A handy litmus test of the presence of ethnolinguistic nationalism as the leading ideology of statehood legitimation and maintenance in a given polity is the medium of education at the university level. In line with its paramount principle of the normative isomorphism of language, nation, and state, ethnolinguistic nationalism entails the enforcement of exclusive monolingualism in the national language for all the nation-state’s institutions at each level of administration, including the educational system. In this configuration, the national language doubles as the polity’s official (state) language, and ideally should be unique and not shared with any other nation-state or nation.

The role of the university in an ethnolinguistic nation-state is of much more political and ideological importance than in politics of another character. When the first ethnolinguistic national movements appeared in Central Europe during the nineteenth century, one of their initial goals was to establish a national university with the national language in the role of the exclusive medium of education. For example, in Austria-Hungary’s crownland of Bohemia (or the western half of today’s Czech Republic), Czech became the region’s co-official language, alongside German, in 1881. But that was insufficient from the Czech national perspective, because the University of Prague (founded in 1348) remained monolingual in German after the 1784 switch from Latin to this language as the medium of instruction. Any plans of overhauling this university into a bilingual institution with Czech and German as its equal languages of education did not work either, because this solution was an abhorrence both to Czech and German ethnolinguistic nationalists, who by definition, aspired for nationally-defined monolingualism as the basis of politics and nation-building. As a result, in 1882, the university was split into a Czech-medium University and a German-medium University, both sharing the same name of Charles-Ferdinand University, but spelled differently in Czech (Česká univerzita Karlo-Ferdinandova) and in German (Deutsche Karl-Ferdinands-Universität). Following the breakup of Austria-Hungary and the establishment of the nation-state of Czechoslovakia with its capital at Prague, the university’s shared name was also split. The latter institution became Deutsche Karls-Universität, while the former, Univerzita Karlova. The Czech-language Charles University survives to this day, but its German-language counterpart was dissolved in 1945 in the wake of World War Two and its assets transferred to Charles University.

Due to so much ideological and political capital staked on the medium of instruction, changing it or closing a university altogether was a useful weapon for suppressing a (proto-) national movement. For instance, following the failed 1830–1831 uprising of the Polish-Lithuanian nobles against the Russian Tsar, in the following year, 1832, the tsar ordered the dissolution of the Polish-language Imperial University of Wilno (Vilnius), the Russian Empire’s largest university at the time. Its assets were transferred to Kiev (Kyiv) and used to found Saint Vladimir Imperial University in 1833, obviously with Russian as the language of instruction. Following the Bolshevik Revolution and the establishment of a Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic within the Soviet Union in 1934, this institution was reactivated as the second Ukrainian-medium university after the University of Kharkiv that had been re-established two years earlier, in 1932. A Polish-language University in Wilno was renewed in interwar Poland, but in 1939 the Soviet Union, after partitioning Poland in alliance with Germany, passed the city to Lithuania. Polish Wilno became Lithuania’s capital of Vilnius, and the university the country’s leading institution of tertiary learning. However, the first-ever Lithuanian-medium university was founded earlier, in 1922, in interwar Lithuania’s capital of Kaunas. In today’s Polish capital of Warsaw, a Polish-medium university was founded by the Russian Tsar in 1816. It closed down after the aforementioned uprising of 1830–1831 but was renewed in 1862. In the wake of another failed uprising by the Polish-Lithuanian nobility in 1865–1864, the use of Polish as a medium of instruction was gradually limited at this university in favor of Russian. As a result, in 1870 the institution was re-founded as a Russian-language Imperial University of Warsaw. The loss of the Russian Empire’s western borderlands to the Central Powers in 1915 allowed for the re-establishment of a Polish-medium university in Warsaw under German occupation. The Russian-language staff were evacuated to Rostov-on-Don, where the Russian-medium University of Warsaw continued until 1917. Afterward it became a basis for the founding of a Medical Institute in 1930, finally yielding Rostov State Medical University in 1994. The University of Warsaw remains Poland’s premiere university to this day, alongside the Jagiellonian University (founded in 1364) in Cracow. Actually, the latter institution is the university with the longest tradition of the continuous use of Polish as its medium of instruction, namely since 1869 when Polish became the official language of Austria-Hungary’s crownland of Galicia.
Unsurprisingly, the founding of numerous ethnolinguistic nation-states across Central Europe in the immediate aftermath of the Great War also entailed the founding of the first-ever universities with the polities’ national languages as media of instruction. The first Latvian-medium University of Riga was founded in 1919. In the same year, the Russian-medium University of Iuriev was transformed into the first-ever Estonian-language University of Tartu. Similarly, also in 1919, the first-ever Slovak-language university was founded at Bratislava in Czechoslovakia, and the first-ever Slovenian-medium University of Ljubljana in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (Yugoslavia). In 1921 the first Belarusian University was established at Minsk in Bolshevik Russia (Soviet Union), and following the founding of a Belarusian Soviet Socialist Republic three years later (1924), Belarusian became the main medium of instruction at this Belarusian State University, alongside, for a time, sidelined Russian, Yiddish, and Polish. However, since the late 1930s Russian has been the leading or sole medium of education at all of Belarus’s universities. No typical monolingual Belarusian-medium university was ever established until 2018, when the Ніжній Ніжинський Национальний Університет (Nil Hilević University) was tentatively founded in Minsk. It is a private initiative, which has not been launched properly yet. Only the future will tell whether it is going to be successful.

Because Central Europe’s earliest nation-states were established in the Balkans, not surprisingly, universities with the national language as the medium of education were founded there already in the nineteenth century. However, the process was not straightforward given that most of these national polities first were steeped in ethnoreligious nationalism strongly connected to the respective “holy tongues” of this or that religion or Church. As a result, the switch from such a vernacularized holy tongue to the standard national language was gradual and often quite prolonged. Serbia’s University of Belgrade began its history as Higher School (Велика школа) in 1808 and was officially made into a university in 1905. Until 1869 Church Slavonic and Slaveno-Serbian were the languages of instruction, while the switch to standard Serbian was gradual and was not completed before the turn of the twentieth century. In Greece the University of Athens was founded in 1837 with Katharevousa (or vernacularized New Testament Greek) as the language of instruction, which was superseded by Demotic (vernacular Greek) only in 1976. Such linguistic complications were less pronounced in the cases of Romania’s University of Bucharest (founded in 1864) and Bulgaria’s University of Sofia (established in 1904) with Romanian and Bulgarian as their respective media of education. Albania was the Balkans’ first-ever clearly ethnolinguistic nation-state since the moment of its inception in 1912. The country’s first University of Tirana opened for business in 1957, but the quarrel between proponents of the prewar “capitalist,” postwar “socialist,” and Yugoslavia’s Kosovan standards of the Albanian language was not settled until 1972. The case of Macedonia’s first university is also telling. During the war, in 1941–1944 Bulgaria annexed this southern section of interwar Yugoslavia. In 1943 a Bulgarian-language university was founded at Skopje. At the end of World War Two, in order to cancel out the Bulgarian influence, the communist Yugoslav authorities recognized Macedonian as a language in 1944. During the latter half of the 1940s this institution was gradually revived, and finally, in 1949, officially made into the first-ever Macedonian-medium university.

In many ways, language policies pursued at universities in the Apennine Peninsula served as an example to be emulated in the western Balkans. The switch to Italian as the language of education at universities commenced in the mid-eighteenth century. For instance, in 1754, the first-ever course in Italian was offered at the University of Naples (founded in 1224), nevertheless Latin continued to dominate in this function. The University of Padua (founded in 1222) was the most important institution of tertiary education in the merchant Republic of Venice. The switch from Latin to (Venetianized) Italian (Tuscan) as the language of instruction was gradual and lasted from the 1760s through the 1780s. The process was streamlined after 1797 when this republic was incorporated (and then reincorporated in 1815) into the Habsburg lands, where already in 1784 vernacular German had replaced Latin as the language of education and administration. Meanwhile, at the turn of the nineteenth century, parts of the Apennine Peninsula were directly incorporated into France, while others made into French client states. Across the entire area schools and universities were secularized, a unified educational system introduced, and the balance decisively tipped from Latin to Italian (and, at times, French) as the medium of education. The French administration also introduced the potent revolutionary idea that all the state administration, legal system, and education should be conducted in a single standard vernacular-based language across a polity’s territory. This novel concept dated back to the 1793 decision which, four years into the revolution, had banned languages other than French from public use across France. In the Papal States, the University of Bologna (established in 1088) and the University of Rome (founded in 1303) continued with Latin as the main medium of education until the death of Pope Leo XII in 1829. In the wake of the Congress of Vienna he had reaffirmed the position of Latin. At the University of Sassari (established in 1617) and the University of Cagliari (founded in 1624), located in the island of Sardinia in the Kingdom of Sardinia, Latin remained the language of instruction until 1852.

In Scandinavia, Russia, the German-speaking regions of Central Europe, the Habsburg lands, and in Turkey the rise of universities with national languages in the role of media of instruction is connected to the earlier, typically imperial tradition, as in the case of the earliest Polish-language universities, as discussed above. The University of Vienna in the capital of the Habsburg hereditary lands was founded in 1365. In 1784 its language of instruction was switched from Latin to German. In the same year the University of Pest (Budapest) was established for the Habsburg’s Hungarian lands where Latin was retained as the official language until 1844. In the northern (Protestant) half of the Holy Roman Empire, the University of Marburg (established in 1527) was at the forefront of the gradual introduction of German as a medium of instruction in the
first half of the eighteenth century. The Russian autodidact and polymath, Mikhail Lomonosov, studied there in the latter half of the 1730s. This experience convinced him to introduce Russian as the medium of education at the University of Moscow, the establishment of which he was tasked in 1755. But Russian was not fully standardized until the 1820s, meaning that the actual language of instruction was Slavono-Russian (that is, vernacularized Church Slavonic written and printed in Grazhdanka, or Petrine Cyrillic).

The hold of prestigious Latin as the preferred medium of university education lasted longer in Scandinavia’s Protestant kingdoms of Scandinavia and in Prussia. At Prussia’s premiere University of Königsberg (nowadays, Kaliningrad in Russia), founded in 1444, German replaced Latin only in the course of reforms during the early nineteenth century, introduced for shoring up the kingdom after it had been resoundingly defeated by the Napoleonic armies in 1807. At Denmark’s oldest University of Copenhagen (founded in 1479) Danish replaced Latin as the language of instruction in 1830. The process was even more prolonged at Sweden’s oldest institution of tertiary learning, Uppsala University (established in 1477), where a similar switch from Latin to Swedish lasted for a century, from 1852 to 1953. No such complications were observed in Russia’s Grand Duchy of Finland where an Imperial University of Helsingfors (Helsinki) was founded in 1828 with Swedish as its medium of education. The rise of Finnish ethnolinguistic nationalism resulted in the proclamation of the independence of Finland in 1917. After the subsequent civil war, it was decided—quite atypically for modern Central Europe—that the new nation-state should have two official languages of equal importance, Finnish and Swedish. Beginning in 1919, the University of Helsinki became a bilingual institution.

Modernization and ethnolinguistic national movements were the greatest challenge to Central Europe’s multiethnic empires. After the Hungarian-medium university in Budapest (1844) and the Polish-language one in Cracow (1869), the Habsburgs coaxed the Hungarian nobility to agree to the founding of a Croatian-medium University of Zagreb in 1874. In turn, the Czechs had to wait for a university in their national language until 1882 when one was established in Prague. Meanwhile, the Polish-Lithuanian nobility in Galicia was at times successfully pressed to allow for opening (Little) Ruthenian (Ukrainian)-medium departments at the Jagiellonian University, and especially at the University of Lwów (Lviv, founded in 1784).

Similar challenges constituted even a higher hurdle in the Ottoman Empire where there was no tradition of secular education. The empire’s oldest university-style institution, Al-Azhar, founded in 970, was located in Cairo, taught in Arabic, and to Westerners appeared to be just a department of Islamic theology writ large. Nowadays, Al-Azhar is Egypt’s oldest and largest university. The main Medrese of Konstantiniyye (Istanbul) was founded in 1453, immediately after the fall of Constantinople. In 1846 it was made into a university, dubbed as the Darülfünûn (House of Multiple Sciences). Initially, it was a cross between a traditional medrese and a Western-style university with Arabic as its leading medium of education, and the growing use of Osmanlica. However, the wholesale adoption of Western-style modernization required some courses to be taught in French beginning in 1874. The institution’s name was usually translated into Western languages as “Imperial University.” Both traditionalists and Westernizers, for different reasons, had this university in their sights, which led to its repeated dissolution, so that it had to be re-founded in 1865, 1874, and 1900, increasingly as a Western-like university. In the process Arabic was replaced with Osmanlica (Ottoman Turkish written in Arabic letters) as this institution’s medium of education. After the founding of the Turkish nation-state in 1923, the university’s status was reconfirmed a year later, in 1924. Subsequently, in the wake of the 1928 official switch from Arabic to Latin letters for writing and publishing in Turkish, in 1933 this institution was formally renamed as Istanbul Üniversitesi (Istanbul University). However, Mustafa Kemal (since 1934 Atatürk) disliked the traditionalist and pro-Ottoman Istanbul, so he ordered the creation of a “proper” Turkish-medium national university at the republic’s capital in Ankara. It was a prolonged process that lasted between 1925 and 1946, when the University of Ankara was formally founded. The academic staff grouped in the Faculty of Language, History and Geography (founded in 1935) had underpinned with their expertise and research numerous Kemalist reforms, including the creation and standardization of the vernacular-based Turkish language purged of Arabisms and Persianisms, which replaced Osmanlica.

Perhaps, the University of Chernivtsi, Ukraine is one of the best examples of how ethnolinguistic-style nation-state building impacted universities in Central Europe and their media of education. In 1875 it was founded in Austria-Hungary’s crownland of Bukovina, named as Franz-Josephs-Universität Czernowitz (Francis Joseph University of Czernowitz). German was the institution’s medium of education. At that time, Bukovina was located at the Dual Empire’s frontier with Russia and Romania. Following the breakup of Austria-Hungary, Bukovina was incorporated into Romania, entailing the renaming of the university to that of Universitatea Regelui Carol I din Cernăuți (King Carol I University in Cernăuți). In 1919, Romanian was introduced as another language of instruction, alongside German, but by the mid-1920s German had been fully replaced with Romanian in this function. Following the 1940 Soviet takeover of northern Bukovina, this region was incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic. The university was yet again renamed, this time, as the Чорнівецький державний університет Chernivets’kyi derzhavnyi universytet (Chernivtsi State University). Ukrainian superseded Romanian as the language of instruction. After the war, this university became better known under its Russian-language parallel name, that is, the Чернівецький державний університет Chernivskii gosudarstvennyi universitet, because in the postwar period Russian became the leading medium of education at this institution, as elsewhere across the Soviet Union. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union (1991), in independent Ukraine, in 2000 the university was yet again renamed as the Чернівецький національний університет імені Юрія Федьковича Chernivets’kyi natsional’nyi universytet imeni
Iurii Fed’kovycha (Iurii Fedkovich Chernivtsi National University). In the wake of the 2014 Ukrainian Revolution of Dignity, Ukrainian became the university’s sole language of instruction.

In the framework of ethnolinguistic nationalism, the role of the national university’s medium of instruction is of utmost importance. The Western model of creating an Einzelsprache assumes that, first, a national academy (of sciences) is founded with the primary initial task of producing an authoritative monolingual dictionary of the target national language, alongside a similarly authoritative grammar. In line with the logic of national monolingualism, both publications should be fully executed in the national language that they aspire to standardize. Typically, such a national academy is closely related to the national university where the national language is introduced as the sole (or at least, leading) medium of education. Standardizers (overwhelmingly men) of the national language tend to double as members of the academy and the university’s high-flying professors with close links to a given national movement’s leadership (or an independent nation-state’s government). The academicians-cum-professors make sure that the standard of the national language, which they produced (often with the nation-state’s approval and financial support) is actually employed for university education, and they enforce its consistent employment via the gateway of examinations. Only these students who have a “full and correct command” of “their” national language are allowed to graduate. In turn, graduates become the elite (or more broadly, intelligentsia) of “their” national language.

Ethnolinguistic nationalism’s guiding principle of the normative isomorphism of language, nation, and state was reinforced time and again with the vast acts of ethnic cleansing and genocide during and in the wake of the Balkan Wars and both world wars (see Maps 11, 26–30). In addition, during the interwar period and in the postwar Soviet bloc (as informed by national communism since 1956), monolingualism in the national language was enforced across most of Central Europe. The existence of the non-national communist multiethnic federations of Czechoslovakia, the Soviet Union, and Yugoslavia reinforced a similar kind of national monolingualism at the level of the union republics. Hence, the breakups of all three non-national federal polities yielded a plethora of ethnolinguistic nation-states. In the Czech Republic, Czech is employed as the sole medium of education; in Slovakia, Slovak; in post-Yugoslav Croatia, Croatian; in Macedonia, Macedonian; in Montenegro, Montenegrin; in Serbia, Serbian; in post-Soviet Estonia, Estonian; in Latvia, Latvian; in Lithuania, Lithuanian; and in Ukraine, Ukrainian (especially after 2014). There are, however, exceptions to this pattern. After 1995, the adoption of Russian as a co-official language led to the rapid marginalization of the national and state language of Belarusian, meaning that Russian is the sole or leading medium of instruction at the universities in Belarus, and in the country’s entire educational system. In officially trilingual Bosnia, Bosnian is employed at Bosnian universities (for instance, the University of Sarajevo) and schools, Croatian at Croatian universities (for example, the University of Mostar) and schools, while Serbian at Serbian universities (for instance, the University of Banja Luka) and schools. Likewise, in officially bilingual Kosovo, Albanian is the language of instruction at the University of Prishtina, while Serbian at the Serbian University of Pristina, which is actually employed for its seat in Kosovska Mitrovica (that is, the northern part of the Mitrovicë/Mitrovica). In addition, in Moldova’s Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia, the bilingual, Gagauz and Russian, Komrat/Comrat University has been active since 1991.

Map 39 illustrates the current (2009) shape of the observance of normative monolingualism, which obtains across entire Central Europe with some rare exceptions. At the turn of the twenty-first century, at the level of university education, this drive to deepen and maintain monolingualism in education has been reinforced by the requirements of the supranational processes of European integration and globalization. At that time, around forty universities were founded with English as their medium of education, in some cases with the parallel employment of a local national language or French. However, most of these English-language universities are located in Southeastern Europe (the Balkans), where the tradition of education in Western Europe’s (post-imperial) languages has survived to this day, especially in Turkey and the divided Cyprus. In the wake of the wars of Yugoslav succession, the prolonged presence of international stabilizing forces in Bosnia and Kosovska Mitrovica, the bilingual, Gagauz and Russian, Komrat/Comrat University has been active since 1991.

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Aljaksandr Łukašenka’s increasingly authoritarian regime, which introduced the de facto Russification of the country’s educational system, administration, and public after 1995. As a result, in 2004 this university had to move its seat to Vilnius. In the Lithuanian capital, a Polish-language university was founded in 1998 for the country’s Polish minority. In light of the fact that Poland did not reciprocate with a similar Lithuanian-language university for the country’s Lithuanian minority indicates that this Polish-language university is perhaps a form of Poland’s geopolitical pressure on Lithuania, similar to that of Bulgaria’s on Moldova. Due to the fact that Transylvania changed hands between Hungary and Romania in 1918, 1940, and 1945, following the Second World War, in the region’s capital city of Cluj (Kolozsvár) two universities were located, one teaching in Romanian and the other in Hungarian. In 1959 both universities were united into a single institution, with two languages of instruction. A unique development for a Soviet bloc nation-state. With time, Romanian began to dominate, but after the end of communism, almost an equal number of degree programs are offered in Romanian and Hungarian. Last but not least, and for that matter uniquely on the scale of the entire globe, in 1985, an Esperanto-language International Academy of Sciences was founded in San Marino. Although not a university in name, it is a cross between an academy and research university. In Central Europe, after the disappearance of Latin as a medium of education, this academy is the region’s sole university-style institution to employ an Einzelsprache that does not serve as an official language in any of the world’s extant states (see Map 17).

Hungary offers an interesting example of how different the fates may be of universities not teaching in the national language. In 1991 the English-medium Central European University was founded with its two main campuses in Prague and Budapest. After the mid-1990s wave of populism under the watch of the Czech Prime Minister, Václav Klaus, the Prague campus was shut down and merged with its Hungarian counterpart. Beginning in the mid-2010s another wave of populism (with anti-Semitic undertones) swept across Central Europe, in many ways led by the Hungarian Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán. After two years of administrative harassment, the university had no choice, and in 2018 moved its seat to Vienna. No restrictions of this kind were levelled against Andrássy Gyula Deutschsprachige Universität (known as Andrásy University Budapest in English) founded in 2001. After 1945 it is the first (and thus far, the only) German-medium university located outside of a German-speaking country.

A survey of Central Europe’s universities and their languages of instruction would not be sufficiently comprehensive without a reflection on Jewish educational efforts. Following the Great War, which completed the transformation of the region’s multiethnic empires into ethnolinguistic nation-states, no national state was formed for the Jews. Since the turn of the twentieth century, the Jewish national movement had not been able to agree on a single national language as required by ethnolinguistic nationalism’s norm of monolingualism. The main preferences were quite equally split between Yiddish (then in the process of rapid standardization) and the “holy tongue” of Hebrew, freshly reinvented as a secular Einzelsprache. Although after the 1905 Revolution some university-level courses began to be offered at Warsaw in Yiddish, there was no possibility of opening a Yiddish-medium university in the Russian Empire. In the interwar Soviet Union, in 1921, the first-ever Yiddish-medium university Jewish Section was founded at the Belarusian State University in Minsk. Yiddish-speaking Jews constituted a plurality of Soviet Belarus’s students throughout by World War Two. In 1924, when the official quadrilingualism of Soviet Belarus in Russian, Yiddish, and Polish was promulgated, the Jewish Section was overhauled into a stand-alone Jewish Department. It survived until 1937–1938 when the policy of Russification was introduced across the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, Jewish nationalists (Zionists), who aimed at founding a Jewish nation-state in Palestine established a German-medium Technikum (Higher Technical School) in Haifa in 1912. Many of the staff and benefactors came from the German Empire, which influenced the choice of this language as the medium of instruction. But the Jewish diaspora in North America and Russia contested the decision, and two years later, Hebrew replaced German as this institution’s language of education, and Technikum’s name was duly Hebraized to וֹטכִּנִיקום Technion. This decision set a precedent, and when four years later, in 1918, a Hebrew University of Jerusalem was founded, the choice of Hebrew as its language of instruction had been a foregone conclusion.

Following the Holocaust and World War Two, there was no Jewish university remaining in Central Europe where most of the world’s Jews had lived for a millennium. After 1945, no Yiddish-medium university-level educational institutions were revived in the postwar Soviet Union, apart from teachers’ colleges. However, Hebrew-medium universities multiplied in Israel. This state was founded in 1948 in the Middle East, but in close emulation of Central Europe’s model of the ethnolinguistic nation-state.

In today’s Central Europe about 10 million Roma remain the region’s largest minority. Like earlier in the case of Jews, no national polity was secured for Roma. As a result, now they painfully feel the brunt of widespread (and often politicized) anti-Tsiganism, not unlike Jews, who prior to World War Two suffered similarly ubiquitous and increasingly politicized anti-Semitism. The one telling indicator of the extent of anti-Tsiganism is not only the absence of any Romani-medium university, but of any monolingual school of any kind with Romani as its medium of instruction. The world’s sole Roma secondary school with Romani as an auxiliary language of instruction (alongside Hungarian and English) is I Mashkarutni Shkola Gandhi (Gandhi Secondary School), founded in 1992 in the Hungarian city of Pécs. From the perspective Central Europe’s ethnolinguistic nationalism, a nation (ethnic group) does not exist as long as it has no possibility to use its language in publishing, education, and state administration. Sadly, the region’s nation-states have excelled at preventing any extension of this linguistic privilege to the Roma.