

Maintaining Identity and Rights of National Minorities: Visibility, Linguistic Landscape of the Slovene Minority in Carinthia

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Abstract

This paper deals with the visibility of the autochthonous Slovene minority in Carinthia as one of the crucial factors contributing towards maintaining its identity in the territory of its traditional settlement. The paper focuses on the language of a subset of public signs, i.e., topographical signs, erected by the regional government; a controversial issue that has been exploited for political reasons. In order to elucidate the motivations for this controversy the legal framework concerning national minorities, Article 7 of the Austrian State Treaty being central to it, is examined. Further, the resulting solution of the topographical signs dispute is examined in the light of other areas concerning minority rights as reported in Opinions and Reports under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCPNM). Following on, section 2 provides a brief historical background, section 3 presents the findings of FCPNM reports concerning the implementation of bilingual topographical signs, as well as comparing the trends with minority demography and minority policies regarding media and education. Section 4 discusses the issues from section 3, leading to the conclusion in section 5, that the chronic passivity of central authorities regarding obligations based on international treaties, combined with active anti-minority policies supported by the local German-speaking majority, lead to accelerating language and identity shift and thus assimilation of the Slovene minority.

Keywords: Slovene minority, Carinthia, visibility, linguistic landscape, bilingual topographical signs, *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*

要旨

本稿ではオーストリア・カリンシア州に固有のスロヴェニア少数民族の存在がどのように目に見える形で現れているかについて論じる。この少数民族の可視性はその居住地域で少数民族のアイデンティティを維持するため

に、欠かせない要因の一つである。本論考では、カリンシア州政府に政治的に利用されようとした道路標識の一つ、市町村の入り口に立って地名をあらわす標識を巡る論争、およびその背景に焦点を当てる。論争を理解するためにはまず、オーストリア国家条約、その中では特にスロヴェニア系などの少数民族保護に触れる第7条に注目する。続いて、地名の標識を巡る論争の解決としてできた結果である二言語併用の標識を、「少数民族保護のための枠組み協定」<Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCPNM)> の報告書を基に、オーストリアにおける少数民族保護という文脈で検討する。本稿の第2節ではまず歴史的背景を短く紹介してから、第3節で、二言語併用の交通標識の設置を巡るFCPNMの報告を検討し、第4節では第3節で明らかにされた諸事実を考察する。第5節で、国際条約や協定から生じる義務に対する、オーストリア中央政府の慢性化した消極的態度と、カリンシア州のドイツ語話者の多数が指示する反少数民族的政策が組み合わさったことにより、スロヴェニア系少数民族において、多数派民族の言語の受容、及びアイデンティティの転換が加速化し、同化が進んでいるという結論に至る。

キーワード：スロベニア系少数民族、カリンシア州、可視化、言語的景観、二言語併用の道路標識、「少数民族保護枠組み協定」(FCPNM)

1. Introduction

Visibility of an ethnic minority in the territory of its traditional settlement is one of the crucial elements of its identity in the ethnic, historic and geographic dimensions¹. Visibility of a minority is to a great extent mediated through the visibility of its language. Especially salient in this respect are the public language signs erected by the government, such as topographical signs, road signs, names of streets, names of public institutions, etc., because they are emblematic of the official position and treatment of a minority by the state authorities. In the case of the Slovene ethnic minority in the Austrian state (*Land*) of Carinthia, there has been a long struggle to secure their rights (as stipulated by Article 7 of the *Austrian State Treaty*), and to a large extent denied them by the provincial government of Carinthia (cf. Nećak Lük 1998, 2002; Repe 2003). One of the conspicuous aspects of the struggle was the effort of Carinthian Slovenes to secure their visibility through bilingual public signs, and in particular, public road

signs. We have a typical case of what Bourdieu (1992) calls a struggle for symbolic power. In this case, on the one hand, the efforts of the political exponents of the regional German-speaking majority in Carinthia trying to eradicate the presence of a minority through symbolic denial of its outside visibility, and, on the other hand, the resistance of the said Slovene-speaking minority.

1.1. The notion of ‘linguistic landscape’

Linguistic landscape is a notion that refers to the way and how visible languages are, i.e., how salient they are in a multilingual territory, region or state. Landry and Bourhis (1997) pioneered the notion, outlining it in their often-cited definition as:

[...] the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.

(Landry and Bourhis 1997: 25)

Thus defined, linguistic landscape is relevant for the present study because, referring to “public road signs, [...], street names, place names, [...], and public signs on government buildings”, it provides a powerful analytical tool for dealing with the situation of ethnic minority in the context of majority. Cenaz and Garter (2006) for example, is an interesting study of the two-way relationship between sociolinguistic context and the linguistic landscape of two streets in multi-ethnic areas, one in the Basque country (Spain) and the other in Friesland (Netherlands).

1.2. Protection of minorities and languages in the EU

Based on the tragic experiences of racism and intolerance towards the ethnic ‘other’ in the interwar period and during World War II, Europe, after the war, tried to prevent such excesses from happening ever again. Especially in the EU, multi-ethnicity came to be viewed officially as an asset, as something to be proud of, and not as a threat to the nation state².

As a result, a number of international conventions arose, the most general one being the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* adopted in Barcelona in June 1996. A few years earlier, in the context of Europe, the Council of Europe played a leading role for the adoption, in 1992, of the *European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages* (ECRML), the aim of which was to protect historical minorities and their languages³. Three years later, in 1995, also under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the *Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (FCPNM) was adopted⁴. Additionally, protection of minorities is further warranted on the basis of bilateral and multilateral treaties, an example being the Austrian State Treaty of 1955, which re-established Austria as a sovereign state.

1.3. Purpose of this study

Both Austria and all her neighbors, including Slovenia, are members of the EU, Austria since 1995 and Slovenia since 2004. While Bekeš (2016) gave an overview of the lot of Slovene ethnic minorities in Italy, Austria and Hungary in the light of the Schengen agreement, the present study, building on some of its findings, centers on the ‘visibility’ of a minority and its language in the Austrian state of Carinthia as reflected in the implementation of bilingual topographical signs, i.e., a part of the linguistic landscape. In particular, it tries to shed light on the relation between the visibility and the general situation of the minority in the light of the minority protection framework, provided by FCPNM.

The research questions are:

1. What is the legal framework regarding the protection of minorities and their languages in Austria.
2. What can we conclude from the actual implementation of these legal obligations as exemplified by the topographical signs, known as the ‘*Ortstafeln* issue’ in the Austrian media (cf. *Kleine Zeitung* July 13, 2010), and from the general situation of the Slovene minority as reported under the FCPNM.

The answers are based on an analysis of FCPNM reports and opinions on Austria, on statistics concerning minority (such as censuses, education, media

access), and on an analysis of developments regarding implementation of bilingual topographical signs in the relevant parts of Carinthia. This part is to a large extent based on the facts already reported in Bekeš (2016).

Section 2 starts with a short historical background of Slovenes in Austria and goes on to outline the policies of Austria towards the Slovene ethnic minority, centering on the period after Slovenia's accession to the Schengen Treaty, and to examine the legal framework protecting Slovene and other minorities. Section 3 comprises findings of the *Third Opinion on Austria*, a periodical report by the Advisory Committee on the FCPNM, published in 2011, and the *Fourth Report submitted by Austria pursuant to Article 25, paragraph 2 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, hereafter *Fourth Report*, which became available in early 2016. I first examine the visibility issue, focusing on the implementation of bilingual topographical signs. To show the importance of visibility as the most conspicuous criterion for acknowledging a minority's right to unhindered existence I compare this issue also with demography, i.e., 'counting' of the minority and conspicuous fluctuation in numbers over the years, as well as with another aspect of visibility - media in the minority's language and the minority's access to them, and the accessibility of schooling in the minority's language. All these issues are expected to correlate, i.e., high visibility, represented by a liberal policy of implementation of bilingual topographical signs, should be reflected in undiminished numbers of minority inhabitants in the area as with their unhindered access to media and schooling in their own language, and vice versa. In section 4, I discuss the findings of section 3. The last section offers the conclusions.

2. Policies of Austria towards the Slovene ethnic minority after Slovenia's accession to the Schengen Treaty

2.1. Short historical background of Slovenes in Austria

2.1.1. Beginnings

Slovenia, located at the northwest end of the South Slav language continuum, a stretch of Slav dialects between the Julian Alps and the Black Sea, is one of the last nation-states to emerge on the fringes of former empires (cf. Geary 2005; Schulze 2003).

Slovene lands (which later became Slovenia) were for a long time part of the Holy Roman Empire and its successor, Habsburg Austria. It was the vibrant Protestant movement that played a crucial role in the shaping of a separate Slovene linguistic and ethnic identity, especially by translating the Bible and other religious works into the vernacular based on the centrally located Slav dialects of the Duchy of Carniola. The strong Protestant tradition of writing in the vernacular survived the Counter-Reformation and remained deeply rooted among the rural population, including in what is today the Austrian southern state of Carinthia (cf. Petre 1939; Luthar ed. 2008; Kordiš ed. 2004)

2.1.2. Slovenes in Austria-Hungary

In the later half of the nineteenth century, the Slovene ethnic community was administratively divided between several of the Austrian territories (*Länder*), i.e., the crown land of Austrian Littoral, and the *Länder* of Carinthia, Carniola, Styria and the Kingdom of Hungary. After Italy's independence, the only Slovene ethnic region outside Austria-Hungary was Beneška Slovenija (Venetian Slovenia / It. Slavia Veneta). Trieste (Trst) as the main Austrian port had a thriving urban Slovene population, and Villach (Beljak) and Klagenfurt (Celovec) in Carinthia were also important intellectual centers of Slovenes. In the later half of the nineteenth century Slovenes eagerly took part in the processes of ethnic polarization of the population along the overlapping ethnic borders as a part of the ethnic nation-state building that fermented all over Europe (cf. Kann 1974; Melik 2002; Luthar ed. 2008; Kosi 2013).

2.1.3. Ethnic Slovenes in Austria and neighboring countries between WWI and WWII

After the demise of Austria-Hungary at the end of World War I, the Slovene ethnic territory was split up, two thirds forming the Dravska Banovina administrative region in the new kingdom of Yugoslavia, while about one-third of Slovene ethnic territory was allocated to Italy, Austria and, to a much lesser extent, to Hungary. Drawing up of the border between Austria and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SHS, later Yugoslavia) was the cause of bitter memories for both sides. In 1919, the Saint Germain Treaty ceded the smaller southeastern part of Carinthia to SHS, while the fate of the unresolved part was left up to the

Carinthian Plebiscite, held in October 1920, to decide. Not only in the northern Zone B, with a predominantly German-speaking population, but also in Zone A, the southern part of Carinthia with a 70% Slovene majority, 59% of the total population opted for Austria. This was the result of prejudice stemming from national struggle in the nineteenth century, of skillful propaganda on the Austrian side, and of clumsy politics on the Yugoslav side. More to the East, in Styria, in smaller areas with a Slovene population, the Slovene minority was not recognized at all. Vestiges of protection of Slovene linguistic and cultural identity started disappearing very soon after the Plebiscite, and after the *Anschluss* in 1938 Slovenes in Carinthia were exposed to harsh assimilatory pressure, culminating in persecution of non-complying members of the minority. This was the result of the nationalist ideology of an ethnic nation-state, combined with fascist ideology that was embraced after WWI, not only in Germany but even earlier, in Austria, Italy and Hungary. The Slovene minority in all three countries was exposed to political persecution (cf. Luthar ed. 2008; Pirjevec 2011; Repe 2003).

2.1.4. Slovenes in Austria (Carinthia and Styria) after WWII

After World War II, predominantly because of the influence of different ideological camps, Italy and Austria being part of the ‘West’, Yugoslavia socialist but nonaligned, and Hungary firmly in the ‘Soviet block’, mutual distrust persisted on all sides. Nationalistic sentiments, stemming from the nineteenth century, were further inflated by different historical and ideological perspectives. In addition, in Austria, denazification was never thoroughly implemented, enabling blindness in some circles, which still hinders an objective assessment of their past. A deep-rooted mutual distrust, based on nationalism, bred in the process of ethnic nation-state building, still remains in the relations between Slovenia and its neighbors. This distrust impedes the potential offered by new developments in the EU to overcome the negative historical legacy (cf. Miklavcic 2006).

On 15 May 1955 the *Austrian State Treaty* restoring Austria’s sovereignty was signed, with Yugoslavia as a cosignatory along with the United States, the Soviet Union, Great Britain and France. Article 7 of the Treaty provides for the ample protection of minorities, including Carinthian and Styrian Slovenes

and Burgenland Croats. The plight of the Slovene and Croatian minorities had been aggravated by the fact that until the mid-1950s the border between Austria and Yugoslavia overlapped the Iron Curtain. After the State Treaty was signed relations warmed and contacts across the border became easier for both sides (cf. Luthar ed. 2008).

After Slovene independence in 1991, direct contact between the Slovenian and Austrian governments regarding the Slovene minority became possible, but here too, Slovenia's position vis-à-vis Austria was weak compared with that of Yugoslavia. Furthermore, contrary to developments with Italy, there was no explicit agreement as to Slovenia's status as Yugoslavia's successor to the Austrian State Treaty (cf. Luthar ed. 2008).

Slovenia's integration into the EU and accession in May 2004, accession to the euro zone in January 2007 and accession to the Schengen Treaty in December of the same year undoubtedly contributed also to lively economic contacts and generated a more congenial atmosphere between Slovenia and the Federal Austrian Government (cf. Luthar ed. 2008).

2.2. Legal framework protecting minorities and their languages in Austria

The linguistic rights of the Slovene minority in Austria are protected by several treaties and conventions. Regarding the international obligations of Austria towards its minorities, and specifically the Slovene and Burgenland Croatian minority, the *Austrian State Treaty* is the most specific. Article 7 Paragraph 3 of the Treaty clearly specifies that the protection of minorities basically means protection of their language rights, protection of their right to visibility in the areas of their traditional settlement and their right to schooling in their own language.

3. In the administrative and judicial districts of Carinthia, Burgenland and Styria, where there are Slovene, Croat or mixed populations, the Slovene or Croat language shall be accepted as an official language in addition to German. In such districts topographical terminology and inscriptions shall be in the Slovene or Croat language as well as in German.

(Article 7 paragraph 3, *Austrian State Treaty*)

Slovenia and Austria have, since 2004, been members of the same transnational (or by now perhaps more accurately supranational) community, the EU. As such, not only Slovenia, but Austria too, is signatory to international treaties protecting linguistic and racial minorities, such as the FCPNM (signed in February 1995, ratified in 1998), and the ECRML (confirmed 25 June 1992, valid from 1 March 1998, and ratified in June 2001). Minority rights, and minority linguistic rights are further protected by the Austrian Constitution, domestic laws and bylaws.

In theory, this rich international legal framework should be enough to guarantee a satisfactory environment for minorities, including the Slovene minority. Yet, as has been pointed out by Bhatia (2011), the EU legal system is very ambiguous about the actual implementation of linguistic rights in member countries. In addition, the implementation of signed international treaties and domestic legislation based on, or complying with these rights is usually based on a minority's demographic data. Thus, people who have historically been a constitutive part of a region's population suddenly have to be 'defined', 'counted' and 'classified' into appropriate groups. It is in particular the defining and measuring of minorities that leaves a lot of leeway for tactics conducive to perpetuating the mono-ethnic dream of many members of the majority community.

From here on I will basically follow the findings of the Advisory Committee on the FCPNM, as reported in their *Third Opinion* on Austria. Since the *Fourth Report* also became openly available, I will rely on it for the interpretation of the findings.

2.3. Minority Policies in Austria after 2007

Policies towards the Slovene minority in Austria after the 2007 accession of Slovenia to the Schengen agreement seem to be basically a continuation of the pre-Schengen era: on the one hand 'Daoist' dynamics of *wu wei* (non-action) regarding the legal obligations of the state and regional administration, and on the other hand 'positive engagement' regarding the containment of the minority. Yet, it also seems that some new developments are afoot.

Improvements are seen mainly outside the official sphere, in (i) more lively local cross-border exchanges with an increasing number of joint cultural events, (ii) cooperation in after-school educational events in local schools on both sides of the border, and (iii) increasing local level economic contacts and cross-border tourism⁵.

The continuation of old policies, reflecting persistent sympathies for nationalistic policies by a large part of the majority population in the area, will be dealt with in the next section, focusing in particular on the outside visibility of the Slovene minority as reflected in the linguistic landscape.

3. Visibility in reports on the Framework Convention regarding language policies

3.1. *Ortstafeln* issue – the outside visibility of the Slovene minority in Austria.

Treatment of minorities should not be based on numbers (cf. Brezigar 2004) especially in the light of the ruthless assimilatory policies in the period between the end of World War I and the end of World War II in both Italy and Austria. The regional government of Carinthia, seen as one of the most conservative regions in Austria, was ruled from 1999 until his death in a car accident in 2008, by the Governor (*Landeshauptmann*) Jörg Haider from the Alliance for the Future of Austria (BZÖ); Haider was succeeded by his party fellow Gerhard Dörfler. With an anti-Slovene minority stance as one of the pillars of its policy, BZÖ under Jörg Haider, who never hid his Nazi sympathies, showed extreme contempt regarding Slovene minority rights guaranteed by the Constitution of Austria. As was widely reported in both the Slovenian and the Austrian press, Haider resisted the ruling of the Austrian Constitutional Court of 2001 requiring bilingual topographical signs in all settlements with more than 10% of Slovene-speaking inhabitants, the dispute culminating in the temporary removal of bilingual topographical signs (the *Ortstafeln* issue) in Southern Carinthia. Bilingual topographical signs are visible emblems of the presence of the ‘other’ in an ethnically mixed territory (cf. *Kleine Zeitung* 13.7.2010).

In the rest of this section, I will present the findings of the report of the Advisory Committee on the *FCPNM, Third Opinion on Austria*, adopted on 28 June 2011 (*Third Opinion on Austria*).

The conclusions of the Executive Summary are negative: “There has been no visible progress towards a more consistent and inclusive application of the Framework Convention” (*Third Opinion on Austria*, p.1). This refers to all categories, that is, accessibility of minority languages in media, access to schooling in minority languages, and visibility. Regarding visibility, the Executive Summary refers to the partial solution of the topographical sign issue. It admits that the recent compromise between the Carinthian authorities and the Slovene minority representatives did lead to a solution of the long conflict over bilingual topographical signs in Carinthia, at the same time pointing out that “[t]he outcome, however, remains **substantially below the standard** of protection set by the Constitutional Court in a series of relevant decisions since 2001.” (ibid., p.2; emphasis by the author). The report also stresses that the proposed amendments to the 1976 *Law on Ethnic Groups*, supposedly necessary to implement the decisions of the Constitutional Court concerning bilingual topographical signs were introduced to Parliament without any prior consultation with the representatives of the concerned minority. Also, the planned implementation of the proposed amendments restricts the already achieved rights of the minority, “limit[ing] the possibilities for future appeals to the Constitutional Court on this issue” (ibid., p.7). Furthermore, the report clearly states that even this substandard solution disregards the Constitutional Court decisions concerning bilingual topographical signs (Constitutional Court decisions of 13 December 2001) and the use of the Slovene language with local authorities (Constitutional Court decisions of 4 October 2000) in the region, and remains mostly unimplemented. The report also cites the minority representatives saying that in the municipalities where the use of Slovene as a minority language is formally admitted, there is limited willingness by civil servants to accommodate the minority language (ibid., p.7).

The *Third Opinion on Austria* finally finds the implementation of Austria’s international treaty obligations, as exemplified also in the case of bilingual signposting, being hostage to local policies, regrettable:

19. While welcoming that a solution to the long-standing dispute has finally been found, the Advisory Committee regrets that the **implementation of Austria’s international treaty obligations to protect**

the individual rights of persons belonging to national minorities is made subject to local politics and compromise negotiations, despite unequivocal rulings of the Constitutional Court on the issue.

(Third Opinion on Austria, p.7; emphasis by the author.)

This harsh criticism issued by the Advisory Committee on the FCPNM, otherwise a mild-mannered and rather toothless organ of the Council of Europe (COE), is emblematic of the developments in Austria. The findings imply that at the regional level it pays for politicians to be anti-minority⁶, and that for federal level politics, contrary to the legal framework and standing court rulings, it is more expedient to compromise with the regional political powers, using minority rights as the currency of payment.

The hide-and-seek game played by Governor Haider with the Constitutional Court can be seen in Figure 1 below.



Fig. 1: Three stages in the development of bilingual topographical signs

(Source: Kronen Zeitung, 13 July 2010)

The pictures in Figure 1 are highly symbolic. On the left, we have Carinthian Governor Haider triumphant at his achievement of preserving the monolingual topographical sign on the outskirts of Bleiburg (Pliberk), thus fulfilling the original wish of Carinthian German-speaking nationalists. With this, Haider confirmed the visual elimination of the Slovene minority in the area. The picture in the middle shows the compromise Haider was ready to accept: namely, the relation of inscriptions in German and Slovene on the topographic signs symbolizing the perceived situation of the Slovene minority. The addition of a plate with a small Slovene inscription signals the acknowledgment of its existence as an afterthought, recognizing it as the subordinate, inferior member of the two main ethnic communities populating Carinthia. The last topographical sign on the

right expresses with equal size fonts, the equal weight of both ethnic groups, with the dominant (German-speaking) group's inscription on top.

The overt denial of basic visibility, which is warranted by Austria's international obligations stipulated in the Austrian State Treaty and in the ratified conventions, speaks of the atmosphere prevailing among a substantial part of the German-speaking majority in Carinthia, and speaks also of the lukewarm attitude of the central authorities. They were moved to take action only after civil disobedience by certain prominent members of the Slovene ethnic community (cf. Reiterer 2003).

3.2. Demography

Visibility of a minority or its denial can thus be seen as one component of a wider picture. As it will become clear it is a parallel process: denying recognition of a minority on the symbolic level, through denial of its visibility as reflected in the use of topographical signs, at the same time also denies the minority's very existence. Thus, the dull but relentless pressure exercised by the majority over the minority in Carinthia as documented in the *Third Opinion*, is reflected also in the minority's demography.

Demography is the cornerstone of minority policies. Minority has to be defined and confirmed in the minority's territory, and its territory delimited by the powers that be at the state and regional administrative level. After World War I, with the demise of the Habsburg Empire, these procedures were without exception connected with state coercion and assimilatory pressures. As pointed out above in section 2.1.3, in Austria, after the Carinthian Plebiscite of 1919, promised vestiges of protection for the Slovene-speaking minority were soon replaced by assimilatory policies. With the *Anschluss*, the Slovene-speaking minority began to be persecuted, with many resisting members being sent to concentration camps (cf. Luthar ed. 2008). Thus, official 'objective' defining and counting of a minority can be a very risky process for the minority. It is symptomatic but not surprising that the estimates for numbers of ethnic Slovenes vary wildly (Austria is no exception here, similar processes take place in Italy too), and from one census to another. Furthermore, no politician, conscious of his or her constituency,

dares to propose basing minority policies on the population counts from the Austria-Hungary period, when nationalistic sentiment was not yet close to boiling point and people were not afraid to proclaim their ethnic and linguistic identity.

It often seems as if identification and quantification of minorities are very demanding for the countries where these minorities live. In spite of the clear diction of the laws and conventions, the hidden agenda all too often seems to be defined by efforts of showing the numbers to be as small as possible. This can be achieved by several means, such as by increasing the number of classification categories, by the way national census questions are formulated, by covert or overt intimidation, etc.

As for Austria, compared with the much more focused estimates for other minorities, the estimates of the number of Slovene speakers differ widely, from about 13,000 provided by the 2001 census (cf. Reiterer 2003: 1; Klemenčič and Klemenčič 2006: 149), to about 70,000 provided by Reiterer (*ibid.*). Fluctuations are characteristic of all censuses carried out in the area of bilingual schooling in Carinthia for the years 1951, 1961 and 1971. The fluctuations at first seem to have been the result of double category with regard to the Slovene minority, ‘Slovene’ and ‘Windisch’. The sum of both categories gives slightly less than 40,000 in 1951. Again, the 1961 census, with just one category, this time only ‘Slovene’, gives almost the same number, 39,212. The number suddenly drops to about half in the 1971 census, which included both categories, that is, 20,086 (cf. Klemenčič and Klemenčič 2006: 75). Where have 20,000 people suddenly evaporated to? This downwards trend continues and in the 2001 census in which the combined sum of those declaring themselves ‘Slovene’ or ‘Windisch’ speakers, is down to 13,109 (Klemenčič and Klemenčič 2006: 149). Reiterer (2003: 191-194) points out that the reason behind such striking fluctuation is population census methodology. Based on the oppression experienced in the past “only a fifth ... are ready to identify as Slovene if asked by the authority in the census” (*ibid.* p.193). Based on his 1999 large-scale survey covering a representative sample of about 60,000 persons in Austria and employing a much more precise questionnaire than the census, by extrapolation he arrives at 12.8% as the estimated percentage of the Slovene-speaking population in the whole of Carinthia which corresponds to slightly less than 70,000 persons.

Disparity between the official census data and Reiterer's considerably higher estimate shows how questionnaires can be manipulated to arrive at a desired result. Additionally, various other factors, such as fear and anxiety (see section 2.1.3), influence the declared numbers of a minority, all of which makes 'confessing', i.e., declaring oneself and acting as a member of the minority group, difficult (Reiterer 2003: 195; see also Gumperz' 1982 report on his fieldwork in a Slovene village in Carinthia).

3.3. Minority language access to media and education

Similar conclusions can be arrived at also by looking at the situation of the minority's language access to media. Functioning local media in the minority language are essential for the maintenance of a minority's identity. Any disruption in production of minority media can have an important negative influence on the minority's identity and its continuity.

In Austria, the 'Daoistic' *wu wei*, (non-action) policy also exists with regard to a minority's language access to media, as is evident from the *Third Opinion*. In it, it is clearly stated that the minorities consider the allotted time slots available for their programs in minority languages as far too limited for their needs. Minorities have to rely on their own resourcefulness, as for example the privately organized radio coverage in Slovene language in Carinthia. Furthermore, there is no special subsidy system for print media (cf. *Third Opinion on Austria*, p.7).

As the report reveals, the State does not give much support; it is up to the minorities' own resourcefulness to find ways through non-institutional channels, as the Slovene minority, for the time being, seems to be managing to do in Carinthia.

As for primary education in Carinthia and Burgenland with its Croatian minority, the findings concerning minority education are somewhat more promising. The overall picture is improving, bilingual education often becoming attractive even to the majority. Yet, the underside is that the system suffers from an unavailability of teacher training opportunities for teachers in bilingual schools and kindergartens. Also, the availability of schooling in minority languages is practically unavailable outside of the designated minority areas, which in the light of mobility of minority populations threatens the maintenance of their languages. Further, the *Third*

Opinion on Austria concludes that the policies are unstable and do not follow the minorities' migrations to the big centers such as Vienna, and higher levels of education are not properly catered for (cf. *Third Opinion on Austria*, p.7).

4. Discussion

It can be said that the ethnicity-based nation-state (cf. *minzoku kokka* ethnic nation-state, Tanaka 1981) with 'one country, one nation, one language' as the basic model for modern states since the early nineteenth century, is at the heart of the problems reported on in section 3, both in the *Third Opinion* on Austria and in the other sources. Slovenes, with no statehood and only a vaguely delimited territory, at first, all lived in one country, Austria-Hungary. However, with the imposition of ethnic nation-state borders in the aftermath of World War I, Slovenes were suddenly split over four countries, with two thirds in Yugoslavia (originally SHS) and about one-third finding themselves in Italy, Austria and Hungary (Repe 2003).

While pre-nation-state empires (i.e. Ottoman, Russian, Habsburg) were more tolerant towards ethnic diversity, new ethnicity-based nation-states pushed relentlessly for assimilation of the 'other' within their territories. Austria, and its *Land* of Carinthia is no exception. As is clear from section 2.1, from the second half of the nineteenth century on, a deep antagonism based on ethnicity developed between the Slovene- and the German-speaking people in Austria. This antagonism was already very much alive during the time of the Austrian Empire when the South Slav population was looked upon as second class subjects, especially by the German-speaking population in the areas where both populations overlapped, i.e., Carinthia and Styria⁷. Then, during the interwar period, things only went from bad to worse.

In the aftermath of World War II the situation was to some extent remedied. Together with the international political framework, the international and domestic legal framework also changed, Austria formally came in line with international standards of minority protection. But old inclinations die hard and persist even still, especially so in the conservative political environment of Carinthia.

For the ideology of a homogeneous ethnic-based nation-state, ethnic minorities are a sore point. Their very existence endangers the ideal of an ethnically pure nation state. The most efficient way to suppress a minority is to deny its existence and to at least obstruct, if not prevent, its continuation. The developments presented in section 3 are in line with this. First, the *Ortstafeln* issue is about removing from the linguistic landscape the most obvious testimony of the existence of a minority in the area. This is clear also from the way the offensive was conducted. It was three-pronged. Trying first with complete denial (Fig. 1, left). When this became impossible, the next line of attack was the form of the topographic sign (Fig. 1, center), with the hierarchy relation between majority and minority unashamedly expressed in the relative size of the letters in each inscription. When this also proved impossible, the *Ortstafeln* acquired a 'normal' look (Fig. 1, right). From that point on, the next line of attack has been in the manner in which the relative number of minority Slovene-speakers in each particular area is represented (cf. *Kleine Zeitung*). After putting a lot of pressure on the minority, a compromise was finally reached which, as the *Third Report* clearly points out, is well below the standards of the actual legal framework protecting minorities in Austria.

These developments highly correlate with the trends of the official population censuses in the region. Questions were systematically manipulated so as to assure minimum possible positive declarations regarding the everyday use of Slovene. A further factor was the manner in which censuses were taken. In small rural communities with a majority German-speaking population there is an invisible pressure, often making the 'confession' of one's minority linguistic identity extremely difficult to assert (cf. Reiterer 2003).

Developments in the *Ortstafeln* issue correlate also with another aspect of visibility, i.e., minority access to media in their language. As the *Third Report* shows, Austria is lagging in this area too, and this time, the responsibility is not at the local but at the federal government level with its extremely passive attitude towards Slovene minority rights.

The slightly promising findings of the *Third Report* in the field of primary education - even German-speaking parents are opting to send their children to Slovene-German bilingual schools, are obviously connected with developments

after the accession of Slovenia to Schengen. With borders becoming practically nonexistent, increased contacts on a daily basis have contributed to lessen prejudice on both sides of borders dividing what used to be a naturally connected whole. In spite of some improvements alas, the situation is still far from desirable and as the *Third Report* points out, and predictably, state level policies are unstable. Further, this situation only lasted up until 2015 when, with the refugee crisis, the Schengen regime at the common Austrian-Slovene border was temporarily suspended by the Austrian side.

Contrary to the modest expectations of improvement (Priestly 2003), the most recent, the *Fourth Report* submitted in January 2016, shows that little has changed. Comments by the Advisory Council of the Slovene Minority (Section IV.1 of the Report) put it clearly that funding of the minority has decreased by 40% given that the actual amount of financial support for the minority has not been adjusted for inflation since 1995. For many institutions of the Slovene minority in Carinthia, survival is only possible thanks to support from the Republic of Slovenia. In addition, actual payment of the little support that there is, is delayed until the last quarter of the year, making the financial situation of minority organizations even more precarious. In particular print media are extremely underfunded, for example, the Slovene-language weekly only receives 28,000 euros in annual support. As for nursery schools, training of bilingual teachers is not provided for. Several new bilingual nursery schools were opened, but this is far less than the needs of the whole bilingual area. Regarding bilingual topographical signs, local municipalities can decide whether to erect them or not in certain particular locations. In the case of the Sielach/Sele village, signs were not erected, in spite of the wish of the majority of households, because the municipality of Sittersdorf (Žitara vas) did not give its approval (*Fourth Report* 2016: 138-139).

This hints at a deeply embedded prejudice against the Slovene minority among the majority population in Carinthia, reflected also in the reluctance, both at the Federal level and at the local *Land* level, to act on its behalf. Indeed, in spite of a powerful legal framework provided by the *Austrian State Treaty* and the different international conventions, it has taken decades to start actual implementation of the *Austrian State Treaty* in the form of the ‘demarcation’ of the Slovene minority historical areas. However, a mere look at any Austro-Hungarian census taken

before World War I, when the ethnic distribution had not yet been skewed by forced assimilation, would delineate the relevant areas more fairly, and members of the minority would not have to think twice before ‘confessing’ to their identity.

From all the areas examined, two parallel aspects stand out. On one hand the aggressiveness of a great part of the Carinthian German-speaking majority population and their politicians directed towards the Slovene-speaking minority, and, on the other hand, the passivity of the central government in Vienna when fulfilling its domestic and international obligations regarding the Slovene minority. Which again is not surprising, politicians at the federal level obviously are loath to lose the support of the majority conservative electorate support in Carinthia.

5. Conclusions

The first research question was clarified in Section 2, showing that Austria has a substantial legal framework providing legal protection of minorities, based to a large extent on international treaties, foremost among them being the *Austrian State Treaty*. As was shown in sections 3 and 4, though this framework provides just the necessary condition, with the lack of political will it alone cannot guarantee de facto protection of the, in this case Slovene, minorities.

As for the second research question, the following became clear:

- (i) As can be seen from the *Third Opinion* and further specified by the ‘Commentary’ on the *Fourth Report*, the actual implementation of the legal framework in the case of bilingual topographical signs (*Ortstafeln*) is indeed only a token compromise. A compromise at the expense of the minority, since, as has already been stated above, even when villages with a majority Slovene-speaking population wish for bilingual signs, the signs are refused by the German-speaking majority of the municipal administration, thus denying the minority the right to exercise its rights under the *Austrian State Treaty* (p.139 ff.)

- (ii) According to the *Third Opinion* and the other sources discussed above, the developments regarding topographical signs (*Ortstafeln*) correlate with developments in minority language access to media and education, and also with demography.

The developments in (i) conform to what Marten et al. (2012: 7) say in general:

The visibility of a minority language in this view signals ownership or at least co-existence in a place, but gets sometimes limited to tokenistic functions. Otherwise, the presence of a minority language in the linguistic landscape might be used as an alibi by the majority in rejecting further measures with the line of reasoning that the state of the minority language cannot be too bad if it is visible here and there.

The developments in (ii), through correlation with visibility, also substantiate the above observation by Marten et al. At the same time these parallel developments also confirm the importance of minority language visibility and its presence in the local linguistic landscape as an indicator of the overall situation of the minority, or in the words of Marten et al. (ibid.):

The visibility of minority language as an indicator of spread, vitality, maintenance, identity or status of a language is certainly an under-exposed aspect of revitalization studies or documentation of endangered languages (all minority languages are endangered languages in one way or another, at least in their specific minority settings).

With both Austria and Slovenia now in the EU, is there a hope for the Central Europe linguistic minorities issue, including the Slovene minority, to be solved, and a culture of mutual tolerance to be built, so that borders in the mind can disappear together with physical borders on land?

The EU as a kind of bottom-up, re-emerging 'empire' with democratic potential indeed does seem to contain the necessary conditions for such a development. However, the promise of the Schengen Area to defuse historical tensions across the borders has been short-lived. With Austria unilaterally suspending the Schengen regime, the hope of free flow of people and goods seemingly providing relief for divided historical minorities, Basques, Catalans, Hungarians, Slovenes, Slovaks, has, at least in the area under scrutiny in this paper, come to an end.

So much for the potential. There exists plenty of reason for skepticism. Persistent exclusivist nationalist sentiment seems to be present everywhere and increasing, as the EU election results after 2014 show. Austria, in 2016 barely avoided having an extreme right pro-Nazi president. Again, after the 2017 general elections the political situation took a worrisome turn with the far right Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ) placed third and becoming the junior partner in the governing coalition with the winner, The Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), holding among others the Ministry of Interior portfolio. With its record of Nazi-sympathizing, German nationalism and hostility towards both indigenous and new ethnic minorities as exemplified in the treatment of the Slovene minority in the FPÖ's traditional stronghold of Carinthia, the question of the Austrian state fulfilling its international obligations such as the protection of ethnic minorities remains highly relevant. Even more worrisome is that this seems to be part of a more general trend: not only East, South and Central Europe, but also the more 'democratic' North and West Europe seem to be going in the same direction. Breivik's massacre in Norway, which perhaps seemed extreme in 2011, could be a portent of times to come.

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¹ Compare Marten et al. (2012: 7); Marten's citation of May (2006: 255); for the building of identity see also Joseph (2004), Ch.5 and specifically for the area in question, Minnich (1998).

² cf. Bhatia (2011) for a very scathing view of this official point. Also, the popular sentiment is not always so complacent, as sadly exemplified among others by the recent vote for 'Brexit' in the UK.

³ For issues on defining what constitutes a minority at the EU level, see Das (2004), also Bhatia (2011).

⁴ It is interesting to note, that in spite of a complacent official (*tatema*) reason behind these developments, there are major countries, notably France and Turkey, that have neither signed nor ratified the FCPNM convention, moreover Greece and Belgium have only signed it but have not yet ratified it. In addition, France and Italy, though cosignatories, have not yet ratified the ECMRL. A detailed discussion of the European Constitution framework is given in Urrutia Libarona (2006).

⁵ cf. Roblek (2002) for an early development. Nataša Gliha Komac (personal communication, June 2016), stresses the importance of such developments for the people living in the border zones. See also Doleschal (2009) for the "language infrastructure" available for the Slovene minority.

⁶ Reiterer (2003: 196) on the other hand argues that the dividends from anti-minority policies seem to be diminishing. In the light of developments after the accession of Slovenia to EU and to Schengen, described above, this does not seem to be entirely the case.

⁷ One such example is a letter of a Slovene sailor on an Austro-Hungarian warship, telling how he used to be abused by his commander, an ethnic German from Graz, as "*Windischer Schwein hund*" (dirty Slovenian dog) (see Marinac 2017: 164).

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