 1915. On the other hand, the media space in which any of the Bunjevac intellectuals would raise a criticism of the proposals put forward was quite limited at the time of their public appearance.

As the most influential newspaper of the Bunjevci Croats before World War I, the weekly *Neven*⁴³ ceased publication in 1914 due to the circumstances of the war. It resumed regular publication in November 1918,⁴⁴ but there was no direct response to the federalist proposals by Jászi and Strobl. Nevertheless, in early December 1918, an unsigned introductory article appeared in *Neven*. It distinctly criticized the shift in the policy of the Károlyi's government towards the non-Hungarian peoples, which was mainly shaped by Jászi. Indeed, this shift was interpreted as a belated and temporary expression of Hungarian political weakness, the sincerity of which was called into question. In the end, the undeniable Yugoslav political orientation of

⁴⁰Szarka (2023), p. 73.

⁴¹The area that largely coincides with the part of Baranja that is now part of the Republic of Croatia.

⁴²According to Strobl's proposal, the Serbian canton was to include parts of Bačka and Banat with a clear Serbian majority.

⁴³*Neven*, an entertainment and educational newspaper published in Baja, Sombor, and Subotica (1884–1914 and 1918–1940), initially as a monthly, later the publication frequency was changed.

⁴⁴Nimčević (2019), p. 310.

the Bunjevci of Bačka became more prominent.⁴⁵ In mid-December 1918 the article was followed by another, very similarly intoned introductory article in *Neven*, which ended with the following sentences:

“The nationalities saw through Karoly and his comrades a long time ago. Now their façade comes off before the Hungarians. The disappointed people understand they are dealing with the same masters who tricked and exploited them before. A wolf changes its coat but not its character.”⁴⁶

In contrast to the earlier agreement with Jászi's views on the national question in Hungary in the pages of *Neven* from 1914, as well as with the more prominent Bunjevac intellectuals, such as Pajo Kujundžić, the political situation after the end of World War I thus had a significant impact on the change of the previously expressed views. At the same time, this situation meant a weakened Hungary and a significantly strengthened and revitalized Yugoslav idea. Accordingly, Bunjevac intellectuals positioned themselves according to the political ideas coming from the Hungarian ranks, as the articles in *Neven* from December 1918 prove.

Moreover, *Neven's* rival from Subotica *Naše novine*⁴⁷ ceased publication in September 1918 due to the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, so no responses to Jászi and Strobl's proposals could appear there either.⁴⁸

On the other hand, the Western Hungarian Croats⁴⁹ at that time generally expressed open loyalty to Hungary, which is evident in their press, such as the weekly *Naše novine*⁵⁰ published in Győr. Namely, in late 1918 and early 1919, *Naše novine* published a series of unsigned articles clearly expressing the loyalty of the Western Hungarian Croats to Hungary. For example, in the article dated November 23, 1918, the idea of annexing parts of Western Hungarian territories inhabited by Germans and Croats to neighboring Austria is explicitly rejected, as is the idea of creating a “Slavic corridor” between the Czechs and Croats that would include this area.⁵¹ The article goes on to call for the establishment and maintenance of a Croatian National Assembly in Hungary, in which representatives of the Western Hungarian Croats - estimated by the author at 60,000 - would participate. The political loyalty to Hungary at that time was justified by the preservation of the mother tongue through its use in liturgy, as well as the expectation that, according to promises made by the Hungarian government, landless peasants would be able to acquire land at very low prices - something that would not be possible in another country.⁵² Identical views on loyalty to Hungary were reiterated in another article in *Naše novine* dated 30

⁴⁵“Novo gudalo – al su stare gusle”, *Neven*, 1st December 1918, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁶“Padaju krinke”, *Neven*, 14th December 1918, pp. 1–2.

⁴⁷*Naše novine* (Our news), a newspaper that was published in Subotica from 1907 to 1918 as a newsletter of the National Christian Socialist Party.

⁴⁸Sekulić (1990), p. 410.

⁴⁹The term ‘Western Hungarian Croats’ refers to the group of Croats who at that time lived in the counties of Vas, Moson, and Sopron, and who today reside in parts of Austria (Burgenland), western Hungary, and Slovakia (around Bratislava).

⁵⁰*Naše novine* (Our news), a weekly newspaper that was published in Győr from 1910 to 1922 as a political, economic and entertainment newspaper.

⁵¹“Vsim hervatom Sopronske, Mosonske i Zelezanske varmegje”, *Naše novine*, 23rd November 1918, pp. 1–2.

⁵²“Vsim hervatom Sopronske, Mosonske i Zelezanske varmegje”, *Naše novine*, 23rd November 1918, pp. 2–3.

November 30, 1918.⁵³ The clear position taken by the editorial board (István Paukovich and Lovre Barilich) and the owner (Andrija Prikoszovich) of *Naše novine* on the question of loyalty to Hungary and the maintenance of the Croatian National Assembly in Hungary essentially followed an earlier proposal by Štefan Pinezich.⁵⁴

In the first months of 1919, *Naše novine* published a series of variations on proposals for territorial and cultural autonomy of the Western Hungarian Croats within Hungary,⁵⁵ and the conclusions of the Croatian National Assembly held in Koljnof on January 5, 1919 were sent to Minister Jászi and referred to cultural and educational autonomy.⁵⁶ However, there are no direct statements by the intellectual elite of the Western Hungarian Croats in *Naše novine* regarding Jászi's or Strobl's ethnofederalist proposals.⁵⁷

Ultimately, it is obvious that by the time Jászi and Strobl's federalist proposals appeared, the Bunjevac intellectual circles had already completely rejected the possibility of remaining in a new Hungarian state, regardless of the internal organization, and turned to the process of forming the South Slavic confederation, trying to bring into it as much as possible of the territory of the former Hungary (Bačka) in which they resided.⁵⁸

There are known cases of collective public actions by the people of Subotica in October⁵⁹ and November 1918,⁶⁰ in which they expressed their sense of belonging to the Croatian nation, their political solidarity, and their inclination to unite with the People's Council of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs and the State of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs.⁶¹ In addition, the majority of the Bunjevac social elite⁶² participated in the Great People's Assembly in Novi Sad on November 25, 1918,⁶³ at which the dissolution of the constitutional ties of Baranja, Bačka, and Banat with Hungary and the unification of these regions with the Kingdom of Serbia was announced.⁶⁴

⁵³“Hervati”, *Naše novine*, 30th November 1918, pp. 1–2.

⁵⁴“K predlogu”, *Naše novine*, 23rd November 1918, p. 5.

⁵⁵More in: Kolnhoffer (2010), pp. 117–119.

⁵⁶“Zopet za korak dalje”, *Naše novine*, 11th January 1919, pp. 6–7.

⁵⁷The question of the political loyalty of the Western Hungarian Croats to Hungary after the First World War was examined in more detail by Katharina Tyran in her article. More: Tyran (2025), pp. 177–193.

⁵⁸The cities of Subotica and Sombor and their immediate surroundings became part of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, while the Bay Triangle ultimately remained part of Hungary.

⁵⁹More in: Heka (2014), p. 115.

⁶⁰More in: Skenderović (2022), pp. 97–105.; Nimčević (2019), pp. 299–325.

⁶¹More in: Mitrović (1975), pp. 270–271.

⁶²More in: Heka (2020), p. 64.

⁶³According to the minutes of the Great People's Assembly in Novi Sad, 757 delegates took part, of which 578 were Serbs, 84 Bunjevci, 62 Slovaks, 21 Ruthenians, 3 Šokci, 2 Croats, 6 Germans and 1 Hungarian. On the other hand, according to the last census before World War I (1910), 1,545,662 inhabitants lived in the area of Baranja, Bačka, and Banat, which was part of the Kingdom of HCS, of which 471,601 were Hungarians, 382,000 Serbs, around 303,000 Germans, 91,000 Croats (including Bunjevci), 76,000 Romanians, 46,000 Slovaks, almost 11,000 Ruthenians, and 145,000 others. It follows that the democratic legitimacy of the delegates present in the Great People's Assembly was very limited, which made their decisions limited, too. See: Heka (2020), p. 65, p. 75.

⁶⁴Heka (2020), pp. 65–66.

Moreover, nowhere in his memoirs does Stipan Matijević,⁶⁵ the first mayor of Subotica in the Kingdom of SCS, mention that Jászi and Strobl's proposals for the federalization of Hungary were considered in the Bunjevci intellectual and political circles at the end of World War I.⁶⁶ On the other hand, Matijević, like Kujundžić before him, emphasizes in his works the unwillingness of official Hungarian politics to apply its legislative provisions on the collective rights of non-Hungarian peoples in Hungary, especially in the area of education in their language, which was guaranteed by law.⁶⁷ At that time, only a few individuals among the Bunjevci, such as the lawyer Luka Plesković⁶⁸ from Subotica and the lawyer Ivan Paštrović,⁶⁹ showed a tendency to communicate with the Károlyi government and seek the possibility of protecting the collective rights of the Bunjevci Croats within Hungary in the pre-war borders.⁷⁰

CONCLUSION

The Bunjevci Croats from Bačka were confronted with new political challenges during World War I as a territorially marginal Croatian community. As Hungary's political position weakened, there was a growing awareness among Hungarian intellectuals of the need to resolve the national issues of the non-Hungarian peoples, which they saw as one of the fundamental prerequisites for the survival of Hungary within its existing borders. Such a climate eventually led to the Bunjevci Croats as a collective becoming a political factor in the deliberations of Jászi and Strobl, where they were offered cultural and educational autonomy according to Jászi's proposal and territorial autonomy according to Strobl's proposal. It was also the first time they were offered a form of territorial autonomy as a collective within Hungary as part of the broader proposal for the federalization of Hungary. However, at the end of World War I, the Bunjevci Croats, led by their social elite, almost plebiscitary supported the Yugoslav idea, i.e., the creation of a Yugoslav state, in which they tried to include as much as possible of the territories where they were settled. In doing so, they ultimately failed in a more serious reception and consideration of the specific ethnofederalist proposals of Jászi and Strobl from the end of 1918.

However, neither Jászi's nor Strobl's proposals came to fruition in practice, as the non-Hungarian peoples on the territory of Hungary decided definitively in favor of self-determination at the end of 1918 and rejected any possibility of compromise with the Hungarian federalist proposals. These proposals did not even have a significant effect on the Bunjevci Croats. Kujundžić, who was familiar with Jászi's earlier work and his proposals for possible concessions to the non-Hungarian peoples in Hungary, died in the meantime in 1915. On the

⁶⁵Stipan Matijević (1872 – 1939), Bunjevac politician. He completed his law studies in Budapest, mayor of Subotica and grand prefect of Subotica from 1918 to 1920.

⁶⁶See: Matijević (1928).

⁶⁷Matijević (1928), p. 4.

⁶⁸Luka Plesković (1872 – 1927), finished grammar school in Subotica, studied law in Budapest, and received his doctorate in Kolozsvár (Cluj-Napoca). Acting mayor of Subotica in November 1918.

⁶⁹Šokčević (2021), p. 167.

⁷⁰Čeliković (2019), pp. 284–285.

other hand, the media space in which any of the Bunjevac intellectuals would raise a criticism of the proposals put forward was quite limited at the time of their public appearance.

REFERENCES

PRIMARY SOURCES

A Magyar Szent Korona országainak 1910. évi népszámlálása. Első rész. (1912). Budapest.

SECONDARY SOURCES

- Beckett Weaver, E. (2011). Hungarian views of the Bunjevci in Habsburg Times and the inter-war period. *Balkanica*, 42: 77–115.
- Bibó, I., Huszár, T., and Szűcs, J. (1995). *Regije evropske povijesti*. Naprijed, Zagreb.
- Čeliković, K. (2019). Nakladništvo bačkih Hrvata tijekom Prvoga svjetskog rata. In: XIV. *Međunarodni kroatistički znanstveni skup*. Znanstveni zavod Hrvata u Mađarskoj, Pečuh, pp. 282–293.
- Heka, L. (2014). Posljedice Prvoga svjetskog rata: samoproglašene „države“ na području Ugarske. *Godišnjak za znanstvena istraživanja Zavoda za kulturu vojvođanskih Hrvata*, 6: 113–170.
- Heka, L. (2020). Trianonski mirovni ugovor i razgraničenje u Bačkoj (Nastanak i dokinuće „Nove Subotice“). *Godišnjak za znanstvena istraživanja Zavoda za kulturu vojvođanskih Hrvata*, 12: 59–86.
- Horel, C. (2023). *Multicultural cities of the Habsburg Empire 1880 – 1914. Imagined communities and conflictual encounters*. Central European University Press, Budapest, Vienna, New York.
- Hroch, M. (2006). *Društveni preduvjeti nacionalnih preporoda u Europi. Komparativna analiza društvenog sastava patriotskih grupa malih europskih nacija*. Srednja Europa, Zagreb.
- Jasi, O. (1912). *Narodnosno pitanje i budućnost Ugarske*. Štamparija Deoničarskog društva Branika, Novi Sad.
- Jászi, O. (1914). *Narodnosno pitanje i budućnost Ugarske*. Tiskara Hungarija, Subotica.
- Јерић, К.М. (2019). Банат, Бачка и Барања у плановима мађарских влада 1918–1921. *Митолошки зборник*, 41: 59–82.
- Judson, P.M. (2016). *The Habsburg Empire. A new history*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, London.
- Judson, P.M. (2023). Making minorities and majorities: national indifference and national self determination in Habsburg central Europe. In: *Sovereignty, nationalism, and the quest for homogeneity in interwar Europe*. Bloomsbury Academic, London, pp. 21–38.
- Kolnhoffer, V. (2010). Gradišćanski Hrvati u razdoblju revolucija (1918–1919). In: *Regionális Tanulmányok. Regionálne Studije. Regionale Studien. Studia Regionalis II. PannonIQm*, Sopron, pp. 115–122.
- Korunić, P. (2006). *Rasprava o izgradnji moderne hrvatske nacije*. Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, Slavonski Brod.

- Kujundžić, P. (1896). *Bunyevác kérdés és az 1868-iki XXXVIII. és XLIV. törvenycikkek végrehajtása*. Tiskara Vinka Blesića, Szabadka.
- Litván, Gy. (2006). *A Twentieth-Century Prophet: Oscar Jászi 1875–1957*. Central European University Press, Budapest, New York.
- Matijević, S. (1928). *Događaji koji su se odigrali u Subotici za vreme mojeg javnog delovanja od 10. nov. 1918. do 20. maja 1920. god.* Gradska štamparija, Subotica.
- Michela, M. (2010). Plans for Slovak autonomy in the policy of Hungary, 1918 – 1920. *Historický časopis*, 58(Supplement): 53–82.
- Mitrović, A. (1975). *Razgraničenje Jugoslavije sa Mađarskom i Rumunjskom 1919–1920*. Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, Novi Sad.
- Nimčević, V. (2019). Uloga podunavskih Hrvata u priključenju Vojvodine Srbiji 1918. godine. In: XIV. *Međunarodni kroatistički znanstveni skup*. Znanstveni zavod Hrvata u Mađarskoj, Pečuh, pp. 299–325.
- Sekulić, A. (1990). Listovi i časopisi bačkih Hrvata od Ivana Antunovića do 1941. *Migracijske teme*, 6(3): 407–414.
- Skenderović, R. (2017a). Hrvatska naselja u okolici Budimpešte i Kalače krajem 19. stoljeća. *Godišnjak za znanstvena istraživanja Zavoda za kulturu vojvođanskih Hrvata*, 9: 61–72.
- Skenderović, R. (2017b). *Povijest podunavskih Hrvata (Bunjevaca i Šokaca) od doseljavanja do propasti Austro-Ugarske Monarhije*. Zavod za kulturu vojvođanskih Hrvata, Hrvatski institut za povijest – Podružnica za povijest Slavonije, Srijema i Baranje, Subotica, Slavonski Brod.
- Skenderović, R. (2022). Važnost i simbolika pjevanja hrvatske himne u crkvi sv. Roka u Subotici 17. studenoga 1918. godine. *Godišnjak za znanstvena istraživanja Zavoda za kulturu vojvođanskih Hrvata*, 13: 97–105.
- Smith, A. D. (2003). *Nacionalizam i modernizam*. Fakultet političkih znanosti, Zagreb.
- Šokčević, D. (2015). Mađarski politički planovi za rješenje hrvatskog (jugoslavenskog) pitanja u vrijeme Prvog svjetskog rata. In: *Prekretnice u suživotu Hrvata i Mađara. Ustanove, društvo, gospodarstvo i kultura*. Bölcsészettudományi Kutatóközpont Történettudományi Intézet, Hrvatski institut za povijest, Budimpešta, pp. 73–83.
- Šokčević, D. (2021). *A magyarországi horvátok rövid története/Kratka povijest Hrvata u Mađarskoj*. Croatia, Budapest.
- Szarka, L. (1990). A méltányos nemzeti elhatárolódás lehetősége 1918 végén. *Regio. Kisebbségtudományi Szemle*, 1: 49–65.
- Szarka, L. (2021). The options for a negotiated peace in the Danube Region: Hungary and neighbouring countries after the 1918 Aster revolution. In: *Central and Eastern Europe after the First World War*. De Gruyter, Oldenburg, pp. 211–219.
- Szarka, L. (2023). The Nationality Policy of the Hungarian People's Republic in the Winter of 1918–1919. The «Switzerland of the East» and the option of a negotiated peace under the government of Mihály Károlyi. *Византизмская Европа*, 1: 61–77.
- Todosijević, B. (2002). Why Bunjevci did not become a nation: a case study. *East Central Europe*, 29(1–2): 59–72.
- Tyran, K. (2025). From Mosaic to pigeonhole: frames, loyalties, and policies among the Croatian-speaking population in former Western Hungary/Burgenland. In: *The disputed Austro-Hungarian border : agendas, actors, and practices in Western Hungary/Burgenland after World War I*. Berghahn, New York, Oxford, pp. 177–193.
- Vuković, P. (2014). Bački Bunjevci i otpor modernizaciji. In: *Zbornik radova 42. seminara Zagrebačke slavističke škole*. FF Press, Zagreb, pp. 197–210.

NEWSPAPERS

Neven (Subotica), 1913, 1914, 1918.

Naše novine (Győr), 1918, 1919.

Open Access statement. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium for non-commercial purposes, provided the original author and source are credited, a link to the CC License is provided, and changes – if any – are indicated.