

# Linguistic Vojvodina: Embordered Frontiers<sup>1</sup>

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*pevaj pijano racki, mađarski, totski, vlaški,  
makedonski i lički, preko dalekih njiva,  
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## 1. Introduction

Article 1. of the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (hereafter SAPV) defines Vojvodina in part as “a region in which multiculturalism, multiconfessionalism, as well as other European principles and values are promoted [and] an inalienable part of the Republic of Serbia.”<sup>2</sup> As such, Vojvodina is but a portion of “[t]he European landscape [which] features a great many discontinuities, places of transition – frontiers.”<sup>3</sup> In an attempt to explain the exact nature of Vojvodina, Ksenija Djordjević raises various questions: is Vojvodina yet another Balkan region, a forgotten or just unimportant region, an exception; has Vojvo-

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1 I would like to thank Motoki Nomachi as well as two anonymous referees for all their comments. They all helped make this paper better. I, however, take full responsibility for all of its shortcomings.

2 Statut Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine [Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina], Web, February 12, 2011. <[http://www.vojvodina.gov.rs/index.php?option=com\\_docman&task=doc\\_view&gid=133&Itemid=70](http://www.vojvodina.gov.rs/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_view&gid=133&Itemid=70)>. In this paper, all translations are mine unless specified otherwise.

3 Joep Leerssen, “Europe as a Set of Borders,” in J. Th. Leerssen and M. van Montfrans, eds., *Borders and Territories. Yearbook of European Studies 6* (Amsterdam and Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 1993), p. 14.

dina been manipulated with superficial language planning; is Vojvodina a model region.<sup>4</sup> None of the questions, which Djordjević perceives as both confusing and inescapable, are answered definitively.

In this paper I examine Vojvodina's multilingual nature, notably the declared coexistence of six (which turn out to be more) different languages and two (and possibly more) different alphabets in the official use (SAPV, Article 26) within the borders of the province. I offer the view that the languages, that is to say – their speakers, are demarcated by frontiers, “transitional zones, with mixtures and minorities – grey areas rather than black lines,”<sup>5</sup> though with a tendency – indeed – toward becoming, if not quite black lines, then certainly dark-grey areas. In the section that follows, section 2, I sketch the geopolitical shape of Vojvodina. In section 3 I discuss the multicultural and multiethnic nature of the province. I present the multilingual nature of Vojvodina in section 4, which I then interpret using theoretical constructs of borderlands studies, in section 5. Finally, in section 6, I conclude my examination of what I refer to as linguistic Vojvodina.

## 2. Geopolitical Vojvodina

According to the State Bureau of Statistics of the Republic of Serbia,<sup>6</sup> the area of its Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is 21,506 square kilometers, or approximately 8,303.5 square miles. As such, Vojvodina is slightly larger than the Japanese island of Shikoku (18,792 square kilometers);<sup>7</sup> the province is also slightly larger than the state of New Jersey in the United States of America (7,417.34 square miles).<sup>8</sup> The area of

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4 Ksenija Djordjević, *Configuration sociolinguistique, nationalisme et politique linguistique. Le cas de la Voïvodine, hier et aujourd'hui* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004), p. 212.

5 Leerssen, “Europe as a Set of Borders,” p. 14.

6 Republički zavod za statistiku [State Bureau of Statistics], Web, February 12, 2011. <<http://webrzs.stat.gov.rs/axd/index.php>>, Municipal Indicators.

7 The Statistics Bureau and the Director-General for Policy Planning of Japan, Web, February 12, 2011. <<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/index.htm>>, Statistical Handbook of Japan.

8 U. S. Census Bureau, Web, February 12, 2011. <<http://www.census.gov/>>, New Jersey.

Vojvodina is almost one quarter of the area of Serbia (24.3%, to be exact). This, however, reflects the official view of the Republic of Serbia, also outlined on the official website of the Government of Vojvodina,<sup>9</sup> according to which Serbia has two autonomous provinces, 1) Vojvodina and 2) Kosovo and Metohija, an issue beyond the scope of the present paper. Of Serbia's 29 counties, 7 are found in Vojvodina; these seven comprise 45, out of Serbia's 194 municipalities.<sup>10</sup> The autonomous province of Vojvodina has its own parliament, which has adopted the province's statute as its highest legal document.<sup>11</sup>

Vojvodina lies in the north of Serbia, bordering Bosnia and Herzegovina (south-west), Croatia (west), Hungary (north), and Romania (east). In fact, Vojvodina's borders with Croatia and Hungary are Serbia's sole borders with those two countries. In the south, Vojvodina borders the part of Serbia commonly referred to as Central Serbia. Of the four countries that border Vojvodina, three (Croatia, Hungary, and Romania) are members of the European Union (EU), while one country (Bosnia and Herzegovina) is a potential candidate country for the EU.<sup>12</sup> Serbia, at the moment, is a candidate country for the European Union whose "status is conferred by the European Council on the basis of an opinion from the European Commission."<sup>13</sup>

Based on the census of 2002,<sup>14</sup> the population of Vojvodina was 2,031,992, which is slightly smaller than the Japanese city of Nagoya (approximately 2,215,000)<sup>15</sup> or the city of Houston, Texas, USA (2006 estimate – 2,144,491).<sup>16</sup> It is worth noting, however, that, according to

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9 Vlada Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine [Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina], Web, February 12, 2011. <[http://www.vojvodina.gov.rs/index.php?option=com\\_frontpage&Itemid=1](http://www.vojvodina.gov.rs/index.php?option=com_frontpage&Itemid=1)>, Get Acquainted with Vojvodina.

10 Republički zavod za statistiku.

11 Vlada Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine.

12 European Union, Web, February 12, 2011. <[http://europa.eu/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/index_en.htm)>, The Member Countries of the European Union.

13 European Union, Glossary.

14 Republički zavod za statistiku.

15 The Statistics Bureau and the Director-General.

16 U. S. Census Bureau, Houston (city), Texas.

Golubović and Marković-Krstić,<sup>17</sup> the overall crude birth rate in Vojvodina, for the period of 1996–2002, was 10.2‰, while the overall crude death rate for the same period was 14.4‰, thus resulting in a negative natural population growth rate of –4.2‰, six times higher than for the period of 1986–1990 (when it was –0.7‰). In the year 2003, a negative natural population growth rate was recorded in all 45 municipalities in Vojvodina. Golubović and Marković-Krstić explain that “the average population age in Vojvodina ..., according to the 2002 census, was 39.8 years, a 9.2 year increase over a period of fifty years, which suggests that the population of Vojvodina is in the stage of demographic old age. ... [O]ut of 45 municipalities, the population of 18 municipalities is in the fifth stage of demographic old age, and the population of 27 municipalities is in the sixth stage of demographic old age – the stage of deep demographic old age.”<sup>18</sup>

### 3. Multiethnic and Multicultural Vojvodina

Golubović and Marković-Krstić claim that, when it comes to ethnicity, “Vojvodina is still one of the most heterogeneous regions in the Balkans.”<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the official website of the Government of Vojvodina suggests that “the national makeup of the population of Vojvodina is very heterogeneous.”<sup>20</sup> Raduški describes Vojvodina as “a multiethnic, multiconfessional, and multicultural territory ... [,which,] ethnicity-wise, has a very heterogeneous population structure of the bi-modal type since, even though many ethnic communities live in this territory, two nationalities dominate – Serbs and Hungarians.”<sup>21</sup>

The results of the 2002 census in Vojvodina, out of 41 available different nationalities,<sup>22</sup> list 22 nationalities (in this particular order: Serbs –

17 Petar Golubović and Suzana Marković-Krstić, “Kretanje stanovništva Vojvodine tokom XX i početkom XXI veka,” *Zbornik Matice srpske za društvene nauke* 121 (2006), pp. 39–48.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 44.

19 *Ibid.*

20 Vlada Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine.

21 Nada Raduški, “Etnička slika Srbije – popis 2002. godine,” *Migracijske i etničke teme* 19:2–3 (2003), p. 260.

22 Republički zavod za statistiku [State Bureau of Statistics], Census 2002.

65.05%, Montenegrins – 1.75%, Yugoslavs – 2.45%, Albanians – 0.08%, Bosniaks – 0.02%, Bulgarians – 0.08%, Bunjevci – 0.97%, Vlachs – 0.00%, Gorani – 0.03%, Hungarians – 14.28%, Macedonians – 0.58%, Muslims – 0.18%, Germans – 0.16%, Romani – 1.43%, Romanians – 1.50%, Russians – 0.05%, Ruthenians – 0.77%, Slovaks – 2.79%, Slovenians – 0.10%, Ukrainians – 0.23%, Croats – 2.78%, Czechs – 0.08%), as well as four additional categories, notably, 1) others (0.26%), 2) undeclared and undecided (2.71%), 3) regional allegiance (0.50%), and 4) unknown (1.17%).<sup>23</sup> Of the 22 nationalities, “the increase in the number of inhabitants happened only with Serbs and Romani.”<sup>24</sup> All other nationalities, including Yugoslavs, who, according to Raduški,<sup>25</sup> have always exhibited high percentages in Vojvodina, were on the decrease – the number of those declaring themselves as Yugoslavs being down by 70%. This is surely a reflection of the fact that the political entity, bearing the term Yugoslavia as a part of its name, notably the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, changed its name to that of Serbia and Montenegro in 2003. Since that time, therefore, the term Yugoslavia itself became a term of the past. What is even more stunning is the tenfold increase in the number of those who were undeclared and undecided.<sup>26</sup>

Unlike the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, which claims precedence over the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, and which declares Serbia to be “the state of the Serbian people and all citizens who live in it,”<sup>27</sup> the Vojvodina Statute declares Vojvodina to be

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23 All percentages are given based on Raduški, “Etnička slika Srbije,” p. 262. Clearly, the order of nationalities does not follow either the decreasing size or the alphabet. It is based on the order in the 2002 Census, in which Serbs, Montenegrins, and Yugoslavs are listed as the first three nationalities respectively; the rest of the nationalities is ordered based on the Cyrillic alphabet.

24 Golubović and Marković-Krstić, “Kretanje stanovništva,” p. 43.

25 Raduški, “Etnička slika Srbije,” p. 261.

26 Nada Raduški, “Multikulturalizam i nacionalne manjine u Vojvodini,” *Srpska politička misao* 16:26–4 (2009), p. 342.

27 Ustav Republike Srbije [Constitution of the Republic of Serbia], Web, February 12, 2011. <[http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/lat/akta/ustav/ustav\\_1.asp](http://www.parlament.gov.rs/content/lat/akta/ustav/ustav_1.asp)>, Article 1.

“an autonomous province of female and male citizens who live in it.”<sup>28</sup> Even more interesting is the fact that the Statute contains an article on national equality, Article 6., according to which “in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats, Montenegrins, Romanians, Romani, Bunjevci, Ruthenians, and Macedonians, as well as other, numerically smaller national communities that live in it, are equal in fulfilling their rights.”<sup>29</sup> It appears that the ten selected nationalities are all those with a bigger than 0.5% share in the overall population of Vojvodina based on the 2002 census, except for the Yugoslavs who, with 2.45%, rank fifth, right behind Croats, yet find no place in the Statute. According to Raduški, the “[e]thnic complexity of Vojvodina is apparent not only in a high number of different nationalities and their proportion in the population, but also in the spatial distribution of the nationalities, considering the fact that over 80% of Vojvodina’s municipalities is ethnically heterogeneous.”<sup>30</sup> Elsewhere, however, she suggests that the percentage of municipalities with an ethnically heterogeneous population is higher than 90%,<sup>31</sup> with two national minorities, Hungarians and Slovaks, exhibiting spatial polarization and ethnic domination in certain municipalities, while other national minorities are characterized by spatial dispersion and the absence of ethnic domination. Nevertheless, the national minorities of both of these, otherwise juxtaposed, patterns are characterized by a high concentration of population: about 60% of all Hungarians in Vojvodina live in eight municipalities wherein they have either an absolute (in six) or relative (in two) majority; more than one-third of all Romanians in Vojvodina live in only two municipalities; over 60% of all Ruthenians in Vojvodina live in just two municipalities; over 83% of all Bunjevci in Vojvodina live in a single city, that of Subotica.

Despite the apparent tendency of national minorities in Vojvodina to concentrate in certain counties, municipalities, or cities, it turns out that the so-called national or ethnic distances among them, as well as among them and the dominant Serbs, are not all that different. Žolt and

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28 Statut Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine, Article 1.

29 Statut Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine.

30 Raduški, “Etnička slika Srbije,” p. 264.

31 Raduški, “Multikulturalizam i nacionalne manjine,” pp. 343–344.

Koković<sup>32</sup> report that ethnic distances of the citizens of Vojvodina toward Serbs, Hungarians, Croats, Montenegrins, Slovaks, and Romani are all grouped around the numeric value of 3 on a scale from 1 to 5 (1 – no, no way; 2 – rather not; 3 – it’s all the same to me; 4 – yes, I have nothing against it; 5 – yes, very gladly), with the difference between the highest value and smallest distance (ethnic distance toward Serbs is 3.6419) and the lowest value and biggest distance (ethnic distance toward Romani is 2.7098) being less than one.<sup>33</sup> Žolt and Koković speak – indeed – of tolerance among and successful coexistence of national and ethnic groups in Vojvodina based on two general aspects of the results of their research. First, desirability levels for members of national minorities (Hungarians, Croats, Montenegrins, Slovaks, and Romani) to be neighbors or work/business partners are higher than the overall levels of ethnic distance toward the same national minorities. Second, there appears to be a “conscious critical attitude toward one’s own national/ethnic identity”<sup>34</sup>: (ethnic) distances within one nationality or ethnicity are similar to distances

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32 Lazar Žolt and Dragan Koković, “Etnička distanca u Vojvodini (rezultati istraživanja),” *Sociološki pregled* 39:3 (2005), pp. 251–264.

33 Here I present Žolt and Koković’s results most pertinent for the present paper despite several questions that could be raised regarding their report. Notably, they explain that the citizens of Vojvodina were answering questions regarding levels of (non)desirability to enter social relations and contacts (spouse, neighbor, teacher, business partner, boss, and president of the country) with “most numerous and for Vojvodina most characteristic national and ethnic groups (Serbs, Hungarians, Croats, Montenegrins, Slovaks, Romanians, Ruthenians, and Romani). Žolt and Koković, “Etnička distanca,” p. 253. Their list of national and ethnic groups, however, does not follow the results of the 2002 census that they themselves provide in a footnote (also given in the present paper above): if Ruthenians were the cutoff point, then Yugoslavs and Bunjevci are missing from the list without an explanation. Also, in addition to the eight national and ethnic groups listed, the actual questionnaire reproduced in the report contains one more entity – Jews. Finally, all the results throughout the report discuss ethnic distances toward six national and ethnic groups: Serbs, Hungarians, Croats, Montenegrins, Slovaks, and Romani; there is no explanation what the scores for Romanians, Ruthenians, and Jews, who were listed on the questionnaire as well, were.

34 Žolt and Koković, “Etnička distanca,” p. 256.

toward nationalities or ethnicities other than one's own, though – expect- edly – the former distances are smaller than the latter.

Another article of the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vo- jvodina, Article 7., speaks of multiculturalism and interculturalizm, stat- ing – in full:

Multilingualism, multiculturalism and multiconfessionalism represent general values of special interest for the AP of Vojvodina. It is a duty of all province's bodies and organizations, within their rights and duties, to support and help preservation and development of multilingualism and cultural heritage of national minorities that traditionally live in the AP of Vojvodina, as well as help mutual respect of and contact among different languages, cultures and faiths in the AP of Vojvodina.<sup>35</sup>

Tripković cautions against the exclusive use of the term multicul- turalism, which he interprets as an ideology, and consequently introduc- es two other terms, notably multiculturality and multiculturalization, the former – “a state of factual cultural plurality,” the latter – “a process based on an idea or ideal of a tolerant, equal, harmonious, all-encom- passing relationship and coexistence of different cultures and subcultures within one, be it narrower or wider, social space (local, regional, state, interstate or worldly).”<sup>36</sup> Tripković indicates that the “multicultural ca- pacities of Vojvodina are *still preserved* and that ... they could be further developed.”<sup>37</sup> One way in which they are, Raduški explains, is by the very fact that the province finds itself within Serbia, a country whose leg- islative branch “does not make a difference between minorities based on their size; the guaranteed rights are accessible to members of all national minorities.”<sup>38</sup> Those rights are, in part, reflected in Serbia's passing the Bill of the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities in 2002, joining the Framework Convention for the Protection of Nation- al Minorities in 2001, ratifying the European Charter for Regional and

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35 Statut Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine.

36 Milan Tripković, “Multikulturacija, multikulturlizam i prava manjina,” *Sociološki pregled* 39:1 (2005), p. 90.

37 Ibid., p. 93.

38 Raduški, “Multikulturalizam i nacionalne manjine,” p. 345.



Minority Languages in 2006 (sic!), and signing bilateral international agreements on reciprocity of the protection of minorities with Hungary, Romania, Macedonia, and Croatia. Raduški, however, points out that the fulfillment of the rights does not depend solely on the legislative norms, but rather on deeper social changes. She also introduces the idea of the outdated nature of the term multiculturalism, which is why the new term – interculturalism – is preferred in order to account for “the establishment of a dialogue between cultures, in which way a dynamic relationship and mutual influence of different cultures is supported.”<sup>39</sup>

Žolt and Marinković describe Vojvodina in a socio-cultural manner as “a unique model of coexistence of different peoples, cultural models, traditions, and faiths not only within the state of Serbia, but in Europe as well.”<sup>40</sup> According to their report on the preferences of the citizens of Vojvodina for narrower or wider territorial units and political communities, Vojvodina is a territorial entity with which its citizens identify mostly, followed by their own town/city, Serbia, sub-region, Europe, the country of Serbia and Montenegro,<sup>41</sup> and the Balkans. Relevant for the present paper is the fact that those who most frequently put Vojvodina in the first place were Croats and Hungarians, while Serbs did it least frequently. Similarly, Croats and Hungarians most frequently identified with their own town or city, while Montenegrins did it least frequently, in turn indicating most frequently (50%) that they are citizens of Serbia.<sup>42</sup>

#### 4. Linguistic Vojvodina

The languages of Vojvodina are put forth as one of the crucial aspects of the multiculturalism and interculturalism in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. Indeed, as Pušić points out, language, together

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39 Ibid., p. 338.

40 Lazar Žolt and Dragan Marinković, “Regionalni, lokalni i globalni identitet Vojvodana,” *Sociologija* 45:2 (2003), p. 156.

41 Both the research and report were prepared during the period of time when the present-day countries of Serbia and of Montenegro constituted a federation state, known at the time as Serbia and Montenegro.

42 Žolt and Marinković, “Regionalni,” p. 161.

with ethnicity and religion, is a part of the “‘standard’ set of features,”<sup>43</sup> used to define the notion of multiculturalism in daily political discourse. Such is the case with the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, in which the languages of the province, its undisputable multilingual nature, are but a foundation of Vojvodina’s proclaimed multiculturalism and interculturalism. It is in the Statute, together with the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, as well as three crucial bills, 1) of the protection of rights and freedoms of national minorities; 2) of the official use of languages and alphabets; and 3) of the ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, where the policies toward Vojvodina’s multilingualism are outlined. Legal recognition of multilingualism is, of course, a necessary foundation for any treatment of languages that purports to be respectful of them all; the implementation of this legal recognition is what will demonstrate whether the proclaimed respect is in fact being realized. At no time, however, should speakers’ own attitudes toward the languages of others, in their immediate and not so immediate surroundings, be neglected, for it is the speakers who use those languages whether they are legally obliged to do so or officially reported that they do.

#### ***4-1. Policies toward Languages***

Article 10. of the Constitution of Serbia addresses the issue of language and alphabet in the country. According to this article, “[i]n the Republic of Serbia, the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet are in the official use. Official use of other languages and alphabets<sup>44</sup> is regulated by law based on the Constitution.”<sup>45</sup> The Constitution, thus, recognizes only one language and only one alphabet in the official use. The Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, however, first – expectedly

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43 Ljubinko Pušić, “Jedna slika multikulturalnosti u Vojvodini: jezik kao pretpostavka za komunikciju,” *Sociologija* 50:2 (2008), p. 176.

44 The question of exactly how different alphabets, which are to be mentioned are, is beyond the scope of the present paper; rather, I accept the legalistic notion of ‘other languages and alphabets.’

45 Ustav Republike Srbije.

so – follows the Constitution, and, second – not surprisingly – in part accounts for the province’s multilingualism:<sup>46</sup>

In the bodies and organizations of the AP of Vojvodina, Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet, Hungarian, Slovak, Croatian, Romanian, and Ruthenian language and their alphabets are in the official use, in accordance with the law and a decision of the province’s parliament.

The use of the Latin alphabet of the Serbian language in the bodies and organizations of the AP of Vojvodina is regulated by a decision of the province’s parliament according to the law.

National communities, which are not mentioned in the first paragraph of this article, fulfill their right to officially use their language in accordance with the ratified international contracts, the law, and a decision of the province’s parliament.

While this article of the Statute builds upon what is declared by the Constitution and, together with Serbian, includes five more languages (as well as, apparently, alphabets), adding to the whole set yet another alphabet in which Serbian language can be written, notably Latin, the article fails to mention specifically four other nationalities (and, consequently, their languages and alphabets) of Vojvodina, otherwise overtly present in Article 6. of the Statute, given above, in which the issue of national equality is addressed: the languages and alphabets of Montenegrins, Romani, Bunjevci, and Macedonians are not contained in Article 26. If there is any pattern to be found in the order in which the languages are listed in the article, it seems that they follow the 2002 census population count results (again, with four nationalities dropped from that order).

It is important to remember here that Serbia has ratified the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, whose essence is the protection, right to use, and promotion of regional and minority languages. According to the bill that acknowledges the ratification, the Republic of Serbia accepts the Charter’s responsibilities for “Albanian, Bosnian, Bulgarian, Hungarian, Romani, Romanian, Ruthenian, Slovak, Ukrainian, and Croatian language.”<sup>47</sup> It is clear that at least the lan-

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46 Statut Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine, Article 26, Official Languages and Alphabets.

47 Zakon o ratifikaciji Evropske povelje o regionalnim ili manjinskim jezicima

guage (and alphabet) of the Romani population in Vojvodina is missing from Article 26. of the province's Statute, even though it was specifically mentioned in Serbia's Bill of Ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages.

In the Republic of Serbia and, consequently, the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, the rights of the national minorities, when it comes to the use of their mother tongue, are regulated by the Bill of Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities. According to Article 10. of the bill, "[m]embers of national minorities can use their language and alphabet freely, both privately and publicly."<sup>48</sup> In territories where national minorities traditionally live, the bill also allows that "their language and alphabet can be in the equal official use," that is, equal with the official Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet. In fact, local governments are mandated by the bill to provide for the equal official use of the language and alphabet of a national minority if the said minority's population reaches 15% in the latest census.<sup>49</sup> Still, in Vojvodina, "in local communities in which a language and alphabet of a national minority is not in the official use, it will be introduced in the official use in specific areas if the percentage of members of a national minority reaches 25% in the latest census."<sup>50</sup>

Numerous aspects of the official use of languages and alphabets are regulated by the Bill of the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets.

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[Bill of the Ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages], Web, February 15, 2011. <<http://www.ombudsman.rs/pravamanjina/attachments/Zakon%20o%20ratifikaciji%20evropske%20povelje.pdf>>, Article 3.

48 Zakon o zaštiti prava i sloboda nacionalnih manjina [Bill of the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities], Web, February 15, 2011. <<http://www.ombudsman.rs/pravamanjina/attachments/Zakon%20o%20zastiti%20sloboda%20i%20prava%20nacionalnih%20manjina.pdf>>.

49 Zakon o zaštiti prava i sloboda nacionalnih manjina, Article 11.

50 Odluka o bližem uređivanju pojedinih pitanja službene upotrebe jezika i pisama nacionalnih manjina na teritoriji Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine [Decision on the Closer Arrangement of Various Issues of the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets of National Minorities on the Territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina], Web, February 15, 2011. <[http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/odluke/Odluka\\_sluzbene\\_jezika.pdf](http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/odluke/Odluka_sluzbene_jezika.pdf)>, Article 8.

While the bill repeats what the Constitution, Statute, and Bill of the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities also state when it comes to the language and alphabet in the official use in the Republic of Serbia, it additionally lists all instances that constitute the official use of languages and alphabets, which include Serbian, written in Cyrillic, as well as languages and alphabets of national minorities. Ultimately, the bill also addresses the issue of an oversight of its own implementation by stating that various appropriate ministries are in charge of overseeing the actual implementation of individual articles of the bill.<sup>51</sup> Similarly, the Parliament of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina provided a separate document in which it requires that the Parliament be informed at least once a year “about the fulfillment of rights to official use of languages and alphabets of national minorities.”<sup>52</sup>

#### ***4-2. Implementation and Control of Policies toward Languages***

The 2009 Report on the Fulfillment of Rights to the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets of National Minorities in the AP of Vojvodina claims that, in reality, an actual overview had not been performed until 2002; “in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina overviews started in mid May of 2002. ... [Due to the fact that this was the beginning of actual overviews,] the initial ones were mainly instructional, in that they were providing explanations, directions, and reminders, rather than issuing penalty fees.”<sup>53</sup> Another report from 2009, on the Completed

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51 Zakon o službenoj upotrebi jezika i pisama [Bill of the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets], Web, February 14, 2011. <<http://www.ombudsman.rs/pravamanjina/attachments/ZAKON%20o%20sluzbenoj%20upotrebi%20jezika%20i%20pisma.pdf>>, Article 22.

52 Odluka o bližem uređivanju pojedinih pitanja službene upotrebe jezika i pisama nacionalnih manjina na teritoriji Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine, Article 10.

53 Izveštaj o ostvarivanju prava na službenu upotrebu jezika i pisama nacionalnih manjina u AP Vojvodini [Report on the Fulfillment of Rights to the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets of National Minorities in the AP of Vojvodina], Web, February 15, 2011. <[http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/inform/Inf\\_2009/Izvestaj\\_ostv\\_prava\\_nacm\\_2009.pdf](http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/inform/Inf_2009/Izvestaj_ostv_prava_nacm_2009.pdf)>, p. 26.

Inspection of the Implementation of Bills that Regulate the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, concludes that, while “a significant improvement in all aspects of the implementation of bills has been made, an imbalance between the praxis and the existing regulations is still present.” The Province’s Secretariat of Regulations, Administration and National Communities is praised for the improvement, but the Bill of the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets is criticized as being, “for the most part, imprecise and systematically outdated ... [which is why] its urgent revision is necessary, in accordance with the needs of the praxis, which asks for new and more up-to-date ways of regulating issues of the official use of languages and alphabets.”<sup>54</sup>

The Province’s Secretariat of Regulations, Administration and National Communities is a body of the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina which informs about the official use of languages and alphabets in Vojvodina. According to the latest available report from November 2010,<sup>55</sup> the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet are used in all 45 municipalities in Vojvodina, as the two are constitutionally declared to be in the official use in the Republic of Serbia, while in 22 of them the Latin alphabet is used as well. Of the languages and alphabets listed in Article 26. of the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Hungarian is used in 31 municipalities, Slovak in 13, Croatian in 10, Romanian in 6, and Ruthenian in 4. Thanks to the abovementioned provision that, in Vojvodina, the languages and alphabets of other national minorities can be introduced in the official use on the local level, the

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54 Izveštaj o izvršenom nadzoru u 2009. godini nad primenom propisa kojima se uređuje službena upotreba jezika i pisama u Autonomnoj Pokrajini Vojvodini [Report on the Completed Inspection of the Implementation of Bills that Regulate the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina], Web, February 15, 2011. <[http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/inform/Inf\\_2009/Izvestaj\\_2009\\_upravni\\_nadzor.pdf](http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/inform/Inf_2009/Izvestaj_2009_upravni_nadzor.pdf)>, p. 15.

55 Jezici i pisma u službenoj upotrebi u statutima gradova i opština na teritoriji Autonomne Pokrajine Vojvodine [Languages and Alphabets in the Official Use in the Statutes of Cities and Municipalities of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina], Web, February 15, 2011. <<http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/mapa.php>>.

Czech language and alphabet are used in one municipality, Macedonian in two local communities of two different municipalities, and Bulgarian in one local community only. Vojvodina's multilingualism is even more striking when one realizes that in 39 of the province's 45 municipalities (86.67%), one or more languages and alphabets of national minorities can be found in the official use, with an overall total of eight languages and alphabets of national minorities in the official use in the whole province.

It is important to mention here that a similar report about the official use of language and alphabet in Vojvodina from May 2009<sup>56</sup> differed from the one from November 2010 in two respects. First, in 2009, the Latin alphabet of the Serbian language was used in 23 municipalities, as opposed to 22 in 2010. Second, in 2009, the Macedonian language and alphabet were used in just one local community.

At least some insight into exactly how all these languages and alphabets in the official use operate in everyday life is provided by the 2009 Report on the Fulfillment of Rights to the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets of National Minorities in the AP of Vojvodina. The report analyzes various aspects of what is referred to as the official use by the Bill of the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets. Three of its conclusions are extremely relevant for the present paper.

First, of all 45 municipalities in Vojvodina, the website of only one of them was created according to the prescribed provisions, notably in all the languages and alphabets in the official use in that municipality. Second, the report found unsatisfactory the way in which languages and alphabets in the official use were utilized for writing names of streets and squares in the province. Third, differences in the way national minorities themselves used their own language and alphabet were particularly striking. The Province's Secretariat of Regulations, Administration and National Communities is – logically – the secretariat with which members of national minorities in Vojvodina communicate the most. Even though the right to communicate in one's own language and alphabet

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56 Službena upotreba jezika i pisma na teritoriji AP Vojvodine [Official Use of Language and Alphabet on the Territory of the AP of Vojvodina], Web, February 15, 2011. <<http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/ostalo/sljezik.pdf>>.

is guaranteed, it appears that members of the Hungarian and Croatian national minorities utilize that right much more than members of the Slovak, Romanian, and Ruthenian national minorities. The 2009 Report on the Fulfillment of Rights to the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets of National Minorities in the AP of Vojvodina cites that, in six different instances (two in 2008 and four in 2009), members of the Hungarian national minority wrote to the Secretariat in Hungarian language and alphabet in 75%–100% of instances, the rest – 25%–0% – being in Serbian. The report claims, without giving specific numbers, that a similar trend was recorded with members of the Croatian national minority. At the same time, members of the Slovak, Romanian, and Ruthenian national minorities used their languages and alphabets in barely 40% of instances.<sup>57</sup>

In February 2009 the Secretariat issued a document entitled Analysis of the Fulfillment of Rights to Official Use of Languages and Alphabets, Particularly Serbian Language and Cyrillic Alphabet, in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The analysis was a result of an investigation initiated by the Association for the Protection of the Serbian Language Cyrillic Alphabet, *Ćirilica*. The investigation concluded that the provision about “the official use of the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet in state, province’s, cities’, and municipalities’ bodies, as well as in institutions, companies, and other public organizations”<sup>58</sup> has been fully implemented. The analysis also noted two cases from 2006 in which two different business owners were charged, and consequently fined, for not providing labels and signs in the Serbian language and Cyrillic alphabet, but rather in the Serbian language and Latin alphabet.<sup>59</sup>

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57 Izveštaj o ostvarivanju prava na službenu upotrebu jezika i pisama nacionalnih manjina u AP Vojvodini [Report on the Fulfillment of Rights to the Official Use of Languages and Alphabets of National Minorities in the AP of Vojvodina], p. 13.

58 Analiza ostvarivanja prava na službenu upotrebu jezika i pisama, posebno srpskog jezika i ćirilčkog pisma, u Autonomnoj Pokrajini Vojvodini [Analysis of the Fulfillment of Rights to Official Use of Languages and Alphabets, Particularly Serbian Language and Cyrillic Alphabet, in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina], Web, February 15, 2011. <[http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/inform/Inf\\_2008/Analiza\\_upotreba\\_jezika.pdf](http://www.puma.vojvodina.gov.rs/dokumenti/inform/Inf_2008/Analiza_upotreba_jezika.pdf)>, p. 12.

59 Ibid., p. 11.



### 4-3. *Attitudes toward Languages*

Pušić presents results of research on multicultural communication in Vojvodina, in particular with respect to the issue of multilingualism and speakers' attitudes toward it.<sup>60</sup> The research was conducted in 2003 on a multistratified sample of 1204 subjects from different socio-ecological areas, which included Serbs (69,4%), Montenegrins (2,6%), Croats (4,6%), Hungarians (9,8%), Slovaks (1%), Romanians (0,8%), Ruthenians (0,2%), Romani (0,5%), Albanians (0,1%), Yugoslavs (7,1%), Bunjevci (1%), and other nationalities (3%).

When asked whether they speak a language of a national minority, which is not their mother tongue, the subjects answered affirmatively in 14.8% of instances on average; the percentage of those who answered negatively ranged from between 57.3% to more than 70%, with the lower values found in population age 46 and older (and among those age 51 and older every fifth subject spoke a language of a national minority which was not their own mother tongue), and the highest values found among those age 45 and younger. Further confirmation of the finding that the younger the population, the lower the interest in knowing languages of national minorities was found in the percentage of elementary, high school, and college students who do not speak a language of a national minority which is not their own mother tongue – 73.4%. Of all the nationalities polled, Slovaks (38.5%), Hungarians (37.7%), Croats (29.5%), and Yugoslavs (31%) answered the polling question affirmatively in percentages often more than double the average of 14.8%. Members of one other national minority, the Montenegrins, however, answered the polling question negatively in 71.9% of instances. They were followed by the major nationality in Vojvodina, Serbs, who answered the polling question negatively in 67.5% of instances. Still, Pušić concludes that “with all subjects, the most overt need is the need to communicate in own mother tongue. This certainly changes the stereotypical sense of Vojvodina where the aboriginal population knew the language ‘of those other ones’ ‘at least a little’.”<sup>61</sup>

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60 Pušić, “Jedna slika multikulturalnosti.”

61 Ibid., p. 184.

Another polling question asked of the subjects to express their attitude about members of the majority population in a certain region learning a language of a national minority. Of all the respondents 26.8% answered in the affirmative; 51.8% in the negative; 21.4% of the subjects indicated that they had no opinion on the issue. Again, the younger subjects were less inclined to answer the polling question affirmatively (15.9% of those age 25 and younger) and constituted the biggest group of those who said they did not have an opinion on the issue (27.7%). And yet again, Hungarians (59.8%), Slovaks (46.2%), Croats and Yugoslavs (38.6% each) expressed the opinion that it is necessary to learn a language of a national minority in percentages higher than the average percentage (in the case of Hungarians more than twice as high). Serbs, the majority nationality in Vojvodina, however, in 60.6% of instances expressed a negative opinion on the issue, closely followed by Montenegrins. Pušić suggests that the ethnic makeup of Vojvodina is a very complex one, “and naturally so, it displays cultural and spatial nuances. In this traditionally immigrant region certain ethnic groups have ‘positioned’ themselves spatially over time both in cities and in towns.”<sup>62</sup>

## 5. Embordered Frontiers

The area of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina is about one-fifth of one percent of the overall area of Europe, yet Vojvodina, with its multilingualism, contributes to the continent’s diversity as much as any other of its larger, or even smaller, regions, thus shaping an image of Europe as “a set of borders,” as Leersseen interprets it:

[t]he European landscape features a great many discontinuities, places of transition – frontiers, [of which] cultural frontiers (such as religious or linguistic ones) meander across the map with far less precision or neatness (than the states’ borders, B. B.). They are hardly ‘borders’ at all but rather transitional zones, with mixtures and minorities. ... [T]hey do not surround or enclose anything; they form a crisscross of individual lines rather than a well-meshed net.<sup>63</sup>

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62 Ibid., p. 180.

63 Leerssen, “Europe as a Set of Borders,” p. 14.

Indeed, what Vojvodina's multilingualism exhibits are frontiers (not borders) in Stoddard's sense of the term *frontier*, which "could mean a cultural setting, a normative perspective toward others in time and place."<sup>64</sup> Stoddard's account of the concept known as *frontier* is an attempt at unifying what he refers to as "many different meanings including: an areal expanse, a temporal period, a process of dynamic change, a cultural context associated with 'rugged individualism', a line of cultural interface or a demeaning term labeling a community or its people as 'out of step with modern society'."<sup>65</sup> Stoddard explains that the best way to understand the concept *frontier* may be "by examining its application in the description of indigenous peoples" in that they were "identified according to how they used their environment," which suggests that "[f]rontier lines were then drawn around these 'culture areas' designating usage, not ownership."<sup>66</sup> A very important feature of frontiers, according to Stoddard, is their persistence, the fact that "the frontier patterns from earlier times persist," and, as such, "are strong."<sup>67</sup>

Vojvodina's linguistic frontiers are based exactly on usage and not ownership within all of the province's culture areas. They are strong and persistent despite the almost constantly changing nature of the province's population and the conditions under which the population of the province lives. According to the evidence laid out in the present paper, there are at least three different ways in which these frontiers are formed.

First, the very fact that the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina contains an article that specifically lists 10 of all of Vojvodina's nationalities, notably Serbs, Hungarians, Slovaks, Croats, Montenegrins, Romanians, Romani, Bunjevci, Ruthenians, and Macedonians, is a form of legal acknowledgment of frontiers within the province's borders. Whatever the intent of this article might have originally been, the actual list of nationalities in it singles out those listed from the rest of Vojvodina's nationalities, together with their overall cultural settings. This may

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64 Ellwyn R. Stoddard, "Frontiers, Borders and Border Segmentation: Toward a Conceptual Clarification," *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 6:1 (1991), p. 2.

65 Ibid.

66 Ibid.

67 Ibid., p. 3.

be viewed as a process of *frontier confirming*, much like the process of *border confirming* as Dimitrovova describes it.<sup>68</sup> She develops the concept of *border confirming*, juxtaposing it with the concept of *border transcending*, when examining the European Neighborhood Policy (ENP).<sup>69</sup> According to Dimitrovova, the bordering process of *border confirming* “is about confirming border areas of demarcation and division in which borders are conceived as boundary lines, frontier zones, or barriers.”<sup>70</sup> Unlike Dimitrovova, who chooses to define borders in part by using the term frontier or, specifically, frontier zones, I prefer to keep them apart. I do, however, adopt the term *border confirming* and apply this concept to Vojvodina’s linguistic frontiers, consequently establishing the concept of *frontier confirming*. Dimitrovova views *border confirming*, with respect to the ENP, as “the continued relevance of the state-centric approach in which borders circumscribe territory and shape the identity of the political community within the border-confirming framework.”<sup>71</sup> In Vojvodina’s case, it is province’s national communities, rather than political communities, with their cultural settings that are territorially circumscribed by frontiers. The national communities are allowed to shape their identities within those frontiers, as indicated by the article of the Statute of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The unavoidable vagueness of the language in the article, in that it does not specify anything but the names of nationalities, is yet another indication of how extremely elusive frontiers are.

Second, the apparent ethnic heterogeneity of Vojvodina, the presence of 22 different nationalities in it, based on the 2002 census, is ap-

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68 Bohdana Dimitrovova, “Re-Making of Europe’s Borders through the European Neighbourhood Policy,” *Journal of Borderlands Studies* 23:1 (2008), pp. 53–68.

69 “The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) seeks to establish special relations with the neighbouring countries in Eastern Europe, the Southern Mediterranean and the Southern Caucasus for which accession is not in prospect. It was instituted as early as 2003 to share the benefits of enlargement with the neighbouring countries and avoid the emergence of new divisions, and forms part of the European security strategy (EU, Glossary).”

70 Dimitrovova, “Re-Making,” p. 53.

71 *Ibid.*, p. 65.

parently coupled with what is referred to as a high concentration of the population. Specifically, all national minorities in Vojvodina, no matter whether they are otherwise spatially polarized and ethnically dominant, or spatially dispersed and ethnically not dominant, are said to be highly concentrated in particular counties, municipalities, or cities in the province. Furthermore, members of at least two national minorities, Croatian and Hungarian, most often identify with Vojvodina, as well as their own town or city, when given a choice of Vojvodina, one's own town/city, Serbia, sub-region, Europe, the country of Serbia and Montenegro, and the Balkans. A combination of the two parameters, high concentration of population and regional identity, adds to the idea of existing frontiers, albeit "grey areas rather than black lines."<sup>72</sup>

Third, members of at least four different national minorities – Hungarian, Slovak, Croatian, and Yugoslav – in opposition to the majority nationality, the Serbs, think that learning a language of a national minority other than their own is necessary. Similarly, members of the same four national minorities side together, saying that they – indeed – speak a language of a national minority other than their own. In addition, members of the Hungarian and Croatian national minorities are most frequently found to communicate with the Province's bodies in their respective mother tongues. Linguistic frontiers in Vojvodina have thus been confirmed, and fairly clearly so, against the dominant – and declared to be in the official use – Serbian language. These grey-lined frontiers may be darkening, however. The youngest members of Vojvodina's population, those age 25 or younger, express the least interest in knowing languages of national minorities and think that learning a language of a national minority in the immediate surrounding is unnecessary. Not only are Vojvodina's linguistic frontiers gaining prominence within the borders of the province, in that the youngest population is displaying sometimes sharply differing linguistic attitudes from those of the oldest population, they are also exemplifying kernels of a phenomenon that could be referred to as *frontier segmentation*, much like *border segmentation*, as Stoddard describes it.<sup>73</sup> Starting from two extreme views of border(land)

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72 Leerssen, "Europe as a Set of Borders," p. 14.

73 Stoddard, "Frontiers."

s, one emphasizing their uniqueness, the other – their sameness, Stoddard suggests that “both perspectives have their function; both are very much needed.”<sup>74</sup> As a word of caution to those who insist on the borders’ sameness, their homogeneity, Stoddard cites several examples of borders whose spatial dimension displays “various border segments [which] have developed as a result of their varied natural resources” or else due to “the pockets of population concentration with the sparsely populated areas along a given borderline”<sup>75</sup>; this accounts for spatial *border segmentation*. There is, on the other hand, temporal *border segmentation* thanks to the fact that “with the passage of time, some initial conditions, political liaisons and border functions ascribed to it may change.”<sup>76</sup>

The idea of segmentation of borders, developed by Stoddard, can easily be applied to Vojvodina’s linguistic frontiers, thus establishing the idea of segmentation of frontiers. In Vojvodina’s case, *frontier segmentation* happens over time, and it is clearly demonstrated in the change recorded in two different reports on languages and alphabets in the official use in the province: according to the report from November 2010, compared with the report from May 2009, one local community introduced a minority language in the official use and one municipality dropped an alphabet from the official use. Adding to that is the fact that the generations of the population, who express little or no interest in learning a language of a national minority, will slowly be overtaking the generations of the population whose attitude toward languages of national minorities, at least at the moment, differs.

## 6. Conclusion

The border of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina appears to be precisely defined, its 21,506 square kilometers in part clearly demarcated from the surrounding areas by the language in the official use in the province. The Serbian language of Vojvodina borders Croatian of Croatia in the west, Hungarian of Hungary in the north, and Romanian of Romania in the east. Vojvodina’s southern border is linguistically differ-

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74 Ibid., p. 9.

75 Ibid., pp. 10–11.

76 Ibid., p. 14.

ent from its western, northern, and eastern borders, in that to the south of it Serbian is the language in the official use as well. Within Vojvodina's border linguistic frontiers form what is often referred to as the province's multicultural or multilingual nature.

I have demonstrated how the linguistic frontiers of Vojvodina are clearly shaped, in as much as frontiers – indeed – can be shaped clearly. Embordered in part by the official use of Serbian language and alphabet are eight different languages and alphabets of Vojvodina's national minorities also in the official use. Moreover, both the languages and alphabets of the national minorities that are in the official use, and those that are not, are encouraged to continue to thrive within Vojvodina's border: the linguistic frontiers will persist, albeit embordered, as they naturally do.