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*Border Problems: Changes in the  
Borderline of the Drava Banovina and  
Sava Banovina/Banovina of Croatia  
1929–1941*

*Abstract*

*This article examines the formation of the internal borders of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and their lasting impact on the contemporary Croatian–Slovenian border region. The banovinas – the largest administrative units established during this period – serve as the primary example. When determining their borders in 1929 and 1931, the royal dictatorship allegedly applied a range of geographic, transportation, and economic criteria. The establishment of the banovina boundaries in 1929 resulted in the transfer of certain settlements from one cultural–historical and administrative context to another, prompting varied local responses. It was only after the creation of the Banovina of Croatia in 1939 that public discussion emerged regarding the preferred administrative affiliation of individual municipalities and settlements.*

**KEYWORDS:** *administrative borders, Kingdom of Yugoslavia, Sava Banovina, Drava Banovina, border perspectives*

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### Izvleček

Članek predstavlja oblikovanje notranjih meja v Kraljevini Jugoslaviji ter vpliv na sodobno mejno območje med Hrvaško in Slovenijo. Glavni primer so banovine – največje upravne enote, vzpostavljene v tem obdobju. Ko je kraljeva diktatura v letih 1929 in 1931 določala njihove meje, je domnevno uporabljala vrsto geografskih, prometnih in gospodarskih meril. Vzpostavitev banovinskih meja leta 1929 je imela za posledico premestitev nekaterih naselij iz enega kulturno-zgodovinskega in upravnega okolja v drugo, kar je spodbudilo različne lokalne odzive. Šele po ustanovitvi Banovine Hrvaške leta 1939 se je oblikovala javna razprava glede zelene upravne pripadnosti posameznih občin in naselij.

KLJUČNE BESEDE: upravne meje, Kraljevina Jugoslavija, Savska banovina, Dravska banovina, dojemanje meje

### Introduction

A policy of centralization and unitarism in Yugoslavia reached its peak during the dictatorship of King Aleksandar Karadorđević. The regime introduced a series of state reforms, the most notable of which was the redrawing of the country's internal administrative boundaries. In October 1929, new regional units known as *banovinas* were established throughout Yugoslavia. With certain modifications in 1931 and 1939, these remained the Kingdom's principal administrative divisions until its dissolution in 1941.

The purpose of this article is to examine how the establishment of these boundaries affected the border areas between two banovinas – the predominantly Croatian *Sava Banovina* and the Slovenian *Drava Banovina*. The analysis focuses on three distinct border regions and their populations between 1929 and 1941. It explores both the process of border delineation in 1929, 1931, and 1939 and the main ideas that guided it. Furthermore, the article seeks to understand how the inhabitants of certain border areas perceived the division between the Sava and Drava banovinas in an era when citizens had little or no influence over their political destiny. This, in turn, provides insight into their perception of the border itself.

Understanding these historical perceptions of boundaries and associated identities is crucial, as the areas under study today lie along the Croatian–Slovenian border, where territorial disputes remain unresolved. It is

important to emphasize that, well into the modern period, these border regions exhibited significant linguistic and cultural heterogeneity. Individuals residing on one side of the present-day boundary frequently shared their origins, familial, historical, and cultural ties with communities located on what is now the opposite side of the border.

In analyzing how the boundaries were established – and how residents of the affected settlements responded to these changes, which significantly influenced their daily lives – a wide range of sources was consulted. These included various studies, academic articles, and diverse published materials, particularly statistical publications printed in the first half of the 20th century. However, primary sources proved to be the most valuable. In addition, contemporary newspaper articles published in Slovenian and Croatian press were used.

### *Ideas behind the borders (1921–1929)*

The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes, in 1929 renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, was a new country at the time of its creation in 1918. It consisted of different territories (Slovenia, Croatia, Dalmatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Montenegro, Vojvodina, South Serbia – Macedonia, etc.) which before 1918 had separate political, legal, cultural, and other developments. From its very inception, the newly established state faced a profound political crisis. This instability stemmed primarily from the irreconcilable visions held by politicians of various factions and backgrounds regarding the fundamental question of how the new country should be organized. One group maintained that a viable South Slavic state could only be achieved through a federal framework, in which the constituent nations would enjoy extensive self-governing authority. Others, however, contended that the creation of a modern and cohesive Yugoslav state necessitated a policy of centralization and national unitarism.<sup>1</sup>

Despite resistance from most political parties bearing Croatian and Slovenian designations, the *Vidovdan Constitution* of 1921, together with the *Law on the Division of the Country into Provinces (oblasti)*, formally enshri-

1 Neda Engelsfeld, *Povijest hrvatske države i prava* (Zagreb: Pravni fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu, 1992), 323, 363–64; Bosiljka Janjatović, “Karađorđevićevska centralizacija i položaj Hrvatske u Kraljevstvu (Kraljevini) SHS,” *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 27, no. 1 (1995): 55–76.

ned the latter approach.<sup>2</sup> This course of action, however, soon precipitated a severe political crisis within the Kingdom, culminating in King Aleksandar Karađorđević's proclamation of a royal dictatorship on January 6, 1929.<sup>3</sup>

During the subsequent five years, the policy of centralization and unitarism in Yugoslavia reached its zenith. The dictatorial regime implemented a series of far-reaching state reforms in politics, economy, society, and culture. One of the most prominent reforms was the redrawing of the Kingdom's internal administrative boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

Following the administrative reform of 1929, the Kingdom of Yugoslavia was divided into nine banovinas, most of which were named not after nations or regions, but rather major rivers, representing symbolically bodies of water that connect and not divide citizens.<sup>5</sup> In terms of both territory and population, these banovinas functioned as regional administrative units. Administratively, their primary purpose was to serve as efficiently organized entities, staffed with adequately trained personnel and endowed with sufficient authority to implement the reforms envisioned by the dictatorial regime. In practice, however, their proclaimed self-governing character was largely illusory, as they functioned almost entirely as instruments of the central government.<sup>6</sup> Both national unitarism and administrative centralism were evident even in the delineation of the new boundaries.

From a territorial perspective, the regime acknowledged that the borders of the banovinas – as well as those of their predecessors, the *oblasts* – were deliberately designed to break with all previous administrative traditions, including the regional and semi-autonomous entities that had historically existed in these territories.<sup>7</sup> The authorities believed that certain

2 Seka Brkljača, "Teritorijalne samouprave u Kraljevini Srba, Hrvata i Slovenaca: Od ustavne kategorije i realizacije do historiografske obrade," in: *Revizija prošlosti na prostorima bivše Jugoslavije*, ed. Vera Katz (Sarajevo: Institut za istoriju, 2007), 113.

3 Jure Gašparič, "Uvedba diktature kralja Aleksandra," *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 46, no. 1 (2006): 241–54.

4 For more on the January 6 dictatorship see: Christian Axboe Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavia: Identity in King Aleksandar's Yugoslavia* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2014); Ivana Dobrovojević, *Državna represija u doba diktature kralja Aleksandra 1929-1935*. (Beograd: Institut za savremenu istoriju, 2006).

5 Sabrina P. Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918–2005* (Washington; Bloomington; Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2006), 79–81.

6 Stipica Grgić, *Između režimske ideologije i potreba građana: Savska banovina 1929–1939*. (Zagreb: Fakultet hrvatskih studija, 2020), 214–22.

7 Mladen Klemenčić, "Promjene upravno-teritorijalnog ustroja Hrvatske 1918–1992," in: *Hrvatske županije kroz stoljeća*, ed. Franko Mirošević (Zagreb: Školska knjiga, 1996), 124.

former units, such as the Austro-Hungarian Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia, which had its own regional parliament (hr. *Sabor*) and autonomous institutions, had begun evolving into centers of (sub)national identity formation – Croatian, Slovenian, Muslim, and others. Consequently, even the thirty-three *oblasts*, the direct precursors of the banovinas, were to be abolished, not only because their autonomous assemblies conflicted with the regime's centralizing agenda, but also because the state sought a smaller number of regional entities that could be controlled more easily. Beneath the banovinas remained the districts (*okraji, kotari, srezovi*) as administrative subunits of the state, and below them the urban and rural municipalities (*občine*), nominally conceived as self-governing units.<sup>8</sup>

During the Yugoslav dictatorship of the 1930s, all levels of administration were placed under the strict control of the central government. The state leadership emphasized the principle of administrative territorial integrity, according to which every settlement was required to belong to a single municipality; each municipality could fall under only one district; and each district was subordinate to a single banovina. The authorities sought to adhere rigorously to this hierarchical principle.<sup>9</sup>

Nevertheless, the regime's assumption that the new administrative division – established by the *Law on the Name and Division of the Kingdom* in 1929 – together with other legislative measures introduced under the dictatorship, would foster the creation of a cohesive South Slavic state and nation, proved misguided.<sup>10</sup> The regime celebrated this territorial reorganization as its *monumental achievement*,<sup>11</sup> yet it clearly embodied an undemocratic and coercive unitary policy. In practice, the construction of the banovinas and the redrawing of their boundaries meant that territories previously linked to one regional center were severed from it and attached to another with which they had no historical, administrative, cultural, or

8 In January 1929 all self-governing rights were suspended, along with those of municipal councils. At the helm of every self-governing unit, from the smallest to the biggest, were regime-imposed commissars. Stipica Grgić, "Općinske uprave u doba šestosiječanjske diktature," *Časopis za suvremenu povijest* 45, no. 1 (2013): 92–98.

9 "Comp.: "Zakon o unutrašnjoj upravi," in: *Upravno zakonodavstvo*, vol. I. (Zagreb: Themis, 1929), 124; "Zakon o općinama," in: *Upravno zakonodavstvo*, vol. V. (Zagreb: Themis, 1933), 12; "Grupisanje opština," *Policija XX*, št. 11–12 (1933): 616–17.

10 Dobrovojević, *Državna represija*, 65.

11 For the example of regime's extensive self-praise campaign see: *Kraljevina Jugoslavija i njena upravna podjela prosudjena po našim istaknutim ličnostima, domaćoj i stranoj štampi* (Zagreb: Themis, 1929).

economic connections. As early as 1931, the prominent opposition politician Svetozar Pribičević observed: “*To travel from one end of a banovina to its center, you must pass through the territory of another banovina. In some banovinas, parts were torn from their natural, thousand-year-old milieu; they have no transport, economic, cultural, or any other connection with their new centers.*”<sup>12</sup>

Table 1: Kingdom of Yugoslavia and its banovinas (after 1931)<sup>13</sup>

	<b>Banovina</b>	<b>Surface (in km<sup>2</sup>)</b>	<b>Population</b>
1.	Coastal (Primorska)	19,653	901,660
2.	Danube	31,229	2,387,295
3.	<b>Drava</b>	<b>15,849</b>	<b>1,144,298</b>
4.	Drina	27,845	1,534,739
5.	Morava	25,466	1,435,584
6.	<b>Sava</b>	<b>40,535</b>	<b>2,704,383</b>
7.	Vardar	36,672	1,547,243
8.	Vrbas	18,917	1,037,382
9.	Zeta	30,997	925,516
10.	City of Belgrade Administration	378	288,938
<b>Total:</b>	<b>Kingdom of Yugoslavia</b>	<b>247,542</b>	<b>13,934,038</b>

For somewhat different reasons, the delineation of the territories of the Sava and Drava banovinas in October 1929 did not provoke significant controversy. The Slovenian ethnic territory in Yugoslavia was almost entirely encompassed within the Drava Banovina, while the borders of the Sava Banovina largely corresponded to those of the former Austro-Hungarian lands of Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia. In contrast, the remaining banovinas – which included areas corresponding to present-day Bosnia and Herze-

12 Svetozar Pribičević, *Pogledi na stanje u Jugoslaviji i njenu budućnost* (s.l.: s.p., 1931), 19–20.

13 *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31 marta 1931*, vol. I (Beograd: Državna štamparija, 1937), VII–XI.

govina and Serbia – divided both Serbian and Muslim ethnic regions.<sup>14</sup>

Although more than 90% of the 1929 boundary between the newly established Sava and Drava banovinas followed the former Austro-Hungarian border separating Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia from the Inner Austrian provinces,<sup>15</sup> several local border disputes nonetheless arose. These primarily concerned individual settlements that the regime had assigned to one banovina even though the residents expressed a preference to belong to the other. While only a limited number of complaints were recorded regarding the demarcation of banovina borders in 1929 – and even after their minor revision in 1931 – this scarcity is understandable given the political climate of royal dictatorship at the time. In general, however, historians concur that the state authorities of this period demonstrated little regard for the preferences or consent of the population.<sup>16</sup>

#### *Border delineation of 1929 and subsequent revisions in 1931*

During the delineation of banovina borders in 1929, the regime asserted that the demarcation was based primarily on geographical, transportation, economic, and cultural criteria. Naturally, the inhabitants of the border regions were not consulted in the process. In this way, the authorities justified the inclusion of the Međimurje districts of Čakovec and Prelog within the Sava Banovina – on the grounds of their stronger connection to Varaždin – even though these districts had belonged to the Maribor oblast from 1924 to 1929. Similarly, the alleged economic gravitation of the Bela Krajina region<sup>17</sup> toward the city of Karlovac served as the rationale for incorporating the Črnomelj district into the Sava Banovina. Owing to its purportedly better transportation and economic links, the district of Čabar was assigned to the Drava Banovina in 1929.<sup>18</sup>

14 Dobrivojević, *Državna represija*, 111–13.

15 Marko Zajc, *Kje se slovensko neha in hrvaško začne: Slovensko-hrvaška meja v 19. in na začetku 20. stoletja* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2006), 284.

16 Jure Gašparič, *SLS pod kraljevo diktaturo* (Ljubljana: Modrijan, 2007), 116–19; Nielsen, *Making Yugoslavs*, 208–11, 232–33.

17 For more on the problem of the identity of the population of Bela Krajina until the modern era, see: Boris Golec, *Nedokončana kroatizacija delov vzhodne Slovenije med 16. in 19. stoletjem: po sledih hrvaškega lingvonima in etnonima v Beli krajini, Kostelu, Prekmurju in Prlekiji* (Ljubljana: Zgodovinski inštitut Milka Kosa ZRC SAZU, 2012), 11–79.

18 “Granice novih banovina,” *Obzor*, October 4, 1929, 1.

The ambiguous principles guiding the territorial division between banovinas became more apparent when the only subsequent modification of their borders was undertaken. The amendments to the *Law on the Name and Division of the Kingdom* in August 1931 did not take into account the will of the population as a motivating factor for change. On the contrary, the regime emphasized that it had applied the same criteria as in 1929, thereby avoiding any fundamental reorganization. Ultimately, in 1931, the Čabar district was detached from the Drava and attached to the Sava Banovina. Conversely, the newly established Metlika district, together with the Črnomelj district, the largest Međimurje municipality of Štrigova, along with several other smaller settlements in Međimurje, were transferred to the Drava Banovina.<sup>19</sup>

In September 1931, several smaller settlements – Dubrava and Dubrava Breg in the Varaždin district, and Preska, Badličan, and Prhovec in the Čakovec district – were intended for incorporation into municipalities belonging to the Drava Banovina.<sup>20</sup> However, only a few days after the administrative transfer, these settlements were returned to the jurisdiction of the Sava Banovina, likely because the regime realized that they were geographically isolated from their intended new municipal centers, Zavrč and Središće ob Dravi, both located in the Ptuj district.<sup>21</sup> This reversal effectively acknowledged the inconsistencies in the determination of banovina boundaries and demonstrated the regime's lack of a coherent vision for implementing its own administrative principles.

Compared with the situation in 1929, the 1931 changes were limited in scope. Nevertheless, no further adjustments to banovina borders were made until the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia in August 1939. On the contrary, these borders were further solidified through their detailed codification in § 83 of the newly imposed September 1931 Constitution, which King Aleksandar, as his new proclamation stated, *generously bestowed* upon his people. Once again, citizens were neither represented nor consulted in this process.<sup>22</sup> The Constitution, which remained formally in effect in Yugoslavia until 1946, was intended not to be debated or revised, but simply to be accepted and obeyed.<sup>23</sup>

19 "Tumačenje zakona o ispravku banovinskih granica," *Obzor*, September 2, 1931, 1.

20 "Primopredaja općina Dravskoj banovini," *Obzor*, October 10, 1931, 1.

21 Croatian State Archives (hr. Hrvatski državni arhiv, HDA), HR-HDA-144, Savska banovina: Upravno odjeljenje, box 152, 25700/31, Report from the Čakovec district about the handover of authority, October 28, 1931.

22 Slobodan Samardžić, *Šestojanuarska diktatura: Uzroci i posledice* (Novi Sad: Akademska knjiga, 2023), 38–39.

23 Dobrivojević, *Državna represija*, 61–69.

*New borders and new opportunities*

Before addressing the emerging dissatisfaction with the new borders, it is important to note that certain territories, although separated from their traditional administrative centers after the creation of the banovinas, initially accepted their new affiliations. Despite the cultural, legal, historical, and economic differences within the newly established framework, some local communities perceived the change as an opportunity rather than a disruption. These smaller environments, previously marginalized or neglected, sought to secure investments for their economic and social development or to enhance their regional significance within the new administrative order.

For example, during the brief period in which it belonged to the Drava Banovina (1929–1931), the small town of Čabar witnessed the introduction of public lighting and the commencement of a water-supply system.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, in 1929 a delegation of Čabar residents petitioned Prime Minister Petar Živković to annex several smaller nearby Slovenian municipalities to their district.<sup>25</sup> The request was partially granted, and the Čabar district was expanded to include the neighboring municipalities of Draga, Trava, and Osilnica. These areas, due to their mountainous terrain, had previously been poorly connected with their former administrative (district) center in Kočevje.<sup>26</sup>

Conversely, there were also instances in which local actors sought to exploit the regime's administrative principles to their own advantage. Some residents of Metlika, for instance, welcomed their inclusion in the Sava Banovina, anticipating that the reorganization would facilitate access to their own district center.<sup>27</sup> In July 1931, the Metlika district was established through the separation of nine municipalities from the Črnomelj district and the incorporation of the Radatovići municipality, formerly part of the Jastrebarsko district.<sup>28</sup> Yet, the inhabitants of Metlika aspired to an even broader expansion. Following the inclusion of the Črnomelj and Metlika

24 Željko Malnar, *Povijesna kronologija čabarskog kraja* (Čabar: Matica hrvatska Čabar, 2010), 43.

25 "Deputacije iz Travnika i Čabra u Beogradu," *Obzor*, October 22, 1929, 4.

26 "Uredba o izpremambi meje in ugotovitvi področja srezov Čabar in Kočevje Dravske banovine," *Službeni list Kraljevske banske uprave Dravske banovine*, August 8, 1930, 225.

27 Zvonko Rus, *Kronika mesta Metlike I: Od 12. stoletja do leta 1941* (Metlika: Belokranjsko muzejsko društvo, 1999), 226.

28 "Proslava osnutka novog kotarskog poglavarstva u Metliki," *Obzor*, July 2, 1931, 4.

districts into the Drava Banovina later that year, a group of prominent local figures – led by the writer Engelbert Gangl, who at the time was aligned with the regime as one of the elders of the *Falcon* (sl. *Sokol*) of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, a prominent pro-regime association – prepared an extensive proposal for the enlargement of the Metlika district. The plan, which was submitted directly to King Aleksandar, argued on geographical, economic, and infrastructural grounds that the district should be expanded eastward and southward to include additional municipalities from the Sava Banovina, such as Sošice, Vivodina, Ribnik, and even Ozalj. Although the proposal adhered closely to the same geographical, economic, and transportation criteria that the regime itself had invoked when establishing the banovina borders, it received no official response.<sup>29</sup> The municipal councils of Vivodina and Sošice expressed their support for the initiative, but the Sava Banovina administration rejected it, citing the provisions of the 1931 Constitution, which explicitly prohibited further alterations to banovina boundaries.<sup>30</sup>

### *Three disputed border areas*

Although the regime continued to justify the administrative reorganizations of 1929 and 1931 by emphasizing geographical, transportation, economic, and cultural criteria purportedly intended for the benefit of citizens, in the border regions these changes assumed different meanings and produced varied effects. The following discussion examines how such administrative interventions generated several territorial and identity-related challenges in specific border municipalities – namely Draga, Trava, and Osilnica in Lower Carniola; Štrigova and Razkrižje in Međimurje; and Radatovići in the Žumberak region. Before addressing these issues in detail, it is necessary to outline several general characteristics of these areas.

According to the 1921 census – the only interwar Yugoslav census that inquired about respondents' native language, as presented in the table below – the municipality of Štrigova was predominantly Roman Catholic with a Serbo-Croatian-speaking population. In contrast, Draga, Trava, and Osilnica were characterized by an absolute Slovenian majority. Until the early 20th century, the region surrounding Čabar constituted an ethni-

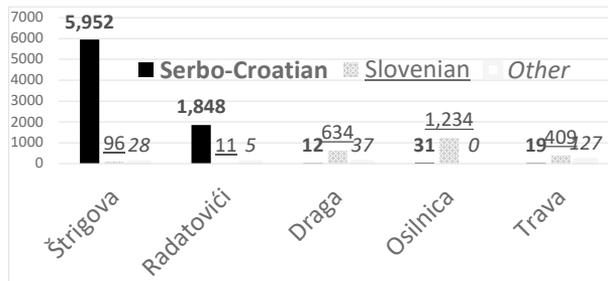
29 Archives of Yugoslavia (sr. Arhiv Jugoslavije, AJ; Belgrade), SR-AJ-74, Kraljev dvor, 37–55, Application for an extension of the Metlika district [no date, 1931].

30 HDA, HR-HDA-144, Savska banovina: Upravno odjeljenje, box 153, 25956/31, Report from the Metlika district, August 28, 1931.

cally heterogeneous Slovenian–Croatian area. This territory, now situated within the Republic of Croatia near the Čabranka River, was originally part of Carniola (Slovenia). It subsequently came under the authority of the Croatian noble family Zrinski, who facilitated its political integration into Croatian territorial structures. Nonetheless, they simultaneously promoted extensive settlement by a predominantly Slovenian population.<sup>31</sup> In the 1920s, the Croatian historian Emilij Laszowski observed that both the linguistic characteristics of the Čabar population and their traditional folk attire – particularly women’s clothing – provided clear indicators of their Slovenian origins.<sup>32</sup>

The linguistic situation in Radatovići was somewhat more complex: although the census classified the native language as predominantly Serbo-Croatian, most of the population were descendants of settlers who had migrated to the region during the early modern period, when it formed part of the Austro-Hungarian Military Frontier. The inhabitants of Žumberak thus constituted a geographically and socially isolated enclave – a *Greek Catholic island* surrounded by Roman Catholic communities. As a result, they possessed only a limited sense of national identity and primarily identified with their immediate regional environment. While today the vast majority of Žumberak residents identify as Croats, in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries they adopted a variety of identities.<sup>33</sup> The examples of these communities illustrate how the regime’s administrative policies could be both manipulated and differently interpreted at the local level.

Figure 1: Population of municipalities and their native languages (1921)<sup>34</sup>



31 Golec, *Nedokončana kroatizacija*, 92.

32 Emilij Laszowski, *Gorski kotar i Vinodol: dio državine knezova Frankopana i Zrinskih: Mjestopisne i povjesne crtice* (Zagreb: Matica hrvatska, 1923), 43.

33 Zajc, *Kje se slovensko neha in hrvaško začne*, 347–54.

34 *Definitivni rezultati popisa stanovništva od 31 januara 1921 god.* (Sarajevo: Državna štamparija, 1932), 266–67, 290–91, 300–1.

Table 2: General population and area of municipalities in 1931<sup>35</sup>

	<b>Štrigova</b> (with Razkrižje)	<b>Radatovići</b>	<b>Draga</b>	<b>Osilnica</b>	<b>Trava</b>
Number of inhabitants (in 1931)	6,424	2,011	717	1,216	528
Area of municipality (in km <sup>2</sup> )	50.59	39.84	53.38	40.90	26.11
Number of settlements in municipality	52	26	4	22	4

### *Borderline dissatisfaction*

Whether the populations of the aforementioned municipalities that lay along the border were more or less satisfied with their administrative affiliation to a particular banovina remains difficult to determine. Between 1929 and 1939, there are few recorded expressions of either support for or opposition to these arrangements, which in essence represented administrative divisions within a unitary Yugoslav state.

Following the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia – an entity that inherited the boundary with the Drava Banovina from the former Sava Banovina – in mid-1939, activity in these border regions intensified significantly. In the aftermath of the Cvetković-Maček Agreement, the dominant Croatian political organization, the Croatian Peasant Party, succeeded in securing the new Croatian banovina as a distinct, autonomous, and quasi-federal unit, in many ways separated from the rest of the Yugoslav kingdom.

The creation of this autonomous Croatian entity prompted residents of certain peripheral settlements, who identified as either Croatian or Sloveni-

35 *Splošni pregled Dravske banovine* (Ljubljana: Kraljevska banska uprava Dravske banovine, 1939), 4, 12; *Upravno, sudsko i crkveno razdjeljenje i imenik prebivališta Savske banovine* (Zagreb: Kraljevska banska uprava Savske banovine, 1937), 4.

an, to openly advocate for incorporation into the banovina corresponding to their perceived national affiliation – or, in the case of Slovenian-identifying communities, into a prospective Slovenian banovina, the establishment of which was widely anticipated at the time.<sup>36</sup> Moreover, numerous politicians and public figures from both the Slovenian and Croatian sides sought to mobilize public opinion through the press, drawing attention to the ambiguous status of these border settlements and arguing that a revision of administrative boundaries was both justified and necessary.

### *Radatovići (Črnomelj district)*

The municipality of Radatovići in Žumberak was established by the Zagreb Provincial Government in 1924; fifteen villages and hamlets were separated from their previous administrative center in Sošice and thereby formed an independent municipality.<sup>37</sup> In July 1931, the Radatovići municipal council formally expressed gratitude to the King and government authorities for approving their application to join the newly created Metlika district.<sup>38</sup> Several months later, the districts of Črnomelj and Metlika were annexed to the Drava Banovina. This administrative change was welcomed by the inhabitants of Radatovići, who anticipated improved prosperity for the municipality. However, in 1936, the district in nearby Metlika was dissolved, and the Radatovići municipality was placed under the supervision of the relatively remote Črnomelj district.<sup>39</sup>

By 1939, the residents of Radatovići had become disillusioned and petitioned for integration into the Banovina of Croatia. Addressed to Ivan Šubašić, Ban (en. governor) of Banovina of Croatia, the petition articulated dissatisfaction with the governance of the Drava Banovina, which was perceived as neglectful towards their municipality. The petitioners emphasized their exclusive judicial, economic, and educational ties to Croatian regions. They

36 Mihailo Konstantinović, *Politika sporazumna: Dnevničke beleške 1939–1941, Londonske beleške 1944–1945* (Beograd: Pravni fakultet Univerziteta u Beogradu, 2023), 57, 70.

37 Udruga Uskok Sošice, “Nekadašnja općina Radatovići,” accessed October 20, 2025, <http://uskok-sosice.hr/nekadasnja-opcina-radatovici/>.

38 AJ, SR-AJ-74, Kraljev dvor, 37–55, Radatovići municipal council – conclusion, July 27, 1931.

39 “Uredba o ustanovitvi novega sreza škofjeloškega in o ukinitvi sreza metliškega v Dravski banovini,” *Službeni list Kraljevske banske uprave Dravske banovine*, August 5, 1936, 629.

strongly opposed the appointment of Slovenian-speaking teachers to their local elementary school, noting that the children did not understand the language of instruction. Furthermore, Slovenian teachers reportedly regarded the municipality as “*a place of punishment*”,<sup>40</sup> The petition also highlighted frequent derogatory references by Slovenians, who labelled them as “*Serbs, Vlachs, or Carniolan Orthodox people of Žumberak*.”<sup>41</sup> The residents expressed that they had endured “*mental torment*” and a “*stepmother-like attitude*,”<sup>42</sup> ultimately desiring only to become “*part of their former motherland*”,<sup>43</sup> i.e., Croatia.

Following the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia, the issue of Žumberak's identity and the delineation in that region became contentious, particularly with the involvement of Janko Šimrak, a prominent Greek Catholic priest from Žumberak and editor of the pro-Croatian newspaper *Hrvatska straža*.<sup>44</sup> Through a series of articles, Šimrak sought to outline the historical evolution of the border in that region.<sup>45</sup> The Slovenian daily *Slovenec* engaged in this discourse, perceiving Šimrak's assertions as encompassing not only demands for Radatovići but also for the entire Bela Krajina region. They countered by highlighting the presence of three Slovenian municipalities within the Croatian Čabar district and asserted that the ethnographic territory of Gorski Kotar belonged to Slovenia.<sup>46</sup> In response, Šimrak dismissed their portrayal of him as a Croatian chauvinist and underscored that Gorski Kotar historically and economically constituted a part of Croatia. He further expressed concern for the Croatian-speaking population of Međimurje within the Drava Banovina (municipalities of Štrigova and Razkrižje). Regarding the three Slovenian-speaking municipalities in the Čabar district, Šimrak declared that *Hrvatska straža* advocated for their return to Slovenia, emphasizing that this was only fair because they were “*someone else's property*.”<sup>47</sup>

40 HDA, HR-HDA-155, Banovina Hrvatska: Kabinet bana, box 30, 31794/40. Petition of Radatovići to ban Šubašić, September 20, 1940.

41 As an example of such insults, they cited a truly benign article: “Žumberačke kresnice,” *Slovenec*, September 4, 1940, 5.

42 HDA, HR-HDA-155, Banovina Hrvatska: Kabinet bana, box 30, 31794/40. Petition of Radatovići to ban Šubašić, September 20, 1940.

43 HDA, HR-HDA-155, Banovina Hrvatska: Kabinet bana, box 30, 31794/40. Petition of Radatovići to ban Šubašić, September 20, 1940.

44 Udruga Uskok Sošice, “Dr. Janko Šimrak biskup, novinar...,” accessed October 20, 2025, <http://uskok-sosice.hr/zumberacki-biskup-janko-simrak/>.

45 “Granice Banovine Hrvatske prema Sloveniji,” *Hrvatska straža*, August 31, 1939, 2.

46 “Zahteve g. dr. Šimraka,” *Slovenec*, September 1, 1939, 2.

47 “Pitanje Bele Krajine, Radatovića i Štrigove,” *Hrvatska straža*, September 3, 1939, 2–5.

*Draga, Trava, and Osilnica (Čabar district)*

In 1930, the Slovenian municipalities of Draga, Trava, and Osilnica were incorporated into the Čabar district. Following the reorganization of banovina borders in October 1931, the Čabar district became part of the Sava Banovina. In 1937, the municipalities of Draga and Trava merged to form a single administrative unit, the Draga municipality.<sup>48</sup> Within these municipalities, the Slovenian language remained the official language of instruction in elementary schools until the dissolution of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia.<sup>49</sup> Despite these arrangements, the situation grew increasingly complex in 1939 and 1940, i.e. after the creation of the Banovina of Croatia and after the announcement of plans to create the Banovina of Slovenia from the Drava Banovina, also with expanded autonomy.

In late September 1939, Karel Škulj, a representative of the Slovenian People's Party, visited the municipalities of Draga and Osilnica, emphasizing the necessity for the inhabitants to clearly express their preferred banovina affiliation.<sup>50</sup> Subsequently, the municipal council in Draga voted in favor of annexation to the Drava Banovina. A petition campaign was initiated, whereby 75% of residents demonstrated support for reintegration with the Kočevje district and the Drava Banovina.<sup>51</sup>

Nevertheless, in 1940 and 1941, the mayor of the Osilnica municipality consistently refused to convene the municipal council or engage in open discussion regarding the proposed separation. On the eve of the Second World War, Mayor Janez Kovač reiterated his opposition to merging Osilnica with the Kočevje district. In March 1941, he underscored the superior institutional and transportation connections between Osilnica and Čabar, noting the poor quality of a 60-kilometer road linking some villages to Kočevje, contrasted with the mere five kilometers separating them from Čabar. While empathizing with his constituents' pragmatical desires, Kovač also asserted: "*We will not give up on our nationality. We remain unchanged, Slovenians, even though we came under the Čabar district.*"<sup>52</sup> This episode

48 "Ukaz kraljevskog namjesništva od 12. studenog 1937. o osnivanju općine Draga," *Narodne novine*, December 2, 1937, 1.

49 HDA, HR-HDA-155, Banovina Hrvatska: Kabinet bana, box 30, 31794/40. Study on the enlargement of the Banovina of Croatia, October 7, 1940.

50 HDA, HR-HDA-1363, Politička situacija (Grupa XXI), inv. no. 5725. Report from the Čabar district, October 10, 1939.

51 HR-HDA-1363, Politička situacija (Grupa XXI), inv. no. 5726. Draga municipal council – conclusion, October 15, 1939.

52 HDA, HR-HDA-157, Banovina Hrvatska: Upravno odjeljenje, box 273, 36872/41. Report from the Osilnica municipal council, March 26, 1941.

illustrates the heterogeneous perspectives on identity among individuals in border regions. Some maintained their identity as an integral component of their heritage, while others prioritized practical considerations, such as economic, infrastructural, and institutional ones, when choosing to reside within administrative borders where they constituted a minority.

*Štrigova and Razkrižje (Ljutomer district)*

In September 1931, the municipality of Štrigova was administratively detached from the Čakovec district of the Sava Banovina and placed under the jurisdiction of the Ljutomer district within the Drava Banovina.<sup>53</sup> It was subsequently noted that

during this separation, the state authorities did not seek the consent of the inhabitants of the Štrigova municipality; rather, the decision was based solely on the fact that Čakovec lies 22 kilometers from Štrigova, whereas the new district seat in Ljutomer is only 10 kilometers away. Considering linguistic differences [i.e., use of Slovenian or Croatian language], it was believed that better administrative support would be achieved by establishing separate district offices in Štrigova.<sup>54</sup>

Immediately following its incorporation into the Drava Banovina in 1931, three hamlets situated on the left bank of the Mura River – Bednjaj, Laze, and Mala Kocija – were separated from the Štrigova municipality and annexed to the Donja Bistrica municipality, which belonged to the Donja Lendava district.<sup>55</sup> This marked the beginning of a gradual territorial fragmentation of the once extensive Štrigova municipality.

Until the mid-1930s, the Drava Banovina comprised a large number of small municipalities. Following the adoption of the *Law on [Rural] Municipalities* in 1933, the authorities initiated a process of consolidation by mer-

53 HDA, HR-HDA-144, Savska banovina: Upravno odjeljenje, box 152, 25700/31, Concept of the report from Sava Banovina about the handover of authority, September 28, 1931.

54 HDA, HR-HDA-155, Banovina Hrvatska: Kabinet bana, box 30, 31794/40. Study on the enlargement of the Banovina of Croatia, October 7, 1940.

55 “Uredba o izpremembah območja srezov in občin zbog izpremenjenih banovinskih mej,” *Službeni list Kraljevske banske uprave Dravske banovine*, September 26, 1931, 1184.

ging smaller municipalities into larger administrative self-governing units, thereby ensuring sufficient fiscal capacity to provide public services. As a result, the number of municipalities in the Drava Banovina was reduced from 1,069 in 1933 to 407 in 1937.<sup>56</sup> Despite these centralizing reforms, the Drava Banovina government decided in 1937 to further divide the Štrigova municipality. One portion in the south became the new Štrigova municipality, encompassing approximately two-thirds of the former municipality's population and territory, while the remaining third was organized into a new municipality centered in Razkrižje.<sup>57</sup> Notably, the principle of territorial integrity was not respected in this division: several settlements were literally split by house numbers between the two municipalities.<sup>58</sup>

Following the establishment of the Banovina of Croatia in 1939, the inhabitants of Štrigova submitted a petition expressing their desire to no longer remain part of the Drava Banovina. In October of the same year, the Štrigova municipal council issued a formal request to be reunited with the Čakovec district and incorporated into the Banovina of Croatia, within the territorial boundaries that had existed prior to the 1931 administrative transfer – including the area of the separated Razkrižje municipality.<sup>59</sup>

Political developments reflected emerging national identities. During the 1938 elections for the National Assembly, the majority of voters in Razkrižje supported the Yugoslav Radical Union, which included the Slovenian People's Party, whereas in Štrigova most votes were cast for the United Opposition, dominated by the Croatian Peasant Party.<sup>60</sup> These results indicate that by the late 1930s, most residents of the newly formed Razkrižje

56 Gašper Šmid, *Uprava Dravske banovine 1929–1941* (Ljubljana: Arhiv Republike Slovenije, 2003), 56–57.

57 *Splošni pregled Dravske banovine*, 12.

58 Under the municipality of Razkrižje came the whole villages and hamlets of Gibna, Razkrižje, Šafarsko, and Veščica, and parts of Jalšovec (house numbers: 16–38), Grabrovnik (house numbers: 36a, 104, 105, 110, 112–151), Banfije (house numbers: 1–15, 26, 27, 30, 31, 34, 44–72, 82, 84–128, 131, 150–171), and Robadije (house numbers: 76–138, 148–179, 205–230). Other parts remained under the Štrigova municipality. “Spojitve, razdružitve in pregrupacije občin in spremembe imena in sedeža občin v območju dravske banovine,” *Službeni list Kraljevske banske uprave Dravske banovine*, October 16, 1937, 790.

59 HDA, HR-HDA-155, Banovina Hrvatska: Kabinet bana, box 30, 31794/40. Study on the enlargement of the Banovina of Croatia, October 7, 1940.

60 During the December (1938) elections in the Razkrižje municipality, the Yugoslav Radical Union got 291 votes, United Opposition (altogether) 83. In the Štrigova municipality, the Yugoslav Radical Union got 165, and United Opposition (Croatian Peasant Party) 320 votes. “Volivni izidi v Sloveniji,” *Slovenec*, December 13, 1938, 3.

municipality identified with the Slovenian national community, while the population of the former Štrigova municipality largely retained a Croatian national orientation.

In their 1939 petition, the Štrigova municipal council also protested against the imposition of the Slovenian language in local elementary schools and churches within both Štrigova and Razkrižje.<sup>61</sup> Between 1939 and 1940, Croatian priests from the Štrigova parish resisted directives from the Drava Banovina authorities requiring religious instruction to be conducted in Slovenian, particularly in the school in Šafarsko, a settlement within the Razkrižje municipality where Slovene catechisms were introduced. Reportedly, parents demanded instruction in Croatian, and, in defiance of official orders, some transferred their children to Croatian-language schools in Štrigova. The parents argued that “*in an era of mutual understanding among the peoples of Yugoslavia, the insistence of the Drava Banovina authorities on Slovenian catechisms in schools is an anachronism.*”<sup>62</sup>

These disputes stemmed from longstanding tensions at the local parish level.<sup>63</sup> Between 1939 and 1941, the residents of Razkrižje increasingly demanded Slovenian-speaking priests and the establishment of a separate parish, independent from Štrigova. The Zagreb archbishop Alojzije Stepinac personally intervened in an effort to reconcile some parishioners and their clergy. His visit to Štrigova in December 1940 was widely celebrated, yet it failed to resolve the conflict, which persisted well into the latter half of the twentieth century.<sup>64</sup>

In contrast to ecclesiastical authorities, the Ban of the Banovina of Croatia, Ivan Šubašić, adopted a more cautious political stance. In 1939, he expressed tentative assurances that the administrative status of the Štrigova and Razkrižje municipalities would be reconsidered soon. During his visit

61 HDA, HR-HDA-155, Banovina Hrvatska: Kabinet bana, box 30, 31794/40. Study on the enlargement of the Banovina of Croatia, October 7, 1940.

62 “Daljnji razvoj situacije u Šafarskom,” *Katolički list*, November 23, 1939, 579.

63 In two separate sources we find some disagreements on the names and intentions of the priests who were sent to Razkrižje in the 1920s and 1930s. While one side claims that their insufficient efforts in language matters led to a split in Razkrižje, the other states that their rigid insistence on the Croatian language turned the population against them. See: Breda Pogorelec, “Razkrižje (Iz kronologije boja za slovenski jezik v cerkvi),” *Jezik in slovstvo* 38, no. 3 (1993): 110; and Frano Glavina, “Svećenici u obrani hrvatske Istre,” *Glas koncila*, January 11, 2009, 25.

64 “Boravak preuzv. g. Nadbiskupa u Štrigovi,” *Katolički list*, December 27, 1940, 631. In 1942, Razkrižje was given a separate parish by Archbishop Stepinac. But it remained under the Zagreb Archdiocese for fifty more years. Pogorelec, “Razkrižje,” 111–12.

to Međimurje in 1940, Šubašić stated that the people of Međimurje demonstrated profound affection “for every piece of Croatian soil.”<sup>65</sup> Referring to the border question, he added that “although Štrigova is part of our common homeland, Yugoslavia, it should belong to its motherland, Croatia.”<sup>66</sup> This statement represented a moderate and conciliatory position, reflecting broader contemporary debates regarding territorial adjustments and the competing aspirations for integration into the Banovina of Croatia.

In the end, the issue of demarcation in this border region was only resolved after the Second World War. Although the highest legislative body of socialist Yugoslavia, the National Assembly, never fulfilled its promise to pass a law concerning the Slovenian–Croatian border in this area, this line became the national border between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia as we know it today.<sup>67</sup>

### *Towards the end of an era*

By the end of the 1930s, the authorities of the Banovina of Croatia made notable efforts to accommodate the requests of various municipal councils regarding their incorporation into, or secession from, its administrative jurisdiction. In 1940, a comprehensive study was undertaken concerning the potential merger of the Štrigova, Razkrižje, and Radatovići municipalities with the territory of the Banovina of Croatia. The study sought to demonstrate that the majority of the local population identified as Croats, and this demographic argument – together with the expressed wishes of the inhabitants – was presented as conclusive evidence in favor of the proposed merger.<sup>68</sup>

The establishment of the Banovina of Croatia signaled a broader need for the administrative and constitutional reorganization of the Yugoslav state. The Croatian Peasant Party, as the principal political representation

65 “Završen put ban Hrvatske po Hrvatskom zagorju i Medjimurju,” *Obzor*, November 21, 1940, 4.

66 “Završen put ban Hrvatske po Hrvatskom zagorju i Medjimurju,” *Obzor*, November 21, 1940, 4.

67 For a full overview of the border development around Štrigova and Razkrižje, see: Stipica Grgić, “Accepting the Border, Choosing the Border: The Štrigova and Razkrižje Micro-region in the First Half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century,” *Prispevki za novejšo zgodovino* 56, no. 3 (2017): 26–43.

68 HDA, HR-HDA-155, Banovina Hrvatska: Kabinet bana, box 30, 31794/40. Study on the enlargement of the Banovina of Croatia, October 7, 1940.

of Croatian citizens, consistently advocated for greater autonomy for the Croatian and other constituent peoples. The party anticipated modifications to the borders of the Banovina of Croatia and expressed support for the Slovenian People's Party in its efforts to establish a Banovina of Slovenia.<sup>69</sup> In this context, the idea of territorial adjustment along the border enjoyed support on both sides: Slovenian representatives expected a process of territorial exchange to take place in 1939, following the anticipated creation of the Banovina of Slovenia. However, the year passed without any concrete action.

Some proponents of democratic reform emphasized that the border issue could only be resolved “*fairly, justly, and to the satisfaction of the people*”<sup>70</sup> through decisions made by freely elected autonomous bodies – namely, the Croatian Parliament (hr. *Sabor*) and the Slovenian National Assembly (sl. *Narodni zbor*). Nevertheless, the growing threat of the Second World War and the increasing political instability of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia prevented such developments. Although the Cvetković-Maček Agreement envisioned that the future national parliament (hr. *Narodna skupština*) would determine the competences and territorial scope of the reformed banovinas, the government ultimately chose not to convene the assembly, thereby preserving the internal political status quo and halting further federalization efforts.<sup>71</sup>

Only in the aftermath of this period, within a transformed political environment, was the border between the Republic of Slovenia and the Republic of Croatia definitively established. Unlike during the Kingdom of Yugoslavia, the will of the local population in border regions was largely taken into account.<sup>72</sup> Nevertheless, certain sections of the frontier – particularly in Istria – have remained the subject of dispute to this day.<sup>73</sup>

69 Ljubo Boban, *Maček i politika Hrvatske seljačke stranke 1928–1941*. Vol. I (Zagreb: Liber, 1974), 227–32.

70 “Razkrižje in Štrigova,” *Slovenija*, September 6, 1940, 1.

71 Boban, *Maček i politika*, Vol. I, 235–36.

72 Grgić, “Accepting the Border,” 37–38.

73 *Bela knjiga o meji med Republiko Slovenijo in Republiko Hrvaško* (Ljubljana: Ministrstvo za zunanje zadeve Republike Slovenije, 2006).

### *Conclusion*

The establishment of the banovinas in 1929, instituted under the Yugoslav royal dictatorship without public consultation, constituted a pivotal act of administrative and territorial reconfiguration. Conceived as highly centralized units, these entities were designed to supersede pre-existing historical, legal, and regional frameworks by integrating populations according to geographical, infrastructural, and economic criteria rather than ethno-historical boundaries. Despite these intentions, the delineation between the newly constituted mostly Croatian-speaking Sava Banovina and mostly Slovenian-speaking Drava Banovina largely continued to follow the former Austro-Hungarian frontier separating Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia from the Inner Austrian provinces, thereby perpetuating latent spatial and political tensions.

For certain communities along the border, whose historical development had been conditioned by divergent legal traditions, cultural affiliations, and economic orientations, the 1929 administrative reform represented both disruption and opportunity. Yet, the creation of the autonomous Banovina of Croatia in 1939, envisaged as the political and territorial embodiment of Croatian national identity within the Yugoslav framework, reactivated national sentiments that prompted contestations along the Sava–Drava frontier and renewed claims for territorial realignment. The ensuing Croatian–Slovenian disputes – most notably involving the Slovenian communities of the Čabar district (Draga, Trava, Osilnica), the Žumberak municipality of Radatovići, and the municipalities of Štrigova and Razkrižje in Međimurje – exposed the complex intersection of national identification, administrative rationalization, and local pragmatism. While national belonging constituted a salient dimension of social identity for the majority of inhabitants, archival evidence suggests that certain border populations prioritized pragmatic considerations such as administrative efficiency, infrastructural accessibility, and economic viability over ethnonational affiliation.

In sum, the experience of these contested frontier zones illustrates the multidimensional character of interwar Yugoslav state- and nation-building. The banovina system, conceived as an instrument of centralization and integration, simultaneously revealed the persistence of localized agency and the limits of top-down territorial engineering in a politically heterogeneous and historically stratified landscape.

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*Težave z mejo: spremembe mejne črte  
med Dravsko banovino in Savsko  
banovino/Banovino Hrvaško, 1929–1941*

*Povzetek*

Konec leta 1929 so bile v kraljevi diktaturi ustanovljene banovine kot najvišja upravna delitev Kraljevine Jugoslavije, in sicer brez posvetovanja z javnostjo. Te enote so bile zasnovane kot močno centralizirane entitete, ki naj bi presegle prejšnje zgodovinske in pravne regionalne meje ter povezale prebivalce s skupnimi geografskimi, prometnimi in gospodarskimi interesi. Čeprav je približno 90 % meje med novoustanovljenima Savsko in Dravsko banovino iz leta 1929 sledilo prejšnji avstro-ogrski meji, ki je ločevala troedino Hrvaško, Slavonijo in Dalmacijo od notranjeavstrijskih dežel, je vztrajalo več ozemeljskih sporov.

Za nekatere lokalne skupnosti vzdolž te meje – ki so jih zgodovinsko oblikovale različne kulturne, pravne in gospodarske tradicije – je upravna sprememba predstavljala priložnost. Številne so si v novem upravnem okviru prizadevale pridobiti naložbe v lokalni gospodarski in družbeni razvoj ali razširiti svoj vpliv. Po ustanovitvi avtonomne Banovine Hrvaške – ki naj bi bila politično in ozemeljsko utelešenje hrvaškega naroda znotraj Kraljevine Jugoslavije – leta 1939 pa so nekatere obmejne skupnosti začele zahtevati, da bi bile prerazporejene na nasprotno stran meje. V teh razmerah so nastali manjši hrvaško-slovenski ozemeljski spori, v katere so se vključile vidne osebnosti in organizacije iz kulturnih in političnih krogov. V razpravi je šlo najpogosteje za slovenske skupnosti v srezu Čabar (vključno z nekdanjimi občinami Draga, Trava in Osilnica), žumberško občino Radatovići ter občini Štrigova in Razkrižje v Medžimurju.

Čeprav je večina prebivalcev tistega časa imela narodno identiteto za bistven element osebne in skupnostne pripadnosti, so jo nekateri prebivalci – zlasti na obmejnih območjih – v svoji hierarhiji vrednot postavljali na nižje mesto. Namesto tega so kot glavne razloge, zaradi katerih bi bili raje vključeni v upravno enoto, v kateri bi morda predstavljali etnično ali narodno manjšino, poudarjali praktične vidike, kot so institucionalna učinkovitost, gospodarske priložnosti in prometna povezanost.