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Territorializing Minorities Policies in  
Central-Eastern Europe

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## Abstract

The contribution starts from a historical analysis of the first post-war period; then, the success of the self-determination principle and its application in Central-Eastern Europe brought to the creation and consolidation of old and new National States (Greece, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). These States, anyway, were often as multinational as the old Empires they had replaced. Their birth, moreover, was troubled by the resistance of the vanquished powers (who were ceding important parts of their territories) and of many minorities who did not belong to the national projects which lay behind these States. The fear of the spread of Russia socialism, further, represented another problem to take into consideration in order to pacify Central-Eastern Europe. Acknowledging the problems created by the hostility between Nations and Minorities and between the different interpretation both gave of the self-determination principle, international diplomacy arranged special regulations to grant to the minorities precise guarantees. In 1919 and during the following years, the States were consequently called to commit themselves to accept some international obligations concerning the protection of minorities: the special treaties signed by Czechoslovakia, Poland, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Romania and Greece; the clauses inserted in the general peace treaties, some unilateral declarations asked to the candidates to join the League of Nations, and other multilateral

or bilateral agreements. This whole of measures was put under the control and supervision of the newborn League of Nations, which provided a special procedure in the field of minority rights. Despite these precise obligations, many States clearly protested against this imposition considering it an unjust interference in their own internal affairs. The effective protection of minorities, as a matter of fact, soon became a matter of concern for the international institutions and for the relationships among the Central-Eastern European States. The Minority rights proved to be a difficult question for interwar Europe and a great hurdle for the different projects all the States aimed to develop: the creation of a State in symbiosis with its respective nation as the historical result of the war and the previous fights against the Empires. The shape assumed by interwar States and by their policies, consequently, tended to forget the obligations concerning minorities and were often addressed towards an exclusivist nationalism. The protection of minorities, therefore, became an important feature in the collective security system and deeply conditioned European scenario contributing to lead the order of Versailles towards its tragic end.

## Keywords

Minorities. Nationalism. League of Nations. Minority treaties

## 1. The Historical Context

The outbreak of the first world war represented a turning point for the evolution of the nationality question in Central-Eastern Europe. The conflict created the opportunity to make a decisive step towards the completion of different national programs and once again proposed the rivalry that few years before had characterized the Balkan wars. The Great war decreed not only the end of the Tsarist, German and Ottoman Empires, but also of Austria Hungary and played the latter a Requiem pour un empire défunt.<sup>1</sup> In fact, the war years created the perfect conditions for the outbreak of the Russian revolutions of February and October 1917 and for the success of the national self-determination principle proclaimed by the Congress of oppressed nationalities held in Rome in April 1918. The definitive imposition of the self-determination principle was a consequence not only of the fourteen points Wilson drafted in 1917 but also, surely with a different and less substantial extent, of the revolution Lenin and the Bolsheviks led in Russia aiming to export it as far as Central-Europe. More correctly, it was also a consequence of this menace, since the acceptance of national demands was seen as a powerful counterbalance to halt the spread of socialism.<sup>2</sup>

1 F.Fejtö, *Requiem pour un empire defunt: histoire de la destruction de l'Autriche-Hongrie*, Paris, Lieu Commun, 1988. The question of nationalities in the Habsburg Empire was particularly important and was identified as one the key-issues in the birth and the evolution of the war: "My apology for inflicting so many unfamiliar details upon the reader is that the key to the whole situation lies in Austria-Hungary, and that upon the fate of its provinces and races in this war depends to a very great extent the question whether the new Europe which is to issue from this fiery ordeal is to be better than the old Europe which is crumbling in ruins before our eyes. For the moment a thick fog of war obscures this point of view". Cfr. R.W.Seton Watson, *Austria-Hungary and the Southern Slavs*, in R.W.Seton Watson-J.Dover Wilson-A.E.Zimmerman-A.Greenwood, *The War and Democracy*, London 1915, p. 122.

2 Lenin strategically handled the national question and after 1905 he worked out the idea that national questions could become one of the main instruments in the hands of the proletariat. Nationalism could represent a tool to enjoin revolution

The end of WWI was not followed by an immediate climate of peace, especially in Central-Eastern Europe. Besides the fights of Bolshevik Russia, which entered into a tragic and bloody civil war, the advance of socialism was seen as an urgent threat to the order and stability of all Europe. Germany recorded the birth of short-lived communist experiments, in Munich and Berlin, Hungary threw away her old governors, started a period of democratic reforms with Mihály Károlyi and his “aster revolution” and, after the note sent by the allied powers through the French colonel Fernand Vix (March 19-20, 1919), assisted to the creation of a Soviet republic. Béla Kun resisted until the first days of August when he had to resign because of Romanian and Czech military pressure culminated in the occupation of Budapest.<sup>3</sup>

But even after the fall of Hungarian communism, Red Russia was still engaged in a war against Poland, which had to last until Trotsky's armies' final defeat; Turkey started to liberate Asia Minor by the presence of the Greeks who occupied conforming to the Treaty of Sevres (1920). Czechs and Poles contended the possession of Teschen, the region of Vilna was occupied by Polish troops,

against Tsarism as it was exposed in Lenin's essays on the right of self-determination, in 1914 and 1916, and in the declaration issued by the first communist government on November 15, 1917, which promised to replace the old policy with a “full and entire mutual trust” among the people of Russia. Declaration of the Russian peoples's rights, 1917. G.Walter, *Le Révolution russe*, Albin, Paris, 1972 (in Italian version pp.526-527). The long first world war inspired Lenin about the importance of national question, which obviously had to be tactically managed by the Party. H.Carrère d'Encausse, Lenin, Fayard, Paris 1998 (in the Italian version pp.171-176)

3 About the socialist experiences in Germany and Hungary, see F.L.Carsten, *Revolution in Central Europe. 1918-1919*, London 1972; A.Mitchell, *Revolution in Bavaria. 1918-1919. The Eisner Regime and the Soviet Republic*, Princeton 1965; C.A.Macartney-A.W.Palmer, *Independent Eastern Europe. A History*, London 1962; J.L.Talmon, *Myth Of The Nation And Vision Of Revolution. The Origins of Ideological Polarisation in the Twentieth Century*, London, 1981; A. Biagini (a cura di), G. Romanelli. *Nell'Ungheria di Bela Kun e durante la missione militare romana. La mia missione (maggio-novembre 1919)*, Roma 2002; P. Fornaro, *Crisi postbellica e rivoluzione. L'Ungheria dei Consigli e l'Europa danubiana del primo dopoguerra*, Milano 1987; P. Fornaro, *Béla Kun. Professione: rivoluzionario. Scritti e discorsi (1918-1936)*, Soveria-Mannelli 1980; G. Herceg, *Béla Kun: Eine historische Grimasse*, Berlin, 1928; A.Kass.-F.Lazarovics, *Bolshevism in Hungary: The Bela Kun Period*, London, 1931; R.L.Tokés, *Béla Kun and the Hungarian Soviet Republic*, New York 1967; G.Borsanyi, *The life of a Communist revolutionary, Béla Kun*, New York, 1993.

D'Annunzio took over the city of Fiume with his “legionaries”, the Reign of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was inflamed by violent movements of resistance in Kosovo and Macedonia. Generally, all the frontiers were experiencing a difficult phase, in which hidden struggles were conditioning the relationships among neighbouring States. Fear of imminent invasions justified the adoption of strict military rules and the repression of any accident could occur along the new national borders. The revanchist attitudes of the enemies were to be associated to the difficult social and economic situation and the new governments decided to deal with these threats acting with the “iron fist”, proclaiming and maintaining martial law and adopting radical measures against socialist agitations, including the ban of communist parties, as Yugoslavia did in 1921.

This atmosphere staged the birth of National States in Central-Eastern Europe, which were based on the relation between State and Nation: the frontiers were to correspond to the territories in which the nations lived, and the authorities were to represent, protect and develop the interests of the national community, that is to say of the majorities, the new dominant groups which replaced the divine legitimacy of the Emperors with the people's support of the nations.

A new European order was set up and structured on self-determination. The National States, anyway, resulted to be as multinational as the old Empires they had replaced. The conference of Versailles and the treaties signed after the war (Versailles, Saint Germain, Neuilly sur Seine, Trianon and Sevres) defined the new frame: the Baltic countries and Finland who obtained their independence with the treaty of Brest-Litovsk and through the difficult phase of Russian civil war; Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Reign of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia from 1929), who were to be added to the existing Bulgaria, Greece and Romania. These States were the expression of different elements: the principle of national self-determination, international alliances and balances, the distinction between winner and vanquished ones... The fragility of this recipe proved since the very first beginning the contradictions of the new settlement, which was strongly criticized by many States

– not only the defeated ones – and also by the British consultant John M. Keynes owing to the lack of a solid perspective for the economic post-war development.

The Baltic States (Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia) had a relatively solid ethnic cohesion as their titular populations represented the 92% of the totality in Estonia (data of 1934), the 73.4% in Latvia (1925) and the 83.9% in Lithuania (1923).<sup>4</sup>

Poland was rebuilt but occupied only a part of her historical territories, including a central region where Poles were the majority and a vast periphery where many minorities lived: Eastern Galicia, which was occupied after a short conflict against the Western Ukrainian Republic; parts of Prussia and the corridor which were given to Warsaw after the fall of the Reich; a part of Upper Silesia (the former Habsburg Duchy of Cieszyn) divided with Czechoslovakia; the region of Vilnius, whose occupation gave birth to an international controversy against Lithuania. This huge set of territories came from different historical experiences – Galicia was part of the Habsburg Empire, the corridor and Lithuania of German and Tsarist ones – and hosted many non-Polish communities who coexisted the Polish majority: the declared language of Polish citizens in 1931 showed that Polish was the mother-tongue of just the 68.9% of the population, while the 13.9% was Ukrainian, the 8.6% Jewish, the 5.3% Belorussian and the 2.3% was German. Naturally, the situation was different in the central regions and in provinces like the Prussian ones, where the Germans were the 90.4% and the Poles only the 8.9%.

Also Czechoslovakia could be described as an incredible mixture of languages, cultures and religions: the country was formed by the Czech lands inherited from Habsburg Austria and by the “Slovak” ones which were part of the former Habsburg Hungary and included the Eastern sub-Carpathian region which was populated by a large majority of Ruthenians (Ukrainians) and Magyars and was

<sup>4</sup> All the ethnic data and the statistics are taken from P. Eberhardt, *Ethnic Groups and Population Changes in Twentieth-Century Central-Eastern Europe. History, Data, and Analysis*, M. E. Sharpe, New York-London, 2003.

completely extraneous to the Czechs. Czechoslovakia hosted more than 3 million Germans (3.149.800 in the Czech lands and 148.200 in the Slovak ones in 1930), Magyar, Ukrainian and Polish minorities; the titular nation was further divided between 7.304.600 Czechs and 2.337.800 Slovaks.

Hungary, which was extremely reduced and lost an important part of her population, hosted more or less the 10% of national minorities – 550.100 Germans in 1920 were the most substantial one – and could be considered as the most “national” State of the interwar period.

The Romanian census of 1930 recorded the great variety of Romanian population: the Romanians represented just the 71.9% of the total and cohabited with Hungarians (7.9%), Germans (4.1%), Jews (4%), Ukrainians and Ruthenians (3.3%), Russians, Bulgarians, Turks and many other ethnic groups. The country born in the XIX century by the union of Wallachia and Moldavia joined Russian Bessarabia, Hungarian Transylvania and Banat, and the Bulgarian Dobrudja already gained in 1913.

Finally, the clearest example of interwar multi-nationalism inside the national States was supplied by Yugoslavia: in 1921, 5.271.500 Serbs (44%) lived with 2.884.700 Croats (24.1%), 1.020.000 Slovenes (8.5%), 755.300 (6.3%) Bosnian Muslims, 505.800 Germans (4.2%), 467.700 (3.9%) Hungarians, 439.700 Albanians (3.7%), 231.100 (1.9%) Romanians; in Macedonia the Yugoslav authorities counted 578.300 (67.6%) Serbs, the Bulgarian ones gave more or less the same estimate of the Bulgarians (632.700).

These consistent minorities created many problems not only for the internal stability of the States, which were firmly addressed towards the development of national policies, but also for the international system and the peaceful coexistence among States. Consequently, the relations between States and ethnic groups were tightened in the same disquieting context which gave birth to a sort of vicious circle. Were the inter-ethnic questions to condition the troublesome inter-State relations or, on the contrary, were the problems between the States to worsen the relations between the

respective nationalities?

The problem lay in the situation of many disputed regions, which were at the center of bitter and harsh polemics in which minorities played an important role. As a matter of fact, interwar international policy was deeply characterized by the dormant dissent existing between the winner and the vanquished ones, the revisionist and the anti-revisionist States.

European nationalism entered into its phase of “hysteria” (R.Conquest) and this evolution turned Central-Eastern Europe into a Pandemonium (P.Moynihan). With the post-war peace treaties the young nineteenth-century nations obtained the final acknowledgement of their independence and reached their “maturity”, even if this term was not as appropriate as many could think. As a matter of fact, the new settlement soon proved to be weak and fragile and its contradictions deeply marked the evolution of Europe during the short Twentieth century (E.Hobsbawm).<sup>5</sup> The creation of the National States actually meant the beginning of further tensions and hostilities among the “oppressed nations” that during the conflict had been allied against Habsburg and German “imperialism”. Ended the age of childhood, nations started a new phase in their life and decided to complete the path undertaken in the XIX century towards the final stage of their national plan, that is to say, the acquisition inside the same frontiers of all the national territories and people which were identified as an integral part of their national tissue owing to certain precise historical, linguistic and ethnic rights.

Nations evolved and, while in the XIX century the terminology used for them was often referred to youth, in the following century the

5 See R.Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century*, New York, 1999; D.P.Moynihan, *Pandaemonium. Ethnicity in International Politics*, New York, 1993; E.J.Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991*, London, 1994. On the situation of Central-Eastern Europe and the nationality problems of this area, J. Rotschild, *East Central Europe between Two World Wars*, Seattle-London, 1983; F. Sugar & I.J. Lederer, *Nationalism in Eastern Europe*, Seattle – London, 1994; H. Seton-Watson, *Le democrazie impossibili. L'Europa orientale tra le due guerre mondiali*, Soveria Mannelli, 1992; M. Waldenberg, *Le questioni nazionali nell'Europa centro-orientale*, Milano, 1994.

most common expressions were anchored to dreams of magnitude: a Greater State for a Greater Romania, Albania, Bulgaria..... But this process of growth and emancipation was far from being peaceful and continued to feature many troubles for the nations who in the first Risorgimento were depicted like young “oppressed” girls.

It was clear that the different national projects could not be all accomplished as the success of a Great Romania, for example, depended on the territorial limitation of Romanian neighbouring States. All the lands which had to become part of these megalomaniac plans were disputed between different States as they had a very important historical role and hosted many consistent minorities. Transylvania, Silesia, Ruthenia, Bessarabia, Macedonia and many more, had all a deep multicultural and multiethnic background that represented their richness and, in the time of nationalism, their weakness: when nationalism became the criteria under which all issues of social, economic and political life had to be decided and elaborated, the hostility among the different nationalities rose and the threat to social order increased. In some years, the former “oppressed nationalities” had the possibility to create their own institutions and this quick turn produced as natural consequence the birth of further ethnic problems, partly deriving from the revanchist attitude of the new States.

International diplomacy detected this potential menace, which prejudiced not only the humanity and ideal equality of rights that democracy should indeed guarantee, but also the peaceful relationships among people and States. A solution to this risk was found in the “internationalization” of the protection of national minorities and in the stipulation of special international treaties to assure these minorities adequate instruments to protect their rights as a collective national entity. The goal of these treaties, which were signed in 1919 by Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia and Romania, and in 1920 by Greece, was not only humanitarian but also political, as it aimed to avoid any further cause of war and to nullify one of the most concrete menaces to the inter-state relations. International diplomacy proved to be conscious that in the past many conflicts had occurred “as a result of the frequent ill-treatment or oppression

of national minorities”.<sup>6</sup>

Apart from Italy, many other States were not compelled to sign a special treaty and this exclusion was due to the fact that, as vanquished powers with limited territories (Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria), they hosted smaller percentages of minorities. Anyway they had to accept some Minority clauses in their peace treaties: the treaty of Saint Germain (art.62-69), Trianon (art. 54-60), Neuilly sur Seine (art.49-57). Together with these clauses, the minority treaties became the first brick of a whole system which fell under the jurisdiction of the League of Nations and was further completed by a set of different unilateral declarations – those released by the candidates to enter the League, such Albania and the Baltic countries -, and by some bilateral and multilateral treaties stipulated by many European States. On these basis, the League elaborated a complex system to render the protection of minorities really effective, placing this matter under the careful control of the international institutions, first of all the secretariat of the League, which had a special minority section, and the committees which were especially appointed by the president of the Council.

But on the other side, the States showed not to appreciate very much this kind of interest. At Versailles, the negotiations were harsh and polemic as the delegations of the interested States opposed to what they interpreted as an unfair, dictatorial and discriminating

6 P. De Azcárate, who later became the Director of the Minorities Section of the Secretariat of the League of Nations, stressed that the aim of the treaties was not to include the humanitarian motive “to shield the minorities from the danger of oppression by the majorities and from the pain and suffering, both moral and material, which such oppression necessarily causes.” Substantially, International diplomacy showed in this way its willingness to “internationalize” the question. P. De Azcárate, *League of Nations and National Minorities. An Experiment*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 1945, pp. 14,15. For the study of the peace-conference, W. V. Temperley, ed., *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris* (6 vols., London, 1920.-24); H. Nicolson, *Peacemaking*, 1919, London 1933; Lord Riddell et al., *The Treaty of Versailles and After*, New York 1935; W. E. Stephens, *Revisions of the Treaty of Versailles*, New York 1939; F. S. Marston, *The Peace Conference of 1919*, Oxford 1944; M. MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months That Changed the World*, 2002; A. Mayer, *Politics and Diplomacy of Paecemaking. Containment and Counter-Revolution at Versailles. 1918-1919*, London 1968.

interference in their national sovereignty.<sup>7</sup>

The future contracting States complained to be treated like “second-class States”. The minority treaties were the expression of a new idea of international relationships, which was based on the existence of an international permanent organization such the League of Nations and were not well digested by the political and diplomatic agents of Central-Eastern European States: the latter were created following the model of the Nation-State, that is to say the coincidence of the institutions and the interests of the titular nations, which had to be safeguarded and re-evaluated after many centuries of oppression and the final success of a difficult national struggle.

## 2. The Minority Treaties

The minority treaties were signed by Poland (June 28, 1919), Czechoslovakia (September 10, 1919), the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (September 10, 1919), Romania (December 9, 1919) and Greece (August 10, 1920). These acts contained common

7 The Romanian prime minister Brătianu – who even left Paris – and the Polish Paderewski strongly opposed these provisions. Wilson had remember to the Romanian that “he is asking the sanetion of the allied and associated powers for great additions of territory which come to Rumania by the common victory of arms,, and thaerefore entitled to say: If we agree to these additions of territory we have the right to insist upon certain guaranties of peace... Serbia and Roumania were being greatly enlarged and if this Conference is going to recognize these various powers as new sovereignties within definite territories, the chief guarantors are entitled to be satisfied that the territorial settlements are of a character likely to be permanent, ant that the guarantees given are of a character to ensure the peace of the world” For the speech released by Wilson, see H.W.Temperley, vol.5, p. 130. International historiography dedicated some very interesting and documented works to the Minority treaties of Versailles. In German, C.Gütermann *Das Minderheitenschutzverfahren des Völkerbundes*, Berlin 1979; B. Schot, *Nation oder Staat? Deutschland und der Minderheitenschutz*, Marburg 1988; in French, J. Foque-Duparc, *La protection des minorités de race, de langue et de religion*, Paris 1922; in English, C.A.MacCarteny, *National States and National Minorities*, H.W.Temperley, *History of the Peace Conference*, vol.V; L.Mair, *The protection of minorities; The working and scope of the minorities treaties under the League of Nations*, Christophers, 1928; O.Janowsky, *The Jews and National Minority Rights, 1898-1919*, New York 1933.



provisions, starting from the undertaking that the stipulations were to be recognised as fundamental laws, prevailing over other official acts, regulations or actions (art.1).<sup>8</sup>

All announced the “full and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion”. The minorities were “entitled to the free exercise, whether public or private, of any creed or belief”, whose practices were inconsistent with public order or public morals (art 2.). Another right which was guaranteed in all these treaties was the possibility of acquiring ipso facto the citizenship “without any requirement of any formality”. This provision was accompanied by the possibility of opting for another nationality and, in this case, to retain the immovable property and to carry away the movable one with no export duties, involving at the same time an obligation to transfer the residence in twelve months (art. 3). This right was confirmed in art.4 which demanded the issue of a declaration before the competent authorities, renouncing to the former nationality. These provisions, anyway, also contained the reference to specific engagements for the terms and conditions of these options, which could be exercised by the husband in the name of the wife or by the parents covering their children under eighteen years of age. The right to opt for a nationality could be freely exercised (art. 5), while citizenship had to be bestowed ipso facto to all persons who were not born nationals of another State (art. 6).

The treaties promised equality before the law, equal enjoyment of “the same civil and political rights without distinction as to race, language, or religion” and affirmed that differences could not prejudice the “admission to public employments, functions and honours, or the exercise of professions and industries” nor the free use “of any language in private intercourse, in commerce in religion, in the press or in publications of any kind, or at public meetings”. Moreover, “adequate facilities” had to be given to minorities “for the use of their language, either orally or in writing, before the

<sup>8</sup> The integral text of the treaties is published as an annex in Temperley’s work about the peace conference. H.W.Temperley, *A History of the Peace Conference of Paris*, vol. V, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London 1924.

courts” (art. 7, art. 8 in the Romanian one).

Referring to the educational system, the States had to ensure adequate facilities for the minorities inside the primary schools and “an equitable share in the enjoyment and application of the sums which may be provided out of public funds under the State, municipal or other budget for educational, religious or charitable purposes (art. 9, art.10 in the Romanian treaty).

All these articles were inserted in the treaties, almost as general clauses that had to be accepted by all the signatories, which, otherwise, had each some specific regulations concerning their particular conditions, which were obviously defined to the benefit of the single minority involved.

In the case of Poland the right of ipso facto citizenship was granted to “persons of German, Austrian, Hungarian or Russian nationality who were born in the said territory of parents habitually resident there” (art. 4); in Romania the same right was bestowed to “persons of Austrian or Hungarian nationality” born in those territories or subsequently transferred to” (art.4).

The treaty signed with Shs, instead, made a clear reference to “Austrian, Hungarian or Bulgarian nationals habitually resident or possessing rights of citizenship (*pertinenze*, *Heimatsrecht*); the Czechoslovakian one concerned German, Austrian or Hungarian nationals.

The rights provided by art. 9 of the treaties (educational, cultural and religious rights) were also conditioned by specific features: in the case of Polish Germans this right was given only “in that part of Poland which was German territory” in 1914, in the treaty with the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes it was applied only to territory transferred to Serbia or to Shs Kingdom since the 1<sup>st</sup> of January 1913, in the other treaties no particular restrictions were mentioned.

Czechoslovakia was the only State which undertook to constitute an autonomous unit within her State, for the Ruthene territory, according to it “the fullest degree of self-government compatible



with the unity of the Czecho-Slovak State” (art.10). This territory was to be constituted with a special Diet with “powers of legislation in all linguistic, scholastic ad religious questions, in matters of local administration, and in other questions which the laws of the Czecho-Slovak State may assign to it”. The appointment of the Governor of the region, instead, was a competence of the President of the Republic and was responsible to the Ruthene Diet (art.11). In Subcarpathian Ruthenia, officials had to “be chosen as far as possible from the inhabitants of this territory” (art.12). The Ruthenians were granted “equitable representation in the legislative assembly” of the Republic and the right to send deputies elected to the Assembly, where they could not vote “upon legislative questions of the same kind as those assigned to the Ruthene Diet” (art.13)

Polish Jews, who were concentrated not only in towns but also in those typical villages where they have been concentrated by Tsarist residence regulations, benefited from various special rules.<sup>9</sup> Art. 10 of the Polish treaty provided them with “educational committees appointed locally”, with the organisation and management of them and the “proportional share of public funds”. Art.11, instead, granted Jewish Sabbath, with the exception of “necessary purposes of military service, national defence or the preservation of public order”. Particularly, Poland declared her intention to refrain from ordering or permitting elections, whether general or local, to be held on a Saturday, as well as from “registration for electoral or other purposes”.

9 S.M.Dubnow, *History of the Jews in Russian and Poland from the Earliest Times until the Present Day*, vol.I, The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia 1916, p.408. *The Persecution of the Jews in Russia*, issued by the Russo-Jewish Committee, London, Wertheimer 1920. E.Mendelsohn, *Class Struggle in the Pale*, Cambridge 1970. J.Frankel, *Prophecy and Politics: Socialism, Nationalism, and The Russian Jews, 1864-1918*, Cambridge, 1981. A very interesting volume concerning the Jewish diplomacy throughout the centuries was presented at Versailles by Lucien Wolf, *The Diplomatic History Of The Jewish Question With Texts Of Protocols, Treaty Stipulations And Other Public Acts And Official Documents*, The Jewish Historical Society Of England, London 1919. It includes the quotations of many cases of abuses against Jews, from Spain in 1498 to Bohemia in 1744-45, including many documents and treaties signed in XIX century at Vienna, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, Algeciras, London and Saint Petersburg.

Romanian Jews were in a very particular position too, as they had already been put under international attention after that the first Romanian constitution of 1866 denied them the right of citizenship, conditioning it to “Christendom” (art. VII). The pressures made after the Congress of Berlin had taken only little changes in the Romanian regulation and so the treaty of 1919 specifically recalled this troublesome question. Definitively, art. 7 obliged Romania to recognise as Romanian nationals “ipso facto and without the requirement of any formality” the Jews inhabiting any Romanian territory, when not possessing another nationality. Another specific measure was that referred to the Saxons and Szeklers in Transylvania, who obtained “local autonomy in regard to scholastic and religious matters, subject to the control of the Roumanian State”.

If Poland and Romania had to deal with consistent Jewish minorities, the Yugoslav Kingdom acquired huge portions of territory inhabited by Muslim communities (Bosnia, Macedonia, Kosovo) and therefore had to grant them some special rights. The latter concerned the free usage of family law and personal status provisions, the nomination of a Reiss-Ul-Ulema, the Muslim religious chief of the country, and the “protection of the mosques, cemeteries and other Musulman religious establishments”. Moreover, Belgrade agreed to assure “full recognition and facilities” to Musulman pious foundations (Wakfs or Vakuf) and religious and charitable establishments, without refusing “any of the necessary facilities for the creation of new religious and charitable establishments” (art.10). The same provisions were granted to Greek Muslims by the art. 14 of Greek treaty which also included a special mention to the Vlachs of Pindus (art.12) and to a local autonomy similar to that given to Saxons and Szeklers of Romanian Transylvania, who obtained “local autonomy in regard to scholastic and religious matters”, even if subjected to the control of the State.

The treaty of Sevres, anyway, was not ratified owing to the Greek-Turkish war and was replaced by the following treaty of Lausanne (1923), whose Section III also dealt with the protection of minorities. Specifically, Lausanne stipulations talked about non-Moslem minorities’ family law or personal status and full

protection of the churches, synagogues, cemeteries and other religious establishments (art.42) and about the rights of being free not to perform any act which constituted a violation of religious observances. These rights were “similarly conferred by Greece on the Moslem minority in her territory” (art.45) but they were not the only ones involving the reciprocal status of minorities. The treaty of Lausanne, in fact, is still remembered for the attached convention and the great exchange of populations it provided, legalizing the transfer of 1.221.489 Greeks and 355.000 Muslims.<sup>10</sup>

A similar convention between Greece and Bulgaria had already been signed at Neuilly in 1919 and entered into force in August 1920 providing for the voluntary – and not forced as in the Greek-Turkish case- exchange of populations between Bulgaria and Greece.<sup>11</sup>

Some differences among the Minority Treaties were also contained in the second chapter, including the final articles dedicated to international relations and to commerce and economy (tariffs, adoption of various conventions, assumption of part of the Russian public debt).

Finally, all the States had another common engagement and agreed that the stipulations constituted obligations of international concern and were “placed under the guarantee of the League of Nations”. As a consequence, these stipulations could not be modified

10 The compulsory character of the convention became a subject of historical investigation as all the parts (International institutions, Greek and Turkish governments) assured that the adoption of this criterion was not chosen but imposed by the others. Also the numbers of the exchange could be modified by further estimates, according to which 506.964 persons migrated to Turkey between 1923 and 1927 and 384.000 came from Greece. F.Adan; *Lo scambio greco-turco di popolazioni nella storiografia turca*, in M.Cattaruzza-M.Dogo-R.Pupo (a cura di), *Esodi. Trasferimenti forzati di popolazioni nel Novecento europeo*, Edizioni scientifiche italiane, Napoli, 2000, p.92. H.J.Psomiades, *The Eastern Question. The Last Phase*, Thessaloniki 1968; B.Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey*, New York, 1932; C.B.Eddy, *Greece and Greek Refugees*, London 1931; A.Alexandris, *The Greek Minority of Istanbul and Greek-Turkish Relations*, Athens, 1992.

11 A.Karakasidou, *Fields of Wheat, Hills of Blood: Passages to Nationhood in Greek Macedonia, 1870-1990*, Chicago, 1997; S.P.Ladas, *The Exchange of Minorities: Bulgaria, Greece and Turkey*, New York, 1932; E.Kontogiorgi, *Population Exchange in Greek Macedonia: the Rural Settlement of Refugees, 1922-1930*, Oxford, 2006.

“without the assent of a majority of the Council of the League of Nations”. Any member of that League had the right to bring to the attention of the Council “any infraction, of any of these obligations” and in these cases any dispute about these articles should have been “held to be a dispute of an international character” following the rules of art. 14 of the Covenant (art. 12 in the Polish and Romanian treaties, art.11 in the Yugoslav one, art. 14 in the Czechoslovak case)

The treaties were the cornerstone of the League’s system of minorities, while the Council of the League represented the effective crossroad for the complaints of treaty violations. Anyway, the procedure to activate the rights under art. 14 of the League Covenant and to react against the violations of the treaty stipulations were not specified by the latter. Only on the 20<sup>th</sup> of February 1920 the Council adopted the resolution proposed by the Italian Titti and decided that the starting point of the procedure would have been the petition to the Council, which did not automatically imply the prosecution of such procedure, as it was to be interpreted as “une information pure et simple”. The petition could be sent not only by the States, as indicated by the previous treaties, but also by the minorities. In this case, the petition should reach the State involved, which had the time to respond or to leave the petition without comment. The act could then be communicated to the Council, to which the State could send its declarations.

If the petition could be received, a special Committee was appointed to study the case and, when considering it as a probable violation of the treaties, to forward the study to the Council. In practice, the Committee acted also to mediate between the counterparts, asking the States for the sanation of the faults invoked; actually, between 1920 and 1929 it did not forward almost half of the petitions received, rejecting them or treating to find a compromise directly with the State involved.<sup>12</sup>

12 The procedure concerning the protection of minorities was completed and implemented during the Twenties, especially in 1923 and 1929, and during this period the debates about a possible reform continued and were especially animated by the action of Germany and the interested States, which repeatedly criticized the system and obtained the adoption of more restrictive criteria in order to deem the petitions of the minorities as receivable. J.S. Roucek, *Procedure in Minorities Complaints*,

Individual Council members had the unique privilege of placing complaints on the agenda, giving way to the petitions received, deciding how much pressure to put on the governments and, eventually, relocating the final decision to the Permanent Court of Justice. Even if the petition arrived at the Council, the latter had to “endeavour to effect a settlement of the dispute” (art. 15 of the Covenant) and to find a compromise. Only at the end of the procedure, after negotiations held by the special Committee and also by the Council, the dispute had the possibility to arrive to the Court of Justice, where only member States could be represented.

The procedure was better defined in the context of the League discussions, during the Twenties, when also the States activated to deepen their relationships in matter of reciprocal minority treatment and these bilateral acts sometimes prefigured special procedures, as the Geneva Convention for Upper Silesia (May 15, 1922) between Germany and Poland did. Other treaties regarding exclusively or indirectly minorities were signed by Czechoslovakia and Austria (treaty of Brünn and protocol of Carlsbad in 1921); by Germany and Poland (treaty of Danzig, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1920), by Finland and Russia (declarations inserted in Treaty of Dorpat, on the 14<sup>th</sup> of October 1920); by Italy and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (treaty of Rapallo, on the 12<sup>nd</sup> of November 1920, art. VII, 1, 2, 3); by Poland and Soviet Russia (treaty of Riga, on the 18<sup>th</sup> of March 1921); by Estonia, Finland, Latvia and Poland on the 17<sup>th</sup> of March 1922; by Bulgaria and Greece, on the 29<sup>th</sup> of September 1924; by Poland and Czechoslovakia (Treaty of Warsaw, on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of April 1925); the Statute of self-government of Memel, on the 8<sup>th</sup> of May 1924.

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 in “The American Journal of International Law, Vol. 23, No. 3 (Jul., 1929), p.542 ff; M.Mazower, Minorities and the League of Nations in Interwar Europe, in “Daedalus”, Vol. 126, No. 2, Human Diversity (Spring, 1997), pp. 47-63; H.B.Calderwood, Should the Council of the League of Nations Establish a Permanent Minorities Commission?, in “The American Political Science Review” 27, no. 2 (1933): 250-259; H.Rosting, Protection of Minorities by the League of Nations, in “The American Journal of International Law”, vol.17, no.4 (October 1923), pp.641-660; H.Dickinson, Les droits des Minorités, Bruxelles 1924; The Problems of Minorities, Carnegie Endowments for Peace, New York 1926; M.Richard, Le droit de pétition, Paris 1932.

In addition to the treaties, another form of granting minority rights was the unilateral declaration that some States released during the procedure of admission to the League of Nations. Many States were candidates to join the League and in the admission of the Baltic States, Finland and Albania an important contribute came from the evaluation of their will to enforce the principles of the Minority Treaties and to take the necessary measures to carry them into effect. While in the case of Finland the Council found her position quite satisfactory (resolution, October 2, 1921) just looking at the Finnish constitutional chart, Albania had to issue a special declaration at Genève, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October 1921 and unilaterally recognized all the provisions included in the first treaties. Later on, similar declarations were issued by Lithuania (May 12, 1922), Latvia (July 7, 1923) and Estonia (September 17, 1923) and were all accepted by the Council.<sup>13</sup>

But the practice of the following years proved that the implementation of this whole of treaties and stipulations was hurdled by a sum of different factors. As a matter of fact, all the States kept the exclusive legislative competence and were the only ones who could put into practice the commitments they had taken at the international level. Subsequently, the effective protection of minorities depended on many features, for example on the existence and the international position of a Kin State, on the relationships with the central governments and on the approach and interpretation given at laws by local authorities.

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 13 About the history and the experience of the League of Nations, Z.Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919-1933*, New York, 2005, p.256; F.P. Walters, *A History of the League of Nations*, New York, 1950, p.76; E.Ranshofen-Wertheimer, *The International Secretariat: A Great Experiment in International Organization*, Washington, DC, 1945; M.Koskenniemi, *The Gentle Civilizer of Nations: The Rise and Fall of International Law, 1870-1960*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004; E.Bendiner, *A Time for Angels: The Tragicomic History of the League of Nations*, New York, 1975; Z.Steiner, *The Lights That Failed: European International History, 1919-1933*, Oxford, 2005, p. 299; M.R.Mouton, *La Société des Nations et les intérêts de la France (1920-1924)*, Bern, 1995; J.Spencer Bassett, *The League of Nations, a Chapter in World Politics*, Longmans, New York 1930; D.Hunter Miller, *The drafting of the Covenant*, New York: Putnam’s, 1928 ; F.S.Northedge, *The League of Nations: its life and times*, Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1986; F.P. Walters, *A history of the League of Nations*, Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1986.

Owing to these circumstances, the real situation of the minorities resulted quite different from the one drafted in the treaties, and only in few cases the intervention of the League conditioned positively the protection of the minorities- the most quoted case is that reached by Finland and Sweden for the Aaland islands – while generally it echoed at international level the controversies between the different States involved in the disputes. The states which had signed the minority treaties (Poland, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia) clearly declared that they had accepted such treaties because they were compelled to (Memorandum issued to a Committee of the League in 1929) and showed to be reluctant to submit to the control of the League and the Permanent Court of Justice.<sup>14</sup> The protection of the minorities, thus, was never fully realized and the minorities became a further feature for the weakening of the instable States, a sort of Trojan horse which accompanied the system of national-States built at Versailles towards its tragic end.

### 3. The National States

The emancipation of the formerly oppressed nationalities was carried out with a maximum appeal to national antagonism, since the liberated nations were identified with the States, and their ideological glue was represented by nationalism. As Ernst Gellner pointed out in his studies, the agricultural societies (for example

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14 The memorandum of these States was issued in 1929, in the context of the debates for a reform of the international procedure, when many States expressed their concerns for the effectiveness of the protection of minorities, supporting or refusing the proposal of Germany and Canada in order to give the League a general competence over these questions or to create a special permanent body and to give it the exclusive competence for the protection of minorities. Official Journal of the League of Nations, Issue 7, July 1929, pp.1168. Romania, moreover, had repeatedly opposed to submit the question of her agrarian reform to the Court of Justice, N.Titulescu, *La réforme agraire en Roumanie et les optants Hongrois de Transylvanie devant la Société des Nations*, mars-avril 1923, Paris 1924, p. 49; E.M. Borchard, *Opinion on the Roumanian- Hungarian dispute before the Council of the League of Nations*, arising out of the application to Hungarian nationals in Transylvania of the Roumanian agrarian law of 1921, New Haven, 1927.

those of Central-Eastern Europe) generated classes and groups which needed a definite cultural expression. Nationalism was used to create “imagined communities” (Anderson) which were placed above all the individuals and their rights. Citizens were the holders of rights and duties, but the latter transcended the individualities to regard the people as a whole, as an expression of a new historical age: the nation had the divine mission to educate the man to sacrifice, to responsibility and to ethics at the service of the community.<sup>15</sup>

But to comply with their mission, nations had to establish their relationships with the others, that is to say the minorities who were not part of their collective imaginarium, as they were different for language, religion and culture.

The process of transformation of Central-Eastern Europe began at the end of 1918 and in 1919, with the occupation of some territories by the armies of the victors, which provided for the first changes in the institutional structure of many regions. Bureaucracy was the means to eradicate the past and to forge the new character of the State which had to be national-addressed in all its forms and branches. As a consequence, even before the signature of Versailles treaties military occupation anticipated the choices that the authorities later applied. Civil officers of the former ruler were expelled as a consequence of their language ability and also as they refused to pay the oath of allegiance to new administrations.

After this first “cleansing”, the first step of this wide reform was developed thanks to the constitutions, which legally proclaimed the

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15 The idea of nation and the development of nationalism have been studied both as the basis and the consequence of the national States, as a social product which influenced the political evolution, or as a result of State policies which forge the societies strengthening the sentiments of national belonging of some groups who could be considered simply as “imagined” and not real communities. An important role in this process was undoubtedly played by the national authorities and by the total coincidence of the State structure with a central-addressed model, based on the French centralist state. R.Schlesinger, *Federalism in Central and Eastern Europe*, New York, 1945, p.419; E.Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, 1983; B.Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London, 1991.

correspondence of the State with its respective nation.<sup>16</sup> As a matter of fact, the texts started from celebrative preambles in which they emphasized the success and the glory of the Nation, and continued enlisting the rights and duties of the citizens. Some particular expressions, anyway, were used in order to limit these rights, for example freedom of press, which the Yugoslav constitution limited in the case of “hatred against the State as integrity and of religious discord” (art. 138). The Polish text established many cases in which citizens’ rights could be suspended, in all the State or in part of it, in occasion of internal disorders or conspiracies against the State, the Constitution and the security (art. 124). All the constitutions imposed an official language, and some particularly talked about an official religion which enjoyed a primary position within the State; it was the case of the Roman-Catholic church in Poland (art. 114), of the Orthodox State religion in Bulgaria (art.37); the Evangelic-Lutheran in Finland (art.83), the Orthodox in Greece (art.1) and in Romania, where the latter was considered predominant while the Greek-Catholic creed prevailed over other confessions (art.22).

Nationality often coincided with citizenship and it was an essential condition to be elected in the Assembly and to assume public functions. All the constitutions did not permit their citizens to have the double citizenship, while some expressly forbade them to serve another State or to receive honour prizes from foreign authorities.

The constitutions recognised the new role of the State, which became a political actor and was called to guarantee the development of the nations. Faithful to their ideological commitments, the authorities assumed a role of social emancipation, for example through the building of accommodations and services to comply with their citizens’ needs. They also intervened in the field of public education, trying to satisfying the obligations of the Minority

16 For the study and the texts of the interwar constitutions, see A.Giannini, *Le costituzioni degli Stati dell’Europa orientale*, Roma 1929; Headlam-Morley, *The New Democratic Constitutions of Europe. A Comparative Study of Post-War European Constitutions with Special Reference to Germany, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Finland, The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats & Slovenes and the Baltic States*, Oxford-London 1928.

treaties, but most of all developing the conditions under which the new system had to be set up, that is to say limiting the influence of the former dominant nations and emphasizing the educational development of the new ones. Even accepting education in minority languages in public institutions and promoting a general diffusion of literacy, State policies could not avoid to favour the national elements. The international commitments did not prevent them to lead a process of transformation which let the minority primary schools survive but seriously affected the secondary ones and the universities, imposing strict rules for minority languages – when not forbidding them as happened since the Twenties in Fascist South-Tyrol- and for the relationships between the minorities and their Kin States.

Czechoslovakia, which had the most democratic interwar government, granted in her Constitution (art.129) and through the special law (February 29, 1922) the liberalism of her regulation in matter of languages. Anyway, in the military forces this law only tolerated the use of minority languages in cases of total ignorance of Czech (art.I, p.3) while it left for future government decrees the compulsive use of Czech language, the only official language of the Republic (art. I). Poland unified the previous laws with the national regulation of 1922 directing the contents of the teachings in order to “integrate” her minorities from Ukraine and Belarus.

Romania took over minority schools and universities – as those of Cluj and Cernaui – and left a minimal space for minority institutions since the immediate post-war years, confirming this attitude with Anghelescu law in 1925. Yet in 1920, anyway, Romanian authorities made clear which was the interpretation of the local autonomy granted to Saxons and Szeklers in religious and school questions with art. 11 of the minority treaty. Ioan Cantacuzeno explained to the conference of ambassadors how this autonomy could not be used to create a university, which would constitute a “marche allemande” and a “strong fortress of Germanism” in the hearth of Eastern Europe. Only primary schools could be admitted as legal expressions of that local autonomy, as they interested just one site, while the universities, attracting students from different parts of the

country would not be involved in that provision.<sup>17</sup>

Yugoslavia finally coordinated her scholar system in 1929 in the context of King Alexander's authoritarian turn towards the suppression of the different national identities and the definition of Yugoslavism. During the execution of these reforms, state structures were gradually nationalized, and the space left for minorities decreased. Also because of the poor economic and budget conditions, all the States diminished and cancelled their funds for minority schools, leaving them in the hands of private initiative. The national address given to their educational system had as a consequence a preference for the classical matters, while the scientific ones remained attended mostly by the minorities, as happened in the case of medicine and engineering faculties in Romania, where the Jews students were the majority. The management of schools was also deeply connected with the dominant Churches, as demonstrated by the fact that the costs of public education were often charged on the Ministers of Church (in Yugoslavia, Hungary and Romania).

In many cases, the regulation of the minority schools gave life to harsh controversies and to real battles, which were fought by the State and the minority organizations, and in which children were used as an instrument of fight, becoming a sort of "kidnapped souls" and being sacrificed to the interests of their national groups.<sup>18</sup> The

17 Art.11 created immediate problems since minorities, from the point of view of Bucharest, aimed to create some real corporations and to empty the powers of the State. The attempt of establishing secondary schools and universities, hence, could not be tolerated as well as the subventions and the economic help of Hungarian State and organizations. Note of the president of the Romanian delegation Joan Cantacuzeno to the president of the conference of ambassadors, Georges Clemenceau (Paris, January 12, 1920) Historical Archive of the Italian Army's General Staff (Aussme), folder E8, box 74, dossier 3.

18 It was the case of Germans of Czechoslovakia, which has been fully analyzed in the interesting Zahra's work, and of the Germans in Poland, who animated – also thanks to the intervention of German government of the association Deutscher Volksbund – an intensive international campaign against Polish measures. The petitions of the Germans were numerous and required the intervention of the Council of the League and also of the Permanent Court of Justice, which both often supported German point of view. In the case of the Deutscher Volksbund of Polish Upper Silesia's petitions of June 1, and August 24, 1928, for example, the entries on the primary schools in the Voivodeship of Silesia and the different time-limit

languages of the administrations were radically changed and, while in the past the nationalities fought to have their idioms recognized in marginal sectors of State authorities, after 1919 governments inverted this reality. Former minority languages became the official language of the State, while German and Hungarian, which had previously been supported and extended by the policies of the State, were legally accepted, but only in residual cases.

This complex process of institutional nationalization was driven from the centre, that is to say from the capital cities and it gave birth to many clashes also within the different groups of the same nationality. Transylvanian Romanians denounced the centralistic approach of Bucharest, exactly as the different ethnic groups of Yugoslavia made against the Grand-Serb perspective which was evident in the building of the Southern Slavs' union. But if this tendency could be explained by the previous existence of independent States (Kingdoms of Serbia and Romania), it was showed also by Slovaks against the prevalence of Prague interests, and generally in all the periphery regions which could boast different histories and different ethnic composition.

With the exception of Polish Silesian administration and the Greek region of the monasteries, all the State policies were planned and negotiated directly by the governments, as no space was left for any form of decentralization, self-government or federal structures. The institutional model adopted in Central-Eastern Europe was represented by French centralism, and it meant that

established to access to minority schools were seriously questioned. The petition of March 22 1929, instead, regarded the opening of a minority school at Koszeczyn, where Polish authorities stated that the number of 40 declarations which necessary for opening a school, was not achieved. For German association, on the contrary, it "was largely exceeded". The appeal of Deutscher Volksbund of Polish Upper Silesia of June 1928 concerned the schools of Janow, Nowa-Wies; that of December 1928 the schools in Swierklamec, Nova-Wies and Lipiny.. The petition of the Deutscher Volksbund of Polish Upper Silesia (August 8, 1928) after the closing of six minorities schools insisted on the non fulfillment of the resolution of the council (March 12, 1927) and of the decision of the Court, according to which "instructions have just recently been given to the school authorities that they should favourably consider the cases of children who have been refused admission to the minority schools". Official Journal of the League of Nations (OJLN), January 1929, issue 1, pp.61-4, 65. OJLN, november 1929, issue 11 p.1684. T.Zahra, *Kidnapped Souls. National Indifference and the Battle for Children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948*, Ithaca-London, 2008.

the local authorities – which could better represent the interests of the minorities but were mainly composed of members of the majorities – had no concrete powers to adapt the decisions to the local conditions. During the peace-talks, the governments had often promised liberal forms of autonomy to those territories and minorities whose annexation had to be formally recognised by international diplomacy. After having obtained this result, anyway, promises were not followed by facts, and autonomy was never put in practice. It was the case of Polish Eastern Galicia, of Slovakia (the Slovak American leaders had negotiated with the Czechs the Pittsburgh agreement in 1918), but the most outstanding case was undoubtedly that of Czech Subcarpathian Ruthenia, which was drafted by the Czech minority treaty. The latter contained a whole of provisions dedicated to this region, which theoretically had to receive a powerful regime of self-government centered around a local Diet. In fact, on the contrary, this Diet was never elected and the clauses accepted in 1919 were not accomplished, owing to clear reasons of stability – the risk was to form a Hungarian or Ruthenian Diet inside the Czechoslovak state – which were shared also by the League.<sup>19</sup>

Another problem created by the coexistence of various populations inside the same National State was represented by citizenship. As a matter of fact, the question became a focus point in all the different minority treaties Eastern European States signed at Versailles. Even though accepting different solutions in the different countries, the latter contained the same principle, the *ipso facto*, without any formality, recognition of the citizenship to those people who were “habitually resident at the date of the coming into force”

19 The local self-government was not present in Eastern European States where “The system of centralized administration has been productive of intense discontent and unrest”. In Germany and Austria, on the contrary, local self-government was closely associated with the survival of democratic institutions against the rise of Fascism. A. Cobban, *Administrative Centralization in Germany and the New States, 1918-39*, in “International Affairs (Royal Institute of International Affairs), Vol. 20, No. 2 (Apr., 1944) p.264. On the Ruthenian case, A.Scrimali, *La regione autonoma della Rutenia dopo il Trattato di San Germano*, F.lli Vena, Palermo, 1938, M.Yuhasz, *Wilson’s Principles in Czechoslovak Practice. The Situation of the Carpatho-Russia people under the Czech yoke, Homestead 1929.*

of the treaty (art. 3 Polish treaty). This concession, anyway, did not compromise the right of the said people to opt for a different nationality, retaining their properties in the territory they have not chosen to regard as their national legal residence.

This *ipso facto* recognition gave birth to many problems as it was not totally accepted by the successor States, which adopted legal decrees to regulate in the details the grant of citizenship. The question influenced first of all the refugees, who were stateless and seeking a country of asylum, the Armenians and the Greeks escaping from Turkey, those who left the Soviet Union, and some years later the Jews in Hitler’s Germany.

In many cases these decrees put legal obstacles to their supposed new citizens, asking for documents which were difficult to gather, requesting evidence of their previous staying, imposing payments or denying this right.

Jews were the first victims of this strange combination of international provisions and national applications, but not the only ones. In fact, while the purpose of the treaties was to allow every resident to have the nationality of one State, with the rights deriving from it, for thousands of minorities the reality became slightly different. Many States – starting from Czechoslovakia – requested to combine the old rules with the new ones imposed by the treaties and in this way avoided to fully accept this *ipso facto* naturalization. First of all, the old Austrian regulation was based on *Heimatrecht*, and in some cases this regulation remained into force, with the consequence that the states demanded the presentation of the old documents of *Heimatrecht-Pertinenza*. Unfortunately, not all the subjects could gather and find these documents, and many social classes (functionaries, intellectuals) had never asked for them, since during the Habsburg period, the possession of *Heimatrecht* was useful especially, when not exclusively, to obtain the public relief.<sup>20</sup>

20 The work of the League’s secretariat underlined that, while the minority treaties contained all the recognition of *ipso facto* citizenship, at the same time they left unvaried the general clauses of the peace treaties ( St.German and Trianon) which instead referred to *heimatrecht-pertinenza*. M.Vichniac, *Le Statut International des Apatrides*, in “Academie de Droit International, Recueil de Cours”, Volume 43 (1933-



Actually, the system in force in 1919 varied in the different countries, where the local authorities often had the opportunity – legal or more often illegal – to deny citizenship to the applicants. One of the most radical regulations in this sense was passed by Turkey on the 24<sup>th</sup> of July 1927, when the executive was authorized to deprive of their nationality those Ottoman subjects who did not take part in the national struggle and remained outside Turkey during the war of independence, without returning during the period between 1923 and the promulgation of the law.

Many controversies arrived before the Courts, which were not fully aware of international obligations or were surely more inclined to apply national regulations. The result was that during the interwar period a large number of persons was left stateless (*Heimatlose*) and was not entitled to enjoy full civil and political rights.<sup>21</sup> The question was a matter of international concern and in 1922 the Successor States signed a special Convention in Rome, which was not ratified by the great majority of the States, with the exception of Italy and Austria. As a consequence the problem survived and was kept alive not only by the activity of the Jewish organizations, which were engaged in fighting this “restrictive” attitude showed by the State authorities. The status of Jewish stateless persons was greatly described by Philip Roth and his image of erratic Jews, and perfectly emphasized by Hannah Arendt’s analysis about the origins of Totalitarianism and her general thought, deeply conditioned by her stateless status.<sup>22</sup>

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I), pp. 115-246.

21 MacCartney indicated 80.000 for Czechoslovakia only. “To declare a person stateless was a very convenient way of getting rid of him if he was for any reason undesirable.... The sufferers were usually members of minorities”. C.MacCartney, *Refugees. The Work Of The League*, London, 1931, p. 517. See also, C.Skran, *Refugees in Inter-war Europe: The Emergence of a Regime*, New York, 1995.

22 In Hannah Arendt’s analysis, *The age of Totalitarianism* (1951) this was “the first great damage done to the nation states”, p. 278; In *The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man* Arendt formulated two central theses. In her analysis on the nation-state building, she first claimed that “the nation had conquered the state”, and then she criticized what she called “the perplexities of the Rights of Man”.

Another funding character of the National States was the deep connection they made between the State and the economic development of its titular nation. These States were interpreted as a starting point for the revaluation of their people, who had been minorities in the former Empires – Austria-Hungary, Russia and German Reich – and had not enjoyed a primary position in the social scale. The conquest of power, thus, had to be the start of a new glorious period in which nations were rightly entitled to climb the economies of their States and to occupy the places that foreign oppression had denied them for many centuries. As the economic reality of Eastern Europe was deeply characterized by agriculture, the redistribution of the lands represented the first step along this process of rebalancing the economic and social situation of these territories. States decided to play an outstanding role in the economic reorganization of their resources and in the conversion of foreign capitals into national ones. When it was not possible, almost everywhere, they managed to replace the capitals of Germans and Hungarians with new ones taken from the Allies of that moment, especially France and Great Britain.

With policies which were more or less effective in each State, this aim took to the cut of old commercial and economic connections with Vienna and Budapest, and to the start of new national enterprises. Industrial companies and banks were managed by the State and assigned to autochthonous capitalists or to new foreign societies, especially those of the allied countries and of France, which was the most interested power in Eastern European political and economic development.

All the States announced epical agrarian reforms to give concrete application to the concepts of democracy and social justice, and addressed these measures especially against the minorities. In countries that had large proportions of peasants in their populations (from 34% of Czechoslovakia to 78% of Rumanian and 80% of Bulgaria) the agrarian reforms were also a tool to quiet down socialist tendencies and to get a compromise with the major labour forces.

The most radical reforms were executed in Yugoslavia and

Romania, where the land was confiscated immediately after the war, between 1919 and 1921, then distributed or nationalized. Belgrade and its Minister for the Agrarian Reform aimed to replace the old Muslim bey of Bosnia, Kosovo and Macedonia, and the Magyar and German magnates of Vojvodina and Slovenia, with Slavic elements encouraging the colonization of the new territories by new settlers, who were most of all Slavs.<sup>23</sup> As happened in Yugoslavia, also in Romania the proportions of the land to be confiscated changed from region to region. At the end of the conflict and after the declaration released at Alba Iulia (December 1, 1918), on the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 20<sup>th</sup> of July 1921 Romanian parliament adopted a law which considered expropriation as a State right “for reasons of public utility”. Among its targets, this regulation had “to satisfy general cultural, economic, social and physical interests (art. 1).

These measures regarded indirectly the interests of the minorities, for example the Russians of Bessarabia, or the Magyars of Transylvania who were generally punished as they owned the majority of the large estates and particularly when they had lacked from their residence after the 1<sup>st</sup> of December 1918. In both regions the limits fixed by the law were generally inferior to the ones imposed in the Old Reign.<sup>24</sup>

23 In Bosnia, “after the collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy... property was confiscated and the Muslim element in Bosnia suffered complete impoverishment”. A. Zulfikarpašić, *The Bosniak*, London 1968, p. 15-16, 90. “Factors influencing the early reforms or re-form movements following World War I were the general and increasing poverty of the peasantry, the democratization of countries where peasants dominated the population, the threat of Bolshevism, the defeat of Germany and Austria- Hungary, and demands of war veterans. Expropriation and redistribution of land previously owned by defeated, foreign nobility (German, Hungarian, and Moslem) was easiest since the interests of these former landlords were no longer represented in the national governments.” S.Thompson *Agrarian Reform in Eastern Europe Following World War I: Motives and Outcomes*, in “*American Journal of Agricultural Economics*”, Vol. 75, No. 3 (Aug., 1993), pp. 840-844. A.L.Kosinski, *Society Changes in the Ethnic Structure in East-Central Europe, 1930-1960*, in “*Geographical Review*”, Vol. 59, No. 3 (Jul., 1969), pp. 388-402.

24 During the activity of the boundary commissions, the Italian official Paolotti had the opportunity to investigate the effects of the agrarian reform in Romania and dedicated to it a whole chapter of his final report. *La questione della legge agraria e della opzione*. The Romanian government proposed different measures for the new regions “la legge agraria appropriata a ciascuna delle provincie stesse”, per la

In Czechoslovakia, the reforms of 1919-1920 redistributed mainly German nobles’ estates to peasant smallholdings; as a consequence, “middle-sized Czech and Slovak farmers benefited the most”, while “Hungarians and Germans claimed that the reform was aimed at them”.<sup>25</sup>

Similar policies were acted also in Poland, to the detriment of German colonists, who reacted vigorously against Polish reforms and petitioned the League many times, obtaining many favourable decisions and advisory opinions from the Permanent Court of Justice, and animating the German-Polish relationships during all the interwar period.<sup>26</sup>

In Bulgaria, the authorities managed to settle refugees from Thrace and Macedonia in the parts where land was expropriated, mostly to the residual former Turkish nobles, thus completing the process that Bulgarian government started yet after 1878, when the overwhelmingly Turkish estates were redistributed among peasant smallholdings. Additional reforms were implemented in

Bessarabia, la Bucovina, la Transilvania (Transilvania, Banato, regione del Körös e regione del Maros) e “per il vecchio regno (Oltenia, Valacchia, Moldavia e Dobrugia)”. *Rapporto finale del tenente colonnello Paolotti*, Aussme F3, 374, 4. The provisions especially affected the Magyars and those declared “absent”. H.L. Roberts. *Rumania: Political Problems of an Agrarian State*, New Haven, 1951.

25 H. Agnew, *The Czechs and the Lands of Bohemian Crown*, Stanford 2004, p. 184; I.L. Evans, *Agrarian Reform in the Danubian Countries: II. Czechoslovakia*, in “*The Slavonic and East European Review*”, Vol. 8, No. 24 (Mar., 1930), pp. 601-611; J.Macek, *The Land Question*, Volume VI, Part 3, *The Czecho-Slovak Republic Foreigners’ Office*, Prague, 1920, p. 8; Z.P.Pryor, *Czechoslovak Economic Development in the Interwar Period in V.Mamatey-R.Luža* (ed. by), *A History of the Czechoslovak Republic*, Princeton 1975; A.Teichova, *An Economic Background to Munich International Business and Czechoslovakia 1918-1938*, Cambridge 1974.

26 In the first part of the interwar period, Poland enacted two land reforms. The first in 1920 established low prices of compensation, circa 50% of the market price and paved the way for the second one of 1925. According to the declarations of some authorities, as the voivode of Pomorze, the final target was to cleanse the lands of large German holdings. W. Staniewicz, *The Agrarian Problem in Poland between the Two World Wars*, in “*The Slavonic and East European Review*”, Vol. 43, No. 100 (Dec., 1964), pp. 23-33. For a German perspective over the new measures Germans were subjected in Poland, the Baltic and Czechoslovakia, R. Blanke, *Orphans of Versailles. The Germans in Western Poland, 1918- 1939*, Lexington, KT University Press of Kentucky, 1993, p. 208 .

1920-23 but they were generally soft, since the majority of the land was already in the hands of Bulgarian small owners.<sup>27</sup> As a matter of fact, the extent of these measures in the Balkan countries was considerably more limited, as a consequence of the conditions of properties. In fact, while large estates characterized former Austria-Hungary, Poland and Rumania, peasant holdings were widespread in Serbia and Bulgaria.

Since 1919 Eastern European States showed to have made up their minds about the future of their economy, replying to John Maynard Keynes who wondered about the new fundamental economic factors in the future relations of Central and Eastern Europe. The explosion of nationalistic passions propelled by the war as well as the reaction against international proletariat movements paved the way for the development of economic nationalism, which represented the response to Keynes' dilemma.<sup>28</sup>

The classical doctrine of laissez-faire was abandoned in order to make the State become the principal actor of the economic play. States sponsored the growth of their economy imposing monopolies, adopting protectionist policies, managing their currencies to have stable conditions and developing infrastructures to define a new web of roads and communications inside their national borders. They nationalized their resources and acquired important proportions of capital in industries and stock holdings; they promoted the development of the banks which had social and national aims, as the Živnostenká banka in Czechoslovakia, the

27 On Bulgarian case, H.Jorgensen, *The Inter-War Land Reforms in Estonia, Finland and Bulgaria: A Comparative Study*, in "Scandinavian Economic History Review", vol.54, issue 1, 2006; *The Human Rights of Muslims in Bulgaria in Law and Politics since 1878*, Bulgarian Helsinki committee, Sofia, 2003; V. Alton Moody, *Agrarian Reform before Post-War European Constituent Assemblies*, in "Agricultural History", Vol. 7, No. 2 (Apr., 1933).

28 For the study of the State role in interwar economy, I.T. Berend-G. Ránki, *Economic Development in East central Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries*, New York 1974 (*Lo sviluppo economico nell'Europa centro-orientale nel XIX e XX secolo*, Bologna 1978). G.Ránki, *The Role of the State in the Economy in the interwar Period – Hungary, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania*, in "Papers in East European Economics", n. 29, 1973; N.Spulber, *The State and Economic Development in Eastern Europe*, New York 1966.

Bank Gospodarstwa Krajowego in Poland or the Marmorosch, Blank & Co. and the National bank in Romania. During the Twenties the Romanian government had serious – and for some, even "personal" – interests in banking system, as proved by the strong connection existing between the Liberal party and the National Bank.<sup>29</sup>

Romania represented the perfect sample of this economic nationalism, which meant an increase of public properties, especially in those strategic areas where it was important to replace foreign capital, as in former Habsburg Slovakia and Slovenia, and this policy was limited only by the lack of resources. Romania had experienced such policies since the end of XIX century and strengthened them after WWI, with the definition of the *prin noi înșine* (through ourselves alone) constitutional policy. This strategy aimed to make România Mare not only a political entity, but also an economic one which had the mission to transform the country using all the resources of the new frontiers.<sup>30</sup>

This ambitious policy combined the nationalization of important resources, as mines and oil wells, and the adoption of precise

29 "Exista o intreprindere a intereselor comerciale și financiare cu cele ale clasei conducătoare...iar controlului industriei, băncilor și guvernului a căzut inevitabil în mâna acelorași persoane". K. Hitchins, *România. 1866-1947*, Bucharest 1994, pp. 383-384.

30 "Azi în România Mare el devine o entitate nu numai politică, care prin participarea întregului său neam are viitorul său asigurat, dar și economică, cuprinzând în hotarele acestui stat hinterlandul direct influențat de gurile Dunării. Astfel România va fi mâine un stat economiceste complet, prin folosirea întregului neam la propășirea lui economică, prin bogățiile naturale deosebite pe care teritoriile dobândite le aduc în țara exclusiv agricolă de până ieri, prin transformarea munților din hotar în rezervor viitor de energie economică de tot felul, dar mai cu seamă fiindcă cuprinde în statul stăpânitor al gurilor Dunării toate regiunile bogate dintre Nistru și Tisa care au scurgerea lor normală către aceste guri". Vintilă Brătianu despre *Economia națională a României Mari*, in "Democrația", 4-5 mai 1919. Sulla politica economica di Bucarest fra le due guerre, cfr. M. Drecin, *Noi prin noi - variantă a doctrinei liberale "prin noi înșine"*, in "Anuarul Institutului de Istorie Cluj-Napoca", AIICN, 1996, XXXV, p.241-246; I. Saizu, *Politica economică a României între 1922 și 1928*, București, 1981. Sul capitale autoctono e straniero nel campo minerario, L. Bathory, *The Coal and Iron-and-Steel Industries in the National States of Central Europe and the Autochthonous and Foreign Banking Capital (1919-1929)* in "Nouvelles études d'Histoire, publiées à l'occasion du XVII Congrès international des Sciences Historiques", Madrid 1990, pp. 242-247.

rules to favour the national enterprises: the obligation of having determined percentages of Romanians inside the industries, the creation in 1923 of the National Society for the Industrial Credit to give favourable loans to Romanian citizens and companies....

But also in other States, especially after the crisis of 1929, national economic tendencies grew to the detriment of foreigners and, most of all, of Jews, who suffered owing to many regulations and restrictions imposed by the State to safeguard national economies. The effect of these trends, anyway, was not so optimistic: many States lacked strong internal markets and with the decrease of international commerce following 1929 bankruptcy they had to resort to their historical economic reference, that is to say Germany. During the Thirties, Danube and Balkan regions were once again attracted under German influence and this tendency had terrible consequences. The decrease of international commerce accompanied the worsening of international relationships, which were irremediably conditioned by the division between revisionist and anti-revisionist States. The international frictions and the decline of international institutions, on the other side, reflected the gradual shift that many States experienced towards a less democratic and a more nationalist reality. The economic crisis of 1929 accelerated this process and paved the way for the rise of totalitarian nationalisms which combined antisemitism with the revision of Versailles status quo.

#### 4. Conclusions

Hitler's success anticipated the final decline of the collective security system and of the League of Nations, which lost all its prestige after the self-withdrawal of Germany, the self-renunciation expressed by Poland as regards as the application of the Minority treaties, the wars in Spain and Ethiopia and the failure of any attempts made to solve these questions. In few years the castle crumbled and composted the ground for the second world war, a

new tragic experience which had its roots in the democratic instability of the national States, in the economic crisis, in the weakness of the international institutions called to keep order, which were on their side conditioned by the harsh partition between revisionists and anti-revisionists.

In this context, the protection of minorities represented an important matter of the international practice and was particularly urgent. The League's procedure concerning the protection of minorities characterized many meetings of the Council, when some particular controversies reflected the failed reconciliation between the States interested by the disputes. It was the case of Germans in Poland, and of Magyars in Romania, whose problems were many times resolved by the arrangement of some compromises but never abandoned the "original sin" which lay behind them: the existence of serious political clashes between the States and the fragile roots of international law. This system was conditioned by the global participation of all its actors, the States: only their common efforts, the cooperation in the management of the international issues and the common adherence to some shared principles could give to the system that moral and legal authority it needed. The League was no supernatural being but consisted of sovereign States, and thus relied on them and on their earnest and honest will which only could reduce the animosity of the international relations.<sup>31</sup>

The fate of interwar minorities further showed the contrast between international principles and national interests, and the gap existing between the theoretical proclamation of self-determination principle and its concrete application, which required a balance and a

31 "The League is no supernatural being hovering about in space. It consists of Members, each of whom is a sovereign State. Therefore the action of the Council cannot be automatic, because the Council cannot meet if not summoned, and cannot be summoned except by the initiative of one of the Members of the League... No transaction whatever, not only between nations but between individuals as well, would be possible without the assumption of a minimum of good faith, and, as the experience of commerce shows, that very assumption, when universal, reduces to a small proportion the number of cases in which that minimum cannot be obtained. The Council, of course, could not hope to settle any dispute were it not supported by the common and earnest will of its Members. Paul Mantoux, *On the Procedure of the Council of the League of Nations for the Settlement of Disputes*, in "Journal of the British Institute of International Affairs", 5, 1 (1926), pp.17, 31.

stability that was not always present in interwar political scene. The respect of international obligations, moreover, collapsed owing to the emphasis that States gave to their new role and to the concept of national sovereignty. As a matter of fact, nationalism became the alpha and omega of the State policies, which defined a new role for the political authorities. The State was no more a pure instrument of public order, but acquired new and more “invasive” competencies. National States self-assumed the role of social and economic actor, and developed a broad whole of different measures, which affected the daily life of their citizens.

Interwar experience proved that social and national clashes did not derive exclusively from richness or material conditions but mostly on the interpretation and possession of the past and the present. History, thus, was the prototype of the political action while nationhood was the successor of parenthood in the function of framing and interpreting life in a modern society. In this context, nationalism showed its crudest and most discriminating face and the idea of nation of the XIX century finally converted into Orwell’s definition of nationalism: “that lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige”.<sup>32</sup>

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