Sprawy Narodowościowe: Seria nowa, *2024*(56), Article 3346

From Greatness to Ruins: The Hundred Years Between "The German Minority in Czechoslovakia" by Wacław Junosza (1929) and the Present

DOI: https://doi.org/10.11649/sn.3346

Karina Hoření
Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences
https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1791-4717
e-mail: karina.horeni@ispan.edu.pl

Abstract

This paper offers a critical reflection on the article "Mniejszość niemiecka w Czechosłowacji" [The German Minority in Czechoslovakia] by Wacław Junosza, published in *Sprawy Narodowościowe* in 1929. The article under discussion provides an overview of civic associations of the German-speaking minority in the interwar First Czechoslovak Republic. The present study deepens this perspective by looking at contemporaneous reflections on ethnic relations and current academic research on this period of Czechoslovak history. Referring to examples from the spheres of education and industry, which are covered by Junosza, the author examines the possibilities and limits of the coexistence of national groups in Czechoslovakia. The present work focuses on periods both before and after the 1920s: it shows how clear national

This research is part of a project that has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon Europe research and innovation program (Grant agreement No. 101041946), funded by the European Union. However, the views and opinions expressed are those of the author only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or granting authority. Neither the European Union nor the granting authority can be held responsible for them.
No competing interests have been declared.
Publisher: Institute of Slavic Studies, Polish Academy of Sciences.

categories used by Junosza were created, and how inequalities and struggles between these invented national categories led to the fall of multinational Czechoslovakia.

Keywords: ethnic Germans; national minorities; Czechoslovakia; expulsion; Great Depression; minority education; ethnic studies

Introduction: The First Czechoslovak Republic and Its Germans

The short-lived First Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1938), which came into existence at the end of World War I and was crushed after the Munich crisis, is a mythologized period in Czech history. Simply called "the First Republic" (Czech: *první republika*), it is a source of pride for Czechs: it is seen as a period when Czechoslovakia was rich, progressive, and democratic. The adjective *prvorepublikový*, literally "coming from or related to the First Republic", is associated with things such as fashion (elegant and posh), villas (modernist and luxurious), and industry (strong and successful).

The main vehicle for the imagery and aesthetics of the First Republic is the so-called *prvorepublikové filmy*, or movies from the First Republic, such as *Kristián* (directed by Martin Frič, 1939b) or *Eva tropí hlouposti* [Eva Fools Around] (directed by Martin Frič , 1939a). They are usually love stories set in the world of wealthy industrialists, where people wearing elegant clothes and living in modernist villas eventually find love and a marriage of convenience. None of the productions features a German-speaking protagonist or reflects the multinational character of the country.[1] Indeed, these movies ignore the fact that the economic elites of the first Czechoslovak state largely spoke German, and that German-speaking citizens made up about a third of its population. For today's Czechs, the cinematic productions from the period are a representation of the era of the First Republic, which means that they are oblivious to the long and strong historical presence of the German-speaking minority in the country.

At the time of the First Republic nobody could ignore the multinational character of the state. According to the census of 1921, there were 67.3 percent of Czechoslovaks and 30.6 percent of Germans (*Sčítání lidu v Republice Československé*, 1924, p. 60). The difficult coexistence of these two biggest national groups caught the attention of Polish author Wacław Junosza (real name: Eugeniusz Zdrojewski). He wrote an article published in *Sprawy Narodowościowe* in 1929 (Junosza, 1929a, 1929b), which gives an overview of the position of the German minority in the First Republic. The vibrancy and power of civil society of Czechoslovak Germans might come as a surprise to many today. More than seventy years

1 For a discussion of Czechoslovak prewar cinema and its multicultural audience, see Koeltzsch's *Praha rozdělená i sdílená* [Prague Shared and Divided] (Koeltzsch, 2016). She analyzes the movie *Muži v offsidu* [Offside Men] (1931, directed by Svatopluk Innenam). The Jewish identity of the main character, Mr. Načeradec, is not declared openly in the movie. His Jewishness was recognized by the audience only by the stereotypical way the part was played by the Czechoslovak actor Hugo Haas (who was Jewish).

after the forced resettlement of the vast majority of ethnic Germans, the institutions, names, and places listed by Junosza are long forgotten.

The Original Perspective: Wacław Junosza and Germans

What Junosza/Zdrojewski wrote about perished almost completely, and the author himself, who was an employee of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has fallen into oblivion.[2] His article is not a "classic" piece: it is not read by students or referred to by academics. Considering that the issues he writes about were, paradoxically, solved with the expulsion of Germans from Central Europe, it does not seem to be worth reading today. Yet this is what I decided to do. I look at Junosza's article about Germans in Czechoslovakia almost a hundred years since it was written, and I critically reflect on his position, compare it with the current understanding of the era, and finish the story of the German minority that he, for obvious reasons, could not describe.

Although Junosza's article is entitled "Mniejszość niemiecka w Czechosłowacji" [The German Minority in Czechoslovakia], it is not about folk dresses, old customs, or perishing dialects, that is, topics connected with traditional ethnological research on minorities. Most German-speaking inhabitants of Czechoslovakia lived in urbanized industrial regions, so the article tends to focus on industry and education. Junosza gives an overview of the position of the German minority, or, in other words, of civil society claiming to represent Czech Germans. After a brief historical introduction, his article presents several spheres of civic life and lists institutions active in these spheres: schools, cultural associations, trade unions, and political parties. Although he gives just the names and data of various organizations, the article is so long that it was divided into two parts and published in two consecutive issues of the journal (no. 2 and no. 3 of 1929). Repetitive and overburdened with details, it is difficult to read even if one has a keen interest in topics such as the regional media scene in interwar Czechoslovakia. With few exceptions, the author does not give any source of his information, but these data are available in the Czechoslovak Statistical Yearbook or similar publicly available sources.

The article was written in a specific period of Polish-Czechoslovak relations. After the establishment of independent Poland and Czechoslovakia in 1918, their relations were extremely tense and even violent due to border disputes, which escalated into an armed conflict in the Těšín region in January 1919 (Klimek & Kubů, 1995, pp. 38–40). In the 1920s, one of the battlegrounds was minority politics: the Polish government claimed that the Polish

2 I would like to thank my colleagues Karolina Ćwiek-Rogalska, Michał Rogalski, and Wojciech Mądry (and his colleagues from the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań), who made an effort to find some more information about Junosza. I would especially like to thank Kacper Rosner-Leszczyński, who solved the puzzle and found Junosza's real name in a study by Klemens Trzebiatowski, *Oświata i szkolnictwo polskie na Pomorzu Zachodnim w pierwszej połowie XX wieku* [Polish Education and Schooling in Western Pomerania in the First Half of the Twentieth Century] (Trzebiatowski, 1961, p. 233). I would be grateful for any additional information.

minority in Czechoslovakia (more than 70,000 people, according to the census of 1919) was oppressed, and pointed to the situation in the fields of education, employment, and political representation (Bílek, 2018, p. 116). The relations began to improve only in 1926, when Czechoslovakia and Poland came closer out of necessity at a time when their common enemy, Germany, was growing stronger (Dejmek, 2006, p. 458).

I read Junosza's article also in this context – he writes not only about the German minority in Czechoslovakia but also about minority rights in general. They were an important issue in Czechoslovak-Polish relations, which were changing at the time when his article was published.

New Perspectives: Aim and Scope of the Article

Considering that the plain descriptiveness of Junosza's article leaves a room for interpretation, I offer two additional perspectives. The first one is a perspective from the period – comments from people living there and then which illustrate how they experienced the world that Junosza described. I have selected historical figures of different ethnicities, including Czechoslovak German-speaking journalist Johannes Urzidil, German-speaking Jew Max Brod, German-speaking Czech Anna Gabler, and Jan Novák, a Czech author who created the fictional character of an American visiting Prague in the 1930s.

The second perspective is a present-day one. I show how current historiography builds on or shifts the period's interpretations of ethnic relations in Czechoslovakia. I give examples from Czech historiography, which has long co-created and deconstructed the mythology of the First Republic. During the communist period, the official interpretation of the First Republic was critical especially because of class differences (Olivová, 1961). Positive, or even idealized, interpretations that prevailed after 1989 can be traced in works by Antonín Klimek (2003) or Věra Olivová (1991, 2000). In their article "From 'Islands of Democracy' to 'Transnational Border Spaces'", Ines Koeltzsch and Ota Konrád (Koeltzsch & Konrád, 2016) describe the development of Czech historiography after 1989 and how critical writings appeared – such as those about ethnic relations (Kučera, 1999), the mythology of Czechoslovakia as the last democracy welcoming anti-fascist refugees from Germany (Čapková & Frankl, 2008), or the unequal position of German-speaking inhabitants in such fields as culture (Ludvová, 2012) or even leisure (Koeltzsch, 2016).

This stream of critical research on the First Czechoslovak Republic developed also in international scholarship, as is best represented by the book *Czechoslovakia: The State That Failed* (Heimann, 2009), where even the title suggests that the project of multinational Czechoslovakia was not successful. Moreover, I cite classic works by international authors from the field of ethnic studies – where the question of national coexistence in Czechoslovakia is part of a broader issue of the nature of ethnic belonging in this geographical area – such as Ernest Gellner (1983) and Tara Zahra (2011).

My task of contextualizing Junosza's article is easier because of my position: I know how the world of Czechoslovak Germans collapsed after World War II. Therefore, my paper is framed in a wider historical perspective. Firstly, I focus on the period before his article was written: how society in the Czech lands became divided into Czechs and Germans during the long nineteenth century. Secondly, I also describe the period after that: how the idea of two distinct groups that cannot live together led to the Munich Agreement of 1938 and the expulsion of Czechoslovak Germans after World War II.

I focus specifically on Junosza's assessment of the position of the German minority in Czechoslovakia and whether he sees a deterioration or improvement of this position since the Austro-Hungarian period, especially in comparison with the Polish minority. I also show how the seemingly objective data he works with can be interpreted differently depending on the national or temporal perspective.

After an initial overview, focusing on how the national groups in question were formed, I look at two topics from the broad range covered by Junosza and discuss them in more detail. They are those that he describes at the beginning and almost at the end of his article: the education system and industry. If I tried to critically deal with the full range of topics he covers, the present article would have to appear not in two issues like his text, but in four issues of *Sprawy Narodowościowe*. Firstly, education was a battleground of national struggles in the Czech lands not only in the 1920s but from the nineteenth century; it has received research attention and its analysis can be based on previous research and theories. Secondly, industry makes a good counterpoint to education because economic relations show a different pattern of coexistence between the national groups. The topics that I do not deal with in detail in my article (such as the media or labor relations) are described by Junosza in a similar logic as education and industry, and I believe that the analysis of the latter is sufficient to illustrate my main hypotheses. In the Epilogue, I focus on the afterlife of the German presence in contemporary Czechia.

Labels and Identities: Constructing and Deconstructing Germans, Czechs (and Poles)

"Our beautiful National Theater is nearing completion […]. Hundreds of thousands of generous donations have come from us, poor Czechs, so that such a beautiful, respectable temple of the muses can rise",[3] wrote the teacher Anna Gabler in her diary in 1881 (Gablerová, 2023, p. 182).[4] This emotional comment on the National Theater, one of the most symbolic and largest projects of the Czech National Revival movement, was written in German.

3 All quotations have been translated by the author of this article.

4 Anna Gabler used the German version of her surname, without the Czech suffix *-ová*. However, the Czech translation of her diary, following the current grammar rules, uses the Czech version: Gablerová. In this article, I use the version she used in the German original of her diary.

Although Junosza presents Czechoslovakia's population as divided into clear and ancient categories: Germans and Czechs, the lived reality in the region was more complicated. Gabler was a fierce supporter of the Czech national movement who had a poor command of Czech and prayed for the Habsburgs, and people like her were common until the end of the nineteenth century.

In the next sections of this article, I demonstrate that although Junosza's picture follows the period's understanding of ethnicity and nationality, the seemingly clear distinction was not a given fact but a result of a long process. I illustrate the complicated nature of ethnic belonging from two angles. Firstly, I critically examine the politics of labeling certain groups and Junosza's choices in this regard. Secondly, I show how individuals did not fit in the clear-cut national categories.

Labels

The choice of labels for ethnic or linguistic groups reflects ideas about the world and at the same time creates this world through language. Junosza's choices reproduce the narrative of two national groups – Czechs and Germans – that were in conflict since the Middle Ages. Although he sometimes uses the label "Czechoslovak Germans", in most cases he simply writes "Germans". He overlooks German communities living in Slovakia, which, although much smaller, also had their civic associations and political representation (Furmaník, 2022).

Considering the other group, Junosza mostly uses the term "Czechs" rather than "Czechoslovaks". According to the idea of "Czechoslovakism" proposed by the elites of the new state, Czechs and Slovaks were one nation (Orzoff, 2009, p. 12). This idea persuaded the allies in 1918 that Czechoslovakia made sense as a country and had a future. It also meant that Czechoslovaks were the majority: without this invented group, the population of the country would only consist of several minorities. Social, cultural, and language differences between inhabitants of the Czech lands and Slovakia, as well as their uneven relations, proved that the idea was mostly a utopia and a dream of Czech political elites (Heimann, 2009, p. 51; Kopeček, 2021, p. 2). In general, Junosza decided to ignore how the situation had changed after the establishment of Czechoslovakia; he also ignored the role of other nationalities in the new state and stuck with the dichotomic perspective rooted in the nationalism of the nineteenth century, with two separate entities against each other.

Identities

Not only the labels for certain identities but also their content could be more complicated than Junosza expected. At the beginning of his article, he tells the story of Germans in Bohemia as a distinctive group since the Middle Ages: "The reasons for immigration were purely economic – German settlers who settled in the country hoped to find better

living conditions in a realm that had plenty of vacant land and needed working hands […]. Population in the towns which were founded at that time was purely German" (Junosza, 1929a, p. 36).

Junosza's understanding followed the period's view of ethnic groups as ahistorical separate entities, which has been questioned by social sciences only since the 1970s. It is precisely examples from Central Europe that Gellner uses to illustrate how nations are not primordial entities but are created during modernity. In the Czech lands, like in other regions, religious or region-based identities were replaced by nationality as the main source of identity from the eighteenth century, through means such as education, civic associations, and popular culture (Gellner, 1983). In the Czech lands, the campaign to choose one national side took place at least from the 1850s and went hand in hand with other social and economic changes: from an intellectual movement rooted in the German Romantic tradition, it developed into an economic force when Czech-speaking rural population migrated to cities (Macura, 2015). The extensive network of civil society organizations that Junosza lists in his article developed from the 1860s, when participation in civil society became a major way to manifest participation in nation-building. This process intensified in the first decade of the twentieth century. In the 1920s, when Junosza wrote his article, two communities seen as separate were living in the Czech lands side by side: Germans and Czechs.

Even the results of the census of 1921, which I have quoted above and which Junosza also used in his article, were highly contested and politicized (Paul, 1998, p. 162). While in the Austro-Hungarian Empire nationality statistics were based on declared language, in Czechoslovakia they were based on self-declaration. Even the seemingly objective categories of the census were shaped by national rivalry, and people were forced not only by employees but also by procedures of Czechoslovak Statistical Office, an official body that carried out the census, to create this illusion of separate national groups. The categories and the procedures of conducting the census were designed in a way that would make Czechoslovaks appear stronger compared not only to Germans but also Poles.

Shortly before World War I, Max Brod, a Prague-based German-speaking journalist, wrote about this divided world as follows: "Spring! Spring!… Germans and Czechs have come together, eight artists regardless of their nationality. Here in Prague, […], where not only bowling clubs but also poetry clubs come together in the shadow of national-colored banners…" (Brod, 1907, p. 316). This comment on life in Prague comes from an introduction to his review of the first exhibition of the art group known as "Osma" [The Eight], which was unique precisely because it brought together both Czechs and Germans from the Czech lands, in a period when art groups were defined by language and nationality rather than esthetics (Habánová & Habán, 2013, p. 10). The fact that Brod was surprised by the existence of this group shows how segregated society was at the beginning of the twentieth century. Although Junosza does not point that out, he shows a similar picture of a divided society – every organization, newspaper, or civic association that he lists is defined by its Germanness and probably had its Czech counterpart.

National Indifference

Although from the perspective of mainstream journalism of the period it might seem that it was impossible to avoid the national distinctions, the question remains to what extent the population followed this ideology. Zahra proposes the term "national indifference" with reference to individuals who rejected the idea of clearly defined national identity or were floating between these categories (Zahra, 2010).

Brod, quoted above, was Jewish. As such, he was a member of a group that may have been nationally indifferent in pre-World War I and interwar Czech lands. Junosza mentions that some industrial companies that he considers "German" might be owned by Jews (Junosza, 1929b, p. 243), and thus he unintentionally shows both the position of the Jewish minority and the complicated nature of national categories.

The Jewish community in Czechoslovakia made up only about 1 percent of the population and from the beginning of the twentieth century was mostly urban and middle-class (Cohen, 2006, p. 15). Its members were trapped between the two national identities or could choose one of them. After gaining full rights in 1868, it made sense for Jews to use the German language and become part of German culture, which had higher status. The same reasons may also explain why many ethnic Czechs adopted German identity. However, with the increasing status of Czech in the late nineteenth century and especially after the establishment of Czechoslovakia, it made more sense to adopt the Czech language and Czechoslovak identity rather than German one (Čapková, 2012). In the census of 1921, Jews were listed as a nationality, unlike in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, where they were only a religious category (Lichtenstein, 2006, p. 54). This was, once again, done to reduce the proportion of Germans in statistics.

Another example of a community in a complicated position were Silesians. This population spoke local dialects and was influenced by Czech, Polish, or German cultures. In the 1921 census, in certain regions, the list of nationalities to choose from included Silesian nationality:[5] this specific regional identity was officially put on the list in order to lower the number of people who would declare Polish nationality. Local identity in Silesia was contested and politicized, and individuals in the Těšín/Cieszyn region may have declared different nationalities during their lifetime (Bubík, 2024), depending on changes of their self-perception but also on official policies. Therefore, people with complex identities such as Jews or Silesians might be often included in the categories that Junosza labels as Czechs or Germans.

Although in my article I use the same categories as Junosza, I do not indicate that they cover all individuals speaking a certain language or living in a certain region. On the contrary, Czechs, Germans, but also Jews or Poles, in both these articles, Junosza's and mine,

5 For a detailed analysis of the issue of Silesian nationality in the 1921 census, see Paul (1998).

should be understood rather as representatives of national movements or people who declared certain nationality in the census in a specific political context, but their personal sense of identity might have been more complex.

The Field of National Battles: Education

There are two reasons why Junosza begins his article with a chapter on education. Firstly, it was his field of interest: in 1928 he published a book written in French about Polish education in Germany (Junosza, 1928). It is the only part where he offers an analysis and interpretation of the data rather than a plain description.

Secondly, education was vital for both communities under discussion – from the beginning of the National Revival movement in the Czech lands, education was one of the main battlefields of a real and imagined conflict between the two linguistic communities. The conflict was fueled by the perceived danger of the so-called de-nationalization of children. The idea was that if they attended school with the "wrong" language of instruction, they would lose their national identity and therefore the national community would be weakened (Zahra, 2011).

In the first sentence of the chapter, Junosza captures the main issue of German education in Czechoslovakia: "Czechoslovak Germans have a well-developed school system, which has indeed been reduced in comparison to what it was like before the war, but it is still nevertheless very well equipped in terms of facilities and teaching aids, and it is at a high level" (Junosza, 1929a, p. 42). He admits that German education suffered a decline and thus contradicts the official Czechoslovak interpretation.

In 1938, *Nejkrásnější země* [The Most Beautiful Country] was published, a children's book that reproduced the official justification of the idea of Czechoslovak state, which was internationally questioned at the time. In the opening dialogue, an American of Czech descent meets a talkative Czech person as he leaves the main train station in Prague. Among other topics, they discuss minorities and education, and the Czech person, like Junosza, does not fail to quote some figures:

> [American:] I'm afraid that the Czechoslovak nation, by its great majority, oppresses other nations.
>
> [Czech:] We've been living together for many, many years, centuries; and one could say the opposite. […] I will prove it to you with figures, you will believe them. There are 345 secondary schools in Czechoslovakia and 27.3 percent of them are purely German. Remember that the Germans in this country are 22 percent; so they have more schools than they have a right to. […] That's not how they treat minorities anywhere in the world.
>
> [American:] So they can't complain. (Novák, 1938, p. 15)

But Germans did complain, and Junosza writes about it as follows:

> The German minority is constantly accusing the Czechoslovak state of having closed down a number of German schools and thus forcing thousands of German children to attend

> Czech schools. […] Germans claim that when you take into account the share of the population, they should have 55 more schools, which means that 18,000 German children lack the opportunity for general education. (Junosza, 1929a, pp. 46, 48)

In order to verify the German claim that the number of German schools is insufficient, Junosza compares the share of the German population in Czechoslovakia with the share of schools with German as the language of instruction. His verdict is the same as that of the Czech person at the train station: "After their objective examination, the allegations of the German minority against the Czechoslovak state are not substantiated. This is confirmed by facts and figures again and again" (Junosza, 1929a, p. 49). In his opinion, the position of German education was on par with Czech one.

But the "facts and figures" are not always so clear. Firstly, there is a methodological issue. Junosza compares the number of schools for two categories of Czechoslovak citizens: Germans and Slavs. To create the category of "Slavs", he put together Czechs, Slovaks, Poles, and Ruthenians. Therefore, he put together schools not only from the Czech lands but also from Slovakia and Subcarpathian Rus.[6] Due to the different development of educational policies and national movements in the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy (of which these eastern regions were formerly part), the number of schools in the eastern part of Czechoslovakia was low. In a sample constructed in this way, the "Slavs" appeared to have a low density of schools in comparison with their population share (which the Ruthenians or Slovaks did have), and the Germans had a large number of schools in proportion to their share of the population. But if one were to compare German schools only to Czech ones, the Germans would not be the group with the densest network of schools. Although Junosza always compared only the Czechs and Germans, in this case he created the category of Slavs to weaken the German cause.

Secondly, the feeling of losing one's ground could not always be explained by "facts and figures". In the case of Czech Germans, the sense of oppression and the fear that they were losing their position may have been only loosely related to the actual number of schools: it was rooted in previous developments. Even during the last decades of the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, the German minority had feared that Czechs outnumbered them and that their political and economic power grew too quickly. The mentality of frontiers developed (Judson, 1996, p. 395). This feeling grew even stronger in Czechoslovakia, where Czechs were privileged and shaped the country's policies.

With the emphasis on well-equipped German schools, Junosza downplays the bitter feelings of the Germans about the relative losses in the field of education. Unlike the official Czechoslovak narrative, he admits that German education is in decline and shows an understanding of their grievances. However, in the end, he still favors the Czech interpretation that they are not valid.

6 Subcarpathian Rus is a region at the borders of Slovakia, Poland, and Hungary. Another historical name for this westernmost part of today's Ukraine is Transcarpathia. It was part of Czechoslovakia in the period 1919–1945.

The question that remains is how he would interpret grievances of the Polish minority, which were very similar: Polish newspapers in Czechoslovakia (and in Poland as well) accused the Czechs of destroying Polish schools to "denationalize" Polish children and destroy the Polish minority in Czechoslovakia (Pytlik, 2007, p. 27). Classifying Poles in the category of Slavs, Junosza overlooked other national tensions in Czechoslovakia he must have been aware of.

The Field of Hesitant Cooperation: Industry

While education remained a battlefield of national sentiments, people still had to live together, and their cooperation was often necessitated by economic needs, including in the field of work and production. Although Junosza left industry almost for the end of his article, economic factors played a major role in the developments that eventually led to the dissolution of Czechoslovakia in 1938. The Germans held a strong position in Czechoslovak industry, and Junosza notes this several times, for example: "Germans are the major economic players in Czechoslovakia, and they have advantage especially in industry, trade, and banking, which is, however, slowly declining year by year in favor of the Czech element" (Junosza, 1929b, p. 243). Germans were able to keep their leading economic position in Czechoslovakia. This was true especially for the Borderlands, which were populated by Germans and which became an industrial center of the Austro-Hungarian Empire before World War I (Skřivan, 2007, p. 367). As Junosza describes, German capital dominated especially in the textile and glass industries, which were located in the Borderlands (Junosza, 1929b, p. 245).

Even though Junosza does not state this clearly in his description, industry and finance seemed to be the realm where the symbolic fight between the two nations was less prominent. It is the only chapter where he mentions institutions that were, as he calls them, "utraquist", meaning that they had members of both nationalities (Junosza, 1929b, p. 247).

The national dichotomy that he writes about in previous chapters and that seemed to be firmly established in the realm of education appeared blurry in the realm of industry.

> It is not easy to make statistical comparisons of ownership in terms of nationality, especially in a country so heterogeneous as Czechoslovakia. The share of German industry can only be estimated when you take into account the language used in correspondence, the language of registration with the Commercial Register, and membership of management in trade organizations of a given nationality. (Junosza, 1929b, p. 244)

In this passage, Junosza shows how complex the national labels are, and he shows that they are based on participation in civic associations rather than the other way around. From his description, economic relations might give a different picture of life in interwar Czechoslovakia, where the national categories were not so clear-cut. Still, he feels the need

to divide industrial production along the national lines, which indicates how nationalism was the main axis of (not just his) thinking.

Towards the Bitter End: Politics

In 1922, Johannes Urzidil, a Czech German living in Prague, wrote an article summing up the position of ethnic Germans in the (still) new state:

> The loudest and most successful majority of the Czechs saw the newly founded state as the final realization of a purely Czech state. The masses of the Czech nation [...] could not see anything other than a nation state, created as a homeland for the Czechs, but only as a guest room for other nations [...]. It was claimed that the Peace Conference had decided in the name of the right of self-determination of nations, but where did that leave this right if the main Czecho-Slovak nation subordinated 3.5 million Germans and a million Hungarians? (Urzidil, 1922, p. 157)

Urzidil expressed the feeling shared by the majority of German-speaking Czechoslovakians in the first years of the republic, a feeling that Czechoslovakia was not a state of all its citizens but an ethnic state of the Czechs.

Junosza published his article at a historical moment when it seemed that this flaw could be overcome. In the very last part of his article, he gives an overview of German political parties. He writes that although they rejected the Czechoslovak state at the beginning, they turned towards "activist" politics in the late 1920s, e.g. they participated in several governments (Junosza, 1929b, p. 259). Junosza expects that, eventually, this process will develop further into full cooperation between Czechs and Germans. The second part of his article was published in June 1929, just a few months before the Wall Street crash in October the same year. Therefore, he could not have foreseen the economic and political effects of this event on Czechoslovakia.

The industrial character of Czechoslovakia, which he described in his article, was a factor that worsened the effects of the Great Depression on the country. Due to their reliance on export and individual consumption, the industrial sectors dominated by Germans (both in terms of finance and workforce, such as the textile and glass industries) were affected by the Great Depression more severely (Skřivan, 2007, p. 372). In 1935, the Czech-language monthly *Světozor* [Worldscope] published an article about a committee of Czechoslovak intellectuals who visited the Borderlands.

> They brought back extensive and overwhelming material that could become an indictment. The misery of the North Bohemian population is desperate, and the people are collectively falling into mental depression and a heavy, dull hopelessness. [...] Unemployment in the North Bohemian region is far worse than in the Czech regions [i.e. regions populated by Czechs]. [...] There are places where up to 70 percent of the workers are affected by unemployment. The standard of living of the unemployed is terrible. Child

> malnutrition is a universal phenomenon. Tuberculosis is rampant. ("Kraj, kterým jde hlad", 1935, p. 706)

As the author of the article observed, the situation in the Borderlands was dire, and the result was that the German-speaking community lost the little faith they had gained in Czechoslovakia during the 1920s.

The majority of Czech Germans sought hope elsewhere. In the general election of 1935, they abandoned the "activist" parties and supported the Sudetendeutsche Partei (Sudeten German Party), a political party that, in the 1930s, demanded autonomy and leaned more and more towards Nazi Germany. Hitler supported and even stirred up their demands, and the situation escalated with the Munich Agreement of 29 September 1938. The day after it was signed, Czech newspapers were full of grief:

> FRIENDS!
>
> We stand with sorrow in our souls, like a farmer over his farm partly destroyed, who counts what he has lost and how poor he has become. Yes, we have lost, we have lost too much. […] Perhaps some of what I shall have to build will be smaller at first, but I shall build it better and stronger than before. It will be a good farm again, and it will be more mine, for it will no longer be inherited, but built by these hands. (Čapek, 1991, p. 448)

This is how the Czech novelist Karel Čapek lamented the Munich Agreement right when the German troops entering Czechoslovakia were greeted by those Czech Germans who wished to be part of Germany. The hopeful vision of national cooperation that Čapek shared with Junosza was destroyed.

I do not know how Junosza interpreted this development and if it had changed his understanding of the German minority or his position of a "sympathetic foreigner" towards Czechs. In his interpretation from the 1920s, he stays in the middle ground – although he recognizes and considers the German critique of their position in Czechoslovakia, he tries to stay neutral and just describes the slow decline of their status. Only a larger sample of his texts or more detailed information about his background would help us understand to what extent his stance was influenced by his views, education, or current political relations between Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Germany.

Although I use his data, we come to different conclusions. Throughout my article, I have demonstrated that the position of the German minority was marginalized, and that the marginalizing policies of the Czechoslovak government led to an escalation of the national conflict. In the Czech Republic after 1989, a critical assessment of the inter-war period prevailed. Also, academic writing itself has changed. While Junosza tried to take a neutral stance, I, in line with critical humanities, show how neutral stances are embedded in a specific political context. When in a hundred years someone writes an analysis of our two stories of the German minority again, I am sure it will also be a new one.

Epilogue: The Ruins

If one tried to use Junosza's article as a guide to the Czech lands today, one might be disappointed. The buildings, companies, and schools that he mentions are not there anymore. Around the whole northern, western, and southern borderlands of present-day Czechia, you can find remnants of villages that disappeared completely. Only old waterworks with a German inscription can be found on the site of the former village of Fukov/Fukau in the north of the country; only a small cemetery full of German names can be seen in the field where Pavlův Studenec / Paulsbrunn used to be.

When Čapek wrote about "a home that will be just ours", he predicted the postwar developments. The majority of Czech society saw the position of the German minority in the 1930s as treason, as something that made it impossible for Czech Germans to live in Czechoslovakia in the future. Similarly to other countries in Eastern and Central Europe, more than 2.5 million people were forcibly transferred in 1945 and 1946 from Czechoslovakia to occupation zones in Germany. They were to be replaced by people of "Slavic" origin, which was an umbrella term for other inhabitants of Czechoslovakia and for those of Czech and Slovak descent who lived abroad but were expected to come back and repopulate the Borderlands (Spurný, 2011; Wiedemann, 2016).

The ways of treating German society, its institutions, and materiality were twofold. The official policy was that "the reminders of Germanness should disappear" (Spurný, 2011, p. 38). German institutions were dissolved, German schools were closed down (even in places where the number of Germans who stayed was quite substantial), and German inscriptions on the houses were removed. In reality, the German materiality was often "recycled" – used by the "Slavic" settlers in the new context (Hoření, 2024). The largest group of Germans who were allowed to stay in Czechoslovakia were experts who were supposed to teach new settlers specific skills in glassmaking or textile techniques. Therefore, "Bohemian crystal glass" sold to tourists in Prague or Karlovy Vary could be seen as a material remnant of German industry. Also, beer labels "Pilsner Urquell" and "Budweiser" remind us today that the Bohemian cities of Plzeň/Pilsen and České Budějovice / Budweiss had a German-speaking minority that was the driving force behind their economic development.

Today, an article about the German minority would be very different. In the 2021 census, the number of Czech citizens who declared German ethnicity was 24,632 (*Německá národnostní menšina*, 2022). An umbrella organization of their civic associations is *Shromáždění německých spolků v České Republice* or *Landesversammlung der deutschen Vereine in der Tschechischen Republik* (Assembly of German Associations in the Czech Republic) – nowadays German associations have also Czech names, which often come first, something that was not that important for prewar associations. A few years ago, *Shromáždění/Landesversammlung* started the project called MundArt – on the YouTube channel of the organization one can

find videos of the last speakers of disappearing German dialects in Czechia. There is no better symbol of the change from the once powerful biggest minority with great economic power into a small and disappearing one.

References

Bílek, J. (2018). *Kyselá těšínská jablíčka: Československo-polské konflikty o Těšínsko 1919, 1938, 1945* (2nd ed.). Epocha.

Brod, M. (1907). Frühling in Prag. *Die Gegenwart*, *36*(20), 316–317.

Bubík, M. (2024). *Który duch przeszłości zwycięży na Moście Przyjaźni w Cieszynie?* Spectral Recycling. https://spectralrecycling.ispan.edu.pl/ktory-duch-przeszlosci-zwyciezy-na-moscie-przyjazni-w-cieszynie/

Čapek, K. (1991). *Od člověka k člověku* (Vol. 3). Československý spisovatel.

Čapková, K. (2012). *Czechs, Germans, Jews?: National identity and the Jews of Bohemia* (D. Paton & M. Paton, Trans.). Berghahn Books.

Čapková, K., & Frankl, M. (2008). *Nejisté útočiště: Československo a uprchlíci před nacismem 1933–1938*. Paseka.

Cohen, G. B. (2006). *The politics of ethnic survival: Germans in Prague, 1861–1914* (2nd rev. ed.). Purdue University Press.

Dejmek, J. (2006). *Edvard Beneš: Politická biografie českého demokrata: Part 1. Revolucionář a diplomat (1884–1935)*. Karolinum.

Frič, M. (1939a). *Eva tropí hlouposti* [Film]. Lucernafilm.

Frič, M. (1939b). *Kristián* [Film]. Lucernafilm.

Furmaník, M. (2022). Spišskí Nemci v rokoch 1920–1937. *Kulturné dejiny*, *13*(2), 248–272. https://doi.org/10.54937/kd.2022.13.2.248-272

Gablerová, A. (2023). *Nepíšu to pro nikoho, jen pro sebe: Deník Anny Gablerové z let 1838–1903* (V. Reittererová, Trans.; P. Hájek, Ed.). Kodudek.

Gellner, E. (1983). *Nations and nationalism*. Cornell University Press.

Habánová, A., & Habán, I. (2013). Existuje německočeské výtvarné umění? In A. Habánová (Ed.), *Mladí lvi v kleci: Umělecké skupiny německy hovořících výtvarníků z Čech, Moravy a Slezska v meziválečném období* (pp. 10–19). Arbor Vitae; Galerie výtvarného umění v Chebu; Oblastní galerie Liberec.

Heimann, M. (2009). *Czechoslovakia: The state that failed*. Yale University Press.

Hoření, K. (2024). A brave new world out of the same old pieces: Property confiscation and distribution in postwar Czechoslovakia. *Nationalities Papers*. Advance online publication. https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2024.50

Judson, P. M. (1996). Frontiers, islands, forests, stones: Mapping the geography of a German identity in the Habsburg Monarchy, 1848–1900. In P. Yaeger (Ed.), *The geography of identity* (pp. 382–406). University of Michigan Press.

Junosza, W. (1928). *L'enseignement polonais en Allemagne*. Éd. de l'Inst. D'Études des Questions de Nationalités.

Junosza, W. (1929a). Mniejszość niemiecka w Czechosłowacji. *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, *3*(2), 35–56.

Junosza, W. (1929b). Mniejszość niemiecka w Czechosłowacji. *Sprawy Narodowościowe*, *3*(3), 238–267.

Klimek, A. (2003). *Vítejte v První republice*. Havran.

Klimek, A., & Kubů, E. (1995). *Československá zahraniční politika 1918–1938: Kapitoly z dějin mezinárodních vztahů*. Institut pro středoevropskou kulturu a politiku.

Koeltzsch, I. (2016). *Praha rozdělená i sdílená: Česko-židovsko-německé vztahy 1918–1938* (P. Dvořáček, Trans.). Nakladatelství Lidové noviny.

Koeltzsch, I., & Konrád, O. (2016). From "islands of democracy" to "transnational border spaces": State of the art and perspectives of the historiography on the First Czechoslovak Republic since 1989. *Bohemia: Zeitschrift für Geschichte und Kultur der böhmischen Länder / A Journal of History and Civilisation in East Central Europe*, *56*(2), 285–327. https://doi.org/10.18447/BoZ-2015-4189

Kopeček, M. (2021). Czechoslovakism: The concept's blurry history. In A. Hudek, M. Kopeček, & J. Mervart (Eds.), *Czechoslovakism* (pp. 1–33). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003205234-101

Kraj, kterým jde hlad. (1935, October 17). *Světozor. Světová kronika současná slovem i obrazem: Časopis pro zábavu i poučení*, *35*(42), 706–707.

Kučera, J. (1999). *Minderheit im Nationalstaat: Die Sprachenfrage in den tschechisch-deutschen Beziehungen 1918–1938*. Oldenbourg. https://doi.org/10.1524/9783486596007

Lichtenstein, T. (2006). 'Making' Jews at home: Zionism and the construction of Jewish nationality in inter-war Czechoslovakia. *East European Jewish Affairs*, *36*(1), 49–71. https://doi.org/10.1080/13501670600714742

Ludvová, J. (2012). *Až k hořkému konci: Pražské německé divadlo 1845–1945*. Academia; Institut umění – Divadelní ústav.

Macura, V. (2015). *Znamení zrodu a české sny*. Academia.

Německá národnostní menšina. (2022, October 22). Vláda České republiky. https://vlada.gov.cz/cz/ppov/rnm/mensiny/nemecka-narodnostni-mensina-16122/

Novák, J. (1938). *Nejkrásnější země: Kniha mládeže o Československu*. Nakladatelství Gustav Voleský.

Olivová, V. (1961). *Politika československé buržoazie v letech 1921–1923*. Československá akademie věd.

Olivová, V. (1991). *Československé dějiny 1914–1939*. Karolinum.

Olivová, V. (2000). *Dějiny první republiky*. Karolinum.

Orzoff, A. (2009). *Battle for the Castle: The myth of Czechoslovakia in Europe, 1918–1948*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195367812.001.0001

Paul, E. L. (1998). Czech Teschen Silesia and the controversial Czechoslovak census of 1921. *The Polish Review*, *43*(2), 161–171.

Pytlik, B. (2007). *Polské a české školství na Těšínsku v meziválečném období* [Bachelor thesis, Univerzita Palackého]. Theses.cz. https://theses.cz/id/kbplsh/27516-882823310.pdf

Sčítání lidu v Republice Československé ze dne 15 února 1921 (Vol. 1). (1924). Státní úřad statistický.

Skřivan, A. (2007). K charakteru, rozsahu a zaměření československého vývozu v meziválečném období. *Acta Oeconomica Pragensia*, *15*(7), 367–382. https://doi.org/10.18267/j.aop.219

Spurný, M. (2011). *Nejsou jako my: Česká společnost a menšiny v pohraničí (1945–1960)*. Antikomplex.

Trzebiatowski, K. (1961). *Oświata i szkolnictwo polskie na Pomorzu Zachodnim w pierwszej połowie XX wieku, 1900–1939*. Wydawnictwo Poznańskie.

Urzidil, J. (1922). Tschechen und Deutsche. *Neue Rundschau*, *33*(2), 157–176.

Wiedemann, A. (2016). *"Pojď s námi budovat pohraničí!": Osídlování a proměna obyvatelstva bývalých Sudet 1945–1952* (P. Dvořáček, Trans.). Prostor.

Zahra, T. (2010). Imagined noncommunities: National indifference as a category of analysis. *Slavic Review*, *69*(1), 93–119. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0037677900016715

Zahra, T. (2011). *Kidnapped souls: National indifference and the battle for children in the Bohemian Lands, 1900–1948*. Cornell University Press. https://doi.org/10.7591/9780801461910

Od świetności do upadku. Sto lat od *Mniejszości niemieckiej w Czechosłowacji* Wacława Junoszy (1929) do współczesności

Abstrakt

Niniejsza praca jest krytycznym spojrzeniem na artykuł Wacława Junoszy *Mniejszość niemiecka w Czechosłowacji*, opublikowany w „Sprawach Narodowościowych" w 1929 roku. Zaprezentowano w nim przegląd organizacji społecznych mniejszości niemieckojęzycznej w międzywojennej Pierwszej Republice Czechosłowackiej. Autorka niniejszego artykułu pogłębia tę perspektywę o ówczesne refleksje na temat stosunków etnicznych oraz o aktualne badania naukowe dotyczące wspomnianego okresu czechosłowackiej historii. Na przykładach z dziedziny edukacji i przemysłu, którymi zajmuje się Junosza, autorka omawia możliwości i ograniczenia dotyczące współistnienia grup narodowych w Czechosłowacji. Niniejsza praca koncentruje się zarówno na okresie sprzed 1920 roku, jak i na czasach późniejszych. Pokazuje, w jaki sposób powstały jasne kategorie narodowe używane przez Junoszę, a także w jaki sposób nierówności i walki między wyobrażonymi kategoriami narodowymi doprowadziły do upadku wielonarodowej Czechosłowacji.

Słowa kluczowe: etniczni Niemcy; mniejszości narodowe; Czechosłowacja; wypędzenie; Wielki Kryzys; edukacja mniejszości narodowych; etnografia

Citation

Hoření, K. (2024). From greatness to ruins: The hundred years between "The German minority in Czechoslovakia" by Wacław Junosza (1929) and the present. *Sprawy Narodowościowe: Seria nowa*, *2024*(56), Article 3346. https://doi.org/10.11649/sn.3346

INSTITUTE OF SLAVIC STUDIES
POLISH ACADEMY OF SCIENCES
1954-2024

Publication History: Received: 2024-08-16; Accepted: 2024-11-12; Published: 2025-03-25