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Can Young Members of Slovene Minorities in Neighbouring Countries be Useful for Slovenia's Diplomacy?

The article deals with the issue of incorporating young members of Slovene minorities in neighbouring countries into Slovenia's diplomatic and foreign policy activities. The key precondition for this is the perception of Slovenia as their kin-state. The paper brings two main findings: the first is that a definition of kin-state as a unique concept is problematic, since it changes with different variables. The second finding refers to a concrete case study of young members of Slovene minorities in neighbouring countries, who have different contexts and perceptions of Slovenia (and Slovenehood). This means that Slovenia needs a comprehensive overhaul – and adaption to different conditions – of its own understanding of its ethnic minorities in the neighbouring countries if it wishes to include its young kin in Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Italy in its foreign policy and diplomacy.

Keywords: youth, minorities, Austria, Italy, Croatia, Hungary, diplomacy, Slovenia.

So mladi pripadniki slovenskih manjšin v sosednjih državah lahko sredstvo za delovanje slovenske diplomacije?

Članek obravnava vprašanje vključevanja mladih pripadnikov slovenskih manjšin v sosednjih državah v aktivnosti slovenske diplomacije in zunanje politike, pri čemer predpostavlja, da je ključni predpogoj za to razumevanje Slovenije kot matične domovine. Ugotovitvi članka sta dve: prva se nanaša na to, da je definicija matičnosti kot koncepta sui generis problematična, saj se spreminja glede na različne spremenljivke; druga ugotovitev pa se nanaša na konkretno študijo primera – mlade pripadnike slovenskih manjšin v sosednjih državah. Ti namreč Slovenijo (in slovenstvo) razumejo v različnih kontekstih in predstavah. To pa pomeni, da mora Slovenija temeljito prestrukturirati – in po različnih merah ukrojit – svoje razumevanje lastnih nacionalnih manjšin v sosednjih državah, če želi mlade pripadnike slovenskih manjšin v Avstriji, na Hrvaškem, v Italiji in na Madžarskem vključevati v svojo zunanjo politiko in diplomacijo.

Ključne besede: mladi, manjšine, Avstrija, Italija, Hrvaška, Madžarska, diplomacija, Slovenija.

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1. Introduction and Problem Statement

Inclusion of members of ethnic minorities in the political and administrative structures of their kin-state is a question reviving the old dilemmas regarding ethnic minorities: (1) are minority members a fifth column, or can they play a positive, bridging role between their two states; (2) and if so, how can members of ethnic minorities be included in the state structures of their kin-states? The discussion can get even more sensitive with questions like: (3) may ethnic minority members be employed in the foreign service structures of their kin-states, and (4) to which state will ethnic minority members be loyal – the state in which they have the status of ethnic minority or the state of their ethnic identity? And finally, this context also opens the issue of the citizenship of minority members: legally the members of Slovene minorities are aliens unless they also have Slovene citizenship, while those that do have it also enjoy all the advantages and privileges it brings. The list of questions that have been raised but never answered with scientific rigour should include one more: Are minority members willing to assume the responsibility of becoming an instrument of foreign policy or domestic politics of their kin-state? This is not just an issue in (daily) politics, but an important conceptual question of the emancipation potential of minority communities that is barely addressed in the literature (Ho & McConell 2019; Gilboa 2021). All these questions and dilemmas are important, but unfortunately they remain on the side track in research on the perception of minorities and the ethnic question.

This article is the first (although limited) attempt at testing a limited number of variables aimed at analysing the capacity for using Slovene minorities (i.e. members of the Slovene ethnic minorities in Austria, Croatia, Hungary and Italy) to represent or present Slovenia's foreign policy interests (and pursue diplomacy) in the states where these communities live. In our analysis, we will limit ourselves to young members of these minorities (aged 18–29), since the youth of today are the (political) decision-makers of tomorrow (Mihelič & Lipičnik 2010; Lavrih 2012, 28–30). This means that Slovenia – in order to be able to count on their help in the future – should shape and encourage them already today as it develops and implements its own national interests.

The conceptualisation and theoretic foundations of diplomacy were expanded with the end of the Cold War, and rethinking this field has become more topical as actors that had long been present in diplomatic practice also came under the theoretical spotlight. One such actor are minority and diaspora communities, as well as their individual members, who had been directly or indirectly engaged in diplomacy since the antiquity (cf. the institute of *proxenos* in Ancient Greece). A number of such examples are known also when it comes to Slovenes: already before Slovenia became independent, envoys of the Slovene government or foreign minister included Peter Millonig, a Slovene from Carinthia represent-

ing Slovenia in Washington DC; Karl Smolle, a Slovene from Carinthia heading an information office in Vienna; Božidar Fink and Marko Kremžar, Slovene post-WWII emigrants in Argentina, who represented the newly independent Slovenia in Argentina. Among the first ambassadors taking up duties after Slovenia's international recognition on 15 May 1992, we can find Ferenc Hajós, a member of the Hungarian minority in Slovenia, who served as Slovenia's first ambassador to Budapest; and Karl Bonutti, a member of the Slovene minority in Italy and emigrant, who was appointed honorary consul of Slovenia in Cleveland, US, and who served as the Slovene ambassador to the Holy See between 1998 and 2002. Of course, we must not forget Bojan Brezigar, a member of the Slovene minority in Italy, who was the official spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during Slovenia's first European Union presidency (2008). And the list goes on.

Knowing their work and efforts for Slovenia's successful diplomatic and international relations, we have no doubt the people listed above performed their duties with dedication and pursuing the highest standards. Nevertheless, this does not relieve us of the conceptual question of their position between hammer and anvil. As minority members, they were part of two countries: the one they belonged to ethnically and the one they belonged to by citizenship. In this sense, they bore a kind of duality or dual character.

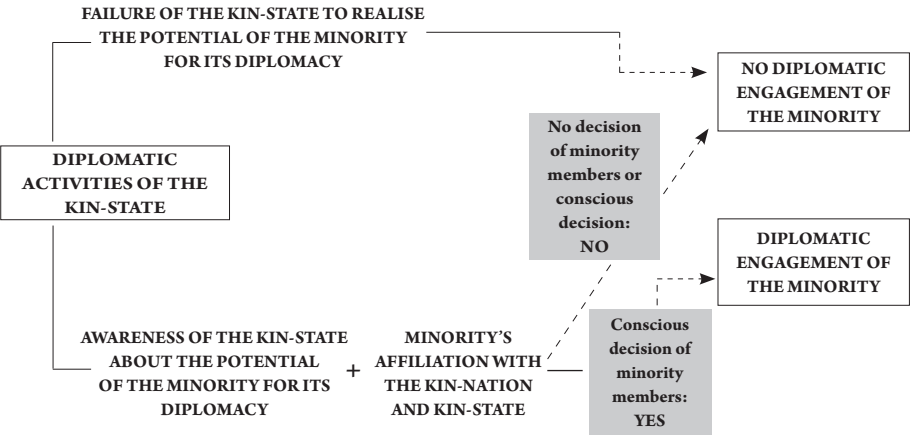
In diplomatic law, these issues are well defined both formally and politically. First, we have the approval of the receiving state that a particular individual may serve as head of the mission there (Article 4 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations; *exequatur* for consuls, Article 12 of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations). Second, states avoid appointing nationals of the receiving state as their ambassadors (Articles 8.1 and 8.2 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations; so-called *regnicos*). If they nevertheless go for this option, they first need an approval of the receiving state, and the latter has much more authority when it comes to its own citizens compared to nationals of the sending state (e.g. limited immunity and more chances not to grant it). And finally, in case of doubts about a diplomat's objectivity, the dismissal of such a diplomat can be quicker and politically less painful. However, diplomatic relations are, of course, not only tied to political and legal relations between two states, but also their social relations. This is where things get complicated.

Appointing someone with dual citizenship identity (nationality and ethnic identity differ from citizenship) as ambassador is generally not an issue when the relations between the two states in question are good. But on the other hand, this dual character can quickly become a stumbling block if the relations between the two states sour. As a rule, an envoy should represent the interests of the appointing state, regardless of whether they come from the state of their ethnicity or a minority community (i.e. a state where this minority lives). But this is easier said than done. A person growing up in a minority community is not only a member of the minority, but also the majority population, since the minority

is not an isolated island existing in a vacuum, but rather functions within a particular society and culture.

Figure 1 illustrates the process of including ethnic minorities in the pursuit of foreign policy and diplomacy of their kin-state. Three preconditions exist for this process to even start: (1) the kin-state of the ethnic minority must be aware that minority members can be an instrument of its diplomacy (and foreign policy in general); (2) members of the minority community in question must feel affiliation with (both!) their kin-nation and kin-state. If this sense of belonging is missing, the conditions for the minority to engage in the diplomacy of its kin-state are not met; and (3) the previous two points are necessary, not sufficient conditions. For minority members to become instruments of diplomacy of their kin-state, they must take a conscious decision about this. In the absence of this decision (non-decision), or if they decline cooperation (active NO), there is no potential for minority members to be used for pursuing the national interests of their kin-state in the receiving state.

Figure 1: Process of including ethnic minorities in the pursuit of diplomacy and foreign policy of their kin-state



Source: Own illustration.

All of the above sets the framework for our analysis of the possibilities for including young members of Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries in the pursuit of diplomatic and foreign-policy interests of the Republic of Slovenia. In doing so, we will not question the precondition of the Slovene Ministry of Foreign Affairs being aware of the potential of including minorities in its foreign-policy and diplomatic activities, as this can be assumed from the analysed normative documents adopted by the Republic of Slovenia (e.g. the Foreign Affairs Act, the Act Regulating Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slove-

nians Abroad, other laws). The potential of young minority members for pursuing the interest of Slovenia's foreign policy and diplomacy will be measured using two proxy variables: (a) affiliation with the Slovene nation (kin-nation), and (b) affiliation with Slovenia as a state (kin-state). We claim that potential for using minority communities in the pursuit of foreign policy and diplomacy only exists when individuals in the minority agree with it (Figure 1). In the case of Slovenia, this means that members of the Slovene minority communities in the neighbouring countries must agree that the Slovene nation is their kin-nation and Slovenia their kin-state in order to realise the diplomatic and foreign-policy interests of Slovenia. If this condition is not met, Slovene minority members can only contribute to cultural and economic cooperation between Slovenia and the state where they live.

To determine whether young minority members meet this condition, and therefore whether it is possible to make them part of Slovenia's diplomatic and foreign-policy efforts, we have set the following two research questions:

RQ1: How do young minority members perceive the Slovene nation – do they see it as their kin-nation?

RQ2: How do young minority members perceive the Republic of Slovenia – do they see it as their kin-state?

These two research questions will be answered using a combination of different methods. The theoretical part will use critical analysis and synthesis of secondary sources on the issue of kin-states and kin-nations. The empirical part will draw from primary source data collected among young members of Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries by Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015), and Udovič and Komac (2022). The data (and analyses) reflect the positions of young people in all four Slovene minority communities in neighbouring countries. To answer the research questions and assess the potential of young members of the Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries to engage in Slovenia's foreign policy and diplomacy, we will only use those variables from the abovementioned studies that are relevant to the research questions: (1) attitude towards the Slovene language, (2) attitude towards the Slovene nation as the kin-nation of Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries, and (3) attitude towards Slovenia as their kin-state. In our analysis, we must be aware of the limitations of the two studies – the unstructured sample and small number of respondents make it hard to generalise the results. Regardless of this, we believe the two studies to be paramount, as they are the only ones conducted among young members of Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries in the last decade. Their results reveal certain positions among young minority members that call for deep and critical reconsideration of the rigid and sometimes unrealistic perception of the patterns of thinking and for realising these considerations in these minority communities.

The article consists of three parts. The introduction and problem statement are followed by a theoretical discussion, setting the framework for defining the concept of kin-nation and kin-state. This theoretical framework is then tested on primary sources from the two empirical studies. The paper wraps up with a discussion and conclusion, which includes some instructions for future research on this issue.

2. Theoretical Framework: Kinness and Foreignness (among Slovenes)

The understanding and conceptualisation of kinness is always derived from the interpretation and conceptualisation of related concepts. But the starting point is always personal identity, which is then upgraded with different forms of social identity, based on a specific difference, or a specific marker. Four identity constellations are most relevant for our discussion: linguistic identity, ethnic or national identity, geographical identity, cultural identity (cf. Valentinčič 2016). State identity is also relevant, as it defines certain characteristic of all the identities listed above.⁷

The social identity question (cf. Južnič 1996; Šabič & Brglez 2002; Zdravković 2015; Vižintin 2015; Bajt 2016; Grgič 2016; Baskar 2020; Riman 2022; Čok 2022) is one of the most difficult and unsolvable issues. Not only does it stem from the core of understanding what defines a person as something (marker), but also from the self-perception (of the subject) (Deutsch 1970; cf. also Spreizer 2015). A similar complexity in understanding and theoretical conceptualisation can be found when we look at the interpretation and definitions of ethnicity, and the derived definition of nation (and state) (Anderson 2006; Cordell 2007; Batory 2009; Bajt 2011; Eigler 2012; Nossal 2018; Pogonyi 2015; Fedinec 2016; Baskar 2020; Kosi 2013; Kosi & Stegar 2016; Vidmar Horvat 2021; etc.). If we take ethnic identity, for example, this complexity is illustrated very vividly in the monograph by Komac et al. (2007), which analyses the ethnic structure of the City of Ljubljana. In this monograph, one of the respondents had this to say about her ethnic identity (Komac et al. 2007, 21): “I don’t know! My father is half Slovene and half Montenegrin, my mother is half Croat and half Muslim. I was born in Slovenia and have lived here my entire life. **Now you tell me what I am!!!!**” [emphasis added]. But when we talk about nation and nationality, we should look at their interpretation by two notable Slovene intellectuals of the 20th and 21st centuries, Janez Evangelist Krek (1925) and Peter Kovačič Peršin (1993). Although they differ in where they start from (Krek⁸ defines the nation more in terms of biology, while Kovačič Peršin⁹ relies more on language and folklore), their thoughts intersect in the end – culture is the artefact that makes a group of people a nation. How we define a nation thus also impacts other related definitions, including that of the kin-nation (Milharčič Hladnik 2015).

We believe there are four conditions for kinness of a nation. First, there can be no kin-nation if there is no nation. Second, there is no kin-nation if the nation had not formed its own state. Third, there is no kin-nation without a unit that is detached from the nation. And fourth, defining an independent concept of kin-nation requires awareness of the existence of the above – awareness of the existence of a nation, and at the same time awareness that part of the nation is physically separated from the main part of the nation.¹⁰ This separation is usually geographical (detachment), which means there is a geographical obstacle between the main part of the nation and the detached unit (detached community) of the same nation preventing these two units to come together and the detached unit to join the main part of the nation. However, the obstacle can also be psychological or sociological. Moreover, the concept of kinness has another inherent characteristic – it is a binary concept. Kinness presupposes the existence of the opposite category of non-kinness or foreignness (us vs them) (Jurić Pahor 2015; Šmrđelj 2021).¹¹

The interpretation of kinness also hits another challenge, highlighted by Strle (2007, 119) – the static view on nations implied in the concept of kinness. In other words: Without a static interpretation of the concept of nation we cannot conceive kinness. A dynamic interpretation of ethnic/national identity creates new ethnic identity communities (Sršen 2016; Sedmak & Zadel 2015). Taking Slovenes in Canada, for example, we can interpret this category statically, meaning that the understanding of who is a Slovene (nation) and who is a Slovene in Canada (detached part of the nation) does not change. But we can also interpret Slovenes in Canada as a new ethnic identity formation *par excellence*, called Canadian Slovenes. The kinness of this community is no longer tied to Slovenia as a kin-state, but rather to their ethnic and political community as they define it themselves (cf. Strle 2007, 120).

The interpretation of kinness (of a state/nation) is, therefore, a two-way process flowing either from the direction of the nation/state or from the detached part of the nation. If it is derived from the nation/state, then this identity community defines itself as the kin-nation/kin-state for detached communities, and also defines the characteristics of kinness (geographic, demographic, linguistic, cultural, etc.). On the other hand, if the detached part of the nation is the one defining kinness, it can be defined much more broadly than it is perceived/interpreted/self-defined by the main national/state community (cf. Komac 2015).¹² The idea of kinness is, therefore, greatly conditioned by the cultural, sociological and geographical structure of what is meant under kin or original. Kinness thus means speaking the same language and/or sharing similar cultural patterns. Kinness is often quickly linked to state, although it does not necessarily depend on a specific delineated geographical area (state-centred view) alone and may bear much broader connotations. An illustrative example is the song *Des Deutschen Vaterland* by Ernst Moritz Arndt, which stresses that the German homeland is

everywhere the German language is spoken: “*So weit die deutsche Zunge klingt Und Gott im Himmel Lieder singt*” (“As far as the German tongue sounds and sings songs to God in heaven”) (Feurzeig 2002, 69–70). Contrary to the German concept, the interpretation of kinness among Slovenes has been tied mainly to ethnic identity since its inception in the mid-19th century (Melik 1986, 16), and remains to this day.

This is confirmed by Reginald Vospernik, who discussed in 1986 the relationship between Slovenia (as the mainland or kin-state) and Slovenes living beyond its borders, stressing that it would be more appropriate to use the uniform cultural space as a measure instead of ethnic lines. He says:

Both mainland Slovenia and those beyond its borders speak of the so-called kin-nation. The kin or mainland – this means a biological, historical, geographical source, and around it are its children and descendants in hierarchical order. But the historical fact is that the ethnogenesis of Slovenehood appeared on the edge of today’s settlement, in former Carantania, in the geographical and spiritual vicinity of the Prince’s Stone. It seems to me that normal, unforced and organically developed relations should also be based on such historical facts. The confidence of numerous minority members building on their own ethnogenesis is an appropriate guarantee for culture creation based on an awareness of a uniform cultural space (Vospernik 1986, 59).

Despite considerations (and doubts) (cf. Moric 2021) that the ethnic line may not be the best marker for the relations between the mainland and non-mainland, the rise of national sentiment in the second half of the 1980s in Slovenia led to a complete fortification of the idea of nationality and mainland as the basic concept of Slovene statehood.

Poet Tone Pavček, one of the national fathers of the Slovene state, read the demands of the national political programme of independence for Slovenia on 9 May 1989.¹³ Among these demands was that “we want to live in a sovereign state of the Slovene nation” (Repe 2002, 198). A year and a half later, voters¹⁴ decided on this demand in a plebiscite, answering the question: Should the Republic of Slovenia become an independent sovereign state? Over 95 % voted for independence, which was then declared on 25 June 1991. Six months later, on 23 December 1991, the Constitution of the Republic of Slovenia was adopted, with three implicit references to the concept of mainland or kin-state/kin-nation.

Article 3 of Slovenia’s Constitution states that “Slovenia is a state of all its citizens and is founded on the permanent and inalienable right of the **Slovene nation** to self-determination” [emphasis added]; Article 6 describes the flag as the “white-blue-red Slovene **national** flag” [emphasis added]; and Article 5 points out that the state shall “maintain concern for the **autochthonous Slovene national** minorities in neighbouring countries and for Slovene emigrants and workers abroad and shall foster their contacts with the homeland”¹⁵ [emphasis added]. The constitutional provisions on the kin-state/kin-nation

were then followed by references in acts and delegated legislation. The Act Regulating Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenians Abroad (2006 and amended 2010) states in Article 5 that:

- (1) Slovenians in the border areas of the neighbouring countries and around the world shall be an equal part of the unified Slovenian nation;
- (2) The Republic of Slovenia is the **homeland** of all Slovenians abroad as well as the protector of the indigenous Slovenian national minority in the neighbouring countries [emphasis added].

A careful reading of this law reveals that the Slovene nation exists as an indivisible whole, regardless of where parts of this nation are settled (*ipso facto* meaning an expansion of not only national policy but also statecraft beyond the state's borders). But things get even more problematic when we look at the second paragraph of Article 5 of this act, where Slovenia decided on its own will to assume the responsibility of being the homeland of all Slovenes outside its borders, meaning that Slovenia alone has the right to determine the kinness (originality) of anyone declaring themselves as a Slovene.¹⁶ Taking the reading of this law to the absurd, we may come to a situation where someone self-declaring as a Slovene and living in Germany must assume the fact that they are not only a member of the Slovene nation but also of the Slovene homeland (delineated with the state borders of Slovenia). The issues with this conceptualisation of kinness are underlined by Žigon et al. (2020, 193), illustrating them with the example of poet Cvetka Lipuš:

Cvetka Lipuš builds her relationship to the Slovene language consciously, but does not link this relationship to Slovenia; [...] the Slovene language [is] part of her identity, while Slovenia (as a state) is not. Therefore, she does not identify herself as a minority member, and she does not consider herself a Slovene (as part of a uniform nation). She considers herself a Slovene poet (in the ethnic sense).

The importance of kinness as a category in the context of the Slovene nation is confirmed by the Slovene website of the Government Office for Slovenians Abroad (N/D), where the section on detached parts of the nation says: "The autochthonous Slovene national communities in neighbouring countries are tightly connected with the Republic of Slovenia, **which is their kin-homeland and protector state**" [emphasis added]. From the perspective of our analysis of the importance of Slovene minority communities and young people in these communities for foreign policy, we should also highlight Article 7 of the Act Regulating Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenians Abroad (2006 and amended 2010). The article stipulates that the "care for Slovenians in the border areas of the neighbouring countries and Slovenians around the world shall be an integral and essential component of the Republic of Slovenia's foreign

policy". What is of essence in this sentence is the content, which acts paternalistic and, looking at Figure 1, indicates a misunderstanding of minority communities (and their youth) as an object instead of subject. Such a formulation deprives Slovene minorities of their self and their agency, interpreting them mainly as helpless units that need to be protected and safeguarded through foreign-policy and diplomatic activities.¹⁷

So, how should kinness be interpreted? Depending on the theoretical framework we assume. Building on classical positivist theories, which focus on etatism, it is in the nature of states to declare themselves as the mainland or kin-state. This in itself means they interpret kinness on the principle of being the protector of the interests of specific communities (in such conceptualisations, kinness is often linked to citizenship). On the other hand, if we take the post-positivist approach, we can see this as a construct determined by changeable and/or complex variables that depend on the individual. It is a self-identification and identity construct built by each individual in order to pursue their activities, desires and interests as part of a specific societal and cultural community, which is also picked by the individual (it can be an ethnic, national, nuclear, local or other community). It is characteristic of this construct that it derives from cultural and historical, economic and political, as well as personal factors, which work reciprocally and simultaneously. The interpretation of kinness thus changes with time and place, as well as with changes in social stratification and place within social patterns.

3. Perceptions of Kinness among Young Members of Slovene Minorities in Neighbouring Countries

3.1 Introduction and Description of the Sample of Empirical Research Used

Below we will use the results of two most recent studies to derive a set of answers as to how young members of Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries see the concepts of kin-state and kin-nation – the studies by Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015), and Udovič and Komac (2022).¹⁸

The survey by Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015) was conducted on 240 respondents (aged 15–29), 60 from each of Slovenia's neighbouring countries (for more on the data collection methods and sample, see Kržišnik-Bukić 2018, 7–26). The survey by Udovič and Komac (2022) was done on individuals aged between 18 and 29. Compared to the former survey (Kržišnik-Bukić et al. 2015), the sample here was smaller (N = 82) and the respondent structure is not symmetrical. The highest share of respondents (almost 50 %) live in Italy, followed by Croatia (22 %) and Austria (21 %), while the fewest live in Hungary (9 %). Although none of these two surveys had a representative sample of respondents – meaning that

their results cannot be generalised – they do indicate certain characteristics and trends in the development/thinking of young members of Slovene minorities, which are relevant to our discussion.

For our analysis, we will only take the variables from the survey by Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015) that refer to the young respondents' affiliation with the Slovene language and nation. These are variables Q20 (first language / mother tongue), Q46 (affiliation with an environment, area, state)¹⁹ and Q48 (ethnic community affiliation). From the survey by Udovič and Komac (2022), we will use the variables Q2 (interpretation of kinness, self-assessment of capacity for pursuing the interests of the Slovene ethnic community or the Republic of Slovenia in Austria), Q3 (interpretation of kinness, self-assessment of capacity for pursuing the interests of the Slovene ethnic community or the Republic of Slovenia in Italy), Q4 (interpretation of kinness, self-assessment of capacity for pursuing the interests of the Slovene ethnic community or the Republic of Slovenia in Hungary) and Q5 (interpretation of kinness, self-assessment of capacity for pursuing the interests of the Slovene ethnic community or the Republic of Slovenia in Croatia).

3.2 Results

3.2.1 First Language / Mother Tongue (Q20)

The mother tongue variable was included in our analysis because it is paramount to understanding affiliation with the Slovene nation. While doing so, we were aware of the limitations of such a variable (e.g. undefined what a mother tongue is; ambiguity of the concept; interpreting the concept through multilingualism), but we nevertheless believe that, for a culture-focused nation like Slovenes (Rupel 2017), language is an important means of identity-building and identification for an individual declaring themselves as a Slovene. Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015) offered four choices with the question: What is your first language (the language you first started speaking)?: (a) Slovene, (b) majority language of the country of origin, (c) Slovene and the majority language at the same time, (d) other. The respondents' answers by country are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: First language / mother tongue (answers by respondents in %)

	Austria	Croatia	Italy	Hungary
Slovene	73.3	8.3	38.3	6.7
Majority language	11.7	83.3	16.7	66.7
Slovene and majority language	11.7	8.3	41.7	26.6
Other	3.3	0	1.7	0
Total	100	100	98.4	100

Source: Calculations based on Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015, 87).

Table 1 reveals different starting positions with respect to the mother tongue of the respondents. While Slovene as a mother tongue is strongly present in Austria, the situation is reversed in Croatia and Hungary, where the majority language is predominant. Also worth noting is the situation in Italy, where respondents said their mother tongue was both Slovene and the majority language. Summing up, we can point out that the perception of Slovene as a mother tongue can serve a tool for mobilising young minority members in Austria and partly in Italy (cf. Brezigar & Vidau 2021), but it would not be effective in Hungary and Croatia.²⁰

3.2.2 Affiliation – with a Town, Area, Country

Question 46 (Q46) was used by Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015) to test young minority members’ affiliation with their environments. The underlying thesis of the researchers was that the more affiliation young minority members feel with their primordial environment, the more attached they will be to the basic characteristics of this environment.

Table 2: Affiliation with the environment (in %, I feel affiliation or strong affiliation with this category)

	Austria	Croatia	Italy	Hungary
My village/town	43.4	48.3	65.4	62.3 ²¹
My municipality	31.7	45	43.3	38.3
My region/province	48.4	68.8	43	21.5
My state ²²	45	53.4	30	33.4
The border area	36.7	33.3	75 ²³	56.7

Source: Adapted from Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015, 234–239).

The results reveal major differences between young members of the minorities in the four analysed states. Strongest affiliation with the basic local community was expressed in Hungary and Italy. In Croatia, on the other hand, young people in minority communities feel the strongest affiliation with their region/province. From the perspective of pursuing Slovenia’s foreign policy, it is important to note that, with the exception of Croatia, young minority members perceive state affiliation as less important than local affiliation. A case in point is Italy, where three quarters of the young respondents from minority communities feel affiliation with the border area. This is an imaginary formation that everyone interprets their own way. One of its features is, however, that it is defined by a serried Slovene population. An interesting observation is also made by Obid (2018b, 204–205), who links the strong local patriotism in the cases of Austria and Italy with emotional attachment to the local environment, which suffered greatly through history for expressing Slovene national identity (under fascism and Nazism).²⁴

3.2.3 Self-Declared Affiliation with the Ethnic Community

For young minority members to have the capacity and to in fact engage in Slovenia’s foreign policy, it is not only important that the individual in question be in contact with Slovenia, but also that they feel affiliation with the Slovene nation. This is one of the main features of the concept of kinness, as part of which expressing one’s national affiliation is supposed to be an attempt at overcoming the physical (as well as psychological and sociological) obstacles in establishing contact with the kin-nation. Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015) asked their respondents about their ethnic community affiliation (Q48). Their answers are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Ethnic community affiliation (respondents’ answers in %)

	Austria	Croatia	Italy	Hungary
Slovene	56.7	11.7	38.3	23.3
Majority	8.3	51.7	3.3	33.3
Slovene and majority	30	30	50	43.4
Other or no answer	5	6.6	8.4	0

Source: Adapted from Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015, 265).

The results are somewhat surprising, as they indicate that young minority members in Austria feel the greatest affiliation with the Slovene ethnic community, while those in Croatia feel the least affiliation. On the other hand, they feel the highest affiliation with the majority nation in Croatia and Hungary. These data pose a serious challenge not only for Slovenia’s foreign policy, but also for the Government Office for Slovenians Abroad. Given that minority communities are by definition regarded as affiliated with the kin-nation, these high shares of affiliation with only the majority nation in Croatia and Hungary indicate an inappropriate policy of Slovenia towards its minorities, since it has failed to put in place an understanding of the relationship between the kin-nation and minority community as something positive and something that connects.²⁵

3.2.4 Kin-Nation and Kin-State

Udovič and Komac (2022) asked young members of Slovene minority communities directly whether they consider the Slovene nation and the Slovene state their kin-nation and kin-state, respectively. The questions were aimed at testing how young minority members perceive kinness of the nation and state.

Table 4 reveals the following: While respondents from Austria and Italy overwhelmingly labelled Slovene as their mother tongue, this was far from the case with respondents from Croatia and Hungary. However, a different picture is revealed when it comes to the relationships in the triad of the Slovene lan-

guage – Slovene nation – Slovene state. Symmetrical relations can be observed among the respondents from Croatia and Hungary, while greater asymmetry is seen among respondents from Italy and Austria. While almost all respondents from Austria agree that Slovene is their mother tongue, already their affiliation with the Slovene nation as their kin-nation is at a much lower level of agreement. A similar pattern is found with respondents from Italy. On the other hand, we can see with respondents from Hungary and Croatia that their affiliation with the Slovene nation is relatively higher than their perception of Slovene as their mother tongue. Another important point is that, apart from the respondents from Croatia, all other respondents agree that Slovenia is not their kin-state/homeland. And this runs contrary to the numerous documents (mentioned above) that were adopted in Slovenia over the last 30 years.

Table 4: Interpretation of kinness of language and nation/state among young minority members (1 = I completely agree, 7 = I completely disagree)

	Austria		Italy		Hungary		Croatia	
	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s
The Slovene language is my mother tongue	6.9	0.25	6.5	1.17	4.2	2.32	4.4	2.54
The Slovene nation is my kin-nation	3.9	2.43	4.6	1.99	5.0	2.1	5.1	2.35
The kin state is the country where you were born	4.1	2.19	3.8	1.94	4.7	1.94	5.3	1.5
My kin-state is Slovenia	2.6	2.33	3.7	2.06	3.0	2.06	5.5	1.93

Source: Calculations based on Udovič and Komac (2022).

3.2.5 Self-Assessment of the Capacity for Pursuing Slovenia’s Interests in the Country of Origin

Udovič and Komac (2022) used two statements for respondents to indicate their agreement to establish whether young members of Slovene minorities are aware of their capacity, as well as test their desire to pursue either the interests of their minority community or Slovenia’s national interests in the state where they live. The authors did this above all to test the potential of using young minority members for pursuing Slovenia’s foreign-policy interests and activities, in accordance with Figure 1.

The findings that can be drawn from Table 5 paint quite a diverse picture. While respondents from Austria, Hungary and Italy agree overwhelmingly that their actions and activities can contribute to the realisation of the interests of their ethnic community within their country, the self-assessments of the capacity to pursue Slovenia’s national interests are much less clear-cut. The highest level of agreement with the latter statement was among respondents from Hungary (6.0), and the lowest among those from Austria (3.8). Respondents from Italy and Croatia agree slightly more with this statement.

Table 5: Self-assessment of the capacity for pursuing the interests of the Slovene ethnic community or the Republic of Slovenia in the country of origin (1 = I completely disagree, 7 = I completely agree)

	Austria		Italy		Hungary		Croatia	
	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s	\bar{x}	s
As a member of the Slovene ethnic community in [...] I can contribute to the pursuit of the interests of this community in [...]	6.4	0.96	6.0	1.3	6.3	1.03	5.0	1.71
As a member of the Slovene ethnic community in [...] I can contribute to the pursuit of the interests of Slovenia in [...]	3.8	2.02	4.8	1.83	6.0	1.1	5.3	1.14

Source: Calculations based on Udovič and Komac (2022).

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings from the research by Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015), and Udovič and Komac (2022) open three important questions on whether (and how / to what extent) Slovenia’s foreign policy and diplomacy can rely on the youth in Slovene minority communities in the neighbouring countries in the pursuit of Slovenia’s national or foreign-policy interests in these states.

The first question refers to the relationship between minorities and their kin-state (in our case Slovenia). We can see that the respondent young members of minority communities in the neighbouring countries relate their Slovenehood to different components. While young minority members from Austria and Italy view it primarily through the lens of the Slovene language, young minority members from Croatia and Hungary link their Slovenehood mainly to their understanding of affiliation with the Slovene nation. However, almost all of them – with the exception of the respondents from Croatia – agree on one thing: they do not perceive Slovenia as their kin-state/homeland. We can explain this in two ways: (a) young minority members are connected with Slovenia through cultural/ethnic ties (language, culture, tradition, etc.), but not in the national sense (cf. also Kovačič 2021); and (b) for young minority members, their kin-state/homeland is the country where they were born and the country of their citizenship,²⁶ not the one with which they are linked in terms of culture, language and ethnic ties. This has changed from older generations. The identities of young minority members are dual or adapted (Vavti 2007, 169), and even fluid with some (cf. Žigon et al. 2020).

The second dilemma relates to our definition and interpretation of kinness and kin-state/homeland. We have established that young minority members find this concept to be outdated, which begs the question whether the provisions of Article 5 of the Act Regulating Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and

Slovenians Abroad (2006 and amended 2010), which defines the extraterritorial status of minorities as part of the kin-nation, also call for an overhaul. Particularly considering the fact that Slovene minorities developed simultaneously with the creation of the Slovene nation. The difference being, of course, that the Slovene nation became homogenous with the help of nation-wide media and socialisation, turning it into a supra-regional community, while the fundamental identification and connecting mechanisms among Slovene minorities in the neighbouring countries remained tied to local and regional affiliation (cf. Klemenčič 2011). We believe the provision in question should be updated in a way that is more inclusive rather than exclusive. It should be rewritten around a new core concept of kin-nation, which builds much more on (the common) culture rather than homeland (which is usually limited to the standard state form).

Third, the key finding – also relevant from the perspective of foreign policy – is that Figure 1 fails to explain sufficiently the understanding of minorities as an actor in diplomacy. The figure was designed on the presumption that foreign policy is realised in the kin-state (subject), while the minority and its members merely confer the messages (as an object). Our interpretation was based on the premise that the minority wishes to belong to the kin-state and finds kinness (of their homeland) important. The results of the studies by Kržišnik-Bukić et al. (2015), and Udovič and Komac (2022) reveal a different situation. Young minority members perceive kinness in different ways – for some it refers to the state of their first language / mother tongue, or self-declaration of affiliation with the nation of this state, for others it is the local environment, and others still see it as simultaneous affiliation with both their languages and nations. After all, (young) minority members in Italy have replaced the classical concept of kinness and homeland with the concept of the border area – a geographical area that exists conceptually, but is completely undefined geographically. As a result, we can see that the state expressing kinness is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. To achieve a sufficient condition, the idea of kinness of a particular state/nation must be granted legitimacy by the minority community. Kinness thus cannot be defined (or claimed) by the state (mainland) alone; it requires an intersection between a self-definition of the state as the kin-state and the legitimacy given by the minority that it is in fact their kin-state. And this is a finding that is also crucial for the pursuit of Slovenia's foreign policy and diplomacy, which has a potential for using young minority members, but with a diversified approach. In Croatia and Hungary, political decision-makers can do this more directly, stressing the political component of foreign policy. In Austria and Italy, things are different, on the other hand, and in order for the Slovene minority to internalise the Slovene national interests they should be pursued through economic and cultural cooperation between their two states and nations in particular. This realisation is pivotal for the formulation of approaches to Slovenia's relations with its

neighbours, which should not continue along the one-size-fits-all line as today, but rather tailored to different criteria and conditions – the Slovenia's national interest, the minority in the relevant country, and of course the political and economic relations with the country in question.

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Notes

- ¹ In the international scientific literature, the concept goes by different names: kin-state, external homeland, motherland, *état-parent*, *Heimat*. The Slovene term generally used is literally closer to external homeland, rather than state (e.g. Act Regulating Relations between the Republic of Slovenia and Slovenians Abroad (2006 and amended 2010, Article 5). However, this article will use the term kin-state (called the “external national homeland” by Brubaker 1993, 6; also 1995 and 1996).
- ² Interesting observations on the generational divisions in the perception of Slovenia as their kin-state and the Slovene nation as their kin-nation for Slovenes in Austria can be found in Lavrih (2012, 61–74), who says that: (1) the veteran generation (interviewees aged 70–90) perceive the Slovene language as their mother tongue, the Slovene nation as their kin-nation and Slovenia as their kin-state/external homeland; (2) the baby boomers (interviewees born between 1945 and 1970) and Generation X (interviewees born between 1970 and 1980) perceive Slovenehood and the Slovene language mainly through an emotional component, while they no longer see Slovenia as their external homeland; (3) Generation Y (interviewees born between 1980 and 2000) view Slovenehood much more pragmatically, sometimes even anachronistically. Slovenia is not a homeland for them, that is Austria.
- ³ This dilemma was most evident in Slovenia’s case in relation to the Austrian State Treaty. With respect to the enforcement of the latter, Slovenes in Carinthia often say this is a matter between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Austria, and not the Slovene minority. On dilemmas regarding Carinthia, see Griesser-Pečar (2021).
- ⁴ Here, we should stress that the terms Slovenia’s national interest and Slovene minorities in neighbouring countries, although often used in Slovenia, have never been precisely defined. This topic offers as much content as there are people discussing it. The paper talks about a topic that is somewhat of a taboo in Slovenia’s foreign policy – the usefulness of Slovene ethnic minorities in the pursuit of Slovenia’s interests in the states where these minorities live.
- ⁵ In 2000, Slovenia’s Prime Minister was Andrej Bajuk, a Slovene who grew up and lived in Argentina; and Angelika Mlinar, a Slovene from Carinthia, was Minister of Development and Cohesion Policy between December 2019 and March 2020.
- ⁶ This issue is relevant in multinational formations. For instance, the Yugoslav federal diplomatic service had a certain distribution according to its constituent states (also called republics), by which specific posts usually went to specific republics (Slovenes were often permanent representatives to the United Nations – cf. Udovič 2016; they were usually consuls or at least vice-consuls in Klagenfurt and Trieste, and often ambassadors in Bonn – cf. Udovič 2022). Such an ethnic key can be found today in the diplomatic service of Bosnia and Herzegovina, but not, for example, in those of Spain, the UK or Belgium (Catalonia, Basque, Scotland, Valonia, Flanders).
- ⁷ There are, of course, many more spheres of identity. Among others, social identity, economic, world-view and religious identity, the identities of different subcultures (e.g. punk identity, LGBT identity), etc.

- ⁸ Janez Evangelist Krek (1925, 130) said: “A nation, **due to its common origin, has certain characteristic physical features** [...]. As one nation we can therefore count families and individuals **with the same physical**, and especially **psychological characteristics**, as well as the same language” [emphasis added].
- ⁹ According to Peter Kovačič Peršin (1993, 36), a “nation genealogically starts constituting when **related families** recognise themselves as the same in terms of **speech, customs, historical fate** and geographical settlement” [emphasis added].
- ¹⁰ This severed/separated part can go under different qualifiers (minority, ethnic community, emigrants, expats, etc.), but all of these qualifiers mark the same thing – separation of a smaller unit from the larger unit.
- ¹¹ A debate on this binary category took place in the Slovene National Assembly when appointing Angelika Mlinar, a Slovene from Carinthia, as minister on 17 and 19 December 2019. Below are a few statements from the session records: “Were she a proud Slovene, they would have used raw materials from Slovenia. I simply can’t avoid the feeling that your interests are more in Austria than Slovenia. If you become minister, we will have a representative of Austria in the Slovene government. I have a feeling we will have some sort of a ‘foreign agent’ in the government. Look, others are not allowed dual citizenship in Austria, and you were allowed to keep the Austrian citizenship ...” (Jani Ivanuša, SNS, 17 December 2019 in National Assembly 2019a). “We are once again divided around this issue as a nation and politicians: Is it right for this person to be the flag bearer at the Olympics or not, just because he’s not a fullblood Slovene, because he was not born in Slovenia?” (Gregor Perič, SMC, 19 December 2019 in National Assembly 2019b). “The Slovene frog of shamelessness seems to be cooked tender with the candidacy of an Austrian for minister in the Slovene government, and we’ve all added our spices in the pot.” (Robert Polnar, DeSUS, 19 December 2019 in National Assembly 2019b). “She wouldn’t give up the Austrian citizenship if she weren’t allowed dual citizenship. And this – sorry I have to say so – unfortunately sounds as if not even a ministerial post means enough to her to give up the Austrian citizenship. And the feeling, which – admit it – even you in the coalition have, is that she only took the Slovene citizenship for the position.” (Alenka Jeraj, SDS, 19 December 2019 in National Assembly 2019b).
- ¹² In the case of Slovenes in Canada, Strle (2007, 120) finds that there are different definitions of the kin-state or homeland of Slovenes in this identity community: “Some recognised their homeland in Yugoslavia as a whole, some only in Slovenia, some in the local community, region, religion, possibly only a particular area or their family house [...]. With a brief review of emigrant press and materials of associations involving Canadian Slovenes, [we were able to establish] that most interpreted their homeland as the Slovene ethnic territory, and some understood it more broadly as the territory of South Slavs.”
- ¹³ On the role of minority members on Slovenia’s road to independence, see Klemenčič (2017) and Devetak (2021).
- ¹⁴ Everyone with a registered permanent residence in Slovenia was eligible to vote, regardless of nationality.
- ¹⁵ The content would be the same if the word homeland were replaced with mainland or kin-state.
- ¹⁶ The term for mainland or kin-state in Slovene is the same as the term for queen bee. And in fact, this interpretation of the Slovene nation resembles the organisation of a beehive. In the centre lies the queen bee, and around it are thousands of bees catering to the well-being of the queen bee.
- ¹⁷ Komac (N/D) points out that this interpretation is not only used by Slovenia, but also all its neighbouring countries, so it is “no wonder that we are constantly at loggerheads with our neighbours, and they with us, about land and people”.
- ¹⁸ This online survey was conducted between 4 March and 22 June 2022, and consisted of 8 questions and statements, to which respondents had to take a position.

- ¹⁹ Južnič (1996) defines territorial identity as a space where boundaries delineate the identity framework. For more on territoriality and its impact on minorities (and the other way around), see Bufon (2017), Žagar (2018) and Marin (2012).
- ²⁰ Obid (2018a, 112) notes that some interviewees do not subscribe to the interpretation of belonging to a nation automatically because they speak its language. This is confirmed by interviewee A1, who said: "This perception that you speak a particular language and that makes you a member of a particular nation is so 19th century."
- ²¹ This micro-locational affiliation is confirmed by interviewee M4, saying: "In fact, this [...] is homeland to me. Being from Porabje, from Slovenska ves, from Monošter" (Munda Hirnök & Novak Lukanovič 2018, 140).
- ²² Methodologically, it would be better to use the phrase: The state of my citizenship, or phrase: The state where I live.
- ²³ "Yes, certainly, no doubt I feel part of our space – in terms of culture, sports, music [...]" (Interviewee I1; Vidau 2018, 59).
- ²⁴ For more on the importance of memory, see Orlić (2015).
- ²⁵ Obid (2018b, 216) is more positive about the perception of nation as a significant category, saying that "it is a fact that nation clearly remains a category with which most people, including young people, can identify". He adds that young members of the minority community in Croatia are a special case, as "only the respondents with Slovene or dual citizenship chose the Slovene ethnic community".
- ²⁶ Lavrih (2012, 70) asked young Slovenes in Carinthia to comment on the statement by late Boris Pahor, Slovene writer from Italy, that they are not Slovenes, but rather Austrians speaking Slovene. The author found that all her interviewees agreed, since they linked being a Slovene to having Slovene citizenship. This, however, does not mean they do not see themselves as a distinct group *per se* – i.e. Carinthian Slovenes.

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