

**UNRECOGNIZED ALIKE, YET NOT EQUAL: ALBANIANS AND BOSNIAN  
MUSLIMS IN INTERWAR YUGOSLAVIA 1918-1941**

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# Introduction

Located in a region aggravated by a history of political division, border shifting and power struggle among different ethnic and cultural groups, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (later renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia)<sup>1</sup> proved to be a short lived political, economical and social experiment. In its 23 years of existence (1918-1941), the Kingdom of Yugoslavia had known little, if any, political, social and economic stability. Application of a centralist state approach by the predominantly Serb elite in a country inhabited by mixed and antagonist communities, with distinct culture, religion, that had “inherited from their previous sovereigns seven different legal systems”<sup>2</sup> led to power struggle and competing national ideologies, above all, of the two main ethnic groups – Serbs and Croats. Consequently, relations between Serbs and Croats have continuously been at the centre of attention of most of the scholars who wrote about the first Yugoslav state.

Nevertheless, comparatively little has been written with regard to the socio-economic and political position of other ethnic and cultural groups living within the borders of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, whose existence was stubbornly and continuously denied, such as Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians, Montenegrins and, especially those non-Slavic ethnic groups – Albanians, Germans, Hungarians, Italians, Turks, Romanians, Jews, Roma etc. In a way, political conflicts and clashes between Serbs and Croats have sidelined other issues and developments and, in particular, these with regard to smaller national groups living within the state. The new state that came into existence on 1 December 1918, and which was based on “one language, giving rise to one nation, and the Serbian monarchy”<sup>3</sup> reflected Serb centralist tendencies and the vision of one nation-state for South Slavic people, thus leaving

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this thesis I use different terms to describe this country, such as: ‘interwar Yugoslavia’, ‘Yugoslavia’, ‘Kingdom of Yugoslavia’, ‘Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes’ and ‘Yugoslav state’.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1974), 202.

<sup>3</sup> George Schopflin, “The rise and fall of Yugoslavia,” in *The politics of ethnic conflict regulation* John McGarry and Brendan O’Leary (London and New York: Rowledge, 1993), 175.

almost no space at all for other groups. Likewise, despite the fact that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes accepted the Treaty of Saint Germain for the protection of national minorities in its territory in 1919, it never went further than guarantying language rights (in elementary education) for some of the national groups within the state, such as Germans and Hungarians. In the constitutional level too, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia affirmed a non discrimination clause only in relation to religion and education in mother language, thus omitting any reference to other minority rights of the smaller groups. Serb unitarist and even hegemonic tendencies were reflected also in the territorial organization of the country and functioning of the political institutions that were centered in Belgrade. Nevertheless, internal political and ethnic competition and rivalry, was not only confined within Serb-Croat relationship. Rather, it characterized both nations and national minorities.

Thus, this thesis sets to examine and compare the position of Bosnian Muslims and Albanians, as unrecognized national groups, in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. It attempts to argue that despite the fact that both groups were equally unrecognized, they had different state treatment and, consequently, different position within the state, with Bosnian Muslims being in better position compared to Albanians. The thesis aims at proving this, by arguing that: (a) language was the main unifying element in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, and as such, it 'barred' doors of the state for non-south Slavic speaking national groups; (b) despite the fact that inter-war Yugoslavia accepted the Treaty of Saint Germain (1919) for the protection of national minorities, throughout its existence it tried to negate the presence of national minorities, promoted homogenization and, at a certain level, oppressive policies; (c) there were different standards in the treatment of national groups in Yugoslavia, with those groups (including Albanians) in the territories annexed by Serbia in 1912-1913 treated worse than other groups (including Bosnian Muslims) in the territories assigned to Yugoslavia after the dissolution of Austro-Hungarian Empire; (d) the position of Albanians and their treatment

by the state was further determined by the interplay of at least three factors – nationalizing state, external homeland (Albania) and national minority, all forming a ‘triadic nexus’<sup>4</sup> – something which was not characteristic for Bosnian Muslims; (e) by the same token, the behavior of minorities toward the state (including their political organization and identification with the state) was of great importance for the treatment they will receive from the state. While a relatively high level of identification with the state and political bargaining was characteristic of Bosnian Muslims throughout the inter-war period, Albanians, lacking a strong political organization that will articulate their interests within the state, in many cases chose armed resistance as a way to oppose state’s repressive policies; (f) finally, the treatment of Bosnian Muslims in the interwar Yugoslavia falls largely in the category of integration and assimilation policies, whereas the treatment of Albanians in that of marginalization and expulsion.

In this thesis, however, I am not trying to provide a thorough analysis of the position of each of non-recognized national groups, or an analysis of each and every aspect of life and organization of the Albanians and Bosnian Muslims in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia. Rather, by analyzing different treatment and distinct modes, applied by the state, of approaching Bosnian Muslims and Albanians in Yugoslavia, my aim is to give a symbolic contribution in the scholarly work with regard to interwar Yugoslavia. I consider that Serb tendencies for hegemonic control over territory, people and politics in interwar Yugoslavia were very much incompatible with the political orientations of other nations or minorities and, as such, they rendered Yugoslavia an illegitimate and improper state for most of its inhabitants. By focusing on the case of unequal treatment of Bosnian Muslims and Albanians, this study helps to better understand the complex and multi-facet relationship minority-majority, a relationship that is largely determined by political considerations and state’s official (centrist) ideology.

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<sup>4</sup> Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 5.

Therefore, the first chapter of this thesis examines internal organization of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, political institutions and major political developments that have characterized the state. Further, chapter two focuses on other national groups within Yugoslav Kingdom, their legal and political position, as well as other issues related to them. Also, this chapter analyzes in brief minority protection system established at the Conference of Versailles and the League of Nations and its applicability on the case of Yugoslavia, with a particular emphasis on the Treaty of Saint Germain. The following chapter analyzes Bosnian Muslims as the ‘religious other’ of the South Slavic people. It aims at shedding light on the relations between Bosnian Muslims on one side, and Serbs and Croats on the other side, as well as on the role of Yugoslav Muslim Organization (YMO), Bosnian Muslim cultural societies and institution of *reis-ul-ulema*. Fifth chapter, on the other side, depicts the position of Albanians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, their rebellion, unrest and state measures taken to pacify and control the region where they lived – the so called “Southern Regions” (Kosovo and Macedonia). Role of the Islamic Association for the Defense and Justice (Cemiyet), founded at Skopje in December 1919, will be analyzed too in the context of political representation of Albanians and Turks within the state.

Meanwhile, the sixth chapter sets to compare Bosnian Muslims and Albanians in the Yugoslav Kingdom, as two unrecognized national groups, with quite different treatment from the state due to the fact that the former were considered to belong to the Serbo-Croatian speaking national group (and as such, as ingredient part of the nation) while the latter were mainly considered as being alien, hostile and irritant (especially in the political considerations of the Serb elite) element within the state. In addition, this chapter tries to shed light on that if the strategy of the Bosnian Muslims and their leader, Mehmed Spaho, to support the government most of the time, as opposed to Albanian defiance (political and military),

provides an explanation for state's different treatment of the Yugoslavia's main Muslim groups, Bosnian Muslims and Albanians.

The methodology used here combines analytical and critical approaches. The literature contains primary sources – legal documents (constitutions, laws), official and factual data and figures about the social, economic and political system in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and its different national groups. These primary sources and factual data will be examined in detail. By the same token, many secondary sources – books, articles, discussions etc. - which analyze developments in the Yugoslav Kingdom will be included in this thesis.

## Literature review

The great majority of the academic work done on inter-war Yugoslavia deals with the Serb-Croat relations and most of the scholars attribute almost inherent political instability and national strife to the Serb-Croat opposition and failure to agree on the format of the political entity. Above all, three books on inter-war Yugoslavia stand out: Ivo Banac's seminal work *The national question in Yugoslavia: origins, history, politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), Alex N. Dragnich's *The First Yugoslavia. Search for a Viable Political System* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983) and Dejan Djokić's *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

According to Banac, inter-war Yugoslavia failed to be established as a stable and democratic state because of the unresolved national question and prevalence of the mutually exclusive (and mutually irreconcilable) national ideologies that had already evolved in each of its numerous national and confessional communities. Consequently, chances for its internal stability and a workable democratic system in such a polity were very slim. He further argues

that the official state ideology (Yugoslavism) could not reconcile and accept national ideologies of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, let alone to be acceptable by non-Slavic minorities or Macedonians. Put it otherwise, for Banac, given the different historical experiences of different national and religious groups that were included in Yugoslavia, building of a functional and legitimate Yugoslav state was almost impossible or it was pre-ordained to fail.

Alex N. Dragnich, likewise, emphasis Serb-Croat opposition and inability to agree on the terms of state-building in Yugoslavia. For most of the Serb leaders, inter-war Yugoslavia was primarily an extended Serbia and a nation state of south Slavic people, where Serbs (being numerically superior) had a control over it. On the other hand, Croats weren't willing to accept a highly centralized and Serb-dominated Yugoslavia that leaves them in an inferior position and which doesn't recognize their distinct national identity, as promoted staunchly by Croat leaders such as Stjepan Radić, Maček etc. In Dragnich's opinion, efforts to create a stable and acceptable political entity were undermined because of the tendency of the elites who led the unification process to downgrade the political, cultural and religious differences of the Slovenes, Serbs and Croats, not to say anything about minorities.

Finally, Djokić provides a quite different approach. Unlike Banac, he sees political actors more as active agents which act based on their principles, but also pragmatism and not as 'pre-programmed agents'. Instead of an improbable or country pre-ordained to fail, he considers political developments in Yugoslavia as political dynamics and processes leading toward a compromise. The *Sporazum* – Serb-Croat agreement of 26 August 1939 – that created a separate Croat autonomous unit (called by Djokić as 'elusive compromise') - represents such an example. Thus, he is of opinion that World War II and occupation of Yugoslavia (external factors) were the cause of the state's failure.

Undeniably, inter-war Yugoslavia was an example of a long-lasting (and unfinished process) of state-building. Banac, Djokić and Dragnich see it as such too. Nonetheless, though all the three provide many useful elements for analyses of the political dynamics within interwar Yugoslavia, especially the Serb-Croat relations, only Banac provides detailed analyses of minority groups and their role and position in the internal political developments in Yugoslavia. My own approach recognizes the importance of the Serb-Croat-Slovene relations and the way they impacted state-building process. However, I consider that minority groups, both Slavic and non-Slavic are important factors (though more as object than subject) in understanding political developments in Yugoslavia and its state-building process. Two different issues, which otherwise broaden the context, arise from this. First, that smaller minority groups were neglected primarily because of the highly centralized state structures and behavior of Yugoslavia as a nation-state (definition of Yugoslavia as a nation-state was in function of unitarism and centralism). Serbia as the core of the new state, not only lacked experience in managing multi-ethnic state, but by constantly denying the existence of national-minorities in Yugoslavia, followed an exclusive approach. Undeniably, minorities were actively denied.<sup>5</sup>

Second, because of the fact that the existence of numerous ethno-national groups went against the proclaimed national unity (*narodno jedinstvo*) and nation-state, they fell prey of the state-sponsored oppression. Similarly, state behavior toward minorities largely depended on the attitude of the minorities toward the state (non/acceptance of Yugoslavism) and level of threat it poses to the project of state-building and security of the state. These criteria automatically create conditions for different treatment of minorities, as is the case with Bosnian Muslims and Albanians.

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<sup>5</sup> According to Guibernau, “Denial concerns the state’s refusal to acknowledge the existence of any sort of cultural, historical or political national minorities within itself. In this situation, internal diversity is ignored and assimilation is actively encouraged.” See: Montserrat Guibernau, *Nations without States. Political Communities in a Global Age* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999), 60.

In this context, Montserrat Guibernau's theoretical framework on denial of minorities and minority resistance (book: *Nations without States. Political Communities in a Global Age*), and Rogers Brubaker's work *Nationalism Reframed* -concepts of nationalizing policies and securitization of ethnic-relations - will be used to build my argument.

# 1. Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes: a unitary state of three 'tribes'

*"By virtually every relevant criterion – history, political traditions, socioeconomic standards, legal systems, religion and culture – Yugoslavia was the most complicated of the new states in interwar East Central Europe, being composed of the largest and the most varied number of pre-1918 units."*

- Joseph Rothschild<sup>6</sup> -

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was one of the states that emerged as a consequence of the dissolution of the Habsburg and Ottoman Empire at the end of the World War I (WWI). It was officially established on 1 December 1918, after a relatively long process of negotiations and discussions pursued by separate groups that in a way were representing south Slavic people: the exiled Serbian government led by Nikola Pašić then residing in Corfu (Greece), the organization of the Monarchy's South Slavic *émigrés* living in the Entente countries, Yugoslav Committee (*Jugoslovenski Odbor*) residing in London, and political leaders of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in Austro-Hungary, assembled at the National Council (*Narodno Vijeće*).<sup>7</sup> This new country comprised of the already existing Kingdom of Serbia (including Kosovo and Macedonia, which were annexed by Serbia in the course of Balkan Wars of 1912-1913), south Slavic inhabited lands of Habsburg Empire (Slovenia, Croatia, Dalmatia, Slavonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina)<sup>8</sup>, Kingdom of Montenegro<sup>9</sup>, and Vojvodina (also part of the Habsburg Monarchy until 1918). At a ceremony organized in

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<sup>6</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe between the Two World Wars*, 201.

<sup>7</sup> See: Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 12-39; Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans: from Constantinople to communism* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 325-329; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia: Origins, History, Politics* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1993), 115-140; Enver Hasani, *Self-Determination, Territorial Integrity and International Stability: The Case of Yugoslavia* (Vienna: National Defence Academy's Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management of Vienna, 2003), 131.

<sup>8</sup> Serbs, Croats and Slovenes from Habsburg South Slav lands, led by Anton Korošec (Slovene), Ante Pavelić (Croat) and Svetozar Pribičević (Serb), first created the National Council in Zagreb (8 October 1918) and then declared the independence of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs from Habsburg Empire (29 October 1918) – a short lived state which joined the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes just a month later. See: Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise*, 25-26; Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans*, 27-29; Georges Castellán, *History of the Balkans: From Mohammed the Conqueror to Stalin* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1992), 409.

<sup>9</sup> Montenegro's Great *Skupština* voted on 28 November 1918 to depose the Petrović dynasty and join the new state of South Slavs. The text of the voted decree is available at: [http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/greatserbia\\_skupshtina.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/greatserbia_skupshtina.htm) [last accessed: 27.04.2009].

Belgrade, Prince Regence Alexander, replying to address read by Pavelić<sup>10</sup> on behalf of the National Council, said:

“We thus realize what corresponds to the wishes and desires of my people, and in the name of King Peter I proclaim the unity of Serbia with the provinces of the independent State of **Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes**, in the **Unitary** [my emphasizes] Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. [...] Faithful to my father's example, I shall only be the King of free citizens of the State of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, and I shall always remain loyal to the great constitutional, parliamentary, and democratic principles resting upon universal law. [...] Long live the whole people of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes! May our kingdom be ever happy and glorious!”<sup>11</sup>

However, the immediate euphoria surrounding the formation of a united south Slavic state did not extend through the month.<sup>12</sup> There were three main reasons for this: (a) historical legacies, (b) international political and economic relations, and, (c) above all, internal disagreements about the character of the state.

As far as the first factor is concerned, it is the different historical legacies of all the diverse south Slavic peoples and the others that they brought into the unified kingdom in 1918 that “provided very weak foundations upon which modern representative political institutions could be based.”<sup>13</sup> Different communities’ historical experiences and legacies, indeed, reflected their “conflicting national ideologies”.<sup>14</sup> To begin with, apart from the ‘three-named people’, interwar Yugoslavia included some 2 million (17 per cent of the overall population) ethnic minorities: Germans, Hungarians, Albanians, Turks, Italians, Czechs, Slovaks, Ruthenians, Jews etc.<sup>15</sup> As Rothschild points out, Yugoslavia was one of contrasting regions, of internal mountain barriers, of fragmented communications among regions and populated by

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<sup>10</sup> Not to be mixed with the Croat *Ustaša* leader.

<sup>11</sup> See Prince Alexander of Serbia's Reply to Yugoslav National Council's Address in: Snežana Trifunovska ed., *Yugoslavia through documents: from its creation to its dissolution* (Dordrecht : M. Nijhoff, 1994), 160.

<sup>12</sup> Charles Jelavich, “South Slav Education; Was There Yugoslavism,” in *Yugoslavia and Its Historians: Understanding the Balkan Wars of 1990s* eds. Norman M. Naimark and Holly Case (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 98.

<sup>13</sup> John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 264.

<sup>14</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 406.

<sup>15</sup> According to the official census of 31 January 1921, Yugoslavia had a bit less than 12 million people. Because of the fact that people were divided only in linguistic and religious categories, these data is not very accurate. See: Georges Castellan, *History of the Balkans*, 419; Fred Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav People* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 133; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 49-58.

communities of widely divergent cultures, different religions, had inherited eight legal systems from their former sovereignties, and wrote in different orthographies (Cyrillic, Latin, Arabic).<sup>16</sup> In other words, these differences<sup>17</sup> in history, religion, culture and political organization of all the ethno-national groups, made the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes more a “project than a fact”.<sup>18</sup> Undoubtedly, all this rendered the perspectives of the new country rather promising.

The second major problem that the newly created state faced was related to the post-WWI international order that was being shaped in the International Peace Conference in Versailles. In particular, border disputes<sup>19</sup> with Austria, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania, Albania and Italy, which weren't solved through international agreements until 1926,<sup>20</sup> caused a constant headache for the Yugoslav leaders in first post-war years. With Austria, Hungary, and Bulgaria (the defeated), all “mourning their losses, both of territory and of their people”<sup>21</sup>, Yugoslavia was surrounded by hostile enemies (apart from Greece and Romania), ready to interfere in its affairs. In later phases, especially 1930s, it was world economic crisis and the rising of the Axis powers that would cause additional obstacles to the functioning of the country.

Nevertheless, the crucial problem that Yugoslavia faced was that of competing national ideologies (primarily that of Serbs and Croats as the biggest nations) and disagreements about the political organization of the country.

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<sup>16</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 202.

<sup>17</sup> Of particular importance in this context are differences in economic and industrial development of the regions in Yugoslavia. For more on economic problems see: Carole Rogel, *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and its Aftermath* (Westport and London: Greenwood Press, 2004), 7; John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 117-121; John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, 100-122; Alex N. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia. Search for a Viable Political System* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1983), 135-144.

<sup>18</sup> Georges Castellan, *History of the Balkans*, 419.

<sup>19</sup> For more on this, see: Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919: six months that changed the world* (New York: Random House, 2002), 109-124; John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 113-117; Fred Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav People*, 135-139; Charles and Barbara Jelavich, *The establishment of the Balkan national states, 1804-1920* (Published Seattle : University of Washington Press, 1986), 300-305.

<sup>20</sup> Fred Singleton, *A Short History of the Yugoslav People*, 135.

<sup>21</sup> Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 123.

## 1.1. The conflicting visions of Yugoslavia: Serb-Croat opposition

Despite various intellectuals' engagement<sup>22</sup> in promoting an all inclusive Yugoslav ideology, a variety of contradictory comprehensions of Yugoslavism and Yugoslavia predominated among South Slavic people. So, within Yugoslavia, as Macmillan argues, "peoples who had little in common except language never agreed on a common interpretation of what the country meant."<sup>23</sup> Since there is no document that defines Yugoslavism, for some it meant the union of Serbia and Montenegro with the South Slavs of the Dual Monarchy, while for others it represented only the unification of the South Slavs, a union that was hoped would lead to Trialism.<sup>24</sup> For most of the Serbs<sup>25</sup>, especially Serb Prime Minister Pašić<sup>26</sup>, any kind of Yugoslav state meant Greater Serbia, where all the Serbs of the Balkans would live in a united state, where Serbs played a major or hegemonic role. Thus, the new south Slav state, for most Serb leaders was simply the culmination of the long line of events leading to national unity of the Serbs.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, for Slovenes and Croats, a South Slavic state meant a union of equal and free nations of Slovenes, Croats and Serbs. As Rusinow put it, "for many Slovenes

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<sup>22</sup> See for example the role of Ljudevit Gaj, Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, Josip Strossmayer etc, in promoting pan-Yugoslavism: Alexandar Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism in a Multinational State* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1997), 11-19; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 70-115; Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation 1918-2005* (Washington D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Press, 2006), 39-44; John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 41-46; Arnold Suppan, "Yugoslavism versus Serbian, Croatian and Slovene Nationalism: Political ideological, and Cultural Causes of the Rise and Fall of Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavia and Its Historians: Understanding the Balkan Wars of 1990s* eds. Norman M. Naimark and Holly Case (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 123.

<sup>24</sup> Charles Jelavich, "South Slav Education; Was There Yugoslavism," 95.

<sup>25</sup> However, it should be noted that not all the Serb parties and politicians shared the same views with regard to political developments in Yugoslavia and the format of the new state. The main difference is the one between Serb politicians and parties (primarily Radicals) from pre-1913 Serbia and the so called *prečani* (Serbs from Austro-Hungarian territories) who were mainly gathered around Democratic Party. For example, one of the most known exponents of Democratic Party, Ljuba Davidović, in general showed more tolerance toward non-Serbs and in 1933 went as far as to propose a federal arrangement of Yugoslavia with four federal units (Serbia, Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina). See: Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise*, 50,136; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 173-175.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed profile of Pašić and his political vision see: Alex N. Dragnich, *Serbia and Yugoslavia: Historical Studies and Contemporary Commentaries* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1998), 31-62.

<sup>27</sup> George Schopflin, "The rise and fall of Yugoslavia," 304; Dennison Rusinow, "Yugoslav Idea before Yugoslavia," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Ideas 1918-1922* ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 26;

and Croats their primary meaning and function was protection against Italian, Austro-German, or Magyar domination and cultural challenges (but only if the identity and autonomy of each Yugoslav nation was protected by equality in managing their joint state).<sup>28</sup> Especially the leader of the Croatian Peasant People's Party (HSPS), Stjepan Radić was against a unitary state, thus arguing in favor of a federal and decentralized state.<sup>29</sup> Nevertheless, in both Declaration of Corfu (1917)<sup>30</sup> and the document of unification adopted in the session of 23-24 November 1918 of the National Council left open the issue of the format of the future state. Federal/decentralist attitude and tendency of the Croats and Slovenes (including some Serb leaders from Habsburg lands) are exemplified in the Declaration of Geneva (9 November 1918), signed by Serb Government (which nevertheless opposed it just days later) and opposition, the Yugoslav Committee and the National Council.<sup>31</sup> However, under the threat coming from Italy and Austria, Slovene and Croat leaders 'rushed' to join Serbia and create a common state without having discussed in detail all the issues related to state structures and the form of government.

So, "ever since the founding of Yugoslavia, two distinct nationalist policies have struggled for primacy in the debate over the country's political future: Croatian separatism striving for an independent state and Serbian centralism striving to preserve the common Yugoslav state under its dominion."<sup>32</sup> This antithesis was complicated by other factors, namely other smaller national groups (which will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter). In most of the cases, on the side of the "Belgrade camp" were to be found Serbs from Bosnia, Croatia, Vojvodina, as well as other elements from Slovenia and some

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<sup>28</sup> Dennison Rusinow, "Yugoslav Idea before Yugoslavia," 26.

<sup>29</sup> For more on Radić's stance of the unification issue see: Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise*, 29-39.

<sup>30</sup> See: *The Corfu Declaration, 20 July 1917*,

<[http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/greaterserbia\\_corfudeclaration.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/greaterserbia_corfudeclaration.htm)> [last accessed: 20.04.2009]

<sup>31</sup> For more on this see: Alexandar Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia*, 19-24; Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise*, 35-39.

<sup>32</sup> Vesna Pestic, "Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis," in *Peaceworks No. 8*. (Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace, 2005), v.

Muslims<sup>33</sup>; on the ‘Zagreb camp’, otherwise, were mostly those people who weren’t recognized, such as Macedonians, but also Albanians.<sup>34</sup> Be as it may, these different opinions which constituted the main antagonism between Serbs and the other national groups (primarily Croats) would become a continuous plague of the new state. As the latter developments (to be discussed in what follows) showed, Serbia’s motto ‘one king, one state, one people’ was to prevail in the new state of South Slavic people.

## **1.2. Heading toward nation state**

Nonetheless, despite different opinions, especially those of Slovenes and Croats, from the very act of inception, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, was based on the principles of unitary national states, or nation-states.<sup>35</sup> The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes enshrined the idea of “national unity” (*narodno jedinstvo*) in a monarchy, which presumed that in Yugoslavia lived one people with three names—Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.<sup>36</sup> The three constituent peoples, Serbs, Croats and Slovenes were not defined as different nations, but rather as three tribes (*plemena*) of one united nation – south Slavic or Yugoslav nation.<sup>37</sup> Thus, the new state’s Serb leadership pursued the “semi-official doctrine

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<sup>33</sup> Though Slovene politicians were divided, in the main they considered that their interests would be best realized if they participate in the government. Likewise, Bosnian Muslim leaders were convinced that their interests in Bosnia-Herzegovina can be retained by being part of the government in Belgrade. Alex N. Dragnich, *The First Yugoslavia*. 150.

<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, this does not mean that there were clear cut differences and irreconcilable political camps. As Djokić put it, ‘Political actors were active rather than pre-programed ‘agents’, who sometimes acted out of genuine beliefs, but sometimes out of pragmatism, and whose views, in many cases, evolved during the period.’ See: Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise*, 10; H.C. Darby et al., *A Short History of Yugoslavia from Early times to 1966* ed. Stephen Clissold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 175.

<sup>35</sup> By nation-state here we mean a state that “is conceived to belong and to serve solely the interests of the dominant nation to the detriment of ethno-national minorities.” Klejda Mulaj, “A Recurrent Tragedy: Ethnic Cleansing as a Tool of State Building in the Yugoslav Multinational Setting,” *Nationalities Papers, Vol. 34, No. 1*, (March 2006), 21.

<sup>36</sup> Vesna Pestic, “Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis,” 5.

<sup>37</sup> The concept of ‘*narodno jedinstvo*’ of Yugoslavs initially didn’t recognize ethnic or national individuality of Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians and Montenegrins.

of the ‘three-named people’<sup>38</sup> where only religious differences between, the three ‘tribes’ of the Yugoslav nation were officially recognized.<sup>39</sup> As far as language is concerned, despite the fact that Constitution of 1921<sup>40</sup> (Article 3) defined Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian as the official language of the Kingdom, Serbian (Cyrillic alphabet) predominated in official documents and communication in the state administration.

It should be noted, however, that the concept of unitarism or *narodno jedinstvo* had changed according to the interplay of different political factors and balance of power within the state. Prior to the unification, Serbs, Croats and Serbs were perceived as three nations, whereas in 1921 Constitution unitarism was reflected in the form of constitutional concept of “one nation of three names” (*troimeni narod*) historically divided into three “tribes”—Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes.<sup>41</sup> In 1929, King Alexander introduced royal dictatorship in order to “put an end to the country’s disunity by enforcing Yugoslav identity from above”<sup>42</sup> thus forbidding every kind of political association on a ‘religious, tribal (ethnic) or regional’ basis (Para. 1, Article 13).<sup>43</sup>

Nonetheless, though no single ethnic group was in a position to act as the *Staatvolk*<sup>44</sup> in the new Kingdom – Serbs themselves were a minority – the Serbian elite from the very beginning perceived the state as being a nation-state. In no way Serbs saw any “need to adapt their institutions and their political convictions to their new partners.”<sup>45</sup> All the contrary, the Serbian elite by proving to be simply “incapable of expanding their outlook from Serbian to

<sup>38</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 51.

<sup>39</sup> Radmila Radic, “Religion in a Multicultural State: The case of Yugoslavia,” in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea 1918-1922* ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 196.

<sup>40</sup> *Ustav Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca od 28. juna, 1921. god.* (Beograd : Izdavačka Knjižarnica Gece Kona, 1921). Found at: <http://digital.nb.rs/razno/ustav/swf.php?lang=eng&direct=RA-ustav-1921>

<sup>41</sup> Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar, *The former Yugoslavia’s diverse peoples: a reference sourcebook* (California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004), 112-113.

<sup>42</sup> Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise*, 69;

<sup>43</sup> Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar, *The former Yugoslavia’s diverse peoples*, 112-113.

<sup>44</sup> George Schopflin, “The rise and fall of Yugoslavia,” 172.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 304.

Yugoslav horizons”<sup>46</sup> used the pre-existing Serb institutions to control the newly gained territories. These institutions were mechanically transferred to the new parts of Yugoslavia.<sup>47</sup> Thus, very soon, the new state was dominated by Serbian institutions (above all, the Serbian Royal House), including the military, the political leadership, and bureaucracy. As Croatian units from the old Austro-Hungarian army were disbanded, “the Serbian Army became Yugoslav Army”.<sup>48</sup> Serbs also had the highest number of deputies in the Provisional Parliament (*Privremeno narodno predstavništvo*)<sup>49</sup>, convened in Belgrade in March 1919, then they led the first provisional government formed in January 1919 - Stojan Protić was appointed Prime Minister.<sup>50</sup> Another Serb, Nikola Pašić, led the Yugoslav delegation in the talks in Paris Peace Conference.

Based on the ideal of national self-determination, promoted by Wilson at the Peace Conference, the Serb leadership acted as though Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes is a single nation-state.<sup>51</sup> These had two major consequences: first, despite the facts that Croats and Slovenes were officially equal to Serbs, they were constantly overruled and politically dominated in the state institutions, and, second, the definition of the new state as a ‘nation-state’<sup>52</sup>, legally and politically omitted many minority groups, such as Germans, Hungarians, Italians, Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians, Albanians, Turks etc.

First, I will look to the domination of the new state by Serbs and the political and legal means used by them to dominate.

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<sup>46</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 217.

<sup>47</sup> Vesna Pesić, “Serbian Nationalism and the Origins of the Yugoslav Crisis,” 5.

<sup>48</sup> Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 117.

<sup>49</sup> See: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 380-381; Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 46.

<sup>50</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars 1918-1941* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1982), 212.

<sup>51</sup> Hupchick argues that Yugoslavia “was the most artificial European nation-state to emerge from Versailles.” See: Dennis P. Hupchick, *The Balkans: from Constantinople to communism*, 138.

<sup>52</sup> Unlike Hupchick, Dejan Djokić is of the opinion that “if we accept the notion of the ‘national oneness’ – as many contemporaries did – Yugoslavia was a nation-state, in which the South Slavs formed more than 80 per cent of country’s population.” See: Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise*, 38.

### **1.3. From constitutional monarchy to royal dictatorship: politics, government, administration**

During its 23 years of existence, interwar-Yugoslavia was characterized by deep political instability and widely expressed dissatisfaction and obstruction from non-Serbs, mainly Croats. Three different periods of constitutional arrangements can be distinguished: a unitarist parliamentary system (until 1929) dominated by unstable Serb-dominated governments, a centralist system dominated by the crown (royal dictatorship since 1929 – which was weekend considerably after the assassination of King Alexander in 1934), where nationally-based parties were suppressed, and a one-unit federalism, where the Croat unit was privileged.<sup>53</sup> The first period was especially marked by constitutional and organizational struggle, which culminated into the adoption of a unitarist and centralized constitution in 1921 (Vidovdan Constitution).<sup>54</sup> The years to come were very volatile and characterized by Serb-Croat political struggles and disagreement, which ended in a tragic way – with the shooting of Stjepan Radić in the Parliament on 20 June 1928. In this period, politics were dominated by two main parties: Serb Radical Party (led by Pašić and Protić) and Democratic Party, formed out of dissident radicals, Serbs and Croats from Croatia and Slovene Liberals (this party was led by Ljuba Davidović).<sup>55</sup> Between 1921 and 1929, the kingdom had 24 governments and most failed to deal with the state's dire problems and ended in turbulence or political

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<sup>53</sup> Alexandar Pavković, *The Fragmentation of Yugoslavia: Nationalism in a Multinational State*, 32.

<sup>54</sup> Vidovdan Constitution was approved with the support of Serbian parties and votes of Bosnian Muslims and Albanians and Turks from Kosovo and Macedonia. Croat deputies and some Slovenes boycotted the parliament in sign of revolt. Finally, 223 deputies voter for, 35 against, and 161 didn't vote. For more about the debates and procedures that led to the adoption of the new constitution, see: John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a country*, 125-128; Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation*, 51-57; Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, 45-50; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 387-403.

<sup>55</sup> Other major parties were Radić's Croatian Peasant Party, Jovanović's Agrarian Party, Communist Party (suppressed in 1921), Mehmet Spaho's Yugoslav Muslim Organization (JMO), Cemiyet from Kosovo and Macedonia etc. For more on political parties in 1920s, see: Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars 1918-1941*, 219-224; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 141-378; Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, 51-64.

deadlock.<sup>56</sup> In all these governments, Serbs had the main shares<sup>57</sup>, be it in coalition with Slovenes, Croats (after 1925), or with minority parties.

After the royal decree of 1921 and approving of the constitution in 1931, the monarchy, far from legitimating the state, came to be perceived as alien and oppressive by non-Serbs.<sup>58</sup> In 1931, when the new constitution permitted parliament to convene, only ‘Yugoslav’ parties were allowed to offer candidates. As a result, “political extremism of the left and the right flourished underground.”<sup>59</sup> Centralization and hegemonic control were further strengthened as the several regional penal and civil codes, educational systems, and tax structures were now finally unified.<sup>60</sup> After the approval of the 1931 Constitution, when only ‘Yugoslav’ parties were allowed to exist, the dominant party was the “Democratic Yugoslav Peasant Party” (later renamed into Yugoslav Radical Union – JRZ) that almost became King’s official party.<sup>61</sup> Thus, the oppression, especially of non-Serbs, increased.

In other words, both constitutional monarchy<sup>62</sup> and royal dictatorship were periods of Serb hegemonic control over the others. Thus, Yugoslavia became a synonym for an expanded Serbia, the leadership of which was reluctant to give up of its plans to create a Serb-

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<sup>56</sup> Carole Rogel, *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and its Aftermath*, 8.

<sup>57</sup> In general, equality of people (be it only the three officially recognized ‘tribes’) was unthinkable in interwar Yugoslavia. Serbs were very reluctant to share leading political offices with the others (with the exception when they desperately needed votes). So, though they constituted around 40 per cent of population at the time of the unification, Serbs held the position of prime minister for 264 months out of 268 (going to Slovenes for the rest of the time), the ministry of the army and navy for all 268 months, the minister of internal affairs for 247 months, and minister of justice for 237. See: Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 38; According to Rothschild, “of 656 ministers in office between the formation of the state and the conclusion of the Sporazum, 452 were Serbs, 49 were Slovenes, 18 were Bosniaks, 136 were Croats.” The same control was maintained in the army: for example, in 1941, of 165 Yugoslav generals in active service, 161 were Serbs and 2 Croats and Slovenes; of some 1500 military cadets, 1300 were Serbs, 150 Croats and 50 Slovenes. See: Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 278-279.

<sup>58</sup> George Schopflin, “The rise and fall of Yugoslavia,” 173.

<sup>59</sup> Carole Rogel, *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and its Aftermath*, 8.

<sup>60</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 237.

<sup>61</sup> Castellan, *History of the Balkans*: 421.

<sup>62</sup> According to Schumpeter, “A ‘constitutional’ monarchy does not qualify to be called democratic because electorates and parliaments, while having all the other rights that electorates and parliaments have in parliamentary monarchies, lack the power to impose their choice as to the governing committee: the cabinet ministers are in this case servants of the monarch, in substance as well as in name, and can in principle be dismissed as well as appointed by him.” See: Joseph A. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1942), 270.

centered nation-state. In such state and political environment, minorities played quite an insignificant political role and in most cases fell victims of the state-centered policies.

### 1.3.1. Territorial organization of the country

Another important aspect of the domination of the state by Serbs is that of territorial organization of the country. In its entirety, interwar Yugoslavia had three different forms of territorial organization: the *Oblast* (district) system (1921-1929), the *Banovina* (region) system (1929-1939) and *Sporazum* (agreement) system which created a federal Croatia *banovina* (1939-1941). During the transitional period 1918-1921 (when the country was divided in several pre-existing regions), as part of the general discussions on the new constitution, various proposals were made about the administrative division of the country, with Croat representatives asking for a more decentralized (even federalized country) and regional/local autonomy. However, Pašić's proposal, according to which there was to be no regional autonomy, was included in the new constitution.<sup>63</sup> So, the only administrative units sanctioned in the constitutions were districts (*oblasti*), counties (*žrezovi*), and municipalities (*opštine*).<sup>64</sup> *Oblast* system deliberately divided the state into thirty-three "tightly and centrally controlled departments"<sup>65</sup> based on "natural, social and economic circumstances" (Article 95).<sup>66</sup> The heads of the districts (*načelnik*) were chosen directly by the King<sup>67</sup> and in most of the cases, with the exception of the Croatia's six and Slovenia's two districts, they were Serbs (including regions Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Vojvodina).<sup>68</sup> This kind of regulation was

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<sup>63</sup> See Article 95-99 of the *Ustav Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca od 28. juna, 1921. god.*

<sup>64</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 398; Peter Radan, "Yugoslavia's Internal Borders as International Borders: A Question of Appropriateness," *East European Quarterly*, XXXIII, No.2 (1999), 138.

<sup>65</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 217.

<sup>66</sup> Peter Radan, "Yugoslavia's Internal Borders as International Borders: A Question of Appropriateness," 138-139.

<sup>67</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 398; Peter Radan, "Yugoslavia's Internal Borders as International Borders: A Question of Appropriateness," 139.

<sup>68</sup> John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History: Twice there was a country*, 133.

used both to promote ethnic and economic links of the Serbs and ensuring a centralized control and domination within the state.

Serb domination was maintained also after the creation of the ‘Kingdom of Rivers’<sup>69</sup> on 3 October 1929, when the state was renamed into “Kingdom of Yugoslavia”. By a decree of 3 October 1929, King Alexander, in an attempt to promote and safeguard the political-bureaucratic dominance of the Serbian elite under the *Yugoslav* rubric,<sup>70</sup> radically restructured the state. The existing 33 *Oblasti* were replaced with 9 *banovine* (provinces).<sup>71</sup> Though the *banovine* borders reflected geographic and economic considerations, thus cutting across political and national borders, the country was dominated by Serbs again, for as in six *banovine* Serbs were majority, Croats in two, and Slovenes in one.

The last administrative organization of the country was that of *Sporazum* (23 August 1939) when an autonomous Croatian *banovina* was created as a result of the unification of the Croat-dominated Savska and Primorska *banovine*, together with a number of bordering districts drawn from four other *banovine*.<sup>72</sup> Certainly, in any possible aspect, Serbs profited the most from any administrative and territorial organization of Yugoslavia.

To sum up the arguments presented in this chapter, notwithstanding the tendencies and various efforts to create a nation-state in Yugoslavia (out of excessively multinational environment) based on the principle of national self-determination, interwar Yugoslavia remained an ‘incomplete’ or ‘unrealized’ nation states.<sup>73</sup> Though in Versailles Yugoslavia was considered to be a single nation state, in reality, it remained only a “nationalizing state”.<sup>74</sup> And, as the perception of the Serb elite about Yugoslavia as a nation-state (denial of the

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<sup>69</sup> Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation*, 80.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>71</sup> See Article 38 of the *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*, Belgrade, September 3, 1931; See also: Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation*, 81; Dejan Djokić, *Elusive Compromise: A History of Interwar Yugoslavia*, 72-75; Peter Radan, “Yugoslavia’s Internal Borders as International Borders: A Question of Appropriateness,” 139-140.

<sup>72</sup> Peter Radan, “Yugoslavia’s Internal Borders as International Borders: A Question of Appropriateness,” 140.

<sup>73</sup> Rogers Brubaker. *Nationalism Reframed*, 9.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

existence of the minorities is just an example) didn't coincide properly with the reality, various nationalizing policies were applied throughout the existence of the state, in order to achieve the ideal of the nation state. Undoubtedly, various national minorities living in Yugoslavia were the one that were directly affected by various nationalizing policies undertaken by the state. Thus, the following chapter addresses the position of minorities in inter-war Yugoslavia.

## 2. The others: unrecognized national groups in interwar Yugoslavia

*Nothing, I venture to say, is more likely to disturb the peace of the world than the treatment which might in certain circumstances be meted out to minorities.*  
- Woodrow Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference, 31 May 1919 -

Though from its very act of inception, Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was meant to be build as a unitary state, new country's national and religious structure shows a different reality. Thus, like many other states created after WWI, by the novel criteria of ethnic homogeneity, the new state of Yugoslavia looked anything but ideal.<sup>75</sup> The existence of some 727,650 Bosnian Muslims, 585,558 Macedonians (Bulgarians) 513,472 Germans, 472,409 Hungarians, 441,740 Albanians, 229,398 Rumanians, Vlachs and Cincars, 168,404 Turks, 12,825 Italians etc., evidenced in the first census,<sup>76</sup> exemplify new countries huge national, linguistic and religious diversity. The official state ideology of *narodno jedinstvo* did not recognize the existence of separate national groups of Macedonians and Bosnian Muslims – the former were simply considered 'South Serbs', while the latter belonged to the "Serbian or Croatian" linguistic category, but with a different religion (this is to be discussed in detail in the next chapter).

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<sup>75</sup> Adam Burgess, "National Minority Rights and the 'Civilizing' of Eastern Europe," *Contention*, Vol. 5., No. 2, (Winter 1996), 20.

<sup>76</sup> These data is deducted based on the official census of 1921, where nationality was not a census rubric – religion and maternal language are the only census rubrics. For an detailed analyses of the census data, its faultiness and shortcomings, see: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 49-58.

As far as the non-Slavic minorities, Albanians, Turks, Hungarians, Italians and Germans, are concerned, their distinct identity was denied practically during the interwar decades by the dominant Serbs as an attempt to “define the political community in exclusive and homogenous terms.”<sup>77</sup> The new state used different legal and political means to marginalize and dominate these minorities; the 1921 and 1931 centralist constitutions, Electoral Law of June 1922 (which created electoral constituencies on the basis of pre-war census figures, so that Serbia’s huge population losses during the Great War were ignored),<sup>78</sup> territorial and administrative (re)organization of the country (for example Kosovo, Macedonia and Vojvodina were reconfigured in such a way, so that all had Serb majorities),<sup>79</sup> denial of the voting rights and pressures during votings (in the first elections in 1920, Germans and Hungarians of Vojvodina weren’t allowed to vote, whereas pressure to skew the results was applied in Macedonia and Montenegro).<sup>80</sup> In addition, several state initiatives (such as the Regulation for Settlement of Southern Regions of 1920) directly and indirectly led to ‘simplification’ of the ethnic structure of the population for as it led to the expulsion of a large number of members of the minority groups. Mass expulsion or extermination of minorities was a direct implication of the attempt to create a nation state out of a region inhabited by a separate ethnically and linguistically homogenous population.<sup>81</sup>

*Legally*, however, interwar Yugoslavia’s policy toward minorities drew on three different legal sources: The Minority Protection Treaty, 1921 and 1931 constitutions, as well as the state legislation on different fields. Despite the fact that all these three legal sources had to be in harmony with each other, due to political considerations and specific situations of the different minorities, as well as role of outside factors, in general the state was more inclined to

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<sup>77</sup> John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, 265.

<sup>78</sup> Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia: A Concise History* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 39.

<sup>79</sup> John R. Lampe, “The Two Yugoslavias as Economic Unions,” in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea 1918-1922* ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 188.

<sup>80</sup> Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 214.

<sup>81</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 133.

stick to its *ad-hoc* legal documents at the detriment of the Minority Protection Treaty. Before looking into the provisions deriving from the Minority Protection Treaty, it is important to discuss in brief the League of Nations' system for the protection of national minorities.

## **2.1. Yugoslavia and the Versailles's minority protection system**

The Treaty of Versailles, signed on 28 June 1919 (it entered in force in 10 January 1920) was the cornerstone to the League of Nations' minority protection.<sup>82</sup> League of Nations set to safeguard minority rights primarily in the Minority Treaties that it signed with many state parties. Indeed, there were three general provisions with regard to minority rights: nationality, equality of rights (liberty, equality of law, religion, language etc) and specific minorities' provisions.<sup>83</sup> In a situation when the leaders of "the new and enlarged states tended to think of sovereignty as an unalterable and irreducible quantity of rights and immunities which automatically accrue to any state"<sup>84</sup>, the Versailles minority system was only "a corollary and corrective to the principle of national self-determination."<sup>85</sup> By sticking to the predominant principle of national-self-determination, many new states opposed the very principle of the minority protection.

Certainly, regardless of the minority treaties, the record of minority states was discreditable because, obsessed by the ideal of national uniformity, minority states built centralized administrative regimes, undertook to denationalize minorities and, in many cases, on grounds of national security, they persecuted 'disloyal' minorities.<sup>86</sup> Probably the greatest weakness of the Versailles minority system was "the premise that states would undertake in

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<sup>82</sup> Jacob Robinson et al., *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?* (New York: Institute of Jewish Affairs of the American Jewish Congress and the World Jewish Congress, 1943), 27.

<sup>83</sup> Robinson et al., *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?*, 35-40.

<sup>84</sup> Inis L. Claude Jr., *National Minorities: An International Problem* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1955), 31.

<sup>85</sup> Robinson et al., *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?*, 40.

<sup>86</sup> Inis L. Claude Jr., *National Minorities*, 40.

good faith to fulfill their commitments, acting in conformity with the norms of international law and morality.”<sup>87</sup> In reality, this meant that most of the states were free to act and treat minorities the way they wished. “Rapid territorial expansion meant they often imposed their authority in the manner of colonial powers, sending gendarmes, teachers, settler farmers and tax collectors into remote provinces among peoples who spoke different languages.”<sup>88</sup> This way, most of the new states built on the ruins of the old oppressive empires, were quite as multinational and oppressive as the old “prisons of nations”<sup>89</sup> they had replaced. Inability of the League of Nations<sup>90</sup> to take measures against the violation of minority rights rendered the position of minorities extremely unsatisfactory, as they became object of violence, discrimination, assimilation policies<sup>91</sup> and exclusion.

Yugoslavia too, was very much resistant to comply with minority rights of the League of Nation. During the negotiations at the League of Nations, on one side, Yugoslavia expressed its wish to have a free hand in its dealings with national minorities, while on the other hand it asked that the treaties with Italy and Hungary should provide for the granting of special rights to Yugoslav ethnic groups, including the right to education in their mother tongue.<sup>92</sup> Considering it as violation of the principle of equality of states and attack upon state sovereignty, the Yugoslav delegation at the Peace Conference fought stubbornly against the minority treaties. Nikola Pašić, the head of the Yugoslav delegation, while opposing these treaties, addressed five notes to the Conference, stating, among others, that application of such

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>88</sup> Mark Mazower, *The Balkans. A Short History* (New York: Modern Library, 2002), 120.

<sup>89</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and nationalism since 1780. Programme, myth, reality*, 133.

<sup>90</sup> For more on the procedures carried out at the League of Nation with regards to minority rights see: L. P. Mair, *The Protection of Minorities. The Working and Scope of Minority Treaties under the League of Nations* (London: Christophers, 1928), 60-76.

<sup>91</sup> Maria Kovacs argues that “The League of Nations system regarded the long-term fate of most minorities to be incorporation into a single majority nation through assimilation, though the League itself made occasional exceptions to this approach, as in the case of the Swedish-inhabited Aaland Island of Finland. But as a rule, the League minority protection scheme was not designed to prevent such assimilation, only to make the process more gradual and tolerable for minorities.” See: Maria M. Kovacs, “Standards of self-determination and standards of minority-rights in post-communist era: a historical perspective,” *Nations and Nationalism* 9 (3), (2003), 437.

<sup>92</sup> Inis L. Claude Jr., *National Minorities*, 139.

provisions “would imply for our State an anticipatory renunciation of certain incontestable rights of sovereignty”, then claiming that because of the fact that “the Serb-Croat-Slovene State, composed of a single people with three names, three religions and two alphabets, by its very nature is called to practice the broadest tolerance”, the question of minority rights in this State doesn’t have a practical scope.<sup>93</sup> The basic assumption here, which at the same time is the official state policy of Yugoslavia, was that apart from the three-named but single people, whole three religions and two alphabets are recognized, no other groups live in the newly created state.

However, after months of negotiations and pressures from the great powers, the delegation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes at the Peace Conference and decided to sign the Treaty of Saint Germain<sup>94</sup> on 5 December 1919 (the Treaty was entered into on 10 September 1919).

### **2.1.1. Treaty of Saint Germain of 1919**

The Treaty of Saint Germain, undoubtedly, represents the cornerstone of minority rights and obligations that interwar Yugoslavia undertook to comply with and respect. The Treaty has 16 articles in total, and 11 articles stipulate in quite detail the rights of the minorities living in the territory of Yugoslavia and the latter’s obligations. Under Article 2, Yugoslavia undertakes “to assure full and complete protection of life and liberty to all inhabitants of the Kingdom without distinction of birth, nationality, language, race or religion”. According to Article 6, “all persons born in the territory of the Serb-Croat-Slovene State who are not born nationals of another State shall *ipso facto* become Serb-Croat-Slovene

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<sup>93</sup> For more on the position of Pašić at the League of Nations, see: Robinson et al., *Were the Minorities Treaties a Failure?*, 154-157.

<sup>94</sup> See: Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State. St. Germain-en-Laye, 10 September 1919. <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/dfat/treaties/1920/14.html>> [last accessed: 20.01.2009].

nationals.” Articles 8 and 9 provide minorities with the rights to be educated in their mother language (including the right to establish, manage and control at their own expense charitable, religious and social institutions, schools in minority languages). Nevertheless, not all the minorities received the same recognition and protection by this treaty. Articles 3-5 refer in particular to the citizenship rights of Bulgarians, Austrians and Hungarians living in Yugoslavia. By the same token, Article 10 grants to the Muslims provisions suitable for regulating family law and personal status in accordance with Muslim usage.

Article 1 stipulates that provisions contained in Articles 2 to 8 of the Treaty shall be recognized as fundamental laws, and that no law, regulation or official action shall conflict or interfere with them, nor shall any law, regulation or official action prevail over them. In line with this, on 10 May 1920, the Treaty of Saint Germain was declared an interim treaty, and then after the adoption of the 1921 Constitution it became a permanent law.<sup>95</sup> Nonetheless, last paragraph of the Article 9<sup>96</sup>, which provides for rights of minorities to use mother tongue in their schools, reveals state’s intention to distinguish between two sorts of minorities – those living in territories were part of Serbia prior to 1 January 1913<sup>97</sup> and those living in the territories assigned to it after WWI. The former minorities include Albanians, Turks and Macedonians, whereas the latter include Germans, Hungarians, Italians, Romanians, Bosnian Muslims etc. In addition, minorities within Serbia proper were also disadvantaged by the fact that the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes was also “discharged from the obligations undertaken in Article 35 of the Treaty of Berlin of 13 July 1878” (see the preamble of the Minority Treaty).

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<sup>95</sup> Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Evolution of Its Political and Legal Institutions* (Sarajevo: Magistrat, 2006), 287.

<sup>96</sup> The last paragraph of the Article 9 reads as follows: “The provisions of the present Article apply only to territory transferred to Serbia or to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes since 1 January 1913.”

<sup>97</sup> *De facto*, Kosovo, Macedonia and the region of Sandjak were annexed by Serbia during the Balkan Wars 1912-13, but *de jure* they didn’t become part of Serbia until the signing of the London Agreement on 30 May 1913 and Bucharest Agreement of 10 July 1913. So, despite the claims made by the Delegation of Yugoslavia at the Peace Conference that Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandjak were excluded from this Article, *de jure* they weren’t. For more on this see: Gazmend Zajmi, *Vepra 2* (Prishtinë: Akademia e Shkencave dhe e Arteve të Kosovës, 2001), 58-60.

So, despite the fact the interwar Yugoslavia had finally signed the Minority Treaty (which *de jure* means that Yugoslavia recognizes its minorities<sup>98</sup> and it accepts to undertake the necessary steps to create conditions for minorities to enjoy these rights - above all, right to education in mother language) that does not automatically mean that the new state was fully committed to the protection of minority rights without any discrimination. Rather, the treatment of minorities in the country was based on the state's official ideology to create a homogenous political entity that will resemble nation-state as close as possible. As a result, state's attitude (official and non-official) toward several of the minority groups living there was determined more by such factors as size of the minority, geographic position, minority's attitude toward the state, as well as (in)compatibility of a minority (including its linguistic, religious and ethnic similarities/differences) with political elite's vision of a unified nation and state. Thus, Slavic and non-Slavic, pre and post-1913, north and south, actively resistant and passive groups didn't get the same treatment.

As it will be discussed in the next section, domestic legislation which for most of the part was in function of the nationalizing policies of the state, was mostly partial and selective for as it didn't include all the minority groups living in the country. Bosnian Muslims as well as other Muslims in Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandjak profited from Article 10 of Yugoslavia's Peace Treaty and could keep organizing their religious life as they did before, including the application of *shari'a* law in family matters. As far as the language issues are concerned, in the case of Albanians, only their linguistic difference was recognized (in census) but not linguistic rights (there were no schools in Albanian).

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<sup>98</sup> Based both on the application of the Minority Treaty in practice and classification of minorities in official censuses (which was done only in basis of language and religion), it can be said that the new state recognized only religious and linguistic differences of its citizens.

## 2.2. Domestic legislation and nationalizing policies

Because of the prevalence of the idea of national unity and adoption, as well as subsequent implementation, of various nationalizing policies, Yugoslavia's attitude toward minorities was quite aggressive and went at the detriment of the well being of the minorities. When compared with the international undertakings of the country (Minority Treaty), the scope of minority rights was constantly being eroded and restricted in practice.<sup>99</sup> To begin with, both 1921 and 1931 constitutions were very much in disfavor of minorities. As far as the right on education in mother tongue is concerned, the former included only one a general provision (it had to be regulated with the law)<sup>100</sup> with regard to minority rights. Article 16 (right on education) guarantees to 'minorities of other races and languages'<sup>101</sup> education in mother language in elementary schools. So, even when the issue of the minority schools was regulated with the Law on National Education (1929), it forbade opening of the private schools in minority languages (many Hungarian and German schools were closed as a consequence) and some of the provisions of the law (especially those with regard to the opening of the new parallels with no less than 30 children from the ranks of minorities) were not implemented permanently and were bypassed completely in south regions (Kosovo, Macedonia, Sandjak).<sup>102</sup> Article 16, however, was not included in the Constitution of 1931.<sup>103</sup> Indeed, the 1931 constitution doesn't include even a single provision that explicitly refers to minority rights.

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<sup>99</sup> Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 288.

<sup>100</sup> The exercise of his right needed to be further regulated by the law. After several attempts (when draft laws were prepared in 1919, 1921, 1925, 1927, and 1928, but never implemented), on 5 December 1929 Yugoslavia adopted the Law on National Education. It is characteristic of this law that it didn't express the right to education in mother language as a right in principle, but it had to be decided in case-by-case basis. Since the decision and conditions to open schools in minority languages (including private ones) was almost fully discretionary for the officials the ministry of education, some minorities, above all Hungarians and Germans, could profit more from this law. For more on this see: Charles Jelavich, "South Slav Education; Was There Yugoslavism," 104; Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 287-289; Gazmend Zajmi, *Vepra 2*, 68-75; Enikő A. Sajti, *Hungarians in the Voivodina 1918-1947* (Boulder: Atlantic Research and Publications Inc., 2003), 157-160.

<sup>101</sup> See: *Ustav Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca od 28. juna, 1921. god.*

<sup>102</sup> Gazmend Zajmi, *Vepra 2*, 164-165.

<sup>103</sup> See: *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia*, Belgrade, September 3, 1931.

Nevertheless, state refusal to implement commitments to grant positive economic, political, or cultural rights to minority groups went a step further. Being aware of the fact that the very existence of different minority groups within the borders of Yugoslavia went against the official state ideology ‘one state, one king, one language’, the state started implementing various policies which aimed at political disempowerment, economic discrimination.<sup>104</sup> Immediately after its creation, the state of Serbs-Croats and Slovenes embarked on the so called ‘land’ or ‘agrarian’ reform. Based on a proclamation made by Regent Alexander on 6 January 1919 where he promised to solve ‘justly’ the agrarian question and eliminate big estates, on 25 September 1919 was published a Preliminary Decree on Preparation of Agrarian Reform (*Predhodne odredbe za pripremu agrarne reforme*).<sup>105</sup> This decree was the bases of consequent decrees and laws that were adopted throughout 20s and early 30s, which opened the way for confiscation of lands, colonization of land and deportation of people in regions of Kosovo and Macedonia (referred to as ‘South Serbia’), as well as Bosnia-Herzegovina and to a lesser extent Vojvodina.<sup>106</sup> Though all minorities living in these regions were affected by these policies, as it will be discussed in next chapters, the regions of Macedonia and Kosovo were mostly affected from these anti-minority policies.

To conclude with this chapter, despite the international obligations that interwar Yugoslavia undertook at the Versailles Conference, it treated minorities mostly according to its national interests and in line with the state’s ideology of ‘national unity’. Certainly, the overall international circumstances (which undoubtedly didn’t favor minorities) of post-1918 period made things easier for Yugoslavia when it comes to its minorities. Though legally

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<sup>104</sup> According to Klemenčič and Žagar, only the German minority, which was well organized and economically strong, had a major influence on Yugoslav politics. Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar, *The former Yugoslavia’s diverse peoples*, 111.

<sup>105</sup> See: Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941* (Prishtinë: Instituti i Historisë së Kosovës, 1981), 47; Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva. Nacionalne manjine u Jugoslaviju 1918-1941* (Beograd: Inis, 2005), 327.

<sup>106</sup> Effects of the agrarian reform and colonization in Kosovo, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia will be discussed in more detail in the subsequent chapters. For effects of agrarian reform in Vojvodina see: Enikő A. Sajti, *Hungarians in the Voivodina 1918-194*, 164-179.

recognized (explicitly in the Minority Treaty and implicitly in 1921 Constitution), minority groups<sup>107</sup> in Yugoslavia remained for most of the part marginalized and unrecognized. Adopting Sassen's phrase, members of minorities in Yugoslavia were "formal citizens who [are] fully authorized yet not fully recognized".<sup>108</sup> Moreover, they were discriminated in any domain, from language rights, to education, culture and political participation.

Will Kymlicka argues that minorities, by being the greatest obstacle to the goal (or myth) of a unified nation-state, are the first target of nationalizing policies and most in need of 'nationalization'; hence, they end up being subject of "multiple and deeply rooted forms of exclusion and subordination [...] often combining political marginalization, economic disadvantage, and cultural domination."<sup>109</sup> This is the case with interwar Yugoslavia too. However, what interests us here is not that much the marginalization and discrimination *per se*, but different modes of treatment of minorities, various scales of oppression and subordination, as well as causes of the differentiation by the state. In this context, Albanians and Bosnian Muslims represent two cases which exemplify state's differentiated treatment of minorities. Thus, in what follows, first we will look at socio-cultural and political position of these groups within the state and society and then make a comparison between them.

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<sup>107</sup> Though, from the formal legal aspect, all the 'racial, linguistic and religious' groups were guaranteed linguistic rights (including education in mother language) in accordance with the Minority Treaty and 1921 Constitution (article 16), apart from the census categories, there was no document which explicitly determined which groups enjoy the status of national minority. This legal obscurity gave the state enough space for maneuvering and applied its international obligations toward minority groups in a selective manner.

<sup>108</sup> Saskia Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights. From Medieval to Global Assemblages* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2006), 294.

<sup>109</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys. Navigating the New International Politics of Diversity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 65.

### 3. Bosnian Muslims as the religious other of south Slavic people

*“I will join any initiative which brings freedom to our people, because I have had enough of Turkish and German governance.”*  
- Džemaludin Čaušević<sup>110</sup> -

In the official doctrine of ‘national unity’ of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Bosnian Muslims weren’t recognized in national or ethnic terms. Their ‘otherness’ was recognized only with regard to religion. Bosnian Muslims were mentioned neither in the country’s official name nor in censuses<sup>111</sup>, where they were put under the category of ‘Serb or Croat’ linguistic group. Thus, the official stand of the new state’s leadership toward Bosnian Muslims was quite clear – they were Serbs of the Islamic faith.<sup>112</sup> However, their distinct religious (Muslim) identity was officially recognized under the constitutional right of “freedom of faith”. Though Article 12 of the 1921 Constitution stipulates that “exercise of citizenship and political is independent from the confessional faith”<sup>113</sup>, Article 10 of the Minority Treaty accords “the Musulmans in the matter of family law and personal status provisions suitable for regulating these matters in accordance with Musulman usage.”<sup>114</sup> Thus, Bosnian Muslims managed to maintain some kind of autonomy on religious affairs and time after time get a share in the political system of Yugoslavia.

Indeed, both Croat and Serb nationalisms didn’t left a room for a separate Bosnian Muslim (national) identity.<sup>115</sup> After a long period of living in big empires - during the periods

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<sup>110</sup> Words of Bosnia’s *Reis ul-ulema* in a meeting with Slovene politician Anton Korošec on the eve of south-Slav unification (1917). Cited in: Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životom Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca* (Sarajevo: Svjetlost, 1977), 18.

<sup>111</sup> According to the 1921 census, in Bosnia there were living 588,247 Muslims. If one adds other Muslims (minus Albanians) living in pre-1912 Serbia and Montenegro and Novi Pazar, the approximate strength of the Bosnian Muslim community yield to 727,650 persons. See: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 50.

<sup>112</sup> Charles Jelavich, “South Slav Education; Was There Yugoslavism,” 95.

<sup>113</sup> *Ustav Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca od 28. juna, 1921. god.*

<sup>114</sup> Treaty between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and the Serb-Croat-Slovene State. St. Germain-en-Laye, 10 September 1919.

<sup>115</sup> This goes back to earlier periods of the development of pan-Serb, pan-Croat or Yugoslav national ideas. As, Fikret Adanir argues, “neither the Illyrian Movement of Ljudevit Gaj nor Vuk Karadžić’s all-embracing Serbianism left room for a Bosnian-Muslim identity.” See: Fikret Adanir, “The Formation of a “Muslim” Nation in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Historiographic Discussion,” in *The Ottomans and the Balkans. A Discussion of*

of the Turkish Ottoman Empire (1463–1878) and Austria-Hungary<sup>116</sup> (1878–1918) - after WWI, when Bosnian Muslims became part of the south-Slavic state, they experienced “the expansionist ambitions of the Serbs, who regarded the Kingdom of Yugoslavia as though it were an enlarged Serbia, and of the Croats, who were hoping to resurrect of their own.”<sup>117</sup> The more the Kingdom authorities strengthened centralism and unitarism the more they negated the national individuality of the Bosnian Muslims (as well as of the other Yugoslav nationalities), thus offering two possibilities to Bosnian Muslims: to become either Serbs or Croats.<sup>118</sup> Consequently, though they considered themselves part of the south-Slavic people, Bosnian Muslims were very hesitant and pessimistic at the very creation of the state of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Things were further deteriorated by the outburst of violence in Bosnia immediately after the end of the WWI, where in many cases Bosnian Muslims were subject of violence, looting and expropriation from the side of Serbs (many of whom considered to be subordinated and mistreated by the ruling Bosnian Muslim elite in Ottoman and later Habsburg Empire.<sup>119</sup>

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*Historiography* eds. Fikret Adanir and Suraiya Faroqhi (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 269; Sabrina Petra Ramet, “Primordial Ethnicity or Modern Nationalism: The Case of Yugoslavia’s Muslims, Reconsidered,” in *Muslim communities reemerge: historical perspectives on nationality, politics, and opposition in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* editor (of the English edition) Edward Allworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 116-122.

<sup>116</sup> During the Habsburg rule in Bosnia, Benjámín Kállay, the Joint Imperial Minister of Finance, charged with the administration of Bosnia, promoted a new political concept *bošnjaštvo* (Bosnianhood) – a kind of supranational identity - in order to generate loyalty toward the Dual Monarchy and compete with Serb and Croat nationalisms in Bosnia. Nonetheless, many Bosnian Muslims continued to view themselves as members of the Islamic community (*umma*), whereas some educated people opted for Serb or Croat identity. For more on the concept of *bošnjaštvo* and role of Kállay see: Fikret Adanir, “The Formation of a “Muslim” Nation in Bosnia-Herzegovina: A Historiographic Discussion,” 270-276; Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Evolution of Its Political and Legal Institutions*, 204-205; Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History* (London: Papermac, 1994), 147-150; Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day* (London: Saqi, 2007), 73-76.

<sup>117</sup> Carole Rogel, *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and its Aftermath*, 28.

<sup>118</sup> Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar, *The former Yugoslavia’s diverse peoples*, 133.

<sup>119</sup> According to the data presented by Ramet, from 1918 until 1920, about 2000 Bosnian Muslims were killed by local Serbs. Also in 1924 armed Montenegrins attacked some Bosnian Muslim villages killing some 600 people. See: Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 49. For the elements of Serb triumphalism against Bosnian Muslims, namely attacks and pillages in Muslim villages after the arrival of the Serbian army, see also: Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 162; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 368; Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 107; Robert J. Donia and John V. A. Fine Jr., *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed* (London: Hurst and Company, 1994), 122-123; Justin McCarthy, *Death and Exile: The Ethnic Cleansing of Ottoman Muslims 1821-1922* (Princeton: The Darwin Press Inc., 1995), 135-178, 333-340.

Nevertheless, as far as the Bosnian Muslim elite is concerned, for most of its part it was divided between pro-Serb, pro-Croat and a pro-Yugoslav stream, which, however, were united by a common devotion and allegiance to the religion. As Banac put it, “though the Serb and Croat national ideologies, in their strikingly different ways, certainly posed a danger for Muslim religioethnic particularism, the Westernized Muslim was inclining to go over to the side of their adverse critics, Serbs and Croats, who sought to “awaken” the Muslims to Serb and Croat national movement.”<sup>120</sup> But, when faced with aggressive ‘nationalization’ agenda of Croats and Serbs, most of the Bosnian Muslim elite and most of the ordinary people were reluctant to support either side, for as such action meant alienation of the other part and splitting apart of their community.<sup>121</sup> Thus, a third way was to be chosen. The Bosnian Muslim leadership tried to reconcile the principle of a unitary Yugoslav nation-state (which was unavoidable at that stage) with the principle of self-rule for Bosnia and Herzegovina, which, in words of Hoare, would embrace neither “Muslim nationhood nor Bosnian statehood”.<sup>122</sup>

This line of policy, with minor alternations, was carried out by the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (*Jugoslavaska Muslimanska Organizacija - JMO*), a party established in 1919 that became the political voice of the Bosnian Muslims throughout the period 1919-1941. Before looking at the role of JMO in Yugoslav politics, however, it is important to analyze the overall political developments and religious issues in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

### **3.1. Initial political and economic disempowerment**

Bosnian Muslims entered the life into new south-Slavic state with mixed feelings. Though many Bosnian Muslims had suffered a lot during WWI (having to participate actively

<sup>120</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 362.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

<sup>122</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 108.

and supply Habsburg troops), still they weren't that ready to see their country being swallowed up by an extended Serbia. In the decisive moments of the creation of the state of Serbs-Croats and Serbs, however, Bosnian Muslim leaders<sup>123</sup> and people<sup>124</sup> in general were supporting the idea of a common south-Slavic state. Following the creation of National Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and secession from Dual Monarchy in October 1918, delegates coming from Bosnia-Herzegovina created a separate National Council for Bosnia (31 October 1913) and later National Government of Bosnia-Herzegovina (3 November 1918) and also were present in the ceremony of the 1 December 1918.<sup>125</sup> These institutions, however, had a very short life. Already in January 1919, Bosnia's government was replaced with a Bosnian Provincial Administration" (*Zemaljska Vlada*) appointed from Belgrade, which had its departments and competences shrank.<sup>126</sup> Local administration as well was affected by these changes. According to Hoare, Beograd's rule in Bosnia involved also "the systematic purge of Bosnian bureaucracy inherited from the Austro-Hungarian period".<sup>127</sup> Thus, their small number within the provisional institutions set up following the Yugoslav unification in 1918, can be explained by "the scant attention paid to them by other South Slavs"<sup>128</sup>, especially Serbs.

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<sup>123</sup> For the matter of fact, Bosnian Muslim leaders were not fully united when it comes to the future of Bosnia. There were such leaders as Šerif Arnautović and Safvet-beg Bagašić, that were in favor of an autonomous status within Hungary, whereas Bosnia's *Reis ul-Ulema* Džemaludin Čaušević and head of the Bosnian Chamber of Commerce, Mehmet Spaho (later president of JMO), that were in favor of a common Yugoslav state. For more on this see: Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 159-162; Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 93-95; Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Evolution of Its Political and Legal Institutions*, 265-266.

<sup>124</sup> It is indicative the fact that when Serbian troops entered Sarajevo on 6 November 1918 (having been invited by the Bosnian provincial government to suppress the disorder and unrest), they were greeted as liberators by the people in streets. See: Robert J. Donia and John V. A. Fine Jr., *Bosnia and Herzegovina: A Tradition Betrayed*, 123; Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životum Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 27.

<sup>125</sup> There were 6 Bosnian Muslims in National Council of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, 2 in the Central Committee (Dr. Halid-beg Hrasnica and Hamid Svrzo), who also were present in the proclamation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina: Evolution of Its Political and Legal Institutions*, 267-271.

<sup>126</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 102.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>128</sup> Xavier Bougarel, "Bosnian Muslims and the Yugoslav Idea," in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Ideas 1918-1922* ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 102.

Apart from the political disempowerment in the interim period (1918-1921) and violent actions against the Muslims in the period following the creation of Yugoslavia, Bosnian Muslims were affected immensely by the agrarian reform too. Following the interim decree on land reform issued (for all Yugoslavia) on 25 February 1919, two additional decrees (for Bosnia and Herzegovina) on transfer of ownership from landlords to the serfs and the compulsory purchase of *beglik* holdings were issued on 21 July 1919 and 14 February 1920.<sup>129</sup> During the agrarian reform which in Bosnia practically lasted until 1931, more than one million hectares of land were distributed to tenants on *agalik* and *beglik* lands.<sup>130</sup> Due to the fact that most of the landlords in Bosnia were Muslims the agrarian question there “could be solved only at the expense of one confessional community”.<sup>131</sup> The agrarian reform which amounts to “a massive transfer of economic power in Bosnia-Herzegovina away from the Muslims and in favor of Serbs,”<sup>132</sup> in eyes of the most of Bosnian leaders, “bore the stamp of systematic destruction of Muslims.”<sup>133</sup>

Undoubtedly, the state political and economic measures undertaken in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the initial period of the creation of Yugoslavia had enormous negative effects among the members of the Bosnian Muslim community; hence, disempowerment was inevitable. On the other side, however, as a result of these measures, the Bosnian Muslim population started to organize itself.<sup>134</sup> The organization took the form of a political party – JMO, which used political bargaining (solely) to improve the position of Bosnian Muslims within the State of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. Thus, better times were to come for Bosnian Muslims.

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<sup>129</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 108.

<sup>130</sup> According to estimates, some 113,103 families of former serfs obtained 775,233 hectares of land and some other 54,728 families of various types of tenants of *beglik* land obtained some 400,000 hectares of cultivated land. See: John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, 110; Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 108.

<sup>131</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 367.

<sup>132</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 108;

<sup>133</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 368. See also: Milovan Djilas, *The Bosniak. Adil Zulfikarpasic in dialogue with Milovan Djilas and Nadezda Gace* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), 12-15.

<sup>134</sup> Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar, *The former Yugoslavia's diverse peoples*, 132.

### 3.2. Role of the Yugoslav Muslim Organization in empowering Bosnian Muslims

The growing oppression of Bosnian Muslims in the initial phase of the creation of the Yugoslavia was an alarming threat which “prompted the Muslims into a common defense that united both landlords and smallholders, Westernized intellectuals of Croat and Serb orientation and traditional *ulema*.”<sup>135</sup> Thus, already in 1919 various political groupings<sup>136</sup> emerged in an attempt to organize political resistance. This initial political diversity among Bosnian Muslims was eliminated after the creation of the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (JMO) on 16 February 1919, as a union of several political groups of Bosnian Muslims.<sup>137</sup> Though initially JMO sought to embrace all the Muslims of Yugoslavia, in a short time it limited itself only in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina<sup>138</sup>, thus becoming “the [Bosnian] Muslim’s only partisan refuge”.<sup>139</sup> The program<sup>140</sup> of JMO represents a consensus between the more centralist and pro-Serb wing of the party comprising of the intellectuals (including Ibrahim Maglajlić, JMO’s first president) gathered around the cultural society ‘Gajred’ (found in 1909) and ‘federal’ and Croat-leaning intellectuals led by Mehmet Spaho.

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<sup>135</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 368.

<sup>136</sup> In 1919 several groupings were formed in Bosnia Herzegovina: Muslim Organization (*Muslimanska organizacija*), Yugoslav Muslim Democracy (*Jugoslovenska Muslimanska Demokratija*), Muslim Union (*Muslimanski savez*) etc. See: Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 163; Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životum Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 47-54.

<sup>137</sup> JMO gathered groups of people from different social backgrounds and professions. For example, the central committee of JMO, which had 31 people, included: 7 landlords, 5 mayors, 3 professors, 3 work officers, 2 judges, 2 doctors, 2 *mufii*-s, and 1 lawyer, journalist, entrepreneur, teacher, merchant, librarian and district official. See: Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životum Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 57. See also: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 368.

<sup>138</sup> JMO was unable to bridge the gap that existed between the Bosnian Muslims and other Muslims in Yugoslavia. This was partly because of the local interests of the JMO leadership and partly because Belgrade was active in limiting JMO political and cultural activities in the territory of Bosnia-Herzegovina solely. See: Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims: denial of a nation* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 100.

<sup>139</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 371.

<sup>140</sup> The program affirms at the same time “national unity of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in a unitary state based on 1 December Declaration” and “preservation of existing regional borders with their autonomous representation and separate provincial governments”. It considers Muslims as “branch of the Serbo-Croat tribe”. Other goals of the program include “just solution for the agrarian question” and fair compensation for the confiscated land, equality of Islam with other religions, independence of *shari’a* courts and preservation of *Vakuf*-s, educational and religious autonomy etc. For more on the program orientation of the JMO see: Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životum Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 52, 57, (including footnote 161).

Starting with the elections for the Constituent Assembly (held on 28 November 1920), where JMO won 24 parliamentary seats, it continuously won the support of the absolute majority of Bosnian Muslims. This support, which meant parliamentary weight, in return was traded by JMO for economic, social and cultural favors for Bosnian Muslims. Immediately after the 1920 elections, JMO entered in coalition with Pašić, with Spaho and Hamdija Karamehmedović being appointed as ministers of trade (and industry) and national health respectively.<sup>141</sup> However, the turning point with regard to the factorization of JMO and improving of the conditions for Bosnian Muslims was June 1921, when JMO joined votes with Serb (Radicals and Democrats), Cemiyet and other smaller groups to vote the first Yugoslav constitution, known as the “Vidovdan Constitution”. In this case, JMO exchanged its support for the constitution (a centralizing one) for the preservation of old Bosnian borders (within the new administrative division of the country), maintenance of the autonomy of Bosnian Islamic religious institutions, and guarantees of compensation for those affected by the land reform.<sup>142</sup> In line with this, article 135 of the 1921 constitutions stipulates that Bosnia Herzegovina remains within its existing borders and that its existing districts shall be treated as provinces. Thus, though separated into six *oblasti* (article 135 required the division to be completely within the framework of Bosnia’s historical boundaries), according to Malcolm, thanks to the political maneuvering of Mehmet Spaho, “Bosnia was the only constituent element of Yugoslavia which retained its identity.”<sup>143</sup>

Further, pursuant to the article 10 of the Yugoslavia Minorities Treaty of 1919, article 109 of the 1921 Constitution allows *shari’ah* judges to “adjudicate on the family and

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>142</sup> Xavier Bougarel, “Bosnian Muslims and the Yugoslav Idea,” 102. For more on the content of the agreement of 15 March 1921 between Pašić and JMO see: Atif Purivatara, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životum Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 86-93; Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 109; Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 283.

<sup>143</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Bosnia: A Short History*, 165.

inheritance matters of the Muslims.”<sup>144</sup> As already discussed in chapter 2, Minority Treaty also recognized the institution of *reis-ul ulema*<sup>145</sup> as the highest Muslim authority in Bosnia and Herzegovina and extended proper protection for mosques, *vakufs* and other religious charitable institutions. Thus, the institution of *reis-ul ulema* was responsible for organization of religious schools and other charitable institutions according to Muslim rules and, what matters mostly in this case, quite independently from Belgrade. As Imamović argues, these provisions, legally, elevated Bosnian Muslims at the level of religious minority.<sup>146</sup>

Due to its success in gaining high support among Muslims in Bosnia, and its ability to cooperate and compromise with other parties, JMO was most of the time part of the government until the proclamation of dictatorship in 1929. Indeed, these successes led JMO during 1927-1929 toward victories in municipal elections and dominate (regardless Muslims’ smaller number of population as compared to Serbs in Bosnia) organs of governments at the municipal and *oblast* level.<sup>147</sup> Indeed, these kinds of empowerments of Muslims were seen with great suspicion in Belgrade. As a result, Serb radical elements in Bosnia became more aggressive toward Muslims, and in one occasion even tried to assassinate Mehmed Spaho in fall 1927.<sup>148</sup> Pressures from Croatian parties and paramilitaries weren’t missing either.

Nonetheless, the period from the declaration of dictatorship in 1929 until 1934 was quite turbulent and negative for Bosnian Muslims. First, Bosnia and Herzegovina was divided (for the first time in centuries) with the *banovina* model of territorial organization of Yugoslavia. This new territorial organization of the country rendered Bosnian Muslims into minority in all the four *banovina* where Bosnian Muslims lived. Another loss for Bosnian Muslims was the Law on the Religious Community of Yugoslavia (31 January 1930), which

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<sup>144</sup> See: *Ustav Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca od 28. juna, 1921. god.*

<sup>145</sup> The institution of *Reis-ul Ulema* was created in 1909, with the responsibility for the preservation of cultural and religious institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

<sup>146</sup> Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 287.

<sup>147</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 114.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

deprived Bosnian Muslims of the religious autonomy.<sup>149</sup> Civic parties were banned two in this period with JMO joining other political groupings in opposing the royal regime and quest for multi-party elections. Surely, a positive development in this period is the abolition of the agrarian reform, which begun with the passage of the Law on the Abolition of Agrarian reform on Large Estates.<sup>150</sup>

In the elections of May 1935, though JMO was part of the 'United Opposition' coalition, it entered the government of Stojadinović<sup>151</sup> thus continuing their tradition of political bargaining. Consequently further favors were provided for Bosnian Muslims. First, as part of the agreement with Stojadinović to join his government, Spaho managed to receive concessions with regard to Islamic Religious Community, which seat was moved back to Sarajevo and later in 1938 his brother Fehim Spaho was appointed as *Reis-ul Ulema* of Yugoslavia.<sup>152</sup> Further, as Minister of Communications in Stojadinović cabinet, Spaho managed to secure material advantages for Bosnian Muslims employing<sup>153</sup> them in railway companies. This strategy of persisting to be part of the government by any means necessary (which nevertheless brought about good things for Bosnian Muslims) and focus on material advantages of Bosnian Muslims made JMO be considered as the political protector of Bosnian Muslims for most of the inter-war period.

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<sup>149</sup> According to this law, there has to be only one (instead of two: *Reis-ul Ulema* and Grand Mufti, that existed previously) united religious community which will be based in Belgrade and which will be under direct control of the Ministry of Justice. Immediately after the adoption of the law, Yugoslav authorities forced the *Reil-ul Ulema* Džemaludin Čaušević from the office and appointed Ibrahim ef. Magljajić (a pro-Serb mufti) as the new *Reil-ul Ulema*. See: Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 307; Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, Ibid., 118.

<sup>150</sup> This change was undertaken in order to avoid discontent on the part of the Bosnian Muslim peasantry. Nevertheless, remittances (though under the real value of the land) were supposed to be paid for a period of 40 years (until 1975). Until 1941, only 10 per cent of the remittances were made. See: Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 310; Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 49.

<sup>151</sup> Indeed from this moment to the start of World War II, JMO representatives were continuously part of the government. See: Robert J. Donia and John V. A. Fine Jr., *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 131.

<sup>152</sup> See: Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 123; Mustafa Imamović, *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 323-324.

<sup>153</sup> Hugh Seton-Watson writes that when Spaho was minister of Communications, "it became a standing joke that railway jobs were monopolized by befezzed Bosnians." See: Hugh Seton-Watson, *Eastern Europe Between the Wars 1918-1941*, 233.

In any case, the gains that JMO secured, experience taught Bosnian Muslims, “could just as easily be taken away.”<sup>154</sup> Some of them were taken away in 1929 and even more in 1939 after the signing of the Serb-Croat *Sporazum*<sup>155</sup> at the detriment of Bosnia-Herzegovina and Bosnian Muslims. This proves that the most difficult task of the JMO was to try to keep a balance between Serbs and Croats in Yugoslav politics and both prevent their nationalist aspirations in Bosnia and maintain an autonomous Bosnia Herzegovina.

### 3.2.1. Between the lines: making the difference in the Croat-Serb political disputes

Throughout the existence of the inter-war Yugoslavia, the Serb-Croat political conflict directly affected Bosnian Muslims. Bosnia and Herzegovina was a battlefield for both Croats and Serbs who considered it crucial to their nationalist ambitions. By the same token, JMO played the role of the swing political groups, which would either join centralist or federalist block. Typically, JMO used to support the centralist block (understood as Yugoslav unitarism) “against the centrifugal tendencies”<sup>156</sup>, especially in the case of 1921 constitution and participation in Pašić’s governments. On the other hand, JMO’s vision of an autonomous Bosnia<sup>157</sup> was an open challenge to centralism. In other cases, when interests of JMO and Bosnian Muslims would be endangered, JMO would in occasions find a common language

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<sup>154</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 376.

<sup>155</sup> Bosnian Muslims and the JMO leadership were angered very much for having been ignored during the Maček-Cvetković talks. As a result, Džafer Kulenović (who replaced Mehmed Spaho at the head of JMO in 1939 after the death of the latter) pushed for the idea of the creation of a Bosnian *banovina*. Moreover, Kulenović was one of the main initiators of the Muslim Movement for the Autonomy of Bosnia-Herzegovina. See: Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 108; Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 130.

<sup>156</sup> Robert J. Donia and John V. A. Fine Jr., *Bosnia and Herzegovina*, 125.

<sup>157</sup> It is important noting that the concept of ‘autonomous Bosnia-Herzegovina’, according to JMO politicians, implied religious autonomy for Bosnian Muslims and geographical integrity of Bosnia and Herzegovina. JMO leaders also pushed for implementation of the principle of national key (proportional representation) of all three groups, Serbs, Muslims and Croats. In many aspects, this vision resembled political and administrative regulation of Bosnia during Austro-Hungarian Empire. Nonetheless, almost throughout the interwar period there was no serious attempt from JMO leadership to recognize Bosnian Muslims as a separate national group. See: Francine Friedman, *The Bosnian Muslims*, 94; Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životom Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 30.

with the federalist block of Radić.<sup>158</sup> In 1935 elections too, JMO was part of the opposition parties' block. However, "its characteristically tactical interaction between the numerous strategically incompatible forces"<sup>159</sup> never went at the detriment of its vision of an autonomous Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Actually, the position of Bosnian Muslims in the Serb-Croat relations was not merely a matter of political football; rather, it was strongly linked to the issue of nationality and national feeling among Bosnian Muslims. Thus, the division existed among Bosnian Muslim society and intellectuals. "Already in the mid-1920s, the divisions between the pro-Croat and pro-Serb Muslim intellectuals grew deeper, as was demonstrated by the existence of two rival Muslim cultural societies: *Gajret* (The Effort) and *Narodna uzdanica* (The People's Hope)."<sup>160</sup> JMO too faced such problems. Most of the JMO deputies in the National Assembly in Belgrade would declare themselves as Serbs or Croats.<sup>161</sup> But with the Serbs and Croats pressing for 'nationalization' of Bosnian Muslims, the latter resisted more thus opting for a distinct religious identity. Caught between Serbs and Croats, JMO officially endorsed the ideology of Yugoslavism (with Bosnian Muslims as part of the three-named people), for as it provided them with some space for maneuvering. So, despite the various attempts made by Serbs and Croats to 'nationalize' Bosnian Muslims, only a small number of Muslims, especially intellectuals, Croatized/Serbianized and identified themselves as Croats or Serbs of Muslim religion. So, this was a situation in which the declining to identify with the Croats or Serbs, strengthened a distinct Bosnian Muslim (national) identity.<sup>162</sup> Certainly, Bosnian Muslims in the interwar Yugoslavia moved from the position of seeing themselves as either Serb or Croat or a symbiosis of both to the stage of affirming their distinct religious and even

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<sup>158</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 376.

<sup>159</sup> Ibid.

<sup>160</sup> Xavier Bougarel, "Bosnian Muslims and the Yugoslav Idea," 103.

<sup>161</sup> In 1920, 15 MPs from JMO declared themselves as Croats, 2 Serbs, 5 were undeclared and one declared as Bosnian. Whereas, in 1923, all the JMO's deputies, but Mehmet Spaho, were declared as Croats. See: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 375.

<sup>162</sup> Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar, *The former Yugoslavia's diverse peoples*, 133.

national identity. As Bougarel put it, “this political evolution of the Bosnian Muslims explains why in April 1941 they did not really mourn the collapse of the first Yugoslavia.”<sup>163</sup> In the same way, Banac is right to conclude that in interwar Yugoslavia “Bosnian Muslims only lacked a national name.”<sup>164</sup>

So, religious particularism was the core of the Bosnian Muslim identity in the interwar period. Faced with Serb and Croat nationalizing pressures, Bosnian Muslim leaders, in general, chose not to declare their ethnicity. JMO, through its program and its paper *Pravda* (Justice) considered Bosnian Muslims to be a branch (*ogranak*) of the three-name people, Serb-Croat symbiosis, or simply as Yugoslavs. The program of JMO, which was adopted in February 1919, apart from the emphasis put to the equality of three tribes’ names, points out that “Muslims have never given up their homeland or language” and that they have preserved all the features of a real nationalism, but are not aware only of the tribe’s name (*plemenskog imena*).<sup>165</sup> Further, as Purivatra points out, the fact that JMO considered Yugoslavism (*jugoslovenstvo*) to be the easiest way toward rapprochement and unification, indicates JMO’s attitude toward national question, that is, “in spirit of the predominant thesis of a united people with three tribe’s names.”<sup>166</sup> Certainly, the very name of the Bosnian Muslim organization tells about its attitude toward national question and the primacy given to Yugoslav identity as compared to a Serb or Croat one. Be as it may, as Ramet argues, “although the Muslims displayed considerable confusion, or perhaps opportunism, ethnically, they never compromised their Islamic religious interests, and their flirtation with both the Croatian and Serbian national movements never dulled their consciousness of their distinctive

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<sup>163</sup> Xavier Bougarel, “Bosnian Muslims and the Yugoslav Idea,” 104.

<sup>164</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 373.

<sup>165</sup> Cited in: Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životum Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 388.

<sup>166</sup> *Ibid.*, 388-389.

religio-cultural heritage.”<sup>167</sup> Thus, Bosnian Muslims and JMO acted as a confessional-group in defense of their cultural and religious particularity and economic interests.

Briefly summarizing this chapter, being in an inferior position (numerically and politically), Bosnian Muslims developed a unique strategy of trading their political support for economic and, at certain levels, political weight. Thanks to this strategy adopted by JMO and Mehmet Spaho, Bosnian Muslims managed to somehow recover from the initial underestimation and mistreatment in the new state and enjoy certain autonomous rights for most part of the interwar period. As discussed above, JMO’s main aim was to preserve Bosnia-Herzegovina’s autonomy, preserve Bosnian Muslim’s religious institutions inherited from before and avoid ‘nationalization’ (assimilation). And the recipe for this was: support for the government (unitarism) and use of Yugoslav<sup>168</sup> label while keeping their distinct religious identity. In most cases JMO supported Serb parties, but *Sporazum* marked the end of the “pro-Serb course in mainstream Muslim politics.”<sup>169</sup> Bosnian Muslims thus turned against Serbs at the moment when they were betrayed by Belgrade, namely the moment when Bosnia was dismembered politically and territorially. Nonetheless, Bosnian Muslims were quite united in pursuing a political course in defending their rights within Yugoslavia, thus continuously and massively supporting JMO all the time.

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<sup>167</sup> Sabrina Petra Ramet, “Primordial Ethnicity or Modern Nationalism: The Case of Yugoslavia’s Muslims, Reconsidered,” 127.

<sup>168</sup> In the name of an all-inclusive Yugoslav ideology, and surely, for political reasons, JMO also supported centralized education in Yugoslavia. See: Charles Jelavich, “South Slav Education; Was There Yugoslavism,” 100.

<sup>169</sup> Marko Attila Hoare, *The History of Bosnia From the Middle Ages to the Present Day*, 131.

## 4. Albanians: the irritant element within ‘Old Serbia’

*The pan-Serbian regime... has decided to denationalize Kosovo completely, by savagely suppressing the resistance of the Albanians and especially by seizing their land and colonizing it with Serbs.*  
- Kosta Novaković –<sup>170</sup>

From the very beginning, the relationship between the Serb-dominated Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Albanians was marked by a sense of extreme antipathy and mistrust. Serb elites, who came to control the new state, couldn't bear the fact that Albanians were the predominant ethnic group in ‘Old Serbia’ (term used by Serbs for Kosovo) place of the great Serb myth of the “Battle of Kosovo”.<sup>171</sup> On the other side, Albanians, most probably the most reluctant minority to be included in the new state<sup>172</sup>, had a fresh memory of violence, killings and deportations caused by Serb army during Balkan wars in 1912-1913.<sup>173</sup> Indeed, as Banac put it, ‘the second occupation’ of Kosovo and Macedonia were ‘as brutal as anything that happened in 1912-1913’.<sup>174</sup> About half million<sup>175</sup> Albanians, like many other minority groups, were not seen as integral members of the new Yugoslav state (the very name of the state – both Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes and Kingdom of Yugoslavia, tacitly

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<sup>170</sup> Kosta Novaković was a Serb social-democrat and member of Yugoslav parliament in early 1920s. Taken from the article “The Colonization and Serbianization of Kosovo” published in the newspaper *Liria Kombëtare* (National Freedom), July 13, 1931, Geneva. Republished in the book: The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania – Institute of History, *The Truth on Kosova* (Tirana: Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1993), 168-170.

<sup>171</sup> For more on the theme of the myth of the “Battle of Kosovo”, see: Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo* (London: Hurst & Company, 2000), 176-210.

<sup>172</sup> Albanians which were mostly living in Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandjak of Novi Pazar became part of the Kingdom of Serbia and Kingdom of Montenegro after Balkan Wars. After the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, these former Turkish areas were integrated as the province named *South Serbia*.

<sup>173</sup> During the Balkan Wars, Serb and Montenegrin armies occupied Macedonia, Kosovo and Sandjak, which were previously part of Ottoman Empire. During this campaign, there were killed tens of thousands of Albanians (estimates range from 15-25 thousands), as much refugees, hundreds of burned villages, looting and forced conversion. People such as Lev Bronshtein (later known as Leon Trocky), Edith Durham or institutions such as Carnegie Endowment for International Peace have reported in detail these miseries. See: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, *Report of the International Commission to inquire into the causes and conduct of the Balkan Wars* (Washington, D.C: The Endowment, 1914); Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo: A Short History* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 251-256; Dimitrije Tucović, *Sërbia dhe Shqipëria: një kontribut për kritikën e politikës pushtuese të borgjezisë sërbe* (Prishtinë: Rilindja, 1975).

<sup>174</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 297.

<sup>175</sup> According to the 1921 census, in Yugoslavia were living 441,740 Albanians. However, scholars such as Banac and Malcolm consider this number to be underestimates and unrealistic. Some other scholars (Italian Antonio Baldacci and Romanian Nicolae Popp) put the total at 700 000 and 800 000 respectively. See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 268; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 55, 58, 298.

excludes Albanians and other non-Slavs).<sup>176</sup> The initiative of the state to start a process of disempowerment and denationalization of Albanians was immediate; confiscation of land and colonization (will be discussed in the next sections), closing down of Albanian language schools, action for collection of the arms were some of the measures taken by the state.

Immediately after the return of Kosovo under Serbian control (within Yugoslavia) all the secular schools with Albanian as the language of instruction (which were mainly opened during the Austro-Hungarian occupation 1914-1918) were banned.<sup>177</sup> Though almost every other minority in Yugoslavia had its own schools<sup>178</sup> and newspapers, Albanians could only choose between state (Serb) schools, *mektebs* (Islamic elementary schools) and private “Turkish schools” with teaching in Turkish.<sup>179</sup> On the other side, a network of state schools managed from Belgrade was established (in which Albanian pupils comprised about 30 per cent of all primary school children in the region of Kosovo)<sup>180</sup>, with the aim of creating loyal citizens who, with the passing of the time, would know of no other homeland outside Yugoslavia.<sup>181</sup> Nonetheless, a clandestine network of Albanian schools was established in late 1920s and early 1930s within religious institutions, which were open *en masse* especially after the adoption of the Law on Islamic Community in 1936.<sup>182</sup> Other cultural activities were also

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<sup>176</sup> Hugh Poulton, “Macedonians and Albanians as Yugoslavs,” in *Yugoslavism: Histories of a Failed Idea 1918-1922* ed. Dejan Djokić (London: Hurst & Company, 2003), 126.

<sup>177</sup> Denisa Kostovicova, “‘Shkolla Shqipe’ and Nationhood: Albanians in pursuit of education in the native language in interwar (1918-41) and post-autonomy (1989-98) Kosovo,” in *Albanian Identities: Myth and History* eds. Stephanie Schwandner-Sievers and Bernd J. Fischer (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2002), 157.

<sup>178</sup> According to the official statistics from 1929, Germans had 50, Hungarians 91, Rumanians 4, Slovaks 4, Russians 5, Italians 7, and Czechs 3 schools where their respective language was the only language of instruction. See: Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva*, 260.

<sup>179</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 267.

<sup>180</sup> In late 1930s there were only some 252 elementary and 13 secondary schools in the region of Kosovo with some 24 914 Serb and Montenegrin children and around 11 876 Albanian children. In secondary schools Albanians made around 2 per cent of the total number of pupils. See: Ali Hadri, “The Albanian Population of Kosova between two World Wars,” in *The Truth on Kosova* The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania – Institute of History (Tirana: Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1993), 136.

<sup>181</sup> Denisa Kostovicova, “‘Shkolla Shqipe’ and Nationhood,” 159.

<sup>182</sup> In late 1930s, there were around 300 *mektebs* with 11, 362 students and *medreses* in almost all the big towns in the region of Kosovo. Exactly in these institutions where many Albanian *imams* took up teaching in Albanian, thus illegally introducing Albanian language in religious schools. However, in an attempt to forestall nationalist activities of Albanians in religious institutions in Kosovo and Macedonia, state authorities in many cases replaced Albanian *imams* with those coming from Bosnia and who spoke no Albanian at all. Denisa Kostovicova

organized in full secrecy by illegal cultural groups, Catholic Church and these few Albanian students studying in Belgrade.<sup>183</sup> In general, the cultural and educational circumstances were very unfavorable for Albanians precisely because of the unjust state policies; state officials were afraid that state schools “far from Serbianizing Albanians, were providing them with the intellectual skills that could be used against the regime, started discouraging public education for Albanians.”<sup>184</sup> Undoubtedly, this caused backwardness and disabled an eventual emergence of cultural and intellectual Albanian elites in Yugoslavia.

All these state measures, which denied linguistic rights of Albanians, were in contradiction with the Minority Treaty (article 9) and 1921 Constitution (article 16) and Law on Popular Schools of 1929. *De facto*, all these documents bypassed Albanians. Certainly, this was not without any purpose. In fact, Yugoslav authorities negated the existence of national minorities in Southern and Old Serbia. In a response to Albanian criticism in the League of Nations, Yugoslav representatives defended their positing that in the southern regions (annexed before 1919) “there are no national minorities.”<sup>185</sup> The fact that in the official census of 1921 there were some 439,657 Albanian speaking persons doesn’t really (in Serb perspective) invalidate Serbian claims; most of the Serb political leaders embraced the “Arnautiš thesis” (developed by Milojević and Gopčević in the 19<sup>th</sup> century) which considers that there are no Albanians in Kosovo, but only Albanicised Serbs.<sup>186</sup> Logically, behind such

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provides a detailed analyzes of these events. See: Denisa Kostovicova, “‘Shkolla Shqipe’ and Nationhood,” 160-162.

<sup>183</sup> An underground group *Agimi* (The Down) was engaged in importing and distributing books from Albania. Another religious (catholic society) named “Society of St. Catherine” was actively engaged in spreading Albanian literature and culture. But very soon, one of the main members of this society, a famous priest and linguist Shtjefën Gjeçovi was murdered near Prizren on 14 October 1929. In late 30s some 70-80 Albanian students who were studying in Belgrade also found an illegal association called “Besa”, which according to the state officials ‘cooperated with Albanian Embassy in Belgrade in propagating irredentism’. See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 267; Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva*, 241-242 (note 189); Robert Elsie, *History of Albanian Literature* Volume 1 (Boulder: Social Science Monograph, 1995), 304.

<sup>184</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 299.

<sup>185</sup> Cited in: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 268.

<sup>186</sup> Apart from the negation of national identity, various Serb and later Yugoslav officials (such as Vladan Djordjević, Ljuba Davidović, Stojan Protić etc) were openly waging a campaign to dehumanize Albanians, calling them “prehumans, who slept in the trees to which they were fastened by their tails”, “people who satisfy

negation was hidden the strategy of assimilation of Albanians in the region of Kosovo and Macedonia.

Being subject to variety of pressures, including forced conversions to Orthodoxy (in the initial period), the suppression of the Albanian language education, the colonization process, heavy reprisals, confiscation of land, Albanians who had a “long tradition of restlessness behind them”<sup>187</sup>, Albanians remained “firmly opposed”<sup>188</sup> to the new Yugoslav state and its oppressive policies from the very beginning. So, in the period 1918-1920 various revolts of Albanians were organized against strong military control of the region which provoked harsh intervention by the Yugoslav army. With the pretext of collecting arms among the Albanian population, The Third Army (based in Skopje) started a wide range military action in Albanian inhabited areas on 7 March 1920.<sup>189</sup> Responding to this state actions were the *Komiteti për Mbrojtjen Kombëtare të Kosovës* (Committee for the National Defense of Kosovo)<sup>190</sup> formed in 1918 in Shkodër (northern Albania) and other small armed groups of Albanians known as *çetas* or *kaçaks*.<sup>191</sup> The Albanian insurgency which started in 1918 continued well until 1927, when most of its leaders were killed either in the Yugoslav Kingdom or Albania.

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their needs in a way that was not known to any other European people”, “criminal interlopers” etc. See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 268; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 291-295.

<sup>187</sup> H.C. Darby, “Macedonia,” in *A Short History of Yugoslavia: From Early Times to 1966* ed. Stephen Clissold (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 152.

<sup>188</sup> Hugh Poulton and Miranda Vickers, “The Kosovo Albanians: ethnic confrontation with the Slav state,” in *Muslim Identity and the Balkan State* eds. Hough Poulton and Suha Taji-Farouki (London: Hurst & Company, in association with the Islamic Council, 1997), 146.

<sup>189</sup> Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941*, 99.

<sup>190</sup> This Committee was formed by a group of Kosovar leaders who fled to Albania after the creation of Yugoslavia. Hasan Prishtina, Hoxhë Kadriu, Bajram Curri, and Zija Dibra were its most known leaders. Their aim was to fight both through diplomacy (lobbying and petitioning League of Nations) and arms (it devoted most of its energies in supporting *kaçaks*) to join Albanian inhabited areas in Yugoslavia with Albania. See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 273-278; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 302-306; Goran Antonić, “Kosovski komitet i Kraljevina SHS u svetlu jugoslovenskih izvora 1918– 1920,” *Istorija 20. Veka*, Issue 1 (2006), 27-30; Liman Rushiti, “The Outlaw Movement in Kosova (1918-1928),” in *The Truth on Kosova* The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania – Institute of History (Tirana: Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1993), 162-164.

<sup>191</sup> The main leaders of *kaçaks* were Azem Bejta (Galica), his wife (Shote Galica) and Sadik Rama. Azem Bejta, who during the WWI cooperated with Serbs against Austro-Hungarians, became the leader of the armed resistance in Kosovo, controlling up to 10000 men. See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 262, 276, 277.

In general, although the armed resistance of *kaçaks* and Kosovar Committee achieved very little in practice,<sup>192</sup> the reaction of Yugoslav Army against the insurgency had disastrous consequences for Albanian local population. Thousands of people were killed, whole villages destroyed and many people deported in the actions of Yugoslav Army where heavy arms (including air forces) were used.<sup>193</sup> Although state security structures<sup>194</sup> managed to ‘pacify southern regions’ by late 1920s, Albanians continued to be seen as suspicious and danger elements within the state, especially because of their geographic and political proximity with Albania, which by late 1920 intensified its cooperation with Italy, one of the main political adversaries of interwar Yugoslavia. Thus, a new strategy of deportation and colonization of Kosovo and Macedonia was designed in order to fully integrate the ‘southern regions’ in Yugoslavia.

#### **4.1. Colonization of land and expulsion**

Immediately after the annexation of the territories of Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandjak in Balkan Wars, Serbian state started to dismantle the Turkish system of landholding (large estates – *çifliks*) in these regions and colonize the expropriated lands or those abandoned because of the ravages of war. Despite the official discourse<sup>195</sup>, the colonization program was by no means a purely economic project. According to Allcock, it had been initiated by the

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid., 278.

<sup>193</sup> There is no exact figure of the number of Albanians that were killed after 1918, but various sources speak about tens of thousands. For a more detailed account of data on the killings, plunder and deportation of Albanians during the fights between *kaçaks* and Yugoslav army, collected from various sources, see: Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian: A history of Kosovo* (London: Hurst & Company, 1998), 93-95; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 278.

<sup>194</sup> In 1920s, 2/3 of the Yugoslav gendarmerie was stationed in the Kosovo and Macedonia, with the aim of ‘pacifying just liberated areas’. In general, members of gendarmerie were characterized by their extremely bad behaviors towards the people. See: Vladan Jovanović, *Jugoslovenska Država i Južna Srbija 1918-1929* (Beograd: Inis, 2002), 387.

<sup>195</sup> In Serbia, the process was incited with the adoption of a “Law-decree on the settlement of the newly liberated areas,” adopted in January 1914. Montenegro also issued a law on colonization by the same time. See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 279.

Serbian government in 1913 with a primary aim of “strengthening the Serb and pro-Serbian elements of the population in those areas with large Albanian and Bulgarian elements.”<sup>196</sup>

Thus, after the acts of violence, pillage and brutality used during the Balkan Wars, Serbian and Montenegrin states employed different means in order to transform the ethnic character of the land assigned to them.<sup>197</sup>

The colonization process was resumed after WWI though this time it was presented as an ‘agrarian reform’.<sup>198</sup> However, many Albanians in interwar Yugoslavia lost their land and wealth (through expropriation of land) “in order to accommodate Serb colonists.”<sup>199</sup> In the period 1919-1941, in total around 400,000 hectares of land were confiscated in the southern regions for the needs of ‘agrarian reform’ and around 17,000 households of Serb and Montenegrin colonists mainly from Montenegro, Herzegovina and Lika, but also from European countries and America, were settled in.<sup>200</sup> Having in mind the fact the most of the

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<sup>196</sup> John B. Allcock, *Explaining Yugoslavia*, 110.

<sup>197</sup> The whole program was cancelled because of the start of WWI. In the meantime, regardless the favorable conditions that were offered to the colonists (nine hectares per family, free transport etc), until the beginning of WWI only few Serb and Montenegrin families had moved to the region. See: Serb Prime-minister Pašić bought some 300 hectares of land near Prishtina. See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 279; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 296; Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941*, 42-46.

<sup>198</sup> The agrarian reform was implemented in ‘southern regions’ throughout the interwar period. The main documents which regulated confiscation of land and settlement of new colonists were: ‘Preliminary provisions for agrarian reform’ (25 February 1919), ‘The Decree on the colonization of the Southern Regions’ (24 September 1920), ‘The Law on the colonization of Southern Regions’ (11 June 1931), ‘The Law on regulation of agrarian relations in the former regions of southern Serbia and Montenegro’ (5 December 1931) and ‘the Law on settlement Southern Regions’ (15 December 1921) which sanctioned the confiscation of land of *kaçaks*. The whole process was organized by the Directorate for Agrarian Reform in Skopje, which functioned as part of the Ministry for Agrarian Reform. See: Marenglen Verli, “The Colonizing Agrarian Reform in Kosova and other Albanian Regions in Yugoslavia after the First World War,” in *The Truth on Kosova* The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania – Institute of History (Tirana: Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1993), 151-158; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 151; Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941*, 47-51, 71.

<sup>199</sup> Carole Rogel, *The Breakup of Yugoslavia and its Aftermath*, 72.

<sup>200</sup> Almost half (around 80000 hectares) of this confiscated land was delivered to local families of landowners, tenants and former serfs, with Slavs being favored by large. In Kosovo alone, around 200,000 hectares of agricultural land (where were only 580,000 hectares of agricultural land) was confiscated and almost half of it was delivered to some 13,000 families of colonists (around 70,000 people) which moved in. For a detailed account of the colonization process in the ‘southern regions’, see, the work of Milorad Obradović, *Agrarna reforma i kolonizacija na Kosovu (1918-1941)* (Prishtina, 1981). See also: Ali Hadri, “The Albanian Population of Kosova between two World Wars,” 127-129; Marenglen Verli, “The Colonizing Agrarian Reform in Kosova and other Albanian Regions in Yugoslavia after the First World War,” 151-158; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 279-282; Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 299-302; Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 99-100; Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941*, 47-96; Miranda Vickers, *Between Serb and Albanian*, 103-108; Zoran Janjetović, *Deca careva, pastorčad kraljeva*, 324-346.

people in Kosovo and Macedonia at that time lived from agriculture, the state actions to confiscate land and allow local Albanians to have only 0.4 hectares per family member, worsened their economic situation a lot. As a result of this, many people (for example, only in 1938 more than 6,000 people, the population of 23 villages in the Drenica region of Kosova, were deprived of their land)<sup>201</sup> were left no other choice but to emigrate.

Indeed, one of the main aims of agrarian policies in ‘southern regions’ was to force people to migrate.<sup>202</sup> Forced migration and deporting of Albanians was thought to be a more effective policy than long and ineffective process of assimilation through Serb schools to ‘integrate’ southern region in the state system. So, the emigration of Albanians of Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro to Albania and Turkey which had started already during the Balkan Wars<sup>203</sup>, continued throughout the interwar period. However greater efforts were put by the state to expel Albanians and other Muslims from the ‘southern regions’ in late 1930s. Various methods, starting from confiscation of land, direct orders for deportation, humiliation<sup>204</sup> and finally attempts to sign bilateral agreements with countries willing to accept Albanian and Turkish migrants. In line with various proposals and memorandums<sup>205</sup> for expulsion of Albanians from Yugoslavia, representatives of the latter, after almost three years of direct contacts with Turkey, signed on 11 July 1938 the “*Convention on regulating of*

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<sup>201</sup> Noel Malcolm, “Is the complaint about the Serb state’s deportation policy of Albanians between the two World wars based on myth?” in *The Case for Kosova: Passage to Independence* ed. Anna Di Lellio (New York: Anthem Press 2006), 61.

<sup>202</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 301.

<sup>203</sup> Tens of thousands of Albanians have left Kosovo, Macedonia and Montenegro in the period between 1910-1920. See: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 301; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 258.

<sup>204</sup> As Vladan Jovanovic put it, “in practice the Yugoslav administration had demonstrated lack of tolerance through political misuse of Muslim priests and schools, and especially in terms of relation towards Muslim property. Namely, numbered mosques and graveyards were turned into army warehouses, gardens and homesteads.” See: Vladan Jovanović, “In Search of Homeland? Muslim Migration from Yugoslavia to Turkey 1918–1941,” *Currents of History* (Tokovi istorije), issue: 12 (2008), 58.

<sup>205</sup> The most famous memorandum on expulsion of Albanians is the one written by Dr. Vaso Čubrilović (academician of Yugoslavia, former political adviser on the monarchic regime), presented to the royal government of Stojadinović on 7 March 1937. The memorandum entitled “The Expulsion of the Arnauts” calls for use of brute force, intimidation and expulsion of all the Albanians from Yugoslavia.” The full text of the memorandum is available at: < [www.aacl.com/expulsion2.html](http://www.aacl.com/expulsion2.html) > [last accessed: 12.10.2008] and reprinted in: Rober Elsie ed., *Gathering clouds: the roots of ethnic cleansing in Kosovo and Macedonia - early twentieth-century documents* (Pejë: Dukagjini, 2002).

*emigration of the Turkish population from the region of Southern Serbia in Yugoslavia*” which obliged Turkey to take 40,000 families (a family was defined as ‘blood relations living under one roof’) of “Turks’, receiving a payment from Belgrade of 500 Turkish pounds per family.<sup>206</sup> The whole process was to be finished in six years (until 1944) but internal problems in Yugoslavia and outbreak of the WWII prevented the plan from being carried out. Nonetheless, the process of migration of Albanians from Yugoslavia continued throughout the interwar period. So, from 90-150,000 Albanians and other Muslims left only Kosovo in the period between two wars.”<sup>207</sup> Attempts to apply these kinds of state policies against Albanians reveal the fact that the latter were not considered to be equal citizens of the state, but rather unwelcome guests in the south-Slavic state.

#### **4.2. Political representation and the role of Cemiyet**

Political participation of Albanians in the state structures was rather symbolic. With the exception of the period from 1919-1925, Albanians remained fully subordinated and politically controlled by Serb parties. Every form of political organization of Albanians on national bases within Yugoslavia was absolutely unacceptable for the ruling state elite. As Banac notes, “a government bent on expelling Albanians was hardly one to permit legal

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<sup>206</sup> This treaty included only Muslims from Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. It excluded Bosnian Muslims. Also, the treaty excluded the inhabitants of towns (which were mostly Turks - most of the small Turkish-speaking population of Kosovo was urban). Thus, as Malcolm put it, is clear that the measure was in fact aimed at Muslim Albanians, not Turks. See: Noel Malcolm, “Is the complaint about the Serb state’s deportation policy of Albanians between the two World wars based on myth?” 61. See also the full text of the Convention, published in: The Academy of Sciences of the Republic of Albania – Institute of *History, The Truth on Kosova* (Tirana: Encyclopedia Publishing House, 1993), 188-191; Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia*, 67-68; Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias*, 100.

<sup>207</sup> Figures about the number of Albanian emigrants range from some 25,000 (according to official Yugoslav data, in the period 1927-1939, some 19,279 ethnic Albanians went to Turkey and 4322 in Albania) to 250,000 (Albanian sources). However, according to Malcolm, 90,000-150,000 is a reasonable number. See: Noel Malcolm, “Is the complaint about the Serb state’s deportation policy of Albanians between the two World wars based on myth?” 61; Hikmet Oksüz and Ülkü Köksal, “Emigration from Yugoslavia to Turkey (1923-1960),” *Turkish Review of Balkan Studies*, 9 (2004), 45-50; Vladan Jovanović, “In Search of Homeland? Muslim Migration from Yugoslavia to Turkey 1918–1941,” 56-66.

functioning of their national parties.”<sup>208</sup> The only acceptable political association was one organized in religious basis. Thus, on 18 December 1918 a number of Albanian and Turkish and other Muslim landlords from Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandjak established The Islamic Association for the Defense and Justice (İslam Muhafazai Hukuk Cemiyet), known as Cemiyet (*Xhemijet* in Albanian and *Džemijet* in Serbian).<sup>209</sup> In principle, Cemiyet was a religious party (whose program was almost identical with the one of JMO)<sup>210</sup> fighting for Muslim religious autonomy, elementary schools in mother-tongue and defense of landlords interests, but by 1923 it already took an Albanian nationalist stance. Cemiyet also had its own party’s organ “Hak”, a weekly magazine which was published in Turkish and Serbian.

From 1919 to 1923 Cemiyet cooperated closely with Radicals (usually competing with common electoral lists). This helped Cemiyet win 8 seats in the first parliament (1920) and almost double the number in 1923 elections (14 seats).<sup>211</sup> Pašić’s promises for concessions (mainly with regard to compensation for confiscated land) turned Cemiyet deputies into supporters of his centralist policies. Thus Cemiyet voted for the 1921 Constitution<sup>212</sup> and later in 1923 it helped Pašić to form a coalition government, including German representatives. By this time the party was already split into two fractions, with Ferat Draga (Nexhip’s brother), as the new president, advancing demands (including linguistic rights, national equality)<sup>213</sup> and

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<sup>208</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 301.

<sup>209</sup> Though the landlords (both Turk and Albanian) dominated in Cemiyet, there were also Albanian nationalist elements, such as the founder and its first president, Nexhip Draga, who was a well-known member of Albanian political elite in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Among others, he was member of the Ottoman Parliament, active member of Young Turk movement and close collaborator of Hasan Prishtina. He died in Vienna in 1921. For more about his activities with regard to the Albanian nationalist cause, see: Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais: La naissance d’une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe* (Paris: Karthala, 2007), 84, 382, 600, 685, 703-704; Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution. The Young Turks 1902-1908* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 230, 271, 314-315.

<sup>210</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 377.

<sup>211</sup> Due to the electoral arrangements between Cemiyet and Radicals, it happened that Albanians were on the lists of Radicals and Serb radicals (like Puniša Račić – Pašić’s hitmen for Kosovo and the assassin of Stjepan Radić) were Cemiyet’s candidates. Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> 11 Muslims (almost all of them Albanians) from ‘southern regions’ were in favor of the Constitution. See: Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941*, 197.

<sup>213</sup> After 1923 elections, Ferat Draga would continuously criticize state policies (agrarian reform, colonization and deportation) in ‘southern regions’ and demanded more national rights for Albanians and Turks. See: Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941*, 212, 213, 227.

leaning toward Croat opposition and Qenan Zijai pushing for unconditioned cooperation with Pašić. Soon the cooperation between two political parties ended and state authorities initiated a campaign of terror against Cemiyet and Ferat Draga personally, which led to the practical dismemberment of Cemiyet in 1927.<sup>214</sup> However, after 1927 occasionally Albanian candidates would be represented in Yugoslav parliament as candidates of Serb parties and also controlled power in local level (municipalities).<sup>215</sup> Generally speaking, nothing much was achieved with the political engagement of Albanians in Yugoslavia, because, on one side, the leaders of Cemiyet, mostly large landowners, could not speak for most Albanians, since Kosovo was in a state of armed revolt in early 1920s, and on the other side, because Albanians “could not be incorporated into the political structure of the new state because they were from the first treated as an alien population to be crushed.”<sup>216</sup> Thus, throughout interwar Yugoslavia, Albanians remained politically marginalized and for most of the part could not enjoy their rights<sup>217</sup> (guaranteed with the Minority Treaty and Yugoslav Constitution), thus remaining second class citizens. Moreover, in all forms of territorial organization (*oblast* and *banovia* models) Albanians remained scattered in many territorial units and dominated by the Serbs. In many aspects they received a harsh treatment from the state and were continuously seen with mistrust and suspicion. Certainly, one of the reasons why they were seen so was

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<sup>214</sup> Concerned were increased already in 1923 when Cemiyet run in elections with its own list and won 14 seats. They had joined Pašić’s government under the condition that more rights are given to Albanian and Turks (including stop of the terror, deportation, compensation for land and opening of schools in Albanian), but none of these promises were kept. Thus, in 1924 Cemiyet definitely broke with radicals when they voted against the budget. Puniša Račić immediately took revenge and an ‘electoral terror’ started in ‘southern regions’ before elections of 1927. Ferad Draga was imprisoned (and sentenced to 20 years) just weeks before 1925 elections. After elections he was released but then in 1927 was imprisoned again. At the same time, in 1927 Nazim Gafurri, a leading figure of Cemiyet and deputy in Parliament was assassinated. State authorities also closed down Cemiyet’s organ “Hak”. See: Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 378; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 271-272; Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941*, 232; Joseph Rothschild, *East Central Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 218, 219, 224.

<sup>215</sup> For example, in 1937 in local elections in the region of Kosovo, according to statistics, 77 municipalities had Serb mayors whereas 50 municipalities had Albanian mayors. See: Dr. Hakif Bajrami, *Rrethanat Shoqërore dhe Politike në Kosovë më 1918-1941*, 267.

<sup>216</sup> Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia*, 29.

<sup>217</sup> Though Albanians *de facto* were granted various citizenship rights (voting rights) from the very beginning, legally they became citizens of Yugoslavia only in 1928 (with the adoption of Nationality Law in 1928). See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 266; Vladan Jovanović, “In Search of Homeland? Muslim Migration from Yugoslavia to Turkey 1918–1941,” 61.

because of the involvement of external factors, such as Albania (geographic proximity of the Albanian state also stimulated the feeling of nationhood among Albanians in Kosovo) and Italy in providing support for various anti-Yugoslav elements from Kosovo.

### **4.3. The state of Albania and Albanians in Yugoslavia**

The behavior of the Yugoslav state towards Albanians was also affected by regional political developments in general and those between Yugoslavia and Albania in particular, with the later playing the role of the 'external national homeland' to form what Brubaker called the 'triadic nexus'. Indeed, in the aftermath of the WWI political elements from both countries were willing to interfere in each-others affairs, with Yugoslav elements (Serb army and politicians) pushing for territorial expansion toward northern Albania and Adriatic coast.<sup>218</sup> On the other side, Albanian state became the base of Kosovar political and military leaders who were engaged in uniting Kosovo and Albanian-inhabited regions of Macedonia with the state of Albania. City of Shkodra was the centre of organization and activities of members of the Kosovar Committee. The leading figures of the Kosovar Committee, Hasan Prishtina, Hoxhë Kadriu and Bajram Curri were also active in the political scene in Albania – Hasan Prishtina was member of the parliament and then Prime Minister (for some days), Bajram Curri was minister of war in 1920 and Hoxhë Kadriu was minister of justice.<sup>219</sup> This huge impact that Kosovar chieftains had in Albanian politics was to be eliminated just in

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<sup>218</sup> Yugoslav delegation at the Peace Conference was desperately trying to convince representatives of the Great Powers to enable new Yugoslav state to have access on Adriatic Sea. Indeed, Serbian army had occupied several towns in northern Albania and kept them under control well until late 1920, when Albania was finally accepted as a member in the League of Nations with its 1913 borders. The Yugoslav government of Pašić, however, continued with its policy of intervention in Albania also in 1921 when it attempted to create a satellite 'Republic of Mirëdita' bordering Yugoslavia. For more on this, see: Margaret Macmillan, *Paris 1919*, 109-124; Bernd Jürgen Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania* (Boulder: East European Monographs, 1984), 24-25; Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 276-277; John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 157.

<sup>219</sup> Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 276; Bernd Jürgen Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania*, 32; Goran Antonić, "Kosovski komitet i Kraljevina SHS u svetlu jugoslovenskih izvora 1918– 1920," 38.

couple of years when they lost<sup>220</sup> the internal political battle against the strongest Albanian politician to emerge in 1920s and 1930s, Ahmet Zogolli (later to become King Zog I).

Being afraid of losing power in Tirana, Zogolli showed interest in cooperating with Pašić since early 1920s. Cooperation was easy in a situation when both parts had a staunch enemy – the Kosovar Committee. Zogolli’s determination to fight Kosovar leaders won him the sympathy and support of Pašić, who supported the former since 1923. It was these leaders that in 1926 would finally sign a bilateral agreement which finally settled the borders between two countries.<sup>221</sup> Despite the fact that after 1926 Zogolli would build closer relations with Italy<sup>222</sup>, thus causing nervousness in Yugoslavia, his determination to eliminate<sup>223</sup> leaders of the Kosovar Committee gave a great hand to Yugoslavia’s attempt to subjugate its Albanian minority and get rid of Kosovar irredentist movement.

In a word, Kosovar Albanian leaders around *kaçak* movement and Kosovar Committee, with few exceptions, never found a staunch supporter in the Albanian government in Tirana. Regardless of this, the very existence of the state of Albania in border with Yugoslavia was an important factor, first in organization of the Kosovar irredentist movement and secret delivery of textbooks and other school materials from Albania to Kosovo. Moreover, many deported and exiled Albanian families from Kosovo found refugee in the

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<sup>220</sup> Initially, upon the establishment of diplomatic relations between Albania and the Kingdom of Serbs-Croats-Slovenes in 1922, Zogolli’s government annulled parliamentary mandates of the Kosovar exponents (Hasan Prishtinës, Bajram Currit, Hoxhë Kadriut etc). Later in January 1923 Ahmet Zogolli had sentenced to death (in absence) one of the leading figures of *kaçaks*, Azem Bejta and in 1923 he sent his troops to fight *kaçaks* in the neutral zone of Junik between Albania and Yugoslavia. However, the critical point was in 1924. The Albanian opposition led by the Bishop Fan Noli, part of which were also Kosovar chieftains, organized an armed revolt and forced Zogu to resign and flee to Belgrade. But, with the help (both in troops and money) by Yugoslav governments, Zogu retook power in Albania six months later. From this moment on Kosovar leaders were continuously chased by the regime until they were eliminated. See: Noel Malcolm, *Kosovo*, 277; Bernd Jürgen Fischer, *King Zog and the Struggle for Stability in Albania*, 62-70; Albert Kotini, “Nje vrasje ne Selanik,” found at: < [www.revistaklan.com/material.php?id=703](http://www.revistaklan.com/material.php?id=703) > [last accessed: 13.05.2009].

<sup>221</sup> John R. Lampe, *Yugoslavia as History*, 157.

<sup>222</sup> For a detailed analyses of the relations between Albania, Italy and Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in 1920s, see: H. Wickham Steed, “Italy, Yugoslavia and Albania,” *Journal of the Royal Institute of International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 3 (May, 1927), 170-178.

<sup>223</sup> Bajram Curri was killed by Albanian troops in northern Albania in 1925, whereas Hasan Prishtina was assassinated Thessalonica in 1933 by a man who is supposed to have been paid by King Zog. The death of Hasan Prishtina, meant that the irredentist Kosovar movement was destroyed finally. See: Albert Kotini, “Nje vrasje ne Selanik”.

territory of Albania. Last, but not the least, Albania role as the ‘external homeland’ of Albanians in Yugoslavia helped the latter resist state policies of cultural and national assimilation.

In conclusion of this chapter, it must be said that throughout interwar period Albanians remained in an unfavorable position and subject to state oppressive policies. With initial assimilative attempts through state education and later plans for expulsions, Albanians became the “most oppressed national group in Yugoslavia.”<sup>224</sup> On their side, Albanians were not always passive victims of the state oppressing policies. Rather, they took up the armed resistance (through *kaçaks*) and organized various irredentist political and military activities, especially those led by the Kosovar Committee in Albania. In a broader Yugoslav context, though in many cases Albanians sought to build alliances with other minorities (Kosovar Committee with Macedonian IMRO activists<sup>225</sup>) and Cemiyet politicians with Croat opposition parties, they were not that successful for the very reason that almost everyone (especially these from northern parts) were not ready to challenge Belgrade’s control over ‘southern regions’ and Albanians.

In cultural aspect, the most that Albanians could achieve was religious rights. Nonetheless, most of the religious institutions were strictly controlled by state, which feared the possibility that Albanians would carry out clandestine nationalist activities. Rights to use Albanian language in schools and in printing materials, (guaranteed by international and domestic law) were not respected at all. Albanian language could be used only in clandestine schools and in public proclamations of the banned Communist Party of Yugoslavia.

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<sup>224</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 378.

<sup>225</sup> For more on the activities of IMRO in interwar Yugoslavia see: *Ibid.*, 307-328; Andrew Rossos, *Macedonia and the Macedonians: A History* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2008), 155-165.

## 5. Bosnian Muslims and Albanians in the Kingdom of Yugoslavia: a comparison

*“In the exhilaration of recovering ‘ancestral lands’ from over five centuries of Ottoman control, the proponents of this type [pan-Serb] nationalism treated the Muslims of these [southern] regions – particularly those of urkic and Albanian origin – as second-rate citizens, much inferior to the Slavic Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina.”*  
- Alexandre Popović<sup>226</sup> -

Bosnian Muslims and Albanians in inter-war Yugoslavia were united by common religion, but divided by a whole set of other criteria and characteristics, such as ethnicity, language, geography, history, level of national emancipation (nationhood) etc. Undoubtedly, all these criteria were relevant in determining the course of events with regard to one and the other group. So, in what follows I examine all these factors and the way they affected the treatment of Bosnian Muslims and Albanians in the new state.

To begin with, Islamic faith (the common element the both) was not a good pedigree for any of the groups integrated in the new state. With Serbia, as the cornerstone of the new state, traditionally having a strong anti-Muslim and anti-Ottoman orientation, both Bosnian Muslims and Albanians were seen as hostile elements in the new state. In this context, the former was seen by both Croats and Serbs as ‘Islamized’ Serbs and Croats who needed to be ‘returned’ to Catholicism and Orthodoxy or as ‘Asians’ who either needed to be ‘sent back to Asia’ or a process of ‘social deislamization’.<sup>227</sup> The latter, on the other side, were generally seen as ‘remaining of Ottoman Empire’ and as ‘irritant element within ‘South Serbia’ which should be get rid of. So, for this purpose, various plans and strategies were designed and carried out by the state (such as agrarian reform, colonization and deportation) deport Muslims from Yugoslavia. Though both communities were affected by these policies, the position of Albanians was deteriorated more. While Bosnian Muslims had to face confiscation of land (mainly large estates) – which by the way was finished already in 1931 – Albanians were subject both to expropriation and colonization, a process that aimed at changing ethnic

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<sup>226</sup> Alexandre Popović, “Islamic Movements in Yugoslavia,” in *Muslim communities reemerge: historical perspectives on nationality, politics, and opposition in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* editor (of the English edition) Edward Allworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 327.

<sup>227</sup> Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia*, 362, 372.

composition of 'southern regions'. As Klemenčič and Žagar put it, "The Belgrade authorities did not spare any attempts to change the ethnic structure of Kosovo and so 'make good for the injustices done to the Serbs during the centuries of Turkish rule'."<sup>228</sup> Nonetheless, though more due to the political bargaining of both Bosnian Muslim and Albanian politicians than because of state's determination to respect minority rights, both communities were alleviated to the position of religious minority. Recognition of religious equality, right to maintain religious schools, *shari'a* courts and other charitable religious institutions were granted to all the Muslims of Yugoslavia.

Second, different language and ethnic origin of the two communities were essential in determining their position within the new south-Slavic state. Inter-war Yugoslavia, as Schopflin put it, rested on two not wholly mutually supportive pillars, language and monarchy.<sup>229</sup> Article 3 of the 1921 Constitution defines 'Serbian-Croatian-Slovenian' as the official language of the Kingdom<sup>230</sup>. Being Serbo-Croat speakers, there is no doubt that Bosnian Muslims were more advantageous with regard to linguistic rights and education. In the contrary, Albanians were denied - in words of Guibernau, "denial involves the exclusion of the minority language and culture from the state's school system, sentencing them to a slow and so to speak 'natural' death"<sup>231</sup> - their right to have schools with Albanian as the language of instruction, and had to be sufficed with religious schools in Turkish or state schools in Serbian. Consequently, Albanians, who already in 1918 were short of intellectual elites (even compared to Bosnian Muslims), were in a way forced by the state to remain illiterate *en masse*.<sup>232</sup> The only way to be educated in Albanian was through clandestine schools.

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<sup>228</sup> Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar, *The former Yugoslavia's diverse peoples*, 135.

<sup>229</sup> George Schopflin, "The rise and fall of Yugoslavia," 127.

<sup>230</sup> *Ustav Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca od 28. juna, 1921. god.*

<sup>231</sup> Montserrat Guibernau, *Nations without States*, 63.

<sup>232</sup> Though, it should be noted that in 1921 the level of illiteracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina and 'southern regions' was almost the same – 80 in the former and 85 in the latter. See: Joseph Rothschild, *East Central*

As far as ethnic origin is concerned, Bosnian Muslims were considered to be part of the ‘three-named [or Yugoslav] people’ and not as aliens. As it is discussed widely in the third chapter, the identification of Bosnian Muslims as part of the ‘three-named people’ was not just a way of identification from the others (Croats and Serbs). Many Bosnian Muslims intellectuals and politicians claimed to be either Serb or Croat, or a symbiosis of both. This way they fitted more into the concept of the south-Slavic nation state, promoted mainly by Serb elites. Moreover, unlike Albanians, Bosnian Muslim leaders, though in smaller numbers, were part of the political initiatives that preceded the creation of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. In case of Albanians, in contrast, the difference in terms of ethnicity was clearer. Since the struggle in interwar Yugoslavia was more ethnic rather than religious, state’s antipathy toward Albanians was ethnic in character.<sup>233</sup> In this basis Yugoslav state continuously denied the existence of national minorities in ‘southern regions’. Albanians were intentionally represented as Turks who need to be ‘resettled’ in Turkey. Hence, plans and agreements were made to carry out this process.

Third, the behavior of minorities toward the state was of great importance for the treatment they will receive by the state. In general, national minorities respond in a myriad ways to the homogenizing tendencies of the states within which they are included, with cultural resistance and armed struggle as the two major strategies.<sup>234</sup> As discussed in previous chapters, political bargaining was characteristic of Bosnian Muslims throughout the inter-war period. JMO’s strategy of trading political support for economic privileges and religious rights was never abandoned. In contrast, Albanians, despite ‘clientele behavior’ of Cemiyet, chose armed resistance as a way to oppose state’s repressive policies. By the same token, Albanian irredentist attempts were boosted by the very existence of the state of Albania in

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*Europe Between the Two World Wars*, 276; Charles Jelavich, “South Slav Education; Was There Yugoslavism,” 101.

<sup>233</sup> Hugh Poulton and Miranda Vickers, “The Kosovo Albanians: ethnic confrontation with the Slav state,” 144.

<sup>234</sup> Montserrat Guibernau, *Nations without States*, 114.

border with Yugoslavia. Hence, the state viewed Albanians with great suspicion and feared their political and cultural emancipation. Thus, “the Albanians remained firmly opposed to the Yugoslav state, and unlike the Bosnian Muslims were not co-opted.”<sup>235</sup>

In addition to this, it is obvious that the Yugoslav state followed the strategy of ‘securitization of ethnic relations’<sup>236</sup>, which automatically ranks minorities based on their potential threat. So, Albanians with higher sense of nationhood, then a kin state in the border of Yugoslavia and in pursuit of irredentist policies, presented a greater threat to the state than Bosnian Muslims, which were residing in the ‘hinterland’ of the country, without a kin state and quite weak (especially at the beginning) sense of nationhood. Exactly in line with this strategy, in Kosovo “violent military occupation and pacification followed a planned and forced policy of Serbianization, carried out especially by not allowing the use of the Albanian language in schools and administration and by settlement of Serb and Montenegrin colonists.”<sup>237</sup> In reality, in times of crises minorities receive a much harsher treatment and generally they are blamed for “the misfortunes affecting the whole society”.<sup>238</sup> This is best described by the intensification of the state attempts (Yugoslav-Turkish Convention of 1938) to get rid of Albanians and Turks in 1930, a period of general political, economic (domestic and international) insecurity for Yugoslavia.<sup>239</sup> Certainly, the level of threat that a certain community (according to the state authorities) posed to the unity of the state, dictated the behavior of the state and the way it treats minorities.

Finally, different attitudes of Albanians and Bosnian Muslims toward the state affected their mutual relations as well. The following section looks closer to the relation between the two minorities, Bosnian Muslims and Albanians.

<sup>235</sup> Hugh Poulton and Miranda Vickers, “The Kosovo Albanians: ethnic confrontation with the Slav state,” 146.

<sup>236</sup> Will Kymlicka, *Multicultural Odysseys*, 186.

<sup>237</sup> Matjaž Klemenčič and Mitja Žagar, *The former Yugoslavia’s diverse peoples*, 135.

<sup>238</sup> Montserrat Guibernau, *The Identity of Nations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), 150.

<sup>239</sup> In the international level, developments with regard to the creation of the ‘Tripartite Axis’ and pressures posed to Central and South-East European countries had a great impact on developments in Yugoslavia. For more on the crisis of 1930s, see: Jacob B. Hoptner, *Yugoslavia in crisis, 1934-1941* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1963).

## 5.1. Mutual relationship and religious competition

Albanians and Bosnian Muslims in Yugoslavia, though united by religion, were characterized by a traditional, cultural and geographic gap between them. Despite the fact that they lived in one state and initially faced the same problems, “they stood quite apart from each other, divided by tradition, language and ethnic consciousness.”<sup>240</sup> Their common Ottoman experience was partially obliterated during Bosnia and Herzegovina’s administration by Austro-Hungarian Empire (1878-1918). Differences were also notable in traditions and way of life. As anthropologist Ger Duijzings put it, “contrary to the Albanians, who as non-Slavs in a South Slav state were treated as second class citizens, most Bosnian Muslims adopted a lifestyle not very different from that of Roman Catholic Croats or Orthodox Serbs.”<sup>241</sup> However, above all, language and ethnic consciousness were essential factors in prevalence of the gap between the two communities. Because of linguistic similarities with Serbs and Croats and a relatively weak sense of ethnic consciousness, Bosnian Muslims emphasized religion as the main layer of their group particularity. In contrast, religion (though quite strong element in self-identification) was not the main identity layer of Albanians.<sup>242</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, 128.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>242</sup> There is a striking contrast with regard to the role of religion in the emergence of a distinct national identity of Albanians and Bosnian Muslims. In the case of the former, religion didn’t play any significant role in the creation of a distinct national identity. This is mainly because of the threefold religious divide (Albanians belong to three different faiths: Islam, Roman Catholicism and Orthodoxy) among Albanians. Thus, the emergence of the Albanian nationalism in late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was, to use Guijzings phrase, “clothed in religious terms” (a verse by the Albanian poet Pashko Vasa “The faith of Albanians is Albanianism” hence became the motto of the Albanian national elite). Rather, language was the main unifying element among Albanians. For more on this see: Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, 1157-175; Nathalie Clayer, *Aux origines du nationalisme albanais: La naissance d’une nation majoritairement musulmane en Europe* (Paris: Karthala, 2007); Stavro Skendi, *The Albanian national awakening, 1878-1912* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1967). On the other side, Bosnian Muslim identity is built around religion. Being part of the same linguistic group with Serbs and Croats, and being targets of Serb and Croat nationalization projects, religion provided the key to a distinct Bosnian Muslim national identity. Though embracing Yugoslavism, Bosnian Muslim national elites throughout the twentieth century persisted in the recognition of their distinctive religious identity. Thus, in the case of Bosnian Muslims, religion was nationalized. For more see: Sabrina Petra Ramet, “Primordial Ethnicity or Modern Nationalism: The Case of Yugoslavia’s Muslims, Reconsidered,” 111-140; Alexandre Popović, “Islamic Movements in Yugoslavia,” 322-330.

In addition to the fact that Bosnian Muslims and Albanians were not recognized on national bases, neither JMO nor Cemiyet were strong enough to formulate a national project. Though the former managed to strengthen the Bosnian Muslim feeling of separateness from Serbs and Croats, it didn't do it under the banner of a specific Muslim nation.<sup>243</sup> In a situation when Bosnian Muslim elite (including JMO itself) was quite fragmented and divided as far as their national loyalties are concerned, it was almost impossible for a national cohesion of the Bosnian Muslims to exist. This way, instead of tying its struggle for political religious and cultural rights of Bosnian Muslims to national unity of Muslims, Bosnian Muslim elite of inter-war period "sought to reconcile preservation of religious-cultural uniqueness with membership in the Serbian and Croatian nation."<sup>244</sup> Similarly, Cemiyet was unable to have a clear stance with regard to national question of the people it aimed to represent. Unlike JMO that included only Bosnian Muslims, Cemiyet (though predominantly Albanian) it included other Muslims from 'southern regions', such as Turks and various Slavic-Muslim minorities (above all, Muslims from Sandjak. Despite the fact that Ferat Draga occasionally took the role of an Albanian national leader, Cemiyet was unable even to draft an Albanian national project, let alone carry it out. Thus, only Kosovar Committee, which functioned abroad and which was declared as enemy of the Yugoslav state, had a real national project for Albanians in the inter-war period.

These differences, combined with state's strategy of keeping Yugoslavia's Muslims separate (until 1929, all Muslims of Bosnia-Herzegovina (and other ex-Habsburg territories) were placed under the supreme authority of the *reis-ul-ulema* in Sarajevo, while the Muslims of Serbia and Montenegro were headed by the supreme *mufti* in Belgrade)<sup>245</sup> widened the gap

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<sup>243</sup> Wolfgang Höpken, "Yugoslavia's Communists and the Bosnian Muslims," in *Muslim communities reemerge: historical perspectives on nationality, politics, and opposition in the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia* editor (of the English edition) Edward Allworth (Durham: Duke University Press, 1994), 221.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid.*, 217.

<sup>245</sup> Radmila Radic, "Religion in a Multicultural State: The case of Yugoslavia," 199.

between both communities even more. Political cooperation was missing too.<sup>246</sup> The largest Muslim party in Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav Muslim Organization (JMO), despite its name, did not embrace Muslims in Kosovo and Macedonia (mainly Albanians).<sup>247</sup> Moreover, on the religion-political aspect, relations between Bosnian Muslims and Albanians have clearly been asymmetrical; the Islamic Community in Yugoslavia was always dominated by Slavic Muslims from Bosnia, something which didn't happen only because of the higher educational level of the Bosnian *ulema*.<sup>248</sup> Thus, a kind of religious competition has been dominant in the relations between two communities. With Bosnia and Herzegovina being “the heartland of Islam in Yugoslavia”<sup>249</sup>, Muslims from the ‘southern regions’ made several attempts to overcome their position as second-rank believers within the Islamic Community.”<sup>250</sup>

In addition, the missing of a stronger religious sense of solidarity among all Muslims of Yugoslavia was obvious. Historical experience, growing sense of nationhood, and state policies contributed in weakening the ties of the former Ottoman Empire Muslim subjects. As Popović put it, Muslims of ‘southern regions’ “endured – for the most part as helpless onlookers – the long agony and ultimate disintegration of ‘The Sick Man of Europe’”<sup>251</sup>, contrary to Bosnian Muslims who have had a relatively prosperous period under Austro-Hungarian rule. Despite the fact that Muslims from the south were in a worse position than Bosnian Muslims, they were not supported politically by JMO even after 1924, when Cemiyet was practically dismembered.<sup>252</sup> Nevertheless, JMO always differentiated between Muslims from Sandjak (who were considered to be part of the Bosnian Muslims – they were sad to be

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<sup>246</sup> One of the rare occasions when Cemiyet and JMO agreed was their tacit agreement in 1920 to ask for constitutional guarantees for the existence and jurisdiction of Shari'a courts. See: Fikret Karčić, “The reform of shari'a courts and Islamic law in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1918-1941,” in *Islam in Inter-War Europe* eds. Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (London: Hurst & Company, 2008), 258.

<sup>247</sup> Leslie Benson, *Yugoslavia*, 29.

<sup>248</sup> Ger Duijzings, *Religion and the Politics of Identity in Kosovo*, 128.

<sup>249</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>251</sup> Alexandre Popović, “Islamic Movements in Yugoslavia,” 326.

<sup>252</sup> In reality, in 1927 JMO claimed that they didn't have anything in common with Cemiyet. See: Atif Purivatra, *Jugoslovenska Muslimanska u Političkom Životu Kraljevine Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca*, 337 (footnote 73).

‘krv naše krvi’ (blood of our bloods)) and Albanians and Turks, who were regarded as national minorities.<sup>253</sup> Though JMO and Bosnian Muslim politicians were constantly observing the situation in Sandjak (in JMO’s paper *Pravda* there was a special column for Sandjak), they couldn’t embrace them politically due to the objection of the state officials, who were categorical in considering Slavic-Muslims outside Bosnia and Herzegovina as Serbs and different from Bosnian Muslims.

Though in the period 1919-1929 Muslims of Bosnia and Herzegovina and those of ‘southern regions’ were governed separately (including *shari’a* courts)<sup>254</sup> Bosnian Muslims were dominating Muslim religious institutions in Yugoslavia. Apart from the institution of *reis ul-ulema* in Sarajevo there was also a Shari’a Law Schools (which was elevated to the rank of faculty in 1937 – High School of Islamic Theology)<sup>255</sup> and religious teachers from Bosnia were also widely present in the three *medresa* (*King Alexander’s Velika Medresa, Isa Bey Madrasa, Meddah Medressa*) in Skopje.<sup>256</sup> However, Bosnian Muslims’ supremacy in religious institutions was interrupted shortly in the period 1930-1936, when the Law on the Islamic Religious Community was passed in 1930. This law united Muslims in the Supreme Council of the Islamic Religious Community located in Belgrade, with two *ulema* councils in Sarajevo and Skopje, and abolished the Muslim’s religious and educational autonomy with the Justice Minister to become supreme administrative authority.<sup>257</sup>

Finally, state authorities tried to aggravate relations between Albanians and Bosnian Muslims by putting them against each-other. State authorities, in their initial attempts to

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 344.

<sup>254</sup> *Shari’a* courts in Bosnia were regulated by the model inherited from Habsburg Empire, whereas these ones in Kosovo, Macedonia and Sandjak were regulated according to the Islamic law from the times of Ottomans. After 1929, when new laws on the unification of Islamic Religious Community were adopted, the two different systems of the application of Islamic Law were abolished and a united one was created based on the Bosnian model. See: Fikret Karčić, “The reform of shari’a courts and Islamic law in Bosnia and Herzegovina 1918-1941,” 261.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>256</sup> See: Muhammed Aruçi, “The Muslim Minority in Macedonia and its Educational Institutions during the inter-war period,” in *Islam in Inter-War Europe* eds. Nathalie Clayer and Eric Germain (London: Hurst & Company, 2008), 344-361.

<sup>257</sup> Radmila Radic, “Religion in a Multicultural State, 200.

assimilate the Albanian minority through state-sponsored schools, brought to the area Bosnian Serb-Croat speaking Muslim teachers to the area.<sup>258</sup> Similarly, in a reaction to the increasing number of Albanian *mullahs* (Muslim Teachers) and *imams* who embraced the cause of education in Albanian, state authorities in Kosovo and Macedonia undertook necessary steps to replace Albanian *imams* with Serb-Croat speaking Bosnian Muslims who spoke no Albanian at all.<sup>259</sup> Apart from preventing Albanian educational clandestine activities carried out in religious institutions, these efforts also aimed at strengthening of the sense of religious collective identity among Albanians as opposed to the ethnic or national one.

To sum up the argument, Albanians and Bosnian Muslims were treated differently in a wide range of aspects and contexts. Their differences in ethnicity and language were far more important factors in determining state's attitude than their common religion. In a state modeled based on the concept of nation-state, where (assumed) common language and ethnicity is the cornerstone of new nation-state, Bosnian Muslims were co-opted easier within the new state structures. By the same token, Albanians' attitude or resistance (including armed resistance) posed greater threat to the state's political and territorial unity as compared to Bosnian Muslims' political maneuvering. Finally, these differences and above all their different ways of perceiving (and, consequently, behaving toward) the new state impacted their mutual relations, which, as we have seen, weren't close or intensive at all.

## Conclusion

It is beyond any doubt that inter-war Yugoslavia was a very complex state in every possible aspect – national, religious and cultural diversity, historical experiences as well as political visions of its communities etc. Though this complexity had complicated the situation

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<sup>258</sup> Hugh Poulton, "Macedonians and Albanians as Yugoslavs," 127.

<sup>259</sup> Denisa Kostovicova, "'Shkolla Shqipe' and Nationhood," 161.

and made the task of managing the state quite difficult, it is not the complexity *per se* that rendered the state into a questionable and opposed polity. Rather, as I have tried to argue throughout the thesis, it was the predominant official state ideology of centralism and national unity (be it understood as unity of the ‘three-named people’, ‘three nations’ or ‘south-Slavic nation’) and lack of willingness to accommodate various national interests, that has set the course of political developments in interwar Yugoslavia. Certainly, it is undeniable that various national groups, which have consequently been victims of political and cultural disempowerment, have suffered the most from the state-centralism and attempts to create a homogenous nation-state out of a profoundly heterogenous national, religious, and cultural environment. Consequently, as Schopflin argues, “The monarchy, far from legitimating the state, came to be perceived as alien and oppressive by non-Serbs; separate ethnic discourses came to the center of politics.”<sup>260</sup> It is state centralism and ideology of national unity (understood in ethnic terms) that alienated smaller minority groups.

In general, state attempt to ignore and eliminate internal diversity led either to expulsion or assimilation of minority groups. Both processes were present in interwar Yugoslavia. Though the state was persistent in ignoring internal diversity (both verbally and practically), state’s approach toward various minorities varied a lot. On one side, south-Slavic minority groups such as Bosnian Muslims, Macedonians and Montenegrins, which were seen as ethnically Serb and/or Croat, and thus part of their nation<sup>261</sup>, were victims of assimilative policies, which were carried out through centralized educational system, forced ‘nationalization’ (like changes of the surnames and religion in some cases). On the other hand, non-Slavic minorities such as Albanians, Turks, Germans, Hungarians, Jews etc., were victims of marginalization and, partially, expulsion. Although in different forms and

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<sup>260</sup> George Schopflin, “The rise and fall of Yugoslavia,” 173.

<sup>261</sup> Hugh Poulton and Miranda Vickers, “The Kosovo Albanians: ethnic confrontation with the Slav state,” 146.

numbers, all these communities were victims of forced migration after the creation of the inter-war Yugoslavia.

Thus, categorization of communities in south-Slavic and non-south Slavic represents the first level of distinction between Bosnian Muslims and Albanians, as the two communities that are in focus of this thesis. Though of the same religion, Bosnian Muslims and Albanians were perceived differently due to their ethnic origin, thus illustrating that ethnicity was of paramount importance for the new state. So, the former found more space within state institutions (starting from the very process of unification), whereas the latter were continuously denied and weren't granted even those rights deriving from Yugoslavia's international obligations (language and educational rights) and were discriminated against in any key domain. Further, no serious state attempt was made to expulse Bosnian Muslims (this, however, does not deny the fact that many Bosnian Muslims left Yugoslavia), thus choosing slow cultural and even religious assimilation. Whereas, in the case of Albanians, state authorities undertook concrete steps to get rid of them (and Turks) in late 1930s. However, in no way this implies that I consider assimilation to be 'lesser evil' than expulsion and deportation.

The second line of difference, is that of the behavior of the minorities toward the state. Here again there are clear differences in the attitude of Bosnian Muslims and Albanians toward the state, both in perception and concrete action. Bosnian Muslims in general were receptive to Yugoslavia and Yugoslavism provided that it recognizes their different religious identity and retains territorial unity of Bosnia-Herzegovina. This way, JMO was very successful in mobilizing Bosnian Muslims and using their support for it to be part of the central government in Belgrade and secure various economic and political privileges. Moreover, in a situation when Bosnian Muslims still lacked a well developed sense of nationhood, their struggle was more one of cultural resistance, above all, with regard to

religious rights. Certainly, they were quite successful in obtaining various religious rights and privileges which would help them be receptive toward and co-opted in the state.

In contrast, Albanians showed little signs of acceptance of the new state and official ideology of Yugoslavism. Because of their stronger sense of nationhood and recent historical experience with Serbia, Albanians remained firmly opposed to the new state, especially at the beginning. They responded in different ways to the homogenizing tendencies of the state, with cultural resistance and armed struggle being the main strategies used by *kaçaks* and the Kosovar Committee. However, as I have explained earlier, though in general Albanians opposed the state, we can not speak of them as a single and unified unit. There were various groups, different visions and claims that were put forward by members of the Albanian minority, some of them being purely religious, and some political and national. These different streams were best exemplified in Cemiyet, where its different elements had religious, pro-Serb, and Albanian national orientations. Another issue related to resistance and opposition of minorities is the issue of state security. Being nationally more aware, having a tradition of armed opposition and having a kin-state in Yugoslavia's borders, it is understandable that Albanians posed greater threat to the national and state unity of Yugoslavia.

Despite the fact that I consider (in)compatibility of the minorities and state official ideology of centralism and national unity on one side and minorities' attitude toward the state to be the main factors which led to different treatment and position of Bosnian Muslims and Albanians in Yugoslavia, nevertheless, I don't negate the role of other factors as well. Different political capacities, differences in possession of cultural and political elites, different geography and many other factors are as relevant as the former. All these factors and others I didn't mention played a great role in determining the relationship between the state and Bosnian Muslims and Albanians, as well as the relation between themselves. As far as the

later relation is concerned, in overall it was asymmetrical, with Bosnian Muslims dominating even in the aspect where both minorities were quite equal – religious autonomy and organization of religious institutions.

Last but not the least, while strongly supporting the argument of different treatment of minority groups by the state of Yugoslavia, I also take in consideration the international context of inter-war period, especially with regard to minority rights and state sovereignty. Thus, despite completely unfavorable position of most of the minorities in inter-war Yugoslavia, above all Albanians, the former was not a unique case (in Central Eastern Europe) of a state that applied policies of forced assimilation and deportation in order to achieve the ideal of national self-determination, which is a homogenous nation-state.

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