

# National Frameworks: Reflections on the Construction of National Interests and Political Agendas in Interwar Europe

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This article explores the relationship that exists between ideology and political interest and applies it to the study of the international system that arose in Europe after the First World War. Following Alexander Wendt's approach to identity as a socializing process, we have underscored the extent to which the principles of the Versailles system affected its member's identities and goals. Because these assumptions derived from the national narratives that had become widespread in Europe during the previous decades, the new international framework became decisively modelled in accord to nationalist ideas. In turn, this meant that member states were socialised within an environment in which nationalist claims and interests could be perceived as legitimate. By depicting nations as the product of narrative practices, this research tries to shed light on the ways in which the institutionalised logic of national discourse influenced international developments after 1920. To do so, a general examination of some political instability issues in interwar Europe will be provided so as to analyse the degree to which nationalist assumptions shaped them. Finally, we argue that this framework had enormous consequences not just for minority and border populations which became increasingly regarded as factors of instability, but also for the broader objective of the Versailles system of maintaining a specific balance of power in Europe.

**Keywords:** National identity; Narration; International institutions; National minorities; International legitimacy.

## Introduction

It is common for historians, sociologists, and other scholars to face a problematic question when they must consider the motives behind the behaviour of political actors. The matter, particularly apparent when we analyse nationalism as a political doctrine, is that of the instrumentalization of ideological claims.

The issue can be briefly summarised. Political analysts and academic researchers alike tend to differentiate ideological or propagandistic claims from other sets of considerations – such as economic, ideological, or geo-strategic factors – which we may describe as *realpolitik*. Behind this difference lies an assumption that portrays ideology and propaganda as being merely disguised and embellished forms that conceal *realpolitikal* motivations. This distinction, in turn, has strong implications for the study of political phenomena. If we, as researchers, acknowledge that these *realpolitikal* motives encompass the deepest level of explanatory factors for the behaviour of a given actor, why should we bother analysing those claims whose purpose is solely to conceal or make them more acceptable?

In the case of nationalism, the consequences of this question have been overwhelming. Many of the most famous studies on nationalism as an ideology – e.g. those of Ernest Gellner, Eric Hobsbawm, or John Breuilly – have tended to dismiss nationalist texts as rhetorical propaganda and look for the deepest roots of the ideas of national identity elsewhere.<sup>1</sup> As Ernest Gellner himself summarised, they thought that ‘we shall not learn too much about nationalism from the study of its own prophets.’<sup>2</sup>

Some researchers, particularly the ethno-symbolic current led by Anthony D. Smith, have tried to provide a counterbalance by showing that the contents of national identity can’t be created out of thin air and

have been historically based on previously existent ideas of communal belonging.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, authors such as Benedict Anderson and Prasenjit Duara have paid strong attention to how the particular way of imagining the nation has shaped the resultant national identities.<sup>4</sup> Despite these efforts, however, strong modernist positions such as Hobsbawm's, Gellner's, or Breuille's still find widespread support.

This identification of 'nationalist discourse' as a tool – a means towards an end –, at least from a 'modernist' theoretical standpoint, has brought the problematic tension between propaganda and *realpolitik* to the front. Scholars have thus been presented with two options: either they have accepted the essentialist positions defended by nationalist discourse (for example, by uncritically acknowledging the idea that national communities possess certain 'rights') and considered them sufficiently self-explanatory;<sup>5</sup> or they have argued that *realpolitik* motivations are the only ones that ultimately matter, without explaining why nationalist claims were adduced by these actors to begin with. In this article I defend that both positions are heavily flawed, and that the solution to this contradiction must come from the removal of such extreme divisions between propaganda and *realpolitik*.

It is particularly important to pay attention to this discussion if we want to study the years that followed the First World War. This period has traditionally been described as one in which nationalist ideologies shaped the internal and external agendas of several European states. For instance, and especially in the case of Germany, the activities of these states have been described as attempts to revoke or alter the unfavourable terms that resulted from the signing of the peace in 1919.<sup>6</sup> This article will try to present a different approach, i.e. that the international norms of the moment, embodied most notably in the postwar peace treaties and in the League of Nations, allowed these

national claims to achieve legitimacy, and permitted the development of the nationalist agendas which, ultimately, would weaken the structural integrity of the whole system.

But what was the process by which these nationalist claims came to be seen as legitimate on the international stage? It is the objective of this article to answer this question. It will be argued that nationalist discourse heavily affected the Versailles system, and a brief summary of the nature and core assumptions of this national framework will be outlined. Then, evidence of the presence of these core assumptions will be provided by analysing some fundamental documents of the international society of interwar Europe, and I will explore the influence that national discourse had in the post-1919 system. Finally, the consequences of this impact will be analysed. To do so, an overall examination of some political instability issues in interwar Europe will be provided to make clear to what degree nationalist assumptions were responsible for them. The review will conclude with a series of reflections on the consequences that the influence of nationalist discourse in the Versailles system had for border populations and national minorities.

## **National narrative assumptions**

Nations can be described as the result of particular narratives of identity and descent. As such, they are not particularly dissimilar from other products of narratives such as religions, *ethnies* (to use Anthony D. Smith's germane term), races, clans, and (arguably) any other community beyond the most basic familiar ties.<sup>7</sup> If we accept that different kinds of narrative produce different kinds of communities, the important fact is, then, to ascertain what makes national narratives unique amongst them.

When we analyse these narratives, especially those that have such global extension as the national idea, it is fundamental to focus first on distinguishing their constituents. Nations cannot be imagined in whatever shape, and this is evidenced by the fact that we can easily recognise various phenomena, in different locations and periods, as particular manifestations of nationalist ideas. In fact, nations are built around a few particular and unchanging notions – which we will term ‘core national assumptions’ – which, when combined, produce a pattern that frames the way in which a community can be conceived. Apart from these core national assumptions, there exist other ‘variable elements’, which fill this textual skeleton and relate it to particular temporal, geographical, or social coordinates. In the case of religious narratives, for example, faith (understood broadly as an unfalsifiable belief) constitutes one of its core assumptions, whereas the belief in the resurrection of the souls, on the contrary, would be a ‘variable’ element which connects the general notion of faith only to particular periods, locations, and cultural and social environments. In short, core national assumptions provide the unchanging structure of national narratives, while variable elements complete and provide content to this textual template.<sup>8</sup>

In the case of national narratives, eight core assumptions have been isolated as producers of this textual pattern. We have termed these notions unity, community, continuity, sovereignty, purity, historical subjecthood, representation, and international global spatiality. Although it is not the objective of this article to provide an exhaustive description of each of these elements, a brief summary of them is necessary.<sup>9</sup>

The concept of **unity** establishes that nations exist and that they are homogeneous, natural communities that possess a unique, distinct character. They allegedly share a powerful common bond (which can be

imagined as a blood connection, or as a language link, or as any other one) and also unified interests, goals, and preferences.<sup>10</sup> The idea of **community** defends that a nation is always made up of an ample number of individuals, and that important events are those which are caused by or affect this large group. By the notion of **continuity**, it is possible to imagine nations as ‘communities not just of the living but of the living in continuity with the dead and the yet unborn’;<sup>11</sup> that is, as communities which remain fundamentally unaltered over time and space, in spite of changing circumstances. The assumption of **sovereignty** establishes that nations possess inherent political rights. One of those is the right to (a certain degree of) self-government, and, as a result, that the nation-state is the political expression of the national community. The idea of national **purity** portrays nations as self-contained communities, which need no external input to develop themselves. Therefore, it designates the influence of one nation upon another (be it political, linguistic, social, artistic, or of any other kind) as an expression of power and as a force that must be resisted. The term **historical subjecthood** embodies the notion that any particular element in a national narrative must be selected, explained, and evaluated from the standpoint of the national community, and that national history portrays the evolution of this group towards its ultimate fulfilment (often, but not uniquely, national self-government). To achieve this goal, nations can be **represented** by individuals or institutions, or, in other words, are capable of embodying their needs and interests in historical actors that advance their natural evolution.<sup>12</sup> Finally, nations must exist in a world of formally equal nations which in turn possess all the assumptions and rights mentioned above, each established in its own territory and within a definite set of borders. This idea has been termed **international global spatiality**. These eight elements, when combined, produce the basic template of national narratives, i.e. the textual structure that distinguishes them from other kind of narratives.

Although they may seem a bit abstract, these assumptions have direct consequences for the international system of post-1919 Europe. After being developed and popularised in the decades prior to the First World War, national narratives (and their core assumptions) were capable of influencing the norms that ruled the international society of the period. As a result, they inherited the ideological framework of national narratives, as well as their own intrinsic contradictions. Eventually, this influence would have enormous consequences both for the existent national minorities in the newly created countries as well as for the Versailles system at large.

Two documents, produced in the later stages of the war and around the time the Treaty of Versailles was being discussed, provide evidence of this assertion. The *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation* (October 1918) and the *Declaration of Irish Independence* (January 1919) are, due to their very nature, texts with an international vocation, written to be accepted by audiences both internal and external to the national group. In this way, both documents provide valuable insight on the kind of arguments that national communities were expected to provide in order to be considered entitled to independent statehood in the late 1910s.

The aforementioned narrative structure can certainly be observed in the case of the *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation*, published on 18 October 1918 by the Provisional Government based in Paris:<sup>13</sup>

We [the Provisional Government] do this [declaration] because of our belief that no people should be forced to live under a sovereignty which they do not recognize, and because of our knowledge and firm conviction that our nation cannot freely

develop in a Hapsburg (*sic*) mock-federation, which is only a new form of the denationalizing oppression under which we have suffered for the past three hundred years.<sup>14</sup>

This portrayal of the Czechoslovak nation is heavily indebted to the core national assumptions exposed above. To begin with, it is stated that the Czechoslovak nation possesses the right to choose its sovereigns. This right is extended, then, to every other people, thus seemingly referencing an international system of formally equal nations.

Habsburg rule is consequently presented as opposed to the natural right of the Czechoslovak nation, and the lack of legitimacy of the dynasty is evidenced, in the eyes of the Provisional Government, by three arguments. First, Habsburg rule is not legitimate because it is not recognised by the nation itself, which, as defined by the core national assumptions, is a politically sovereign community. Secondly, the Habsburgs are unfit to govern the Czechoslovaks because their leadership constitutes a hindrance to the 'free development' of the nation, defined as an evolving community towards completion. As the role of the dynasty in Czechoslovak national history has not been to push it towards advancement, but exactly the opposite, it cannot be thought of as a representative of the national community. Finally, as 'denationalizing' monarchs, the Habsburg 'oppress' the Czechoslovaks and threaten their existence as a people. These three claims, which aim at presenting Habsburg rule as non-legitimate, had their roots in the core assumptions of national narratives.

It is possible to find additional support to defend the claim for Czechoslovak statehood further into the text. For example, the notion of national continuity lies at the foundation of the identification between a political institution which had existed in the seventh century and the new Czechoslovak nation-state. Moreover, it is under the light of this



argument that the reunification of Bohemia and Slovakia as part of the same national body is advocated.<sup>15</sup> This project is presented as a 'right', and thus it is offered as a universally valid argument by which any nation has the prerogative to create a nation-state that encompasses all its nationals.

The notion of a global international space as a natural way of imagining the world served the Provisional Government not only to defend Czechoslovak independence, but also to present Habsburg unfitness to rule:

We cannot and will not continue to live under the rule, direct or indirect, of the violators of Belgium, France, and Serbia [...]. We will not remain a part of a State which has no justification for existence, and which, refusing to accept the fundamental principles of modern-world organization, remains only an artificial and immoral political structure, hindering every movement toward democratic and social progress. The Hapsburg (*sic*) dynasty (...) is a perpetual menace to the peace of the world, and we deem it our duty toward humanity and civilization to aid in bringing about its downfall and destruction.<sup>16</sup>

The violation of the sovereignty of other peoples by the dynasty is exposed in this excerpt as a valid argument for demanding independence. Once again, Czechoslovakia is not presented as a one-of-a-kind entity, but as a member of a community of nations with each possessing a claim to equal rights and goals. This idea is reiterated by emphasising the Habsburg state as an 'artificial' political structure (in opposition to the 'natural' Czechoslovak nation) and by depicting it as a threat to the international system. The conclusion to be extracted from all this is, in the eyes of the Provisional Government, evident: whereas the

Habsburg dynasty has no ‘justification for existence’, a new Czechoslovak nation-state would possess all the necessary legitimacy from the perspective of national narrative assumptions.

A similar logic of argumentation can be found in the 1919 *Declaration of Irish Independence*. Just at the start of the text we encounter the following heading: ‘Whereas the Irish people is by right a free people...’<sup>17</sup> As in the case of the previous document, the natural existence of national communities and the recognition of their inherent rights is underscored. Following this assertion, the lack of legitimacy of the British government is brought to the front, the main argument for this being its opposition to the ‘declared will of the people’. In the face of this situation, national independence is portrayed as the only way of promoting ‘the common weal’ and of constituting ‘a national polity based upon the people’s will.’ The Declaration concludes with an interesting remark:

Now, therefore, we, the elected Representatives of the ancient Irish people in National Parliament assembled, do, in the name of the Irish Nation, ratify the establishment of the Irish Republic and pledge ourselves and our people to make this declaration effective by every means at our command.<sup>18</sup>

Once again, this fragment allows us to observe ideas influenced by the core assumptions of national narratives. Whereas the ‘representatives’ of the nation claim ‘sovereignty’ in the name of the ‘people’, the British rule is referred to as an ‘occupation’ and an ‘usurpation’. The continuity existent between the present and the past of the Irish nation, a fundamental ingredient of any national narrative, is emphasised through the use of the adjective ‘ancient’. This continuous experience – embodied in a particular understanding of the communal past as the defence of Irish independence and as a permanent series of struggles against English rule – provides Irish nationalists with the ultimate legitimising

argument. Irish national rights, even during the long years of ‘foreign’ invasion, had been safeguarded and maintained, and could therefore still supply the necessary foundations for an Irish nation-state.

## **The influence of national narratives on the Versailles system**

National narratives were ubiquitous by 1919, and as we have seen in the cases of the Czechoslovak and Irish declarations of independence, notions stemming from them were considered convincing enough so as to be used to legitimise the creation of these two states. This should not surprise us: a declaration of independence is certainly the kind of text in which one would expect to find a national narrative. Nonetheless, they were far from an exception. Once the war concluded, the treaties and norms that shaped the peace and the international society of interwar Europe were also deeply influenced by the same logic that originated from the core assumptions of national narratives.

As a matter of example, let us observe how these notions manifested themselves in the Treaty of Versailles and in the proposals for a new international society that this text contained. The Covenant of the League of Nations, for instance, was founded on the idea that every member would be equal, sovereign, and independent, a remark specifically stated in Article 10 of the document.<sup>19</sup> However, a few articles later, in Article 22, it can be found that not every people would be capable of exercising these rights, given that some of them are not ‘yet able to stand by themselves.’ At first glance, there seems to exist a contradiction between these two claims, but, from the standpoint of the core national assumptions, they actually make perfect sense.

We have explained that one of the constituents of national narratives presented national history as a developmental account. Progress in this development was produced via the historical agency of remarked individuals or institutions who, allegedly, represented national rights and interests.<sup>20</sup> The climax of these national histories, however, required achieving total national self-consciousness and abandoning the need of this kind of personal representation. As every nation was on the path towards this goal, it was possible to think of the relative position of each one of them in comparison to the others. According to this comparative perspective, some peoples had been historically capable of exercising and defending their national rights, whereas others had not been, and, therefore, had renounced any national claim and were rightfully conquered or controlled by others.<sup>21</sup>

By keeping this notion in mind, the seeming contradiction between a system of independent, sovereign states, and the text of Article 22 can be alleviated. The core national assumption of an international system of formally equal nations is not necessarily at odds with a hierarchy of human groups. In this regard, the Treaty already makes an attempt at this, by dividing them into two categories: the (nationally) conscious, and the un-conscious. This division has enormous consequences, of course, if we take into account the imperialist idea, also present in the Covenant, by which the latter group had to be 'entrusted to advanced nations' to assist in their development.<sup>22</sup> However, we should not consider it solely as a concession to imperialist powers, but as a result – unfortunate, of course, for the subjected populations – of the application of national narrative assumptions to the norms of the new international society.

The rest of the Treaty of Versailles is also deeply influenced by ideas of national belonging and identity which had been popularised in the previous decades. For instance, a great deal of effort was directed at

creating homogenous, cohesive political entities in Europe. The roots of this determination rested on the idea that fostering a community of culture and interest was the best way to avoid instability: exactly what national narratives had been advocating with their claims of producing states that coincided with peoples united by a national 'essence' or 'race'. In this manner, the Treaty embraced the same logic that had been at work in the *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation*, when the Provisional Government condemned the Habsburgs. If peace had to be maintained, instability had to be reduced to a minimum; for this to happen, every 'artificial' barrier ought to be erased and new, more natural borders should be placed instead. A non-national state, comprised of a myriad of different peoples, was not just ill-fitted for the modern world of nations; it was, from the ideological standpoint of the new international system, a threat to global peace.

This belief in the benefits of national unity and homogeneity manifested itself many times in the various peace treaties, as, for instance, in the case of the border territories between Germany and Belgium. Article 34 of the Versailles Treaty established that 'Germany renounces in favour of Belgium all rights and title over the territory of the *Kreise* of Eupen and of Malmédy.' Following this formal declaration, the inhabitants of the region had a period of six months to 'record in writing a desire to see the whole or part of it to remain under German sovereignty.' If that would occur, a Commission would be appointed by the League of Nations to solve the situation. Finally, once the border was ultimately settled, German nationals would have to abandon the (now) Belgian territories or renounce their German nationality altogether.<sup>23</sup>

This pattern, repeated in many other contexts throughout the peace treaties, was a tool to solve the problems that derived from dual claims of sovereignty. Populations were thus given a chance to decide which

nation they were part of, and once they had done so, they were forced to unite with their fellow nationals. The basic assumption that guided this process was that homogeneous, national communities were, by default, less unstable than heterogeneous and ‘artificial’ multi-national empires; as such, it represented another way in which the core national assumptions affected the ideological framework of the negotiators in Versailles.

Very telling in this regard is the beginning of Section V of the Treaty, in which the situation of Alsace-Lorraine is described and the arguments for the restitution of these territories to France is provided:

The High Contracting Parties, recognising the moral obligation to redress the wrong done by Germany in 1871 both to the rights of France and to the wishes of the population of Alsace and Lorraine, which were separated from their country in spite of the solemn protest of their representatives at the Assembly of Bordeaux, agree upon the following Articles:...<sup>24</sup>

As in the case of the declarations of independence of Czechoslovakia and Ireland, this excerpt presents the particular arguments by which the international action of restitution was considered legitimate. Therefore, it provides a valuable source for studying the foundations upon which legitimacy and acceptance rested on the international society of 1919. Considered under this light, it is striking to assess the evident similarity that exists between the arguments introduced in the Treaty and those apparent in the Czechoslovak and Irish documents, and also that many of these shared features have clear connections with the core assumptions of national narratives.

The first reason that supports the restitution refers to the rights of France over the territory. As we have mentioned, the notion of national rights is

dependent on the assumption that nations are natural communities with historical interests and agency exercised through representatives. These natural rights, as a result, are conceived as an essential feature of the nation that take priority over any other claim, even that of military conquest or effective political control. Secondly, and according to the treaty, Germany did not possess any right over Alsace or Lorraine because it had not taken into account the wishes of their population. As a result, the consent of the people – i.e. the expression of national sovereignty – had not been considered, and thus another one of the foundations of these communities according to national narratives had been violated. The third argument maintained that Alsace and Lorraine, as territories which pertained to the French nation, had been ‘separated’ from the rest of their co-nationals. Given that the delegates in Versailles imagined multi-national entities as unstable, they, consequently, agreed with the notion that pictured national unity as a legitimate claim that was desirable for international peace and development. The final argument adduced mentions the protests against German rule conducted by the representatives of the two territories at the Assembly at Bordeaux. This event, in the eyes of the authors of the treaty, proved that these populations (via the action of their representatives) were not inactive in the face of German occupation, and had not lost, as a result of having accepted ‘foreign’ rule, their right to national self-determination.

These four arguments were, according to the treaty, of such a convincing nature, that it was a ‘moral obligation to redress the wrong done by Germany.’ The emphasis on this ethical nature served to firmly establish the core national assumptions as fundamental constituents of the set of rules of the new international society, while at the same time their use was naturalised as an effective argument in case of necessity.<sup>25</sup>

The treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon, with Austria and Hungary

respectively, also match the proposed thesis that national assumptions had a profound influence over the international norms of interwar Europe. Specifically, both documents included some assurance that the parts involved would 'protect the interests of inhabitants (...) who differ from the majority of the population in race, language, or religion', and even contain a section which regulated the 'Protection of Minorities'.<sup>26</sup> Prior to the war, national communities had tended to be narratively constructed by paying attention to alleged racial belonging, linguistic difference, or religious identity. The fact that these three elements are referred to in the treaties suggests that the delegates at Saint-Germain and Trianon were deeply reliant on these notions when they posed the question of minorities in the new states. If that was the case, the idea that these groups needed 'protection' stemmed, ultimately, from the aforementioned understanding by which national unity and homogeneity were the only long-lasting guarantors of internal and external peace.

But, even if they were profoundly influenced by the core national assumptions, the postwar peace treaties had two major flaws when considered from the perspective of national narratives. The first one is evidenced in the cases of Hungary and, especially, Austria. The signatories, as we have mentioned, seem to have been deeply inspired by the direct implications that national unity had for world peace, but they were, at the same time, seriously worried about the position of postwar Germany. Whereas the right of self-determination had been widely granted to disputed territories in order to foster national unity and homogeneity, this right was not recognised for Austria and Hungary, according to Article 88 of the Treaty of Saint-Germain and Article 73 of the Treaty of Trianon, respectively.<sup>27</sup> These clauses contradict the ideological foundations which the rest of the resolutions had been observing and indicate how these frameworks were broken at times in



favour of *realpolitikal* considerations.

The same critique can be made to the second flaw: the situation of nationalities in Eastern Europe. Whereas national unification and homogeneity were intensely pursued as a policy for the disputed western territories of Germany and Austria, the case of their eastern borders was different. The newly created states of Eastern Europe (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Hungary, and the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes) had very mixed populations in national terms; at the same time, however, the Versailles system intended them to function as a barrier against any expansionist ambition by Germany or Russia.<sup>28</sup> Consequently, the existence of national minorities in these countries was taken as a lesser evil and it was regulated accordingly in the aforementioned sections of the Saint-Germain and Trianon treaties.<sup>29</sup> In short, national assumptions present elsewhere were not applied in these cases in favour of *realpolitikal* motives.<sup>30</sup>

The previous examples have illustrated how the core concepts of national narratives made their way into the ordering of the international society in postwar Europe. However, it remains to be explained how this framework affected the interests and identities displayed by the leaders of the European states during the interwar period. For this purpose, we will follow Alexander Wendt's theory about international socialization processes.<sup>31</sup> According to Wendt,

An institution is a relatively stable set or "structure" of identities and interests. Such structures are often codified in formal rules and norms, but these have motivational force only in virtue of actors' socialization to and participation in collective knowledge. Institutions are fundamentally cognitive entities that do not exist apart from actors' ideas about how the world works. (...) On this

view, institutionalization is a process of internalizing new identities and interests, not something occurring outside them and affecting only behaviour; socialization is a cognitive process, not just a behavioural one.<sup>32</sup>

Wendt's underlying idea is that an institution – such as the international society of the interwar period – demands of its members a process of identification with its core assumptions in order to operate.<sup>33</sup> This process of internalizing a new identity is socially constructed and implies gradual phases of identification, as Shogo Suzuki has explained for the cases of nineteenth-century China and Japan.<sup>34</sup> The process of internalising the new set of societal ideas has strong implications for the identity of any actor. First, because identity, as Wendt asserts, is 'an inherently social definition of the author grounded in the theories which actors collectively hold about themselves and one another.'<sup>35</sup> Thus, identity and socialization are but two sides of the same phenomenon: the more an actor accepts the norms and rules of a certain institution, the more likely he is to frame and evaluate himself (and others) in terms of that same set of values. Wendt also describes interests as being based on identities, and even suggests that there cannot exist any interest detached from the socialization process. In summary, this means that the norms ruling interactions in the international society can ultimately shape both the identities and the goals of its members, thus contradicting the extreme theoretical division between propaganda and *realpolitik*.

Wendt's ideas have profound implications for the Versailles system. As we have seen, the norms and rules established in Versailles, Saint-Germain and Trianon – as well as the arguments claimed in the Czechoslovak and Irish Declarations of Independence – present us an international society in which assumptions that ultimately derived from national narratives were considered legitimate. As a result, the identities

of member states were also shaped by these same assumptions via a process of socialization under the society's norms. Finally, these identities produced new interests and ambitions because, as we have observed, the international system of Versailles had some major flaws even from the standpoint of the principles of national narratives. Thus, even though the objective of the system was not to foster nationalism, its tacit acceptance of the foundations of national narrative meant, in fact, that nationalist identities and interests could be validly employed by its member states.<sup>36</sup> In this regard it is possible to describe the Versailles system as a 'nationalist' one.

## **National agendas and border populations in the Versailles system**

The consequences of these societal identities in the interwar period were enormous and widespread. As such, they are impossible to analyse in all their complexity in a study like this one. Nonetheless, an overall examination of them can be made by paying attention to certain examples, allowing us to get a slight glimpse of the ways in which instability concerns were affected by national identities.

First, the period was marked by the development of nationally framed agendas within the newly created states of Eastern Europe. The leaders of these countries, like the representatives of the victors in Versailles, shared the idea that unified, nationally homogeneous countries were more naturally stable. As a result, they tried to develop convincing national narratives to integrate the inhabitants that lived within their borders. However, despite their efforts to push these discourses, they were usually challenged by previous narratives of national belonging defended by groups who saw themselves not adequately represented in

the new states.

In Czechoslovakia, for example, national unity became a problem soon after the declaration of independence. Official Czechoslovakism defended that the Czech and Slovaks were two 'tribes' of the same nation, although the Slovaks were thought to be the less developed among them.<sup>37</sup> Despite this formal coherence, the Slovak population of the country failed to integrate in equal terms with the Czech community because the institutional, political and economic control was held by Prague.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, Czechoslovakian ideology was fundamentally based on Czech history and identity that usually confronted long-held visions which were fundamental for the traditional historical interpretation of the Slovaks.<sup>39</sup> This situation ultimately produced a climate of disappointment among the Slovaks, who increasingly came to see the new state as a foreign occupation by the Czechs.<sup>40</sup>

It is interesting to note that this resentment was framed on national terms, and not, for instance, as a class struggle between an agrarian population and urban bourgeoisie; in this sense, Czechoslovakia was never an undisputed, unified national reality.<sup>41</sup> The fact that the perception of Czech national supremacy was derived from their previous situation within the Habsburg Empire did not alleviate the tension. Pre-existing national narratives of Slovak nationhood were fostered and the new state found itself ill-fitted to fight them back with their own Czechoslovak discourse.<sup>42</sup> As a result, the Czechoslovakian situation became increasingly problematic, if national assumptions present in the international society of the moment were to be applied. And that is even the case if we do not consider the German population of the Sudetenland or the Magyars, who had been the object of reclamation by Germany and Hungary respectively and had even less public representation than the Slovaks.<sup>43</sup>

The Kingdom of the Serbs, Croat and Slovenes – later known as Yugoslavia – suffered from a similar problem that, once again, resulted in a national framing of the situation. Officially, as in the case of Czechoslovakia, the Yugoslav nation was imagined as composed by three ‘tribes’: the Serbs, the Croats and the Slovenes.<sup>44</sup> However, the practical monopoly of top cabinet posts, banking institutions and political officialdom by the Serbs led to the alienation of other communities such as the Croats, who saw their position neglected by the government in Belgrade. Partly, the reason for this was the centralizing political tradition of the Serbs, which was opposed by the more decentralizing positions defended by the Croats and other non-Serb communities.<sup>45</sup> Some stability issues of the postwar period, such as a rebellion of peasants in Croatia, were thereafter framed as a resistance effort made by the Croatian nation against foreign occupation and abuse.<sup>46</sup> This narrative, alongside the inability of the Serbian government to manage the situation, helped the Croatian Peasant Party to gain ample support in the whole region, both in the cities and in the rural areas.<sup>47</sup> The party’s core demands were territorial autonomy for Croatia within Yugoslavia and a formal recognition of Croatian nationhood, which would occur in 1939.<sup>48</sup> However, the most immediate result of Croatian involvement in Yugoslav political institutions was King Alexander’s dictatorship, proclaimed in January 1929, which aimed at the creation of a united Yugoslav national identity.<sup>49</sup> These developments, as in the case of Czechoslovakia, produced a climate of instability that damaged the security of the international system of Versailles in Central and Eastern Europe.

If producing unified nation-states was a problematic issue for new member states such as Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia or Poland, the case of Germany offers an invaluable insight on the way international interests became framed by national assumptions. As the most prominent

defeated power of the war, sanctions on Germany had been harsh and abundant. Among these, territorial losses affected the self-consideration of the German cabinets and public opinion the most. As a result, both the Weimar Republic, first, and the Nazi government, later, searched for ways to recover territories inhabited by German 'nationals'.<sup>50</sup> Interestingly enough, public opinion in countries such as Britain tended to see at least some of these intents as rightful.<sup>51</sup> From their perspective, Nazi intents to control the Rhineland, for instance, seemed reasonable, and this made it difficult for the members of the League of Nations to condemn the occupation as strongly as the Versailles Treaty compelled them to.<sup>52</sup> The Nazi government invoked the internationally sanctioned principle of self-determination, and, from the point of view of many Europeans, this made perfect sense.

The situation repeated itself with the *Anschluss*. As mentioned above, the Treaty of Saint-Germain explicitly prohibited Germany and Austria from merging without the permission of the League of Nations. This measure had been conceived as a caveat against a possible strengthening of the defeated Germany. As such, it was connected with *realpolitik* considerations of the balance of power and collective security. Nonetheless, it had little ideological support and contradicted the principles of national unity and sovereignty established in other international norms. Hitler exploited this fact, as Austrians could be considered German by every indicator considered valid at the moment (i.e. culture, language, or 'racial' descent). Consequently, Hitler's claims appeared to be legitimate and reasonable, and as such they proved difficult to oppose by London and Paris, the main guarantors of the 1919 *status quo*. Therefore, once again, international consent was not asked for, but for a second time the negative consequences for Germany proved to be almost non-existent.

The Czechoslovak dismemberment, however, was totally different. A population susceptible of being considered German mainly inhabited the Sudetenland. This area had been trusted to Czechoslovakia in order to weaken Germany and grant a strong military defence to Bohemia.<sup>53</sup> As in the case of Austria, Germany could claim some rights over the population of these lands by means of an appellation to national assumptions present in the norms of the international system, specifically national unity, independence and representation. And so it did.

After an interview with Hitler, British Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain urged the areas in which German ‘nationals’ were a majority to be annexed to Germany.<sup>54</sup> Similarly, Hungary and Poland took advantage of the situation and pushed their own claims over territories inhabited by their ‘nationals’. The creation of a Slovak country was, in fact, a strict application of the principle of self-determination. In short, up to this moment, despite the obvious preoccupations for its imperialistic policies in France and the United Kingdom, Germany had just been playing its cards within the (nationally influenced) rules of the Versailles system.

All alarms were raised, however, when Germany invaded what remained of Czechoslovakia and renamed it as the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia in March 1939. The shock of the Czechoslovak dismemberment was not only due to Germany’s explicit violation of the sovereignty of another member state, but also because this country could not be identified as German by any means. In this case, unlike as in the instances of Austria or the Sudetenland, Germany played outside the nationally inspired norms of self-determination, independence and sovereignty and, as a consequence, this had strong implications for the societal identity of Germany as perceived by other actors of the system. Considerations stemming from non-national backgrounds, such as

*Lebensraum* or geo-strategic assumptions, were adduced by Hitler's government to justify its behaviour. The appeal to this new set of norms deeply affected state identities across Europe and set in motion a series of pacts and alliances which would lead to a second global conflict after the invasion of Poland.

An overall examination of the consequences of national framing during the interwar period would not be complete without a mention of border populations. As has been shown above, assumptions deriving from the core concepts of national narratives made their way into the norms of the Versailles international system. However, national narratives had been developed with great success in various areas of Europe for a long time, particularly from the 1880s onwards.<sup>55</sup> This meant that the new states produced in Versailles had, within them, long-established alternative national narratives that could effectively challenge these new discourses of nationhood. This was the case, as we have seen, in countries such as Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia. In some instances, previous national identities disappeared and gave way to the new unifying narratives; in others, such as in the Slovak or Croat examples, they resulted in instability, because, as national narratives, they also encompassed the core assumptions of national independence, sovereignty and representation.

The Versailles system proved itself useless for alleviating the tension between these opposing forces. On the one hand, the system, especially in Eastern Europe, had tried to create the conditions for a long-lasting peace based on a set of states that could contain German aspirations. Stability was a central necessity for these new entities, and as such the system stressed the importance for these governments to create national unifying narratives. This was the case because the norms of the international society deeply assumed that nationally homogeneous



countries were more stable. On the other hand, this need for strong entities challenged another one of the ideological foundations of the whole Versailles system: that of national self-determination. In some cases, such as Czechoslovakia, intents by the new governments to push national unifying narratives were perceived by other communities as attempts to underrepresent them.<sup>56</sup> As a result, previous regional narratives were recovered or new ones were developed as alternatives to the centralizing efforts of the newly created states.<sup>57</sup> In the end, this meant that the Versailles system could not easily label these challenges as illegitimate because, although they eroded its strategic interests, they stemmed from the same ideological standpoint as its very regulating norms.

This framing of the problem of border minorities makes it easier to understand the fragile nature of the whole system. The dual intentions of preserving the balance of power on the continent and to ground its political articulation in more 'natural' borders proved to be incompatible. This was because the balance of power required adaptation to circumstances and contextual decision-making from its members, whereas national communities originated from essentialist concepts that stemmed from national narrative assumptions. The agreement reached at Versailles matched (although not completely) the necessities of the victorious international powers at that particular moment, when Germany was defeated and its capacities were checked.<sup>58</sup> However, once the situation changed, the ideological framework they had used to legitimate the new map of Europe turned against them, as they saw how the newly created states were riven by both internal and external national rivalry. Intents of maintaining the postwar *status quo*, such as France's occupation of the Ruhr area in 1923, met with diplomatic criticism because they seemed to contradict the ideological foundations of the international society. Consequently, essentialist

arguments extended and faced each other under the complacency of the system, which lacked the tools to keep them at bay.

Border populations suffered the most from this situation. They were framed as instability factors that had to be dealt with and, as such, attracted the attention of both internal and external actors. Internally, they were usually the focus of educational efforts which tried to assimilate them to match the national narratives endorsed by the government of the country. That was the case, for instance, of the Slovak community and Czechoslovak policies regarding language, which actually meant erasing Slovak varieties in favour of Czech ones.<sup>59</sup> Externally, many of these communities were allegedly part of existing nations, and as such foreign states claimed rights over them.<sup>60</sup> This was exploited extensively by Nazi Germany in relation to the German territories in the Rhineland, Austria, and the Sudetenland, but it is important to remember that the Versailles Treaty had considered a 'moral obligation' to restore Alsace and Lorraine to French sovereignty using the same kind of argument. Once the basic set of norms that ruled the interwar international society was internalized by its members, it became their national goal to return these populations to the motherland. This strong pressure produced a climate of competition between opposing national narratives in which non-essentialist arguments soon lost their appeal.

## **Conclusion**

This article has tried to provide a new perspective on the relation between ideology and political interest. Considering propaganda and *realpolitik* to be limited explanatory concepts to deal with international systems, a different framework has been suggested. In this regard, Alexander Wendt's approach to identity as a socializing process has

allowed us to evidence the ways in which the core assumptions of the Versailles system affected its members' identities and goals, and has ultimately led us to a series of conclusions.

First, the Versailles system was influenced from its conception by a set of guiding notions that stemmed from national narratives. These assumptions – unity, community, continuity, global international spatiality, historical subjecthood, sovereignty, purity, and representation – were all present in documents such as the *Czechoslovak* and *Irish Declarations of Independence* and in the Treaties of Versailles, Saint-Germain, and Trianon. These national narratives had been developing in Europe during the previous decades and by 1919 they were accepted to shape the positions of the negotiating parties in the immediate postwar period.

Secondly, these assumptions in turn affected the identity of member states and framed their internal and external interests. The principle of national unity pressed the newly created states to push national narratives of common belonging, which in turn had to compete with regionally or ethnically established alternatives. This turned out to be a major instability issue when populations claimed by foreign states were at stake, as has been evidenced in the case of the territories claimed by Nazi Germany.

Thirdly, border populations and national minorities were increasingly perceived as factors of instability during this period. The principle of national unity required homogeneous populations in the belief that they were more stable, but this contradicted the mixed reality of the newly created states, such as Czechoslovakia or Yugoslavia. The treaties of Saint-Germain and Trianon had tried to address this problem by devoting one section to the ways in which these minorities should be

dealt with. However, regional conflicts started to appear right from the start, and they were increasingly framed in national, essentialist terms. Ultimately, it meant that the Wilsonian ideal of self-determination did not help in de-escalating the tension between these competing national narratives.

Finally, this article has evidenced that the Versailles system had tried to achieve two goals with its reconfiguration of the political situation of Europe. Both these aims – the maintenance of the postwar *status quo* and the creation of nationally defined state borders – proved to be, in the end, incompatible. This was because the preservation of the balance of power demanded a high degree of adaptation to circumstances and contextual decision-making from the system, whereas, on the other hand, national narratives, from which spatial determinations stemmed, were essentialist and fundamentally established by default. The resulting situation profoundly limited the ability of those members who tried to maintain the post-1919 *status quo* to defend their claims, as highlighted in the case of France's invasion of the Ruhr area or Germany's policy of recovering its lost territory. This, in turn, meant that the system became more and more unstable as time went on and as international circumstances moved further away from the postwar situation.

However, the dismemberment of Czechoslovakia by the Nazi government in 1938-1939 allowed the *status quo* defenders, especially the United Kingdom and France, to present their strategic interests as legitimate claims. The new Protectorate of Bohemia was not German according to any accepted criteria, such as language or racial belonging. As such, the ideological foundation of its rule by German authorities was totally different from that adduced to legitimate its control of Austria or the Sudetenland. It was this apparent incoherence that allowed the members of the Versailles system to condemn Germany's actions as

imperialistic and to prepare the set of alliances that were fundamental at the advent of the Second World War.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> These three authors are usually referred to as members of the 'modernist' school, which considers nations and nationalism to be by-products of modern, industrial societies. An overview of their respective approaches can be found in the following works: E. Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983); E. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism since 1780* (Cambridge, 1992); J. Breuilly, *Nationalism and the State* (Manchester, 1993).

<sup>2</sup> Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, 124-125.

<sup>3</sup> Ethno-symbolist authors believe, in the words of Anthony D. Smith, that cultural elements 'are as much part of social reality as any material or organisational factors' and, therefore, that the study of the symbols, rituals, myths, traditions and memories of national groups is fundamental to understand national identity. For an introduction to the ethno-symbolist approach, see A. Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism: A Cultural Approach* (London-New York, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. (London- New York, 2006); P. Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation: Questioning narratives of modern China* (Chicago-London, 1995). For a brief summary of the debate between the modernists and their critics, see S. Gunn, *History and Cultural Theory* (London-New York, 2011), 136-138.

<sup>5</sup> This position has been explicitly criticised by Prasenjit Duara regarding historical practice and how it helps in the replication of national identity. As he put it, 'our own practice of History shows us that what endures through most of the changes in fashion of historical subjects of inquiry is the silent space of reference: the nation'. Duara, *Rescuing History from the Nation*, 27.

<sup>6</sup> P.A. Martínez, 'La Paz ilusoria: la seguridad colectiva en los años veinte, 1923-

1933', in: J.C. Pereira (ed.), *Historia de las relaciones internacionales contemporáneas* (Barcelona, 2001), 307-320; M. Eiroa, 'La crisis de la seguridad colectiva y los virajes hacia la guerra. La política exterior del III Reich, 1933-1939', in: J.C. Pereira (ed.), *Historia de las relaciones internacionales*, 345-357.

<sup>7</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6. For a definition of the term *ethnie*, see Smith, *Ethno-Symbolism and Nationalism*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Mario Carretero and Floor van Alphen have paid attention to these patterns, which they call 'master narratives' for the case of nationalist histories. M. Carretero & F. van Alphen, 'History, Collective Memories, or National Memories? How the Representation of the Past Is Framed by Master Narratives' in: B. Wagoner (ed.), *Handbook of Culture and Memory* (Oxford, 2017), 283-304.

<sup>9</sup> Most of these notions are based, in one way or another, in the works of many researchers on nationalism. Concepts such as 'sovereignty', 'community', or 'purity' are already present in Ernest Gellner's *Nations and Nationalism*, and they are widespread in studies about the topic. The ideas of 'historical subjecthood', 'continuity', and 'international global spatiality' owe a lot to authors such as Benedict Anderson, Prasenjit Duara, or Xiaobing Tang. X. Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity: The Historical Thinking of Liang Qichao* (Stanford, 1996).

<sup>10</sup> As the historian Frank Dikötter summarised, 'Nationalism, in its broadest sense, endows the members of a national population variously referred to as a nation, people, nationality, or even "race" with an identity which is thought to be unique and distinct from other population groups. A nation, however defined, is thus thought to be a relatively homogeneous entity with shared characteristics which transcend internal divisions of class, status, and region.' F. Dikötter, 'Culture, "Race" and Nation: The Formation of National Identity in Twentieth Century China', in: *Journal of International Affairs*, 49/2 (1996), 590.

<sup>11</sup> G. Cubitt, (ed.), *Imagining Nations* (Manchester, 1998), 8.

<sup>12</sup> The concept of narrative 'representation', although based on the works of Anderson, Duara, and Tang, is also indebted to the narrative theory and researchers such as Paul Ricoeur, Mario Carretero and Floor van Alphen, and Monika Fludernik. For a brief overview of these ideas, see M. Fludernik, *An Introduction to Narratology* (London-New York, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation by its Provisional Government* (New York, 1918). This translation was printed for the Czechoslovak Arts Club of New York City and it can be accessed online on <<https://archive.org/details/declarationofind00czec/page/n6>> [accessed 14/01/2020].

<sup>14</sup> *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation by its Provisional Government*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation by its Provisional Government*, 4. For further information on the ideological basis of the union of the Czech and Slovak nations, see E. Bakke, 'The Making of Czechoslovakism in the First Czechoslovak Republic', in: M. S. Wessel (ed.), *Loyalitäten in der Tschechoslowakischen Republik 1918–1938. Politische, nationale und kulturelle Zugehörigkeiten* (Munich, 2004), 23.

<sup>16</sup> *Declaration of Independence of the Czechoslovak Nation by its Provisional Government*, 5.

<sup>17</sup> *The Declaration of Irish Independence* (Dublin, 1919), 2. <[https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS\\_ID=SamuelsBox2pt14\\_306](https://digitalcollections.tcd.ie/home/index.php?DRIS_ID=SamuelsBox2pt14_306)> [accessed 14/01/2020]. This sentence serves both as a preface and as a way of organising the text, by means of an enumeration of the arguments 'whereas' Ireland should be independent. For this reason, the sentence has no definite conclusion. It has been considered more convenient to reproduce the original source faithfully in spite of this grammatical inaccuracy.

<sup>18</sup> *The Declaration of Irish Independence*, 2.

<sup>19</sup> *Treaty of Peace with Germany* (Treaty of Versailles) (Paris, 1919), 51. <<https://www.loc.gov/law/help/us-treaties/bevans/m-ust000002-0043.pdf>> [accessed 14/01/2020].

<sup>20</sup> Tang, *Global Space and the Nationalist Discourse of Modernity*, 80-81.

<sup>21</sup> The cases of Czechoslovak and Irish Declarations of Independence show the extent to which a continuous resistance against 'foreign rule' was perceived as a *conditio sine qua non* for national recognition.

<sup>22</sup> *Treaty of Peace with Germany*, 56.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 63-64

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>25</sup> The naturalisation of national ideas, both within states and internationally, has been convincingly described by authors such as Michael Billig. See M. Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London, 1995).

<sup>26</sup> As seen in articles 51, 57 and 60 of the *Treaty of Peace between the Principal Allied and Associated Powers and Austria* (St.Germain-en-Laye, 1919), transcription in <http://www.austlii.edu.au/cgi-bin/sinodisp/au/other/dfat/treaties/1920/3.html> > [accessed 14/01/2020]. Also, articles 44 and 47 of the *Treaty of Peace between the Allied and Associated Powers and Hungary and Protocol and Declaration* (Trianon, 1920), transcription in <http://www.hungarianhistory.com/lib/trianon/trianon.pdf> > [accessed 27/12/2019].

<sup>27</sup> These two articles prevented Austria and Hungary from taking part in any policy which would compromise their independent statehood. This clause meant that these two countries could not, without permission by the Council of the League of Nations, unite with each other or, in the case of Austria, with neighbouring Germany.

<sup>28</sup> A. Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism & the Fall of Empires: Central Europe, Russia & the Middle East, 1914- 1923* (London-New York, 2001), 156.

<sup>29</sup> J.L.N. Hernández, 'La articulación del sistema internacional de Versalles. La sociedad de Naciones, 1919-1923', in: J.C. Pereira (ed.), *Historia de las relaciones internacionales contemporáneas*, 288.

<sup>30</sup> Hernández, 'La articulación del sistema internacional de Versalles', 294.

<sup>31</sup> A. Wendt, 'Anarchy is what States make of it: The Social Construction of Power Politics', in: *International Organization*, 46/2 (1992), 391-425.

<sup>32</sup> Wendt, 'Anarchy', 399.

<sup>33</sup> The concept of 'institution' used here follows Christian Reus-Smit's definition: a 'stable sets of norms, rules, and principles that serve two functions in shaping social relations: (...) constitute actors as knowledgeable social agents, and (...) regulate behaviour'. C. Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State: culture, social*



identity, and institutional rationality in international relations (New Jersey, 1999), 12-13. In the case of international society, the deeper level of institutional norms is defined by 'constitutional structures', 'coherent ensembles of intersubjective beliefs, principles, and norms that perform two functions in ordering international societies: they define what constitutes a legitimate actor, entitled to all the rights and privileges of statehood; and they define the basic parameters of rightful state action'. Reus-Smit, *The Moral Purpose of the State*, 30.

<sup>34</sup> S. Suzuki, *Civilization and Empire: China and Japan's Encounter with European International Society* (London-New York, 2009).

<sup>35</sup> Wendt, 'Anarchy', 398.

<sup>36</sup> In this regard, Oliver Zimmer concluded that 'the view that distinctive cultural communities possess a legitimate claim to national self-determination (...) must almost inevitably lead to the politicisation of ethnicity'. O. Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe, 1890-1940* (Hampshire-New York, 2003), 50.

<sup>37</sup> Bakke, 'The Making of Czechoslovakism', 23.

<sup>38</sup> Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe*, 70.

<sup>39</sup> Bakke, 'The Making of Czechoslovakism', 35.

<sup>40</sup> Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism & the Fall of Empires*, 203: 'In the eyes of Father Andrej Hlinka's clerical-conservative, Slovak Populist Party – which maintained a plurality of Slovak votes in parliamentary elections from the mid-1920s on – the prospect of self-determination in an autonomous republic had given way to virtual colonization by the Czechs.'

<sup>41</sup> As Oliver Zimmer put it: 'If minorities refused to assimilate, or sometimes even if they wished to retain their cultural identity, this was seen as a sign of disloyalty and a threat to the territorial integrity of the state.' Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe*, 60-61.

<sup>42</sup> Bakke, 'The Making of Czechoslovakism', 35-36.

<sup>43</sup> Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism & the Fall of Empires*, 203.

<sup>44</sup> D. Djokić, 'Nationalism, Myth and Reinterpretation of History: The Neglected Case of Interwar Yugoslavia', in: *European History Quarterly*, 42/71 (2012), 76.

<sup>45</sup> Djokić, 'Nationalism, Myth and Reinterpretation of History', 80. Oliver Zimmer has also argued that in the new states of Eastern Europe the numerically dominant groups tended to identify with a more hegemonic kind of nationalism, instead of favouring federalist approaches. This may have led to a conception by these dominant groups of national minorities as threatening for the survival of the nation-state and, as a result, they encouraged political action. Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe*, 60-61.

<sup>46</sup> Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism & the Fall of Empires*, 205.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 206.

<sup>48</sup> Djokić, 'Nationalism, Myth and Reinterpretation of History', 80.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 85.

<sup>50</sup> The apparent failure of the Weimar Republic in this regard decisively affected its legitimacy in the eyes of many Germans. See Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe*, 103.

<sup>51</sup> 'Extract from Cabinet Conclusions' 18(36), 11 March 1936 (FO 371/19892)': 'Moreover, many people, perhaps most people, were saying openly that they did not see why the Germans should not re-occupy the Rhineland.'<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/education/resources/german-occupation/source-3/> [accessed 14/01/2020]. This is a fragment of the Minutes of the British cabinet meetings of 1936, and as such provides an interesting insight on the perception that ruling elites in this country had about the situation that led to the Second World War.

<sup>52</sup> Eiroa, 'La crisis de la seguridad colectiva', 351.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 353.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 354. Richard James Overy has defended that popular fear to air bombing also acted as a brake on British and French reaction to German aggression. The position defended by Chamberlain is, however, totally in line with the established rules of international behaviour. R.J. Overy, *The Inter-War Crisis 1919-1939* (Harlow, 1994), 90.

<sup>55</sup> Some researchers have argued that national narratives had existed long before this date; see, for example, L. Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nations 1707-*

1837 (New Haven, 1992). However, I do not consider these narratives of common identity as national since they lack certain core elements mentioned above, usually the existence of a system of formally equal nations or the idea of national sovereignty. Nonetheless, elements from these previous discourses were adopted by national narratives during their consolidation process from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards. This granted a sense of continuity that linked various discourses of identity and belonging.

<sup>56</sup> Roshwald, *Ethnic Nationalism & the Fall of Empires*, 203.

<sup>57</sup> Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe*, 70.

<sup>58</sup> Richard James Overy asserts that Britain and France were regarded, during this period, as 'satiated' states, 'anxious to defend the *status quo* from which they so clearly profited'. Overy, *The Inter-war Crisis*, 77.

<sup>59</sup> I. Deák, *Beyond Nationalism: A Social and Political History of the Habsburg Officer Corps, 1848–1918* (New York, 1990), 208–209. Linguistic assimilation seems to have been the result of formal equality between the two varieties, and not of an intended effort to wipe out Slovak language. Other factors related to the economic and institutional situation of the country seem to have transformed this *laissez-faire* into a threat for the Slovak language in Slovakia. However, the Czechoslovak government proved reluctant to change these language regulations even when faced with these consequences. Bakke, 'The Making of Czechoslovakism', 38-39.

<sup>60</sup> Zimmer, *Nationalism in Europe*, 62: 'This nationalist programme of supporting co-ethnics living outside the home territory enjoyed wide public support in the defeated states as such minorities were regarded as the living symbol and bridgeheads of revisionist claims.'