

# “Breaking Away: Micronations, Microstates, and the Contestation of Sovereignty in East Central Europe, 1918–Present: Political Thought, Aesthetic Output, and their Afterlives”

Moise Palace, Cres, Croatia  
August 31–September 1, 2023

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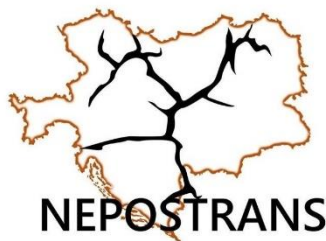
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REVENANT—  
Revivals of Empire:  
Nostalgia, Amnesia,  
Tribulation

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ERC Consolidator Grant Project “NEPOSTRANS: Negotiating Post-Imperial Transitions” (Grant No. 772264, 2018–2023), hosted at the Institute of Political History, Budapest, Hungary

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“Nationalist Separatism as the History of State-Building, as the History of Political Thought:  
The Case of Deutschsüdmähren, 1918 and After.”

Cody James Inglis

Central European University, Vienna, Austria; Budapest, Hungary  
ERC CoG NEPOSTRANS, Institute of Political History, Budapest, Hungary

In the autumn of 1918, a group of village municipalities around the southern Moravian city of Znaim/Znojmo expressed their unilateral desire to unite with the newly founded Republic of German-Austria. The administration of this strip of territory was taken over by the district's representative to the Reichsrat, the German Radical Oskar Teufel (1880–1946). While the Moravian governorship had been taken over by the newly forming Czechoslovak state—and now headed by former Austrian imperial bureaucrat Jan Černý (1874–1959)—these German-speaking-majority municipalities around Znaim/Znojmo argued for a different horizon of state-building, one which was at the same time local, national, and transitional. Although in part encouraged by the German-Austrian state itself—the former civil servant Hieronymus Oldofredi (1873–1935) retained contact with the Austrian Ministry of Interior while he acted as district captain—the German Southern Moravian Circle (Deutschsüdmährischer Kreis) attempted a sort of autonomous course of state-building partially within and outside of the German-Austrian republic. This was only a brief attempt, however; by the beginning of December 1918, the territory was occupied by Czechoslovak troops and reintegrated administratively into the Czechoslovak Republic. The bureaucrats of the short-lived statelet fled across the border to Retz in Lower Austria, where they unsuccessfully tried to maintain a sort of local-government-in-exile.

The case of the German Southern Moravian Circle ought to be perceived as part of the wide-ranging alternatives to nation-state-building which emerged out of the collapse of the Habsburg Empire. While efforts like the Hungarian People's Republic and the Republic of Councils were projects which incorporated myriad Leftist positions, other small separatist formations like the German Southern Moravian Circle were rather camped firmly on the political Right. Ideological diversity across cases may be traced to long-term local circumstances, or perhaps even the contingency of the moment. But larger questions emerge: How did the political language of nationalism function in a local context in a time of strong political polarization? What can the broader intellectual background of local society tell us about the development toward separatist claims made in a nationalist key? Reflecting on these questions, as well as placing this case within the research frame of the ERC Consolidator Grant Project “NEPOSTRANS: Negotiating post-imperial transitions,” I argue that the secessionist or separatist tendencies present in this small case in the former Austrian half of the Habsburg Empire has larger structural connections to the many other attempts at state-building alternatives across the former Habsburg Empire during the months and first years of post-imperial transition and successor state consolidation.

**Cody James Inglis** is a Doctoral Candidate in Comparative History at the Department of History, Central European University (Vienna, Austria). He worked as Junior Researcher on the ERC Consolidator Grant Project “NEPOSTRANS: Negotiating post-imperial transitions” from 2018 to 2023. His dissertation is a history of republican political thought in the Danubian basin from the turn of the twentieth century to the post-Second World War reconstruction period. His research centers on the histories of political thought and philosophy in East Central Europe, with a particular focus on the Habsburg Empire and its successor states from the revolutions of 1848/49 to the consolidation of state socialist regimes after the Second World War.

## “Art Exhibitions and Political Justification: the Hungarian Soviet and the Horthy Regime in Comparison”

Samuel D. Albert

Fashion Institute of Technology and Fordham University, New York, New York, USA

The immediate post-World War I era saw rapid, whipsaw-like changes in Hungarian governments, from Republic to Soviet to Republic to Kingdom, with periods of relative lawlessness in between. Despite the political and social turmoil, at least two of these regimes, the Hungarian Soviet and the Horthy Regency, organized art exhibitions.

Although not as short-lived as the Hungarian Soviet which preceded it, both the Hungarian Soviet and the interwar Regency of Admiral Miklos Horthy faced similar political, economic, and cultural issues. While the borders of the Hungarian Soviet were not yet legally fixed, it was nonetheless clear that the cultural and economic hinterlands of Transleithania—Slovakia, Croatia, and Transylvania—were cut off from the body of Hungary; the borders of the Horthyist state were clearer, a result of the Treaty of Trianon, and so too were the resulting problems.

For both States, what remained of Hungary had to be physically and intellectually reconfigured. Budapest, the political, economic, and cultural capital of the country, remained as important as before the War. Smaller Hungarian towns, such as Szeged or Debrecen, lost the hinterlands of which they had been regional centers and they needed to be reoriented, culturally and economically. Similarly, cities such as Kassau (Kosice, Slovakia) or Marosvásárhely (Targu Mures, Romania) which had been regional centers both culturally and economically were now located outside of Hungary.

Both regimes—the Soviet and the Horthyite—used art exhibitions to signal and to explain the new order they each respectively engendered. In this paper, I will consider two different government-organized shows of the period: the first, organized by the Hungarian Soviet in 1919, “Art Treasures taken into Public Collections,” and the second, organized by the Horthy Regime in 1920, “Hungarian Representative Exhibition.” Both shows embody and demonstrate the political use of art, but from their very origins differentiate themselves. The Soviet exhibition displayed confiscated art supplemented by pieces from State collections; the Horthyist exhibition displayed materials from State collections supplemented by private loans.

Both exhibitions sought to present and solidify a vision of a “new” Hungary, one heir to the pre-war Hungary, but constrained by the limitations imposed by the Western Powers. By documenting the materials shown, and, more significantly, analyzing their accompanying rhetoric—both catalogues’ respective introductory essays, as well as the accompanying popular press—my talk will clarify and elucidate the meanings that the Hungarian regime, regardless of political orientation, invested in the displayed art.

**Samuel D. Albert** is a New York-based Art Historian who teaches at the Fashion Institute of Technology and Fordham University. He specializes in the art and architecture of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and its successor states, 1867–1940, and has published extensively on the topic. Currently, he is working on a multi-year project on Austro-Hungarian, Austrian, and Hungarian Art Exhibitions Abroad, 1890–1940, of which the current talk is a portion. This research has been supported by the Frick Collection’s Center for the History of Collecting, the Botstiber Institute for Austrian-American Studies, and, in the Fall of 2022, Hungarian Fulbright.

“From the independent Szekler Republic to autonomy – the issue of Szekler self-determination”

Csaba Zahorán

Institute of History of the Researcher Center for Humanities, Budapest, Hungary  
Institute of Central European Studies, University of Public Service, Budapest, Hungary

The defeat and collapse of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy in the First World War in the autumn of 1918 foreshadowed a radical rearrangement of power relations also in South-Eastern Europe. This greatly affected Transylvania, a multiethnic region with a Romanian majority, which had been a site of rivalry between Hungarian and Romanian nation-building in the 19th and 20th centuries. Since Bucharest entered the war on the Entente side with the aim of achieving Romanian national unity, the victors’ assertion of the Wilsonian principle of national self-determination pointed in the direction of Romanian goals. This, however, clashed with Hungarian national self-determination, especially in the case of the Szekler region (Székelyföld, Ținutul Secuiesc), which had a predominantly Hungarian majority. Therefore, at the turn of 1918/1919, local Hungarian senior officials formulated a plan for an independent Szekler state—between or in opposition to the Hungarian and Romanian concepts of a nation-state. Although independence was not proclaimed because of the intervention of the Romanian army, and the Szekler Republic became only one of the “ephemeral states” left on paper, the concept did not completely vanish. The idea of regional self-determination repeatedly returned in the course of the 20th century, for example in the Hungarian autonomy plans between the two world wars, in the form of the Hungarian Autonomous Province in Communist Romania (1952–1960/1968), and even today it is still relevant. To what extent did this idea fit in with Hungarian and Romanian nation-state projects and great power plans? What has sustained and reproduced the idea of Szekler self-determination in the more than one hundred years since the end of 1918? In my paper I will present the structural and identity conditions of these two questions.

**Csaba Zahorán** defended his PhD dissertation in 2016 at the ELTE BTK (Budapest) within the 19th and 20th century Eastern European History Doctoral Programme. Between 2012 and 2015 he worked at the Hungarian Institute of Bratislava. Since 2016 he has been research fellow at the Institute of History of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences (now Eötvös Loránd Research Network), where he is member of the Trianon 100 Research Group. He is editor of the journal *Történelmi Szemle*. Since 2019, he works as research fellow at the Institute of Central European Studies (University of Public Service, Budapest). His areas of expertise are: nationalism in Central and Eastern Europe, history of Romania in the 20th and 21st century, historiography and memory of the Trianon Peace Treaty.

“I know that that word appeared and that troops and possibly a battalion were actually fighting units which would fight for the realization of that Autonomy”. Fiume Autonomy as a Persisting Imperial Legacy

Ivan Jeličić  
University of Rijeka, Rijeka, Croatia  
ERC CoG NEPOSTRANS, Institute of Political History, Budapest, Hungary

For the city of Fiume (today Rijeka) the demise of the Austro-Hungarian Empire opened a new political scenario that saw two main opposing actors: the Italian versus the Slovene-Croat-Serb National Council. Behind the façade of national struggle, diverse imperial legacies not only persisted, but were used by local actors to maintain power and achieve annexation. Yet, Fiume’s most prominent and manifest imperial legacy was the city’s special historical and administrative status, synthesized by the term ‘autonomy’.

In late imperial Hungarian Fiume, ‘autonomy’ was a widespread political motto that didn’t disappear with Monarchy’s institutions overnight. From October 1918, in the becoming post-imperial world, Autonomy obtained new vitality and was elaborated in other forms. Socialists, Autonomist-Democrats, and Autonomists advocated Fiume’s historical autonomy to oppose annexation to nation-states and to promote the city to the rank of an independent state. Due to international confluences the free state project was briefly achieved, yet its existence was almost doomed from the beginning and quickly disappeared under the fascists’ and Italian nationalists’ violence.

In fascist Fiume, autonomy, or at least the Autonomists, still subsisted on the political margins. The city’s occupation by the Nazis and the antifascist struggle triggered a new moment for autonomy; autonomist political options and free state advocators returned to the fore, to violently disappear after liberation from the Nazis and fascists and subsequent Yugoslav annexation.

Finally, the democratic transition of the ‘90s, and the political changes at the turn of the twenty-first century resulted with the revival of Rijeka’s autonomist parties and autonomism. The heritage of autonomism now served to advocate the city’s multiethnic character and to oppose the centralization of the Croatian state.

Focusing primarily on the first postwar period, the intent of this presentation is to provide insight into various actors that advocated autonomy as well as reflect on popular and political understandings of autonomy. What the presentation should show is how autonomy, evoked in different ways in periods of political and economic crisis and transformation, can be seen as a persisting imperial legacy of Habsburg-Hungarian Fiume.

**Ivan Jeličić** obtained his PhD in History at the University of Trieste in 2017, defending a thesis on socialism in late Habsburg Fiume/Rijeka. From September 2018 to January 2023, he was a postdoc researcher within the European Research Council (ERC) project “NEPOSTRANS: Negotiating post-imperial transitions,” based at the Institute of Political History in Budapest. From February 2023 he is Assistant Professor (docent) at the Department of Italian Studies Department of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences in Rijeka. He collaborates on the project Rijeka in Flux: Borders and Urban Change after World War II, an international and interdisciplinary research project initiated by the University of British Columbia, Okanagan. His research interests are the political and social transformations between the 19th and 20th centuries and transition processes from the Habsburg Empire to the new states in the Upper Adriatic, particularly in the Rijeka area.

“Red Adriatic in the interwar period: historical context and historiographical debates of Petrovac Red Comune”

Željka Oparnica

Institute of Historical Studies, University of London, London, United Kingdom

The Labin Republic took all the fame; that a small coastal town Petrovac, next to Budva in today's Montenegro, functioned as a so-called Red Commune for 403 days between the late summer 1920 and late autumn 1921 is little known or celebrated today. However, at the time this was a rebellion deemed remarkable and inspiring. Following the first-ever elections to the Constitutional Assembly in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, Petrovac's voters supported communists who used this success to take over the town. Newspapers and journals across the state reported on the case; the *Workers' Newspaper (Radničke novine)* celebrated this success and studied it as a precedent for a communist future. In light of the ever stronger and determined repression of the communist movement in the state starting with 1921, the Petrovac commune now seems an isolated case. Even if a memory of the Red Commune still exists in Petrovac and Montenegro, historians have struggled to contextualize this event within Montenegrin or Yugoslav interwar history.

In light of this vague historiographical narrative, this paper aims to address two sets of questions. The first refers to the historical context, importance, and understanding of the Red Commune in historiography: why and how did the commune succeed in holding on for so long? What were its achievements and failings? What were and are its afterlives? The second set of questions considers this supposedly isolated case as a part of the larger uncovered questions on localism, regionalism, and particularism in the interwar Yugoslav left in general, and the communist movement specifically. In this context, the paper will ask whether there was an Adriatic-specific context that facilitated a distinctive approach to the left movement. Where does the history of the Petrovac Red Commune belong: in the history of Montenegro, Dalmatia, or the Red Adriatic? To what extent and why did local economic, social, and historical conditions influence political positioning in the Adriatic? Finally, why have historians not recognized regionalisms when dealing with left movements?

**Željka Oparnica** is a research fellow at the Institute of Historical Studies, University of London. She received her PhD from Birkbeck, University of London. Her thesis dealt with Sephardi politics in the Balkans in the first half of the twentieth century. Her current research deals with political minorities on the Adriatic in the interwar period. This has facilitated her interest in finding the best and cheapest white wine in Dalmatia.

“Just a legend? The reception of the Banat Republic in local newspapers and memoirs”

Csongor Molnár  
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

In the 1938 Christmas issue of *Brassói Lapok*, one of the leading Hungarian newspapers in interwar Romania, readers could find a lengthy interview with the lawyer Otto Roth from Timișoara (Temesvár/Temeswar/Temišvar). The interview commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Banat Republic. Roth, the central figure of the events of autumn 1918, stated that he only proclaimed the republic—the prefix “Banat” was later taken up by the press and the population. According to Roth, the republic was just a legend, but he never disproved it, because he saw the need for it from the local population.

Rumor has it that Otto Roth, a lawyer and local social democratic politician from Timișoara with good connections in Budapest, proclaimed the Banat Republic in Timișoara on October 31, 1918—a fact which even Roth himself did not want to change for a long time. By examining the available sources, the paper aims to give a much more nuanced picture of the events. In addition to presenting the reception of press materials and memoirs from the period of the Banat Republic, the presentation attempts to broaden the image of the republic based on various local sources, and to point out hitherto unknown events and their role in this ephemeral state. In addition, the analysis of the sources provides insight into the daily life of the republic, the internal relationships of the Banat People’s Council, and the external relationships to the Hungarian government and the Serbian army. Besides this the press materials and the recollections shed light on the emergence and strengthening of regionalism, the role of local identity in the shaping of events and the place of Banat within the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, the Hungarian state and the successor states. The goal of the presentation is to contribute to the history of the Banat Republic and the discourses about it.

**Csongor Molnár** is a doctoral student at the Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest. His dissertation research focuses on interethnic relations and the Hungarian minority in the occupied Banat during the Second World War. To date, his research has been published in the journals *Múltunk* (Our Past), *Kisebbségi Szemle* (Minority Studies Review), and *Regio*.



“Petar Dobrović/Péter Dobrovits's Intellectual Milieu (1900-1922): Between Integral Yugoslavism and Socialist Internationalism”

Lucija Balikić

Central European University, Vienna, Austria; Budapest, Hungary

After the fall of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic in August 1919 and the gradual establishment of the Horthy regime, the intellectual and artistic milieux forged in the prewar imperial capital split. While a certain portion went into exile, to what would become the Soviet Union or countries such as Austria and France, another part descended into the southern Hungarian city of Pécs/Pečuh/Pečuj and, in part due to the Serbian military occupation, continued some of their activities. In this political vacuum between the Horthy regime and the newly established Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, the ethnically mixed counties of Baranya and Baja became not only a point of diplomatic and military contention, but also a prominent place for the leftist intelligentsia, which awaited the spread of the world revolution, to gather. Specifically, one of the most interesting figures in this context, who in August 1921 became president of the short-lived informal Serbian-Hungarian Republic Baranya-Baja, was the Pécs-born, Budapest-socialized painter of Serbian origin, Petar Dobrović/Dobrovits Péter.

While the current historiography of the said republic (specifically the foundational studies by Árpád Hornyák and Emil Szűts) primarily focuses on the military, political, institutional and administrative history of its brief existence and dissolution, in this presentation I will explore the intellectual and, particularly, conceptual stakes of his activities in the period roughly from the turn of century to his final emigration to the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes. The key objective of this presentation is, thus, to examine his intellectual socialization in the circles of Lajos Kassák and the journal *Nyugat* [West] in Budapest, as well as his contemporaneous debates on the canon of integral Yugoslavism and socialist internationalism with Ivan Meštrović, Juraj Gašparac, Veljko Petrović, Miloš Crnjanski, and Miroslav Krleža. In addition, the debates in the local journal *Munkás* [Worker], published under the Serbian military occupation in Pécs, and supported by the Pécs Socialist Party, will be reconstructed and presented as a valuable context and, to an extent, contrast to his political thought.

Moreover, by focusing on Dobrović and his circles' conceptualization of statehood, nationhood, and the ultimate goals of the workers' movement—with which Dobrović interacted most during his stay in Pécs—I would like to explore the thesis that it was in fact primarily integral Yugoslavism which motivated his secessionist agenda, and not the prospect of a world revolution. In other words, I will explore a new perspective on his participation in leftist and Yugoslavist circles in both Budapest and Pécs, arguing that his and his milieux's understanding of the 'nationalities question' was to a considerable extent conflated with their ideas on the emancipation of the proletariat, as well as that the former was ultimately decisive. This is particularly pertinent because his choice to establish the said republic can be regarded as a transitional stage to its annexation to what they considered a 'democratic' Yugoslavia, as opposed to Horthy's authoritarian state.

Lastly, in his later work, which has most often been described by art historians as colourist mediterraneanism, can also be seen as an expression of autochtonist antimodernism, characteristic for the discourse of his Yugoslav contemporaries such as Bogdan Radica, Jovan Cvijić, and even Vladimir Dvorniković, standing in stark contrast to his earlier impressionist work, but also to the leftist political thought of those who were formed in the same milieux, such as the Yugoslav-Hungarian communist Lőrinc Péter/Löbl Árpád/Arpad Lebl.

**Lucija Balikić** is a PhD candidate at the History Department, Central European University, in Budapest and Vienna, where she is currently writing a dissertation on the intellectual history of the Sokol movement in late Austria-Hungary and interwar Yugoslavia. Recently, she authored the book *Najbolje namjere: britanski i francuski intelektualci i stvaranje Jugoslavije* [*Best Intentions: British and French Intellectuals and the Creation of Yugoslavia*] (Zagreb: Srednja Europa, 2022) which deals with British and French liberal intellectuals' discourses and agitation around the creation of Yugoslavia during the First World War, as well as several articles on body-politics and eugenics in interwar Yugoslavia and the position of intellectual history in Croatian historiography.

“Wilsonism, Interregnum, Adventurism:  
A Taxonomy of Ephemeral States on the Territory of the Former Hungarian Kingdom, 1918-  
1921”

Balázs Ablonczy  
Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary  
Institute of History of the Researcher Centre of Humanities, Budapest, Hungary

Between 1918 and 1921, 13 transitional states were established on the territory of the former Kingdom of Hungary (14 if we include the Hungarian Soviet Republic). Some were not even proclaimed (such as the Szekler Republic), others lasted only a few days (such as the Republic of Mura in May 1919 in what is now Slovenia), while others survived for months (such as the Hutsul Republic in the North-Eastern Carpathians), issued constitutional documents (such as one of the few monarchist experiments, the Lajtabánság/Banate of Leitha, in October 1921), created state symbols: flags, stamps, and attempted to transform political life (such as the Slovak Soviet Republic). Their territorial extent varied widely: some included only a few villages (as in the Heanzenland experiment in western Hungary, now Burgenland, end 1918), others exceeded the size of several countries today (certainly the Banat Republic was one of them). But they also had a number of common features: they were created on the peripheries of the country, in many cases they were based on some shared experience of identity going back to the Middle Ages, and they were created by activists who took advantage of the turbulent times and the spirit of the times to create something radically new in the spirit of self-determination, very fashionable in the post-war period.

My paper is an attempt to situate these state formations in the ideological space: which were regionalist, which were democrats or even pre-fascist; which gravitated towards the centre of the Kingdom of Hungary/Hungarian People’s Republic, and were only a tool to remain within the frames of a Hungarian state, which ones were in search of an increased regional autonomy and finally, which tended to seek secession and which were created by local or external actors.

The result, I hope, will be a matrix that can help to construct a typology to categorize these short-lived states and to point out the characteristics of the years following WWI, the “small wars”-period.

**Balázs Ablonczy** is associate professor at Eötvös Loránd University (Budapest) and senior research fellow at the Centre for Humanities, Institute of History (formerly affiliated with the Hungarian Academy of Sciences). He obtained his MA and PhD at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest and a DEA in Université Paris 1. Specialist on the Hungarian history of the 20th Century, he was Ránki Chair at Indiana University (Bloomington) in 2009–2010 and director of the Hungarian Institute in Paris between 2011 and 2015. Author of a dozen books dealing with Horthy-Era Hungary, his most recent books deal with the myths around the Trianon peace treaty (*Száz év múlva lejár? Újabb Trianon-legendák/Expire in a hundred years? Newest legends about the Trianon peace treaty*, 2022; and *Go East! History of Hungarian Turanism*, Indiana UP, 2022) His books have been translated into English, Polish, Russian, Romanian, and French.

## “Challenging the Province from its Margins: The Little Tyrols of 1918”

Christopher Wendt

European University Institute, Florence, Italy

ERC CoG NEPOSTRANS, Institute of Political History, Budapest, Hungary

Much has been written about plans launched by German-speaking Tyrolean conservatives in the wake of the Great War to preserve “German Tyrol” by way of making this alpine region into a state of its own. Whether as an independent buffer between Germany and Italy, as part of a larger “Alpine Republic,” or even as a new seat for the pope, these projects largely aimed at preserving “German Tyrolean” integrity along ethnolinguistic lines and separating Tyrol from the old imperial center of Vienna—and for all practical purposes, they remained consigned to the realm of imagination, of discrete correspondence and back-room dealings.

Less attention, on the other hand, has been granted to a series of local initiatives that emerged from within North Tyrol at the end of the war and which shared basic goals with the grander provincial schemes; that is, they also aimed at putting the post-war political future into local hands. In contrast to the mostly chimerical efforts for “German Tyrolean” statehood, these initiatives, which were launched in late 1918 by local notables in North Tyrol’s remote districts of Reutte and Lienz, produced tangible results: in various instances, they formed councils to take over local administration, opened democratic forums, dismissed resistant state officials, and even directed armed guards. While the leading personalities in both sub-regions never claimed statehood like those of fleeting microstates in Central Europe, they nonetheless demanded the right to choose the most advantageous state-political association for their district as the post-imperial order congealed. At the surface, both district initiatives were responses to perceived long- and short-term neglect by the provincial center. Already historically distant and cut off from Innsbruck, both areas felt particularly abandoned by provincial authorities amidst end-of-war upheaval, and the councils formed in the wake of the war reflected immediate efforts to alleviate disastrous material situations. But, as I argue, these district-based movements were more than that: featuring actors from across the political spectrum, their aims ranged from increasing local control, to expanding democratic representation, to paving the way for accelerated post-war economic development. Critically, in threatening to break away from the rest of Tyrol, they also questioned the supremacy of province-based sovereignty in a region much vaunted for its alleged regional consciousness and set a baseline for developing notions of many “Tyrols” in the interwar years.

**Christopher Wendt** is a PhD researcher in the Department of History and Civilization at the European University Institute in Florence, Italy. His dissertation project, “With God into the New Era: Faith, Nation, and Region in Post-Habsburg Austrian Tyrol,” explores how German-speaking Catholics in the northern part of the former Habsburg Crownland of Tyrol responded to the collapse of the monarchy and navigated the challenges of the interwar period. He is also a junior researcher on the ERC-supported NEPOSTRANS project, where he focuses more generally on the dynamics of post-imperial transition in Austrian North Tyrol.

“The Italian Regency of Carnaro: A Nationalist Free State as the First Step toward a Pan-Adriatic Ghost Protectorate”

Federico Carlo Simonelli  
Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Venice, Italy

The Italian Regency of Carnaro, established in Fiume (today Rijeka) between September and December 1920, is considered by many corners of historiography as the most emblematic expression of the legionary occupation led by Gabriele d'Annunzio and more broadly of subversive paramilitary movements of postwar Europe. The Regency was presented by d'Annunzio both as an expression of the self-determination of the local population in opposition to Wilsonianism, and as a model of experimental government to be opposed to both “plutocratic democracies” and Bolshevism. The Regency was also endowed with a constitution which merged local municipal laws with the principles of corporatism. Starting from the second half of the twentieth century, some interpretations have presented the Regency and its constitution as an experiment in a libertarian and multicultural counter-society, an expression of the progressive currents of the early postwar period.

This presentation proposes a different interpretation. Based on a more extensive analysis of d'Annunzio's “Fiumian exploit,” what I will show is how the establishment of the ephemeral Regency had much more concrete objectives: to replace the local government of Fiume with a civil administration directly controlled by the legionary regime, which imprinted a systematic Italian nationalizing policy on the multi-ethnic space of Fiume, and, above all, aimed to extend it to the rest of the eastern Adriatic coast, creating a ghost protectorate preparing the future annexation of these lands to the Kingdom of Italy. From this point of view, therefore, the Regency and its constitution-manifesto (which remained unapplied) appear as an indirect tool for realizing the plans of the Italian Nationalist Association: the creation of a Mediterranean Italian empire and the construction of an authoritarian and corporatist regime. This presentation will show how these aspects, which would nourish the future fascist program, were eliminated by subsequent reconstructions, thus creating the myth of a D'Annunzian revolution that nowadays nourishes the imaginary of the Italian Right.

**Federico Carlo Simonelli** is a postdoctoral research fellow at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, Department of Linguistics and Comparative Cultural Studies, working on the project “Myths of Legitimation and Government of Difference in the European Imperial Regimes during the Modern and Contemporary Age.” He received his doctorate in the History of Political Parties and Movements from the University of Urbino “Carlo Bo,” with a dissertation on D'Annunzio, published as a book: *D'Annunzio e il mito di Fiume. Riti, simboli, narrazioni* (Pisa: Pacini editore, 2021). His fields of research include Italian political history in the first half of the twentieth century, the Upper Adriatic area, the political use of history and memory, symbols and cults related to national liturgies, and connections between politics, imagery, and mass culture. He carries out consulting and research activities at the Il Vittoriale degli Italiani Foundation, the Society for Fiuman Studies, and the Micheletti Foundation. Simonelli was formerly adjunct lecturer of Contemporary History at the University of Urbino “Carlo Bo.”

“Vevchani: imagining sovereignty and its consequences”

Islam Jusufi

Independent researcher, Skopje, North Macedonia

The issues surrounding sovereignty have had a lively debate in the literature of international relations. Among the areas that have increasingly seen discussions on sovereignty are the processes of contestation and claim of sovereignty. While there have been attempts for establishment of new spaces with sovereign characters, simultaneously these attempts have received responses from existing national authorities seeking to re-claim their sovereignty. This has become important, as gaining sovereignty has been perceived to strengthen the chances for political, economic, and social development of particular spaces seeking sovereignty. The areas seeking sovereignty have established institutions that have sought to protect characteristics that have been of particular significance to that particular space. As trust towards the central government authorities declines, sovereignty is being claimed by sub-units. A region best to observe these developments is in North Macedonia’s municipality of Vevchani, in the southeast of the country. In this light, the proposed paper seeks to analyze the simultaneous processes of contestation and claim of sovereignty and how this has affected the sovereignty perception in the locality performing contestation and claim. The proposed article attempts to see how Vevchani practiced ‘imagination’ and ‘performance’ of sovereignty and what has been the response of central authorities. Additionally, what has been the legacy of this quasi-secession attempt to the current situation in Vevchani and to the overall perception of sovereignty in the case of North Macedonia. While there have been some studies on Vevchani, little is analyzed on the processes of contestation of sovereignty, on the one hand, and claims for sovereignty by Vevchani on the other. In this context, the proposed paper seeks to provide Vevchani as a case study example for studying the reasons and consequences of the attempt for gaining sovereignty.

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## “Separatism in Southern Moldova: The Failed History of the Budjak Republic”

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In 1988, the Gagauz, a Russified Turkic minority, began calling for the creation of an autonomous republic in the south of the Moldavian Soviet Socialist Republic (MSSR). They laid claim to five districts: Comrat, Ceadâr-Lunga, Vulcănești, Taraclia, and Basarabeasca. However, Taraclia had a predominantly Bulgarian population, while Basarabeasca was home to an almost equal number of Ukrainians, Russians, Bulgarians, and Gagauz. Many of these districts' non-Gagauz inhabitants vocally opposed their inclusion into a Gagauz Autonomous Republic. Nevertheless, the inclusion of these regions in the Gagauz Autonomous Republic was deemed crucial, as Basarabeasca and Taraclia divided the three predominantly Gagauz cities from each other. Moreover, the Moldovan government used this opposition to their advantage, arguing that Gagauz autonomy lacked the support of a significant portion of the population.

In response, the Gagauz proposed forming a multi-ethnic autonomous republic, which they referred to as the Budjak People's Republic. They promised that Russian would serve as the proposed republic's official language and that it would maintain close ties with Moscow. These promises appealed to many of the Bulgarians, Ukrainians, and Russians in southern Moldova, who, like the Gagauz, were pro-Soviet, heavily Russified, and feared that they might face discrimination in a Moldovan nation-state. Letters written by local labour collectives extolling their support for the initiative appeared in Taraclia and Basarabeasca's local newspapers while local political elites seriously considered the proposal.

However, the Budjak People's Republic ultimately failed to manifest itself. This paper argues that there were three reasons for this. Firstly, in 1988 and 1989, Gagauz nationalism was the driving force behind the autonomist movement. As a result, many Bulgarians, Ukrainians, and Russians feared any multi-ethnic republic would become dominated by the Gagauz. Secondly, political elites in Taraclia and Basarabeasca quickly realised they could extract significant concessions from Chișinău by aligning with the central government against the Gagauz. Finally, while all Gagauz political elites paid lip service to the idea of creating a multi-ethnic republic, only those in Ceadâr-Lunga were seriously committed to the initiative.

By exploring these factors, this paper contributes to understanding the complexities surrounding the failure of a multi-ethnic autonomist movement in southern Moldova. It sheds light on the dynamics of ethnicity, nationalism, and regional aspirations during a critical period of Moldova's history, offering insights into the challenges of forging unity in a diverse society.

**Keith Harrington** is a lecturer in modern European history and nationalism studies at the School of History and Geography at Dublin City University. In January 2023, Keith successfully defended his PhD thesis, which focused on the role that local elites played in the Transnistrian conflict between 1989 and 1992. During his PhD, Keith won several prestigious scholarships, including the National University of Ireland's Travelling Studentship. He has published several peer-review articles on Moldovan history in journals such as *Plural* and the *Journal of Romanian Studies*. Additionally, he has contributed analytical pieces on Moldovan politics to outlets such as Carnegie, the Wilson Centre, and Balkan Insight.

“Introducing Municipal Separatism: A New Perspective on Krajina Rebellion (1990-1991)”

Ivan Laškarin  
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Krajina was an unrecognised political entity that existed on the territory of present-day Croatia from 1990 to 1995. It was originally established by several municipalities with absolute or relative Serb majorities (Knin, Benkovac, Obrovac, Donji Lapac, Gračac, Korenica, Vojnić, Vrginmost, Glina, Petrinja, Kostajnica, Dvor). However, there were also numerous Serb-populated areas in neighbouring Croat-majority municipalities, many of which demanded separation and the creation of a new municipality or incorporation into existing Serb-dominated municipalities.

The basic assumption of this study is that the dynamics of ethnic conflicts in the municipalities where Serbs were a minority differed significantly from the processes in Serb-majority municipalities. For instance, most violent conflicts during the war in Croatia took place in areas where Serbs were unable to independently impose a political course for entire municipalities. However, scholars have overlooked Serb communities that found themselves in the situation of a double minority—both at the national and municipal levels.

This study seeks to remedy this deficiency by focusing on Serb separatist activities in Croat-dominated municipalities. The aim is to define the phenomenon of municipal separatism and identify its determinants in a selected case. In addition, the focus is on the relationship dynamics between separatist settlements and municipal centres, as well as the influence that Serbs from majority areas had on the behaviour of Serbs in minority areas. The municipality of Otočac, where almost half of all settlements made separatist claims, is used as a case study for the analysis. The research is based on the analysis of archival documents, historical newspaper material and elite interviews.

The value of this study is manifold. The new concept of “municipal separatism” can unravel some rarely studied facets of territorial conflict. Although grassroots, bottom-up activities are of paramount importance to the study of separatism, the concept of municipalities has been overlooked. Moreover, Krajina as a separatist entity and events in the Otočac municipality and the Gacka region have been insufficiently researched. Applying this micro approach to the study of separatism can shed light on little-known aspects of the Yugoslav wars and provide new insights into ethnic relations in the context of state collapse and territorial disintegration.

**Ivan Laškarin** is a doctoral candidate at the Department of International Relations at Friedrich Schiller University in Jena. He holds degrees in sociology from the Universities of Zagreb and Saint Petersburg. Ivan Laškarin's research interests are in the area of domestic and international territorial conflicts, social movements, and dealing with the past. His current work focuses on the causes and dynamics of minority mobilisation in annexation conflicts.



## “Peasant republics in Polish Galicia and Slavonia in 1918”

Jakub Beneš

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As dynastic empires collapsed in central and eastern Europe in the wake of the First World War, peasant soldiers did not wait for urban centers to construct a new political order for them. In numerous villages and market towns across the former Romanov and Habsburg territories, they established local “republics” or “republican” authorities. This involved removing existing authorities, disarming gendarmes and “foreign” soldiers, and electing new representatives of the local peasant population.

The simultaneous rise of self-styled national governments in capital cities across the region presented them with a choice: to pursue self-determination irrespective of political developments beyond the village or locality, or to attempt integration into incipient nation states on their own terms with a mind to imprinting them with their own peasantist outlook. This paper explores these two approaches to peasant self-government in late 1918 by comparing the situation in Polish Galicia with that of the South Slav lands, particularly Croatia-Slavonia. In both these former provinces of the Habsburg Empire, peasant radicals seized power at the local level and established “republics.” But whereas the Tarnobrzeg Republic in central Galicia aimed to normalize relations with the new Polish government, first in Lublin and then in Warsaw, the republics that sprouted up in Slavonian villages such as Donji Miholjac, Petrijevci, and Našice sought complete autonomy from the National Council of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs based at the time in Zagreb.

By assembling the patchy records of such microstates, my paper provides an account of grassroots peasant political aspirations during the collapse of multinational dynastic empires in central and eastern Europe. Peasants everywhere demanded immediate redistribution of large estate land and local autonomy, particularly from wartime states that had expanded dramatically to ensure agricultural production. Soldiers returning from the front played a decisive role in all instances. At the same time, they were divided on the question of the “national revolutions” then sweeping the former Habsburg territories, with some rejecting urban politics wholesale while others attempted to influence their course. This dilemma would define peasant politics throughout the era of world wars in Europe.

**Jakub Beneš** is Associate Professor in Central European History at University College London, School of Slavonic and East European Studies. He is the author of *Workers and Nationalism: Czech and German Social Democracy in Habsburg Austria, 1890–1918* (Oxford, 2017), which won three prizes in Austria, the United Kingdom, and the United States. He has published articles in *Slavic Review*, *Contemporary European History*, and *Past & Present*. He is currently finishing a book manuscript on peasant violence and peasant movements in east central Europe 1914–1950.

“Republics before the Republic: Peasant Revolts in Southern Italy, 1943-1945”

Rosario Forlenza  
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Between 1943 and 1945, groups of peasants took over dozens of small towns in the southern Italian countryside and proclaimed the birth of independent republics, which they called “independent,” or “red.” During their brief lives—sometimes just a few days—the peasant republics implemented revolutionary measures. These included the redistribution of land—an old and strong aspiration for the mass of southern Italian peasants who still lived in the feudal condition of latifundia—the equitable distribution of food, and the creation of people’s tribunals.

This paper argues that the struggle of the southern Italian peasants was not simply a manifestation of a-political spontaneity (jacqueries) or a visceral reaction of fury against the demands of the elites, but a radical political challenge to the structure of power and to the entrenched social relations of the Italian Mezzogiorno. The argument here is that land reform and the end to tyranny would not have been enough for people hoping to claim their rightful place in the world, transform everyday life, and fashion their own destiny.

The social revolution of the war, the collapse of fascism in July 1943, and the disintegration of the national state were a creative moment of liminality, which was particularly salient for a previously politically passive rural population. The lived experiences of such an extraordinary time of mobilization were for them a rite of passage, leading to a crucial transformation. Southern Italian peasants became more modern, escaped feudal backwardness through revolutionary participation, even if their republics were almost immediately subjected to brutal repression on the part of landowners and Allied authorities.

Gaining a sense of dignity, denied them in the past, and of agency to intervene in politics, they produced new meanings, new performances and, ultimately a new civic awareness that went on to energize the subsequent emergence of Italian democracy.

**Rosario Forlenza** is an Associate Professor in History and Political Anthropology at Luiss University, Rome. He has published *On the Edge of Democracy: Italy, 1943–1948* (Oxford, 2019). He is working on a comparative study of revolutions from the perspective of political anthropology and on the totalitarian experiences in interwar Italy, Germany, and Russia.

“Peasant veterans and their micro-states. The role of peasant war veterans in the creation of micro-states in the territory of the former Hungarian Kingdom 1918-1921.”

Tamás Révész

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The Hungarian Kingdom, like many other regions of the Habsburg Empire experienced significant political turmoil after the end of the First World War. In Budapest political regimes followed each other in quick succession. The liberal-nationalist Hungarian People's Republic was toppled by the Bolshevik party and only four months later the Soviet Republic was replaced by Miklós Horthy's nationalist counterrevolutionary regime. Meanwhile, large parts of the former Hungarian Kingdom became part of the newly emerging victorious Czechoslovakian, Romania and Yugoslavian states. Not surprisingly this period has been mostly portrayed by the historiography as a time of social and national revolutions and counterrevolutions. The fact that more than ten different microstates emerged in the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom between 1918 and 1921 could hardly be incorporated into these narratives. Thus many of these short-lived states became forgotten or portrayed as curious but largely pitiful attempts by irresponsible adventurers. The founding fathers of these states were most of the time war veterans, well-to-do peasants or members of the local elite, who served in the Austro-Hungarian army. The supporters of these states were also mostly peasant soldiers who had just recently returned from the frontlines.

This paper investigates the role of these war veterans in the creation of the micro-states in the territory of the Hungarian Kingdom from both the perspective of the „founding fathers” and the local population. It relies on still-unknown sources, including official reports and personal testimonies, letters and diaries mostly collected by local archives. The paper is divided into two main parts. First, it analyses the social background and the motivation of the founding elites. It focuses particularly on the different ways how did wartime experiences influence their decision to break away from the nation-states. Second, the paper concentrates on the perspective of the local population. It examines the reaction of the local peasant veterans to the establishment of these new regimes. Answering the questions above the paper sheds light on how the wartime experience created new ways to legitimize these states. Comparing the different cases the paper also points out some key elements contributing to the relative success of certain microstates and the quick failures of others.

**Tamás Révész** is a research fellow at the Institute of History of Research Centre for Humanities in Budapest. Having earned his PhD in 2018 from the University of Vienna, his research focuses on the borderland wars of Austria and Hungary and the role of war veterans in both countries during the interwar period. He has published articles on the subject in *First World War Studies*, *Südost-Forschungen*, *Contemporary European History* and the *Hungarian Historical Review*. Tamás is also the author of the book *Nem akartak katonát látni? A magyar állam és hadserege 1918-1919-ben* [*Don't they want to see soldiers anymore? The Hungarian state and its army in 1918-1919*], which investigates the transformation of the Habsburg armed forces in Hungary after the First World War, including the mobilization of the Hungarian Soviet Republic. Between 2021 and 2022, Révész worked as a postdoctoral research fellow at UCL SSEES working on the project 'Europe's Last Peasant War: Violence and Revolution in Austria-Hungary and its Successors, 1917–1945.' His research focused on the relationship between the peasantry and the Hungarian Soviet Republic.

“Terra Nullius, Phantom Borders, and Micronations: From Liberland to the Hajduk Republic”

Kevin Kenjar

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Rather than focusing on micronations themselves, this paper explores the principle of terra nullius (“nobody’s land”) that has proved fertile for the formation of micronations. As this paper demonstrates, the unclaimed lands that often provide the territorial basis for microstate claims are often found at the interstices of recognized polities that, for one reason or another, have refused to lay claim to particular lands along their borders. With this in mind, this paper investigates the related concept of *Phantomgrenzen* (“phantom borders”), in which historical borders, often drawn by imperial or colonial authorities, continue to have effects long after their effacement. The particular cases studies explored in this paper include the micronations of Liberland (situated between Croatia and Serbia), Bir Tawil (situated between Egypt and Sudan), and the Hajduk Republic of Mijat Tomić (located within Bosnia-Herzegovina),

**Kevin Kenjar** is an Austrian-American linguistic and cultural anthropologist based at the University of Rijeka as part of the “REVENANT” ERC project. He is specialized in language ideologies, nationalism, linguistic landscape studies, historical anthropology, and memory studies. He has spent nearly two decades working on the former Yugoslavia, particularly Bosnia and Herzegovina. He completed his PhD in 2020 at the University of California, Berkeley, and is the author of a forthcoming book, *The Street Corner That Started the 20th Century*, concerning the changing ideological and linguistic landscapes at a single intersection in Sarajevo over the past several hundred years.

“Bosna Srebrena – a story of a surviving Medieval religious micro-state”

Goran Stanić

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When Pope Nicolas IV sent two Franciscans to Bosnia in 1291 with the assignment to bring a national ruler to the union with the Catholic Church, little did he know that he initiated a mission that would be ongoing until today. In fact, historians argue that the Franciscan province Bosna Srebrena (lat. Bosna Argentina), named after Srebrenica, where they established the first monastery, is the only Medieval Bosnian institution that survived all successive polities that had been established in Bosnia and Herzegovina. During the Ottoman occupation of Bosnia in 1463, Franciscan leader Anđeo Zvizdović met with Sultan Mehmed II on the field near Fojnica where he negotiated a political charter (*ahdname*) that guaranteed undisturbed pastoral work and freedom to profess faith for Franciscans and Catholics. Being the only Catholic order present in Bosnia during Ottoman rule enabled them to expand the borders of the province from Pešta on the north to Bulgaria in the south, with large parts of Dalmatia and Serbia respectively. In fact, *ahdname* presents a reference point for Franciscan collective memory which aided them in preserving their Catholic faith and Bosnian cultural identity even after substantially subscribing to Croatian national identity in the process of national integration during the nineteenth century. In that period, Bosna Srebrena experienced important territorial changes because of the political conflicts and partition with Herzegovinian Franciscans and the newly installed regular clergy. Ultimately, during the war in 1990s, Bosna Srebrena and the Franciscans directed a foremost general anti-war stance and a particular critique of Herceg-Bosna-led separatist politics.

**Goran Stanić** is a research associate in the project “REVENANT: Revivals of Empire: Nostalgia, Amnesia, Tribulation,” ERC Grant #101002908 (University of Rijeka) and a PhD researcher at the Faculty of Theology and Religious Studies (KU Leuven). He previously earned academic degrees in disciplines of philosophy, theology, religious studies, democracy and human rights at Universities of Zagreb, KU Leuven, Bologna and Sarajevo. His doctoral project intersects memory studies with contextual theology in the Balkans with particular focus on Catholic figures of nineteenth-century Bosnia and Herzegovina.

“Memory Politics and Failed Microstates:  
Second World War Revisionism in the Republika Srpska Krajina (1991–1995)”

Vjeran Pavlaković  
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From 1991–1995, Serbs in the newly independent Croatia rebelled against the central government in an attempt to establish their own state, the Republic of Serbian Krajina (RSK – Republika srpska krajina). Never recognized by the international community, and relying on the Milošević regime in Serbia for survival, the Krajina leadership tried to build legitimacy through symbols and historical narratives of Serb victimization and resistance during the Second World War. The memory politics of this microstate not only challenged those of the new Croatian state but revised the “brotherhood and unity” paradigm of communist Yugoslavia as well. Whereas the new Croatian authorities embraced the narrative of the “thousand-year dream” of Croatian statehood, the RSK leadership continued to draw on the tragedy of the Second World War to challenge Zagreb’s sovereignty. However, rather than the multiethnic struggle against fascism represented by the Partisans, it was exclusively Serb victimization and the Četnik legacy which dominated the RSK’s brief political existence. Drawing upon the archival material captured by the Croatian Army after the fall of the RSK, this contribution will analyze the policies related to monuments, the construction of memorial museums, and commemorative practices at sites of memory such as Glina, Jasenovac, and Petrova Gora to explore this microstate’s strategies of nation-building.

**Vjeran Pavlaković** is a Professor at the Department of Cultural Studies at the University of Rijeka, Croatia. He received his Ph.D. in History in 2005 from the University of Washington, and has published articles on cultural memory, transitional justice in the former Yugoslavia, and Yugoslav volunteers in the Spanish Civil War. He is a co-editor of the volume *Framing the Nation and Collective Identity in Croatia* (Routledge, 2019), which was re-issued in Croatian in 2022. He was the lead researcher on the Memoryscapes project as part of Rijeka’s European Capital of Culture in 2020 and a co-founder of the Cres Summer School on Transitional Justice and Memory Politics, as well as a researcher for Rijeka/Fiume in Flux. Current research includes the transnational muralization of conflict and a history of Dalmatian immigrants in the American Southwest, which explores the trajectories of former Habsburg imperial subjects re-inventing themselves as a driving force in the Americanization of US borderlands.