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FACULTY OF LAW IN SUBOTICA – “NORTHERN STAR” OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE KINGDOM OF YUGOSLAVIA*

Abstract: The paper presents the results of the research on the conditions, aims and outcomes of the establishment of the Faculty of Law in Subotica immediately after the First World War, at the time when the southeastern part of former Hungary considered Serbian Vojvodina became the northeastern part of the newly established Yugoslav state. This is the first institution of higher education in this area. At the beginning of the 1920s two branches of the University of Belgrade were established away from the capital, one in the northeast, and the other in the southeast of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (SCS). The establishment of the Faculty of Law in Subotica and the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje was explained by the need to enable young people living far from Belgrade to gain higher education in the closer surroundings. In reality, the Faculty of Law in Subotica had the task of becoming a clearly recognizable and dignified border fortress. University teachers and students were expected to be sophisticated guardians of the north-eastern border of the Yugoslav kingdom. At approximately the same time, two reputable universities in Hungary, whose headquarters after the First World War remained outside Hungary, in Romania and Czechoslovakia, moved to towns near the new southeastern borders. The paper presents examples that in a special way testify of the problems and dilemmas that teachers and students of the Faculty of Law faced during the interwar period, as well as arguments to support the claim that the national mission of the Faculty of Law in Subotica significantly limited the academic autonomy of this institution of higher education.

Keywords: Kingdom of Yugoslavia, higher education, university, University of Belgrade, Faculty of Law in Subotica, Subotica, Novi Sad.

The development of university education in the territory of present-day Autonomous Province of Vojvodina in the 20th century is directly related to the history of higher education in the modern Serbian state. Although the oldest Serbian gymnasiums were established in Sremski Karlovci (1791) and Novi Sad (1810), only a small number of

* The paper presents the results of research within the scientific project *Vojvodinian space in the context of European history* financed by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of Republic Serbia and the scientific project *Historical bases of the autonomy of Vojvodina* financed by the Provincial Secretariat for Higher Education and Culture of AP Vojvodina.

selected boys were educated here for decades and university studies were an unachievable dream for many talented Serbs in the Habsburg Monarchy. The need for university education was expressed at the time of the First Serbian Uprising, when the Great School (1808) was founded on the initiative of Dositej Obradović. Historical circumstances caused discontinuity in the work of the Great School. Twenty years later, the Lyceum was founded in Kragujevac (1838) and it took almost a hundred years after the establishment of the Great School to fulfill the conditions for establishing the University of Belgrade (1905). The University of Belgrade played a significant role in founding the first faculties in the area of the present-day Vojvodina in the 20th century and in founding the University of Novi Sad (1960). However, the study of the history of this institution was long signified in Serbian historiography by the devotion of scientists to “a detailed factual reconstruction of the events” relying on archival and narrative historical sources and periodicals. The most common texts were written and published on the occasion of marking significant anniversaries, which often resulted in narrow (or imposed) thematic frames of research. However, in Serbian historiography starting from the end of the 20th century, significant steps have been made towards overcoming traditional methodological and thematic patterns in the field of studying the history of higher education in Serbia.¹ This created the foundations for the study of the social role and historical significance of institutions of higher education established in the Yugoslav kingdom as organizational units of the University of Belgrade, but their headquarters were far from the Rectorate, in the far northeast and the southeast of the Yugoslav kingdom, in Subotica and Skopje. The history of the Faculty of Law in Subotica and the Faculty of Philosophy in Skoplje reflect the main goals of the Yugoslav educational policy in the field of higher education, the problems that the state faced and the solutions it sought to achieve in the period between the two world wars.²

The official beginning of the work of the University of Belgrade in the autumn of 1905 was not in accordance with the modest conditions for the development of higher education in the Kingdom of Serbia. There were no conditions for celebrating the first decade of work. Even if the international crises that preceded the First World War were ignored, only seven years after its establishment in Belgrade the Balkan Wars were waged and in 1914 the Great War started, during which the work of the University had to be completely suspended. After 1918 the Kingdom of Serbia no longer existed. The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (hereinafter: Kingdom of SCS) was proclaimed. In the new state, the University of Belgrade was no longer the only institution of higher education. Universities in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana, traditional educational and cultural centers of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, received a very important role in the process of national and state integration. Nevertheless, the University of Belgrade was expected to be “the highest educational institution for professional education, scientific exploration and the rise of the Yugoslav national culture.”³

Classes at the University of Belgrade, despite the fresh and painful traces of the First World War, were continued in the winter semester of the academic 1919/1920. In the autumn

¹ Bondžić 2005; Id. 2006.

² Jovanović 2011b.

³ Dimić 1997c: 339-371.

of 1919 about 3000 students arrived to Belgrade from various parts of the country (from the “province”). They faced high costs of living in the capital, whose population at the end of 1919 almost doubled in comparison to the situation before the start of the Great War.⁴ Of the tens of thousands of “new” citizens of Belgrade most of them arrived to the capital of the new state in search of a better life, which in reality most often meant – in search of a state administration job. The lack of living space jeopardized all the newcomers, but the students thought they had to rebel publicly if they wanted to stay until the end of the winter semester in Belgrade. Students’ pressure on educational authorities was so great that in mid-October 1919 the Minister of Education at the time, Pavle Marinković, was forced to publicly promise to students that the state authorities would “requisition” rooms in private homes and apartments in the capital for the purpose of their accommodation. The Belgrade newspaper *Politika* noted that on 24 October 1919 police scribes went around the town “in the company of one or two students” and looked for “flats that were not full and in which a room can be spared for students.” The report in *Politika* pointed out that the “police-student committees” caused protests of apartment owners and “many hostile housekeepers,” and not just of those whose apartments were considered fit for student accommodation.⁵

Public opinion was divided in relation to students’ demands that the cost of studies at the University of Belgrade (scholarship, housing, food) should be borne by the state. A comment published on the cover page of the daily informative-political newsletter *Politika* in mid-November 1919 can be considered indicative. The commentator assessed that it could already be argued that higher education in the Yugoslav kingdom would be regarded as the fastest shortcut to “clerical and other lucrative positions that ultimately lead to bureaucracy and fruitless office jobs.” The state should not encourage such beliefs, it was pointed out in the commentary, and it was indicated that in most countries of the world “the issue of secondary and higher, professional and university education is mostly a private matter of those who are educated and their parents.” The arguments of poor students from the province were refuted with a note that it was widely known that in America “students work as waiters in taverns, as field workers, as footwear cleaners and workers of all kinds,” ready to make a sacrifice “to make for themselves a better place in the society.”⁶

Already at that time, there were plans to establish the Faculties of Medicine, Religion and Agriculture in addition to the Faculties of Philosophy, Law and Technology, which were part of the University.⁷ This meant that the number of students in Belgrade would further increase in the coming years. With this in mind educational authorities decided to establish two new faculties with the seats far from the capital, one in the northeast and one in the southeast of the Yugoslav kingdom. The Belgrade daily *Politika* announced on 4 December 1919 that Skopje would soon “complete all previous preparations for the opening of the Faculty of Philosophy.” It was announced that there was a possibility that “the same kind of the Faculty of Philosophy opens in Sarajevo.” It was also expected that in Subotica there would be one institution of higher education “equal to the faculty, perhaps only with the difference that it

⁴ *Politika*, Belgrade, 10 February 1920, 2.

⁵ *Politika*, Belgrade, 25 October 1919, 3.

⁶ *Politika*, Belgrade, 15 November 1919, 1.

⁷ Bondžić 2004: 7, 19-23.

will not be possible take a doctorate there.” The plan was for it to be the “Legal Academy.” The establishment of new faculties was considered a suitable solution to “overcrowding at the Belgrade University,” but a faculty in the north of Bačka would also have a special mission. The contemporaries realized that the education of lawyers who would be familiar with the peculiarities of the former Hungarian legislation was necessarily predominantly “for the purpose of discussing and liquidating legal affairs in the territory of Vojvodina.”⁸

Immediately after the First World War Vojvodina was considered the embodiment of the idea of a Serbian autonomous territory in the Habsburg monarchy, although in 1918 Serbs did not represent the absolute majority of the population in any of the areas considered to be its parts: Baranja, Bačka, Banat and Srem.⁹ Until 1918, these areas had all the characteristics of the “neglected economic, cultural and educational peripheries” of the former Habsburg Monarchy. Nevertheless, it was often pointed out in the Kingdom of SCS that Vojvodina was an area in which the cultural and educational awareness of the population was at a significantly higher level than in other regions.¹⁰ At the same time, the fact that the majority of the population in Vojvodina was made up of Germans and Hungarians was intentionally disregarded, as well as the fact that since the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867), the state education system was developed in this area with the main goal to create loyal subjects of the Hungarian kingdom.¹¹ Since the founding of the Kingdom of SCS the documents of the Ministry of Education emphasized that “one of the basic duties of cultural and educational policy is to eliminate the harmful consequences of Hungarianization, Germanization, Italianization, Bulgarization, Turkish and Albanian influences spread by earlier regimes through school and the educational system.” Therefore, one of the main goals of educational policy in Vojvodina was overcoming the educational heritage from the time of “foreign authorities.”¹² The realization of this goal was not easy in Baranja, Bačka and Banat, where just before the First World War classes were held almost exclusively in the Hungarian language in several hundred religious, primary (“national”) schools, mostly Roman Catholic, but also Reformational, Lutheran and Jewish, as well as in municipal (state) schools. Hungarian was also the teaching language in both religious and municipal preschool institutions. In addition, in several dozen secondary schools the prevalent language of instruction was Hungarian until 1918 and only in some schools it was German. The classes in the Serbian language were held only in several primary and secondary religious schools. Among them the most important were the two oldest Serbian religious gymnasiums in Sremski Karlovci and Novi Sad.¹³

The “deconstruction” of the Hungarian education system in Vojvodina was started by the National Administration, the executive body of the Grand National Council of Serbs, Bunjevci and other Slavs from Baranja, Bačka and Banat, a provincial government of a kind. The National Administration had a Department for Educational Issues, with the usual authority of the Ministry of Education. The management of this Department was entrusted

⁸ *Politika*, Belgrade, 4 December 1919, 1.

⁹ Popović 1925: 9-10; Popović 1990; Palić 1964: 157; Šimunović-Bešlin 2007a: 9-10, 19-22.

¹⁰ Dimić 2003: 230; Šimunović-Bešlin 2007a: 11-12.

¹¹ Dimić 1997a: 41, 50; Rokai, Đere, Pal i Kasaš 2002: 518-524.

¹² Dimić 1997b: 432.

¹³ Šimunović-Bešlin 2007a: 183, 287-290.

to Dr Milan Petrović, a young teacher in the Serbian Orthodox Great Gymnasium in Novi Sad.¹⁴ His main task was to implement the decision of the National Administration brought in December 1918, which stipulated that all schools in Bačka, Baranja and Banat, in the area delimited by a “demarcation line that stretched north of Baja, Pécs, and Subotica” introduce classes in the mother tongue of the students.¹⁵ In reality, this meant the abolition of teaching in Hungarian “in all schools where Hungarian children were not a majority.”¹⁶ In the spring of 1919, when the National Administration resigned, the responsibility for the implementation of this decision was taken over by a special Department of the Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of SCS in Novi Sad. Continuity was secured by the fact that Milan Petrović retained the position of the superintendent in this Department as well. About a year later, in June 1920, it was decided that the management of educational issues be fully centralized and that the validity of the *Law on National Schools*, passed in 1904 in the Kingdom of Serbia and somewhat amended in July 1919, expand into the territories of Bačka, Baranja and Banat since the beginning of the new school year. With this law, the educational system in the territory of present-day Vojvodina became fully nationalized.¹⁷

In the spring of 1919 the Department of the Ministry of Education in Novi Sad was assigned the task of providing conditions for the establishment of the first institution of higher education in Vojvodina. The idea that, “in the north of the new country, where specific private Vojvodinian law was applied,” the Faculty of Law be established as a special unit of the University of Belgrade seemed quite justified.¹⁸ The need for university-educated lawyers was indisputable, primarily because in Bačka, Baranja and Banat, i.e. in Vojvodina, “trials were still held under the laws from the Austro-Hungarian times” and precisely in these areas there were not enough competent and loyal clerks “in the state administration, and justice system.”¹⁹ There were not enough adequately educated candidates for judges in other parts of the young state either, but in Vojvodina they had to fulfill the requirement to speak the Hungarian language and know former “Hungarian laws,” which remained in effect even after 1918, primarily in order to avoid “undesirable disruptions in the legal life of these regions.”²⁰ On the other hand, the establishment of the Faculty of Law in Vojvodina could also be understood as a clear and unequivocal expression of the recognition, respect and appreciation of the contribution of Serbs from Vojvodina (“*prečani*”, Serbs living on the other side of the Danube, Drava and Drina rivers) in the construction of the modern Serbian state.²¹ Similarly, the particularities of the “newly liberated regions” in the south-east of the Yugoslav kingdom were used to argue and explain the founding of the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, which was expected to play a significant role in transforming the utterly uneducated province, but also to be the centre of studying its historical, social and cultural features.²²

¹⁴ Šimunović-Bešlin 2009: 351-366; *Id.* 2016: 9-66.

¹⁵ Radašin 1986: 4.

¹⁶ Mesaroš 1981: 187.

¹⁷ Šimunović-Bešlin 2007a: 185-188.

¹⁸ Radovanović 2008: 131-133.

¹⁹ Bjelica 2008: 158.

²⁰ Drakić 2015: 9-16.

²¹ Nikolić 2005: 131-137.

²² Jovanović 2002: 333-340.

It seemed logical that the seat of the new Faculty of Law be in Novi Sad. After the creation of the Yugoslav kingdom in the regions of former Hungary a kind of “mixed legal system of state regulation” was developed. For the development of this system especially important were the courts whose seats were in Novi Sad.²³ The network of courts in Vojvodina included seven district courts with the seats in Novi Sad, Subotica, Sombor, Veliki Bečkerek, Velika Kikinda, Bela Crkva and Pančevo. The county courts were in the jurisdiction of district courts. At the end of 1919 the Court of Appeals was established in Novi Sad, which had a supervisory authority in relation to all district courts in Vojvodina.²⁴ The establishment of the Court of Appeals in Novi Sad was necessary because the jurisdiction of the former second instance Hungarian courts was suspended in the area of Vojvodina, i.e. in areas that were “seceded” from former Hungary and included in the new Yugoslav kingdom.²⁵ However, the choice of the seat of the Faculty of Law was carried out at the time when in France there were still difficult negotiations on the demarcation between the Kingdom of SCS and Hungary and when it was still not certain that the Yugoslav delegation at the Peace Conference in Paris would lose a diplomatic battle to merge a significant part of Baranja, especially the town of Pécs with the surrounding area, which was extremely rich in important natural resources.²⁶ In the first half of 1919 the inhabitants of these regions daily faced the possibility of “waking up in Hungary or Romania one morning.” Milan Petrović was well acquainted with the situation, especially in the “controversial” areas negotiated at the peace conference. And the “most problematic region” negotiations with Hungary was the so-called “Baja triangle” in Baranja and Subotica with its surroundings.²⁷

After the First World War, Subotica was the largest city in the north of Bačka and closest to “controversial” areas that were the subject of heated discussions at the Peace Conference in Paris. Since the end of the 19th century, when a millennium was celebrated since Hungarians settled into the Pannonian Plain, Subotica had many modern edifices with electricity, cobbled roads, sidewalks and tram lines to the nearby Palić Lake. Before 1918 Subotica was the third largest city in Hungary (after Budapest and Szeged) and in the Yugoslav kingdom only Belgrade and Zagreb had more residents. Immediately after the First World War in the “northernmost region” of the Kingdom of SCS, more than half of the citizens were of South Slavic origin (mainly Bunjevci). Hungarians accounted for about a third of the population and there were also Germans, Jews, Russian refugees and members of other ethnic groups.²⁸ However, most of the residents of Subotica communicated in the Hungarian language.²⁹ Despite the heterogeneous structure of the population and the significant share of citizens of Slavic origin, this city was justifiably seen as an informal centre of the national and political assembly of Hungarians in the Yugoslav kingdom.³⁰

²³ Drakić 2004: 399-409; Cvetić 2008: 21-22.

²⁴ Drakić 2015: 17-25.

²⁵ Drakić 2008: 368.

²⁶ Horvat 2013: 373-389; Mihaldžić 2000: 49.

²⁷ Petrović 2016: 237.

²⁸ Mačković 2013: 9-10.

²⁹ Grlica 1997: 346-347.

³⁰ Mesaroš 1981: 150-152; Janjetović 2005: 122, 178.

The Hungarians in Subotica did not hide their dissatisfaction over the systematic destruction of the state education system in the regions of former Hungary, which were included in the new Yugoslav state. This was not influenced by the fact that, even after 1918, it was possible to acquire primary and secondary education in the Hungarian language precisely in Subotica.³¹ The Ministry of Education of the Kingdom of SCS almost daily received warnings from Subotica that teachers of the Subotica gymnasium publicly incited Hungarian students to violent behavior and destruction of school property. Milan Petrović thought that for this reason Subotica should be the seat of a new institution of higher education, a branch of the University of Belgrade. He was confident that the faculty with university teachers and students loyal to the new Yugoslav state could play a significant role in the fight against the transformation of the town in the north of Bačka into the centre of “enemy propaganda” and “the natural centre of counter-state elements that maintain a permanent link with the Hungarians across the border.”³² Milorad Nedeljković, the Deputy Minister of Education at the time, agreed with Milan Petrović. Nevertheless, in December 1919 a committee was formed whose task was to personally make sure that Subotica fulfilled the conditions to become an academic centre. The Minister of Education at the time, Pavle Marinković, the Rector of the University of Belgrade, Slobodan Jovanović and the Commissioner of the Department of the Ministry of Education in Novi Sad, Milan Petrović, were part of that committee. Considering that Milan Petrović was most familiar with the cultural and political circumstances in Vojvodina, it can be assumed that precisely his arguments in favour of Subotica as the seat of the new Faculty of Law were crucial.³³

Soon, the first university teachers arrived in Subotica, among them were: one full professor (Dr Milutin Miljković), two associate professors (Dr Milorad Nedeljković and Dr Čedomir Marković), and three part time professors (Dr Grigorije Vasiljević Demčenko, formerly Professor of the University in Kiev, Dr Sergije Viktorovič Troicki, formerly Assistant Professor at the University of Odessa, and Dr Ivo Milić, President of the County Court of Subotica).³⁴ The first students came to the town, about a hundred of them, mostly young men. Most of the students in the first generation enrolled at the Faculty of Law were state scholarship holders “from passive regions,” predominantly from southern Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. Only every fourth student was originally from the vicinity, i.e. from Vojvodina. Among the students, as well as among the teachers, there were a considerable number of Russian refugees.³⁵

Although the conditions were not ideal, classes at the Faculty of Law in Subotica began in the spring of 1920, at the time when uncertainty about the peace negotiations with Hungary was at its peak. By the autumn of 1920 it seemed that it was not certain if the newly founded Faculty of Law would remain in Subotica. During that year Novi Sad slowly became a judicial centre for Vojvodina. At the beginning of September 1920 the president of the Court of Appeals in Novi Sad requested adequate space for the newly established “Department B. at the Belgrade Cassation Court.” The task of this court, whose judges had

³¹ Janjetović 2005: 233-234.

³² Simić 1998: 118-119; Šimunović-Bešlin 2007a: 203-205.

³³ Simić 1999: 32; Šimunović-Bešlin 2007a: 203-204; Bjelica 2008: 159.

³⁴ Radovanović 2008: 133-135.

³⁵ Simić 1998: 122, 128-129.

to meet the criteria that also applied to the Court of Cassation in Belgrade, was to solve cases that until the creation of the Yugoslav kingdom were under the jurisdiction of the highest court in former Hungary, the Royal Curia in Budapest.³⁶ Apart from the fact that this court represented the highest instance in civil and criminal cases, it was competent to perform “supervision over material and formal legal regulations applied by the courts of lower jurisdiction” in the area of Vojvodina.³⁷ It can only be assumed that the significance of Novi Sad in the judicial system of Vojvodina and the Yugoslav kingdom prompted the town authorities in Subotica to speed up the activities and manage to provide a special building for the Faculty of Law before the academic year 1920/1921. It was a very spacious, two-storey building of the former preparandia, built at the end of the 19th century. However, due to neglect during the war years, teaching conditions in the building and accommodation for teachers, clerks and students were very modest. However, inadequate space was not the biggest problem at the beginning of work of the Faculty of Law in Subotica.

Students came to the town in the plain near the border with Hungary from various parts of the Yugoslav kingdom. Although at first there were only about a hundred of them, they were met with distrust and indignation.³⁸ This was also confirmed by a report published in the spring of 1921 on the cover page of the Belgrade daily *Politika*. In an article entitled “Shame in Subotica” readers were informed that an incident occurred in the town on the north of Bačka on Tuesday 3 May, on “the third day of Easter.” Several students of the Faculty of Law were charged with threatening public order and peace and disregarding the city police. Namely, on 3 May “town police officers, 40 to 50 of them,” using excessive force, at least according to the reporters’ estimates, arrested and sent to prison several students of the Faculty of Law. The reasons for the arrest and imprisonment were not entirely clear. Allegedly, everything started with the students renting two coaches, riding through the town, shouting and making the horses gallop. The police reacted because, again allegedly, in front of the Subotica town hall they shouted: “Down with Yugoslavia! Long live Great Serbia!” The students claimed that they shouted: “Long live Yugoslavia! Long live Serbia!” They were released from prison only when the Dean of the Faculty of Law “intervened” with the town authorities. The news was found on the title page of the prominent daily paper because the event testified in some way that “the institution that every other town would have wished for” was considered a “burden and a thorn in the eye” in Subotica. The editorial board of *Politika* assessed that the main obstacle to the development of the Faculty of Law in Subotica was the fact that the inhabitants were “in the majority Bunjevci and Hungarians, while the students in Subotica are, in the majority, Serbs.”³⁹

The incident in Subotica occurred at a time when the Constitutional Assembly worked intensively on the draft of the first constitution of the Kingdom of SCS, which was adopted on 28 June 1921. It can be assumed that the social and political context significantly influenced the fact that the event attracted great public attention. At the end of the same week, two “delegations” from Subotica requested the reception with the Minister of

³⁶ Drakić 2008: 368.

³⁷ Drakić 2015: 27-33.

³⁸ Mačković 2013: 11.

³⁹ *Politika*, Belgrade, 7 May 1921, 1.

Education at the time, Svetozar Pribičević. First, the representatives of students arrived in Belgrade. They asked “an expert committee to be appointed, which will accurately examine the entire Easter event and find the culprits who caused it.” They named the grand *župan* of Subotica as the main “culprit” and demanded that he be replaced and that “the Subotica police force be replaced by the state gendarmerie.” Immediately after them, “one delegation of people from Subotica” arrived in the capital and asked the Minister of Education to move the Faculty of Law “from Subotica.” Due to the seriousness of the situation, the representatives of the Ministry of Interior and the Ministry of Education were sent to Subotica “to open a poll regarding the attack of the Subotica municipal police on the students of the Faculty of Law.”⁴⁰ The results of the “poll” clearly showed that the state had no reason to give up the plan to make Subotica a university centre in the northeast. Already in the following year, more than 500 students enrolled at the Faculty of Law in Subotica.⁴¹

In the Yugoslav kingdom, the main goal of educational policy in the northeastern parts of the country was the annulment of the results of the Hungarian education system. In contrast, in Hungary the main goal of educational policy in the southwestern part of the country was to highlight the cultural and educational superiority of Hungary in relation to the new Yugoslav kingdom. According to the testimonies of the contemporaries, in Hungary after 1918 it was publicly stated that the mission of state institutions of higher education “is to be the outpost of Hungarian science and Hungarian national consciousness.”⁴² In this context, the decisions regarding the establishment of two universities near the Hungarian-Yugoslav border can also be observed, precisely in the areas that were the subject of dispute between the two countries at the Peace Conference in Paris. Namely, the universities from former Hungary, which according to the peace treaty belonged to Romania and Czechoslovakia, were moved to the immediate vicinity of the Yugoslav-Hungarian border: to Szeged (1921) and Pécs (1923). The University of Kolozsvár (Hun. Kolozsvár, Ger. Klausenburg, Serb. Kluž, Rom. Cluj, and since 1974 Cluj-Napoca) was moved to Szeged from the town which in 1918 became one of the economic and cultural centres in the Romanian province of Transylvania (Rom. Transylvania, Hun. Erdély, Ger. Siebenbürgen). The University of Pozsony (Hun. Pozsony, Serb. Požun, Czech. Prešpurk, Slov. Prešporok/Prešporek, and Ger. Pressburg) was moved to Pécs from the town which was named Bratislava after the First World War and the founding of the Czechoslovak Republic. The universities which were moved to Szeged and Pécs should have testified to the long-standing tradition of university education in Hungary. However, this tradition was marked by discontinuity in the development of higher education, which gained momentum only after the Austro-Hungarian Compromise (1867) and can be considered primarily the result of the systematic work of agile ministers of education and educational reformers, Eötvös József and Trefort Ágoston. The University of Kolozsvár was founded in 1872 by the decision of Emperor Franz Joseph, only five years after the Compromise. This institution of higher education was considered to be the successor of the Great Jesuit School, which was founded in 1581 by Báthory István, the prince of Erdély, but the fact that Kolozsvár or

⁴⁰ *Politika*, Belgrade, 8 May 1921, 3.

⁴¹ Mačković 2013: 11.

⁴² Konstantinović 1929: 84-86.

Cluj was the birthplace of the famous Hungarian king Hunyadi Corvin Mátyás and Cultural Centre of Transylvania was not insignificant for the founding of a modern university.⁴³ When Transylvania became part of Romania after the First World War, the Hungarian state authorities decided to move the University of Cluj Kolozsvár i.e. to Szeged, a town only twenty kilometers from Subotica. In the process of choosing the destination for relocation, it was not without significance that until 1918 Szeged was also the seat of one of the two second instance courts (“Royal Table”) in Hungary. The seat of the other was in Timisoara (Hun. Temesvár, Ger. Temeswar, Temeschwar, Rom. Timișoara, Serb. Temišvar), which, like Cluj, was given to Romania after the First World War.⁴⁴

An even more pronounced demonstration of Hungary’s cultural and educational superiority in relation to the Yugoslav kingdom should have been the founding of the University of Pécs in 1923. Since the oldest university in medieval Hungary was founded in this city in 1367, when this modern university was established an emphasis was put on the many centuries of tradition and prestige of Hungary in the field of higher education. At the same time the fact was deliberately neglected that the work of numerous religious educational institutions in Pécs, established after 1367, was marked by discontinuity and that Pécs failed to achieve the status of a prestigious European university centre and the reputation of the universities in Prague, Krakow or Vienna. About a hundred years after the founding of the University of Pécs, Hungarian King Mátyás Corvin supported the founding of the University of Istropolitana (Universitas Istropolitana) in Pozsony. Even that university did not manage to survive for a long time. Only in 1911 was the modern Hungarian Royal University Erzsébet (A Pozsonyi Magyar Királyi Erzsébet Tudományegyetem) founded in Pozsony or Prešporok. It was only four years after the Hungarian Parliament voted the law according to which the Hungarian language became mandatory in all schools in Hungary. This law, named after one of the champions of the Hungarian National Party, Count Albert Apponyi, provoked the outrage of the members of minority communities. Only seven years after the founding of the University Pozsony became Bratislava and the Hungarian authorities decided to move the Hungarian royal university Erzsébet to Pécs. Count Albert Apponyi, who led the Hungarian delegation at the peace conference in Paris, lived to see the fall of the idea of the Hungarian political nation. A hope remained that Pécs, which, unlike Kolozsvár and Pozsony, remained in Hungary, would be the right place to preserve for the future the belief of the cultural prestige of the Hungarians in relation to their neighbours.⁴⁵

The realization of the national mission of the Faculty of Law in Subotica became much more complicated and difficult after the founding of the universities in Szeged and Pécs. The University of Belgrade was far away and Hungarian universities were too close. For the survival of the Faculty it was important to have competent teachers among the staff, who were expected to equally contribute to the quality of teaching and scientific research, as well as to the realization of the national mission of this institution. One of the most promising young teachers from whom so much was expected was Mirko Kosić. He was

⁴³ Rokai, Dere, Pal i Kasaš 2002: 230, 520, 646.

⁴⁴ Drakić 2008: 368.

⁴⁵ Rokai, Dere, Pal i Kasaš 2002: 121, 167-168, 625, 630.

elected assistant professor in 1920. Born in 1892 in Velika Kikinda, Kosić was a volunteer in the Serbian army during the First World War and he received a doctorate in Switzerland in the field of sociological sciences.⁴⁶ After the war he was very active in the scientific and social life of Belgrade. He drew the attention of the scientific circles with the launch of the journal *Social Life – Social Scientific Journal for Politics, Economics, Legislation and Social Sciences* [Društveni život – socijalni naučni časopis za politiku, ekonomiju, zakonodavstvo i socijalne nauke] (1920), which almost one hundred years later is still considered to be the first sociological journal in Serbia, “which fulfilled the highest standards of the European periodicals of the time.”⁴⁷ The reputation of the young scientist in academic circles is also testified by the fact that the Scientific Department of Matica Srpska published his work in 1922 under the title *Sociographic Instructions for Investigating Villages* [Sociografska uputstva za ispitivanje sela]. Although it was a pocket-size booklet, the author was praised and compared with Jovan Cvijić, who initiated sociological, anthropological and ethnological studies of the Serbian villages in 1896.⁴⁸ In January 1923, another assistant professor arrived in Subotica. It was Fedor Nikić who worked closely with Kosić during his studies in Belgrade. A young man from a village in Srem called Grgeteg, only two years younger than Kosić, had only just defended his doctoral dissertation on the theory of public administration at the University of Belgrade when he was appointed assistant professor at the Faculty of Law in Subotica by the decree of Minister of Education Miloš Trifunović, with the consent of the prime minister Nikola Pašić, a radical champion.⁴⁹

Since his first day in Subotica Nikić was aware that the future of this institution of higher education was uncertain. He resolutely advocated the survival of the Faculty of Law with the explanation “that any thought of its abolition presents great damage and danger to our cultural life and national prestige.” He agreed with the belief that Vojvodina needed an institution of higher education primarily because in the border areas “a struggle with the Hungarians is imposed, which will mainly be cultural struggle.”⁵⁰ However, he was aware that the conditions for conducting such a fight, i.e. for the work of the Faculty of Law in Subotica were not good. He believed that it would be very beneficial to adapt part of the premises in the large building of the Faculty for the needs of housing and nutrition of students, because it would solve the problems of poor students, especially students “from Montenegro, who were numerous.” According to his estimates, the students “lived in inadequately equipped rooms and without the necessary discipline, order and cleanliness.” Soon after his arrival in Subotica, the young assistant professor chose a solution that had been constantly imposed since the founding of the Faculty: relocation to Novi Sad. He publicly stated the arguments that had already been widely accepted: Novi Sad was “the natural, administrative and cultural centre of Vojvodina, with the seat of appeals and cassations, with Matica Srpska and its library, with a fund and a legacy for the faculty of law etc.”⁵¹

⁴⁶ Jovanović 2018.

⁴⁷ Trkulja 2018: 26.

⁴⁸ Popov 2001: 207-212.

⁴⁹ Krestić 1992.

⁵⁰ Nikić 1928, 163.

⁵¹ Manuscript Department of Matica Srpska, Novi Sad, M.12.447. *Biography of Dr. Fedor Nikić, retired university professor. With the bibliography.* [Biografija dr Fedora Nikića, profesora univerziteta u penziji. Sa

The advocates of the relocation of the Faculty of Law from Subotica to Novi Sad gathered in the Novi Sad Town Hall in late January 1924. At that meeting, the opinions of the representatives of the Serbian intellectual and political elite about the seat of the Faculty of Law were divided, but the unanimous will was expressed to send a letter to the Ministry of Education regarding the necessity of the existence of at least one higher education institution in Vojvodina. The initiative to move the Faculty of Law from Subotica to Novi Sad was not met with understanding from the Yugoslav educational authorities, but the arguments in favour of resettlement were very convincing. In December 1925 they were used (it could also be said: abused) by the Minister of Education at the time, Stjepan Radić. The leader of the Croatian Peasant Party was entrusted with the educational sector during the short-term cooperation with the Radical Party and the Prime Minister Nikola Pašić. For Radić, the Faculty of Law in Subotica was the right “complication of a faculty.” He did not hide that this institution should simply be abolished, as well as the Faculty of Philosophy in Skoplje. Perhaps it would have happened had Radić stayed in the position of the Minister much longer. However, even after Radić’s dismissal, the debate on the relocation of the Faculty from Subotica to Novi Sad was continued.⁵²

In 1928 the Cultural and Humane National Society “Northern Star” was founded in Subotica, and Mijo Mirković, one of the most talented and most productive Yugoslav theorists and historians of economics of the first half of the 20th century, joined the Faculty of Law. Mirković arrived in Subotica after studying economics and social sciences in Zagreb and defending his doctoral dissertation in Frankfurt, leaving the previously significantly better paid job of the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce in Novi Sad. He was elected assistant professor at the proposal of Fedor Nikić and Mirko Kosić. Mijo Mirković was an exemplary teacher and while he lived and worked in Subotica he wrote his most important scientific works that were used as university textbooks for subjects in the field of economic sciences. He lived very modestly in Subotica together with his family. In the first few years they used one of a dozen flats for teachers in the Faculty building. In the same building there was his office, but also some twenty “collective rooms” for students. When the state “cancelled” those apartments to teachers in 1931, Mirković was forced to rent an apartment for his family (father, mother, wife and four sons).⁵³

Unlike Mijo Mirković, many teachers at the Faculty of Law were not satisfied with the modest income and living conditions in Subotica. Mihailo Konstantinović, who was elected assistant professor at the Faculty of Law in Subotica just a year after Fedor Nikić, admitted in 1929 that the Faculty “with a fair number of its nationally aware students,” gave a “vivid look” to the town in the north of Bačka. However, he concluded that in the town where the majority of inhabitants “are farmers who spend winters in Subotica and summers on the grange,” an institution of higher education “feels like a transplanted plant that cannot release roots and that a town is sought in which this faculty could merge with the local life, get energy from it, sail and form life around it.” In Konstantinović’s opinion, Novi Sad was a “much more cultural and enlightened town” and “a nationally more aware place than

bibliografijom.] (ROMS, M.12.447)

⁵² Jovanović 2002: 339; Bjelica 2008: 161-163.

⁵³ Mačković 2013: 6-8.

Subotica.” Obviously, he himself was not willing to “grow roots” in Subotica and he publicly pointed out that other teachers of the Faculty of Law in Subotica felt like “transplanted plants” and considered this town to be a “passing place,” while Novi Sad could have attracted them to “permanently settle there.”⁵⁴

Opponents of the emphasis of the cultural superiority of Novi Sad in comparison to Subotica, among whom the loudest was the lawyer and Radical Party MP in the National Assembly Jovan Manojlović, publicly expressed their suspicion about the sincerity of the “national motives” of the professors of the Faculty of Law.⁵⁵ Manojlović warned that in spite of the fact that Subotica was inhabited by the majority Slavic population, Bunjevci and Serbs, it was only after 1918 that it was “nationalized.” In this process, according to Manojlović, “Serbian settlements” in the vicinity of the town played a significant role, i.e. colonies of volunteers and optants. Nevertheless, Manojlović believed that the Faculty of Law mostly contributed to the “spiritual transformation” of the town with its distinguished teachers and enthusiastic students.⁵⁶ The mayor of Subotica in 1933, Stipan Matijević, who was the *grand župan* at the time of the founding of the Faculty, was also against the relocation of the Faculty of Law from Subotica. In his opinion, the Faculty of Law conducted an extremely important “national task” and was “a permanent guardian of national awareness” in Subotica. He believed that it was not necessary to prove that “foreign propaganda” “penetrated in the borderlands” easiest and fastest, nor that the “student youth, full of idealism and a national spirit” was best suited for its suppression.⁵⁷

One of those teachers whose strong “national motives” and the commitment to “nationalizing” Subotica could not be denied was Fedor Nikić. This was especially true after the Dictatorship of 6 January was proclaimed. The university teacher launched an informative political paper in Subotica in which he expressed unconditional support for the regime of King Aleksandar and Yugoslav nationalism.⁵⁸ Because of Fedor Nikić’s reputation as a scientist, his national enthusiasm and political reliability, the Faculty of Law in Subotica could also be proud by the fact that the Ministry of Education trusted in one of its professors and engaged him in the process of the unification of school legislation. Unified laws on primary (“national”), secondary (general and occupational) and teacher schools were not adopted in the Yugoslav kingdom until 1929 and on 28 June 1930 a law was passed which generally regulated the rules for the work of state universities in Belgrade, Zagreb and Ljubljana.⁵⁹

In an attempt for the Regime of 6 January and the ideology of Yugoslav nationalism to gain the affection of members of minority national communities, primarily Hungarians and Germans, on Nikić’s initiative the Faculty of Law in Subotica made a decision to establish a special institute for the study of the position of national minorities. It is difficult to estimate whether the idea of establishing such an institute contributed to the improvement of inter-ethnic relations in Subotica, but it certainly affected the success of Nikić’s political

⁵⁴ Konstantinović 1929.

⁵⁵ Šimunović-Bešlin 2007a: 203-207; Bjelica 2008: 163-164.

⁵⁶ Manojlović 1929: 284-285.

⁵⁷ Bjelica 2008: 159; Mačković 2013: 11.

⁵⁸ Popov 1983: 283-298.

⁵⁹ Dimić 1997b: 339-340.

cooperation with the representatives of minority communities, who were willing to publicly show loyalty to the Yugoslav authorities: Szántó Gábor and Nikolaus Hasslinger. In the early 1930s the so-called “loyalty manifestations” of Hungarians and Germans were organized in honour of King Aleksandar throughout Bačka and Banat. These activities, however, did not encounter the general support of members of minority communities in the Yugoslav kingdom.⁶⁰

Nikić’s publicist and political engagement meant that the Faculty of Law was left without one teacher after just eight years of teaching. The ambitious and talented lawyer and a ferocious Yugoslav nationalist believed that a publicist and political career was socially more beneficial and attractive than the teaching and scientific work. In the early 1930s he actively participated in the organization of local boards of the new regime party – Yugoslav Radical Peasant Democracy (JRSD). Not doubting that he had made the right decision, he submitted a request to be retired so that he could be a candidate in the elections, which were supposed to formally prove that the time of the monarchist dictatorship and administration of the state without the representatives of the people was in the past (1931). He did not return to the Faculty of Law in Subotica even when, after the death of King Aleksandar, it looked as if his political career was not successful as it seemed at first.⁶¹ Mirko Kosić, a close associate and friend of Nikić’s, was also excluded from the Faculty of Law in Subotica in 1931, when he simply did not return to Subotica after the expiration of the approved leave of absence.⁶² Kosić’s decision to leave the Faculty of Law in Subotica was preceded by an unsuccessful action that he organized together with Fedor Nikić with the aim to remove the management of Matica Srpska, which they both saw as conservative and impassive. Both Kosić and Nikić worked intensively with Matica Srpska and were members of its departments and committees. After proclaiming the Dictatorship of 6 January, they decided that it was time to take over the administration of the oldest Serbian cultural institution. In the autumn of 1929, Mirko Kosić was supposed to be elected president at the regular assembly of Matica Srpska. It was planned for Matica Srpska to become the fortress of Yugoslav nationalism under Kosić’s leadership with Nikić’s cooperation. At the beginning of 1929 in the *Matica Srpska Annual* Nikić announced that he would begin the fight with Mirko Kosić “for a new spirit proclaimed by the Royal Manifesto of the Christmas Eve.” However, despite the support from the top state authorities, the plan of the young professors of the Faculty of Law in Subotica to “win over” Matica Srpska was not achieved at the next assembly held in the autumn of 1930.⁶³ Although in 1934 he published the first comprehensive textbook of sociology in the Serbian language,⁶⁴ Kosić, like Nikić, chose a political career and replaced the university chair with

⁶⁰ Mesaroš 1989: 43, 46-49; Bešlin 2001: 78-83; Janjetović 2005: 198-199; Šimunović-Bešlin 2007a: 89-91, 94-95.

⁶¹ After the death of King Aleksandar Fedor Nikić did not participate in the social and political life (1935-1939) because he was not trusted by the new political elite led by Milan Stojadinović, the founder of the new party – Yugoslav Radical Community. He was temporarily re-instated to the position of the assistant of the Minister of Education during the rule of Dragiša Cvetković’s government but in July 1939 he was again retired. ROMS, M.12.447.

⁶² Mačković 2013: 14.

⁶³ Šimunović 1997: 30-32; Popov 2001: 275-276, 369-392.

⁶⁴ Jovanović 2018: 53.

a parliamentary bench.⁶⁵ Unlike Nikić and Kosić, Mijo Mirković devoted himself to scientific work and university career. In 1933 he was elected associate professor and in 1938 full professor at the Faculty of Law in Subotica. In his later works, published after the Second World War, he pointed to the frequent cases of abuse of the position of state officials in the Yugoslav kingdom, especially top officials (ministers, assistants and deputy ministers, chiefs, etc.), who exclusively because of political connections and activities managed to transform themselves from “nothing” to “bourgeois” almost overnight.⁶⁶

At the beginning of the 1930s it was obvious that the interest of young people in studying at the Faculty of Law in Subotica, the educational lighthouse “at the northernmost border of the United Motherland,” was relatively weak. The Faculty of Law in Subotica recorded an almost negligible increase in the number of students year after year in comparison to the first enrolled generation. There was even less interest in studies at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje.⁶⁷ At the same time, the number of students at the University of Belgrade grew steadily, precisely at the Faculty of Law as well as at the Faculty of Philosophy. Young people from Vojvodina preferred to study law in Belgrade, where an association for mutual assistance was established under the name “Vojvodinian table.” The poor interest in the studies in Subotica was, among other things, influenced by the continuing uncertainty regarding the survival of the Faculty “at the northernmost border of the United Motherland.” However, during the first ten years of the work of the Faculty of Law in Subotica, approximately 500 students acquired the law degree. In the academic 1927/28 362 students, mostly young men, were enrolled. There were less than 10% female students. Among them there were no more state funded students.⁶⁸ Opposite to that, at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, in the far southeast of the Yugoslav kingdom, girls were dominant, while there was barely 20% of young men. Even among them every subsequent year there were fewer and fewer of those who received scholarships or “benefits” and financial help for living expenses.⁶⁹ Still, students in Skopje could count on the “special semester assistance” of the Ministry of Education due to the specificity of studying and living conditions.⁷⁰

The staff of the Faculty of Law in Subotica persistently struggled to keep this institution of higher education alive. At a meeting of the Council of the Faculty held on 9 February 1932 the *Memorandum* of “survival” was adopted, which was printed with the support of Fedor Nikić and his printing house as a sort of an “open letter” to King Aleksandar.⁷¹ At that time, however, in the northeast of the Yugoslav kingdom there were no adequate conditions for the development of a system of general primary education. Primary schools and gymnasium buildings in Baranja, Bačka and Banat were largely unsuitable, inadequate in size and poorly equipped, but at the time of the economic crisis there were no funds for repairs and maintenance of old schools and the construction of new

⁶⁵ Končar 1995: 91-92, 341-342.

⁶⁶ Mačković 2013: 6-9.

⁶⁷ Jovanović 2011b: 26.

⁶⁸ Mačković 2013: 11.

⁶⁹ Jovanović 2002: 394-395.

⁷⁰ Jovanović 2011a: 435.

⁷¹ Simić 1998: 140-142.

ones either in the state or in the municipal budgets.⁷²

Although the idea of moving the Faculty of Law from Subotica to Novi Sad was still present in mid 1930s, the students from Subotica were prevalently young people from the surrounding area and Vojvodina. There were fewer and fewer state funded students among them. The situation was similar at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, except that the daughters of local officials were predominant there.⁷³ Student Miloš St. Stevanov wrote for the *Voice of Matica Srpska* [Glas Matice srpske] in the summer of 1935 that since the founding of this institution of higher education in the north of Bačka until the end of the 1920s students were mostly state funded and were “sent to Subotica as war orphans in *order to give it national colour* (emphasis in the original, author’s note).” Students from the surrounding area were opting for studies in Subotica only if they had no other choice. In Stevanov’s opinion, the prejudices about the Faculty were based on superficial impressions about the teachers who were mostly not “from here” and among them there were those who did not try too hard to get to know the setting to which they came as well as students who “were not from these parts of the country.” Stevanov believed that the interest of young people in the studies at the Faculty of Law in Subotica would significantly increase if students who were originally from Vojvodina were guaranteed civil service in their home towns. He explained his proposal with the attitude that it was the task of the fathers “to position their child in their surroundings.”⁷⁴ It can only be assumed that Stevanov was aware that at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje most of the students were Serbs from Kosovo, Prizren, Sandžak, Montenegro and Serbia, and that the candidates who declared themselves as Macedonians or Bulgarians were charged with a higher tuition fee in order to motivate them to quit enrollment of their studies.⁷⁵

The establishment of the Faculty of Law in Subotica in 1920 and the survival of this institution of higher education until April 1941 can be considered the first and true success in the history of higher education in Vojvodina. There could be no thought about the further development of higher education in this area during the Second World War.⁷⁶ Unlike the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, the Faculty of Law in Subotica was not restored even after the war. In the revolutionary transformed Yugoslav state, Serbia became one of six federal units and Vojvodina became an autonomous province within Serbia. The new Yugoslav political elite had a new ideology, but did not hesitate to apply (and perfect) the already tried system of ideological and political instrumentalization of education, science and culture in the field of higher education.⁷⁷

⁷² Šimunović-Bešlin 2004.

⁷³ Jovanović 2011b: 27-28.

⁷⁴ Šimunović-Bešlin 2007b: 238-263.

⁷⁵ Jovanović 2002: 337.

⁷⁶ Popov 1984: 393-425.

⁷⁷ Bondžić 2008; Id. 2010; Bjelica 2014.

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ПРАВНИ ФАКУЛТЕТ У СУБОТИЦИ – „СЕВЕРНА ЗВЕЗДА“ ВИСОКОГ ШКОЛСТВА У КРАЉЕВИНИ ЈУГОСЛАВИЈИ

Резиме

Оснивање Правног факултета у Суботици непосредно после Првог светског рата, у време када је југоисточни део некадашње Угарске, сматран за Српску Војводину, постао североисточни део новостворене југословенске државе, имало је врло сложене циљеве и исходе. То је прва високошколска установа на овом подручју. Почетком двадесетих година 20. века основана су два огранка Универзитета у Београду и то далеко од престонице, један на североистоку, а други на југоистоку Краљевине Срба, Хрвата и Словенаца (СХС). Оснивање ових установа требало би посматрати као одговор државе на уочену потребу да се младим и талентованим особама које живе далеко од Београда омогући да стекну високо образовање у свом ближњем окружењу. У стварности је Правни факултет у Суботици имао задатак да постане јасно препознатљива и софистицирана погранична тврђава. Од универзитетских наставника и студената очекивало се да буду поуздани и достојанствени представници државних власти и да својим присуством и активностима покажу колико се далеко на североистоку протежу границе југословенске краљевине. Приближно у исто време су у Мађарској два угледна универзитета, чија су седишта остала ван граница Мађарске (у Румунији и Чехословачкој Републици), пресељена у градове близу југоисточних граница нове Мађарске, у Сегедин (Szeged) и Печуј (Pécs). Национална мисија Правног факултета у Суботици може се сматрати фактором који је значајно ограничавао академску аутономију ове високошколске установе. Оснивање Правног факултета у Суботици 1920. године и опстанак ове високошколске установе до априла 1941. године представљају прави успех у историји високошколског образовања у Војводини, ако се имају у виду изазови са којима су се наставници и студенти свакодневно суочавали. О високом образовању у Војводини за време Другог светског рата није могло бити ни помисли. За разлику од Филозофског факултета у Скопљу, Правни факултет у Суботици није обновљен ни после рата. У револуционарно трансформисаној југословенској држави Србија је постала једна од шест федералних јединица, а Војводина аутономна покрајина у њеном саставу. Нова југословенска политичка елита имала је нову идеологију, али се није устручавала да примени (и усаврши) већ опробани систем идеолошке и политичке инструментализације високог школства.

Кључне речи: Краљевина Југославија, високо образовање, универзитет, Универзитет у Београду, Правни факултет у Суботици, Суботица, Нови Сад.

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ISTRAŽIVANJA – JOURNAL OF HISTORICAL RESEARCHES 29, 143-162