

## 6 MINORITIES RESEARCH

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### Minority Politics and Minorities Rights

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#### **Minorities and International Organisations in the Long 19th Century**

The long 19th century began with the French Revolution, at the end of the Age of the Enlightenment. European thinking of the period knew the concept of minority, and especially religious minority well known, since the two preceding centuries produced numerous conflicts, wars, and atrocities in this respect. The Jewish formed one of these groups. Since the Enlightenment proclaimed tolerance toward these religious minorities, their persecution was ruled out.

Naturally, ethnic (or, according to our conception, national or, even more carefully put, linguistic) minorities were rather numerous in Europe in those times but their minority character remained unnoticed. That people spoke different languages within a country was a well-known phenomenon in the Habsburg Empire only. Here, however, everybody talked about various countries, territories, and their orders, which nobody would have considered minorities. In France, ethnicities that talked not French but some neo-Roman or, like the Basques, some completely different language, made up the majority of the population. Neither the Ancien Régime nor the French Revolution took notice of them, and it was in particular the Jacobins who acted the most consistently to Frenchify these people. This endeavour was so successful that they needed almost two hundred years to wake up from slumber. In this case, let us point out, minorities were clearly seen; only the ruling class did not want to take notice of them.

The issue of ethnic minorities hardly surfaced at all during the revolutionary and Napoleonic wars, that is, the revolutionary quarter of a century. However, the national motif appeared then: the Spanish launched war against the French conquest in 1808 on a national basis, and only a few years later we see the Germans fight their national struggle for independence following the “battle of the people” at Leipzig. The defeat of Napoleon by the Russians in 1812 had a national aspect as well. Therefore, the national motif is known and it has an entry dedicated to it in the great French encyclopaedia of the Enlightenment (it summarised the French approach, indicating that the members of a nation were subjects of the same sovereign). In that quarter of a century, nation almost always indicated a country, that is, a state. Almost, because the case of the Germans was different. Yet, even though there were many German states (more than 300 at the beginning of this quarter of a century and almost 40 at its end), these were all independent states with Prussian, Bavarian, Saxon, etc. population.

There was only one instance during this period when one could talk about minorities almost in the modern sense, and the politics of the time did indeed understand the special character of this problem connected to the Polish. Not exactly in the modern sense because the majority of the contemporaries prob-

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ably remembered that there used to exist a Polish state and consequently a Polish nation. Their country disappeared from the maps exactly at the beginning of these 25 years, in 1795, with the third repartition.

The revolutionary quarter of a century gave a profound stir to the whole of Europe by wiping out certain countries and creating others. (Even a Polish one in the form of a principality, which later became a grand duchy. This was a cause dear to Napoleon because of Countess Walewska.) Following the great shock, the two defeats suffered by Napoleon, and his ever farther exiles, the disrupted world order had to be restored, thought the leaders of the various countries. To achieve this, an international congress was organised with most of the European sovereigns attending personally. If you like, they created an early international organisation with the congress of Vienna, which lasted for almost a year in 1814–1815. It was held in Vienna because the Habsburg Empire was most afflicted by Napoleon. Furthermore, its location in the centre of Europe made it easily accessible in a time when even czars had to travel on horseback or by mail-coach.

The participants of the congress thought in terms of countries, not peoples or ethnicities. This was so natural to them that they did not even feel the need to make mention of it. The Congress was about the restoration of the rights of countries, that is, sovereigns. That of the king of Prussia, for example (we do not talk about a German emperor any more, since Francis II resigned this title in 1806, thereby terminating the existence of the millennial Holy Roman Empire). Yet, the Polish question emerged because of the Grand Duchy of Warsaw: an existing formation at the time, which had been a larger state not much before. Since their feudal elite had been profoundly Polonised, the fact that this used to be originally a Polish–Lithuanian state remained unnoticed even for the Lithuanians. In this case, the person of the sovereign might have caused some confusion as well. The Saxon king reigned in the Grand Duchy founded by Napoleon in 1808, according to the practice of the first half of the 18th century. However, this Saxon king was, to use a modern word, a satellite of Napoleon. He was the last one to remain loyal to the French leader, because of which he deserved punishment. From among the five great powers of the time (England, Russia, Austria, Prussia, and France), Prussia would have been ready to annex Saxony out of punishment. This, however, ran counter to the principle of legitimacy, observed by the Congress, so the Saxon king could not be deprived of his throne. At last, they resolved to give half of the territory to Prussia and preserve the other half. This step settled the Polish question without violating legitimacy or other sacred principles. The Polish state that had been wiped out in 1795, regained its independence. Czar Alexander I became its sovereign, who, posing as the defender of Europe against Napoleon, felt this reward was his due. Thus, the congress' decision created a personal union between Russia and the Polish state.

The rule of emperors, kings, grand dukes, and princes was re-established as they all regained control over their countries. Ethnicity was not an issue neither officially nor in practice. It was regarded as natural that there were several kings

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in Italy (one the Austrian emperor himself) or that almost forty independent states and city states formed the German League. Nobody talked about ethnic minorities or nations, when, at a time characterised by the revolutionary quarter of a century and the example of the French nation-state, small nations began to be formed and gained consciousness in the background, unrecognised by official politics. Ethnicities that had not possessed a country before became nations and sooner or later presented their claims. In 1848, new nations emerged and set forth their demands in the Habsburg Empire and, through the Polish, in Prussia as well. However, no international organisation existed at the time that could have taken notice of this process; in front of which nations, ethnic minorities could have presented their grievances and lodged complaints. This could happen only within the framework of the given, existing state, which, however, looked through these new nations following the suppression of the revolution. Minorities lived in non-central areas of Europe, in Spain and Russia as well, but they did not even dare presenting themselves, let alone coming forward with demands.

Only a few years after the great revolutions in Europe, another armed conflict broke out, the Crimean war, followed by a congress in Paris very similar to that of Vienna. That was the first occasion when minority issues, as we understand them, were discussed. One of these was the issue of the Romanians. They had two principalities for centuries, Havasalföld (called Romanian country – Țara Românească) and Moldva (Moldova), but both had been subjects, vassal principalities of the Ottoman Empire for centuries. Russia took a part of Moldova, Bessarabia, during a Russian-Turkish conflict in 1812. Nobody cared that Romanians, too, lived there. Maybe not even the Romanians. Yet, something had to be done about the two principalities, given that their vassal status was not so explicit any more and because the two territories wished to unite.

Paris became the venue of the peace conference for two reasons. First, because France was one of the great powers to triumph over Russia in that strange war. And second, because Louis Bonaparte, nephew of Napoleon, who was president of the Second Republic following 1849 and emperor of France following 1852, was greatly respected all around Europe and had the reputation of being a protector not only of the poor and the dispossessed, but also that of the small nations. The Peace Treaty of Paris settled the case of the Romanians, then considered an ethnic minority of the Ottoman Empire. The unification of the two principalities was ruled out because of the Ottoman ally. Nevertheless, they could use the “United Principality” name, their internal administrative systems were made almost identical, and it was established that elected princes would have to lead the two countries.

The peace conference had a further achievement: it took measures concerning a religious minority, the Jews, which may remind one of provisions adopted in the first half of the 20th century. Accordingly, the conference required the two principalities to grant equal civic rights to its Jewish subjects, meaning that they were to be endowed with rights equal to the Christian population of the principal-

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ities. It is another matter that this point had to be included in the peace treaty following WWI because the two principalities, which united under the name Romania in 1859-1861, did not fulfil their obligations in this respect.

The 1st International, the first organisation to have a truly international character, was established not much after the conclusion of peace in Paris by a minority, in this case, a social minority, the working class. The founders of this organisation were so busy with considerations stemming from the minority status of the workers, that is, their weakness, that they did not wish to take notice of ethnic or, given the period, national differences at all. Following its initial hesitation, the organisation accepted one great master, Marx, and proclaimed a fundamentally new principle on the basis of his teaching: internationalism. Its final aim was the liberation of the working class from the rule of class and capital, which the dispossessed proletariat that lived as a minority, could achieve with international collaboration only. At that moment, this was a utopian goal but the leaders strongly believed that their ideas were realistic. The organisation they founded sought to help the working class leave its minority status behind; it did not reach out toward other minorities. The organisation, which proclaimed but the liberation of the proletariat, ceased to exist after a few years. Yet, it had a lasting effect in several respects. Workers in Poland (due to the peculiar Polish situation, under the lead of nobles at first) began an illegal organisation in the territories under Russian rule in the 1880s. The principle of internationalism was still so alive that they did not even raise the issue of the Polish state, which had de facto ceased to exist by that time.

With the working class a minority came to the front, whose first timid steps, however, led to nowhere. Ethnic minorities naturally continued to exist, though only "informally", with their status being an internal issue of the states. By the 1870s, however, the question of minorities surfaced in the Balkans as well and the history of diplomacy remembers the events that took place in that area as the Great Eastern Crisis. An insurrection broke out against the Ottoman rule in Herzegovina in 1875. Originally, it was a peasant revolt that started because of the peasant services, but then it spread over to Bosnia, with the Bulgarians also preparing for an armed uprising. The leaders, (sometimes the sovereigns themselves) of the two primarily affected great powers, Austria-Hungary and Russia, met on several occasions. The Turkish crushed the Bulgarian uprising cruelly, which caused an outrage all over Europe. Serbia tried to intervene but it was similarly defeated. The envoys of the great powers held negotiations in Constantinople for weeks to find a solution that could ensure the security of the Christian subjects of the empire, who formed not only ethnic but also religious minorities. In the meanwhile, however, the Ottoman government adopted a constitution, thereby rendering the attentions of the great powers unnecessary. The Russian government was not willing to tolerate this offence and declared war on Turkey in the spring of 1877. Despite all the difficulties, the Russian troops reached the environs of Constantinople by early 1878. The Russians forced the Turkish to make peace in San Ste-

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fano (today: Yeşil-köy). The peace agreement established a Bulgarian principality (the territory of which had been under Ottoman rule since 1396), which was to become a vassal territory of the Ottoman Empire. The other formerly vassal states in the Balkans (Romania, Serbia, Montenegro) were granted full independence. Consequently, the arrangements in the Balkans dealt with the issue of the ethnicities of the region, which had been in some form of a minority status, exactly on the basis of ethnicity. Furthermore, the achievements of this peace agreement were more comprehensive and affected more ethnic minorities than Treaty of Paris in 1856.

Peace was concluded on 19 February 1878 (on March 3 according to our calendar), the birthday of Russian Czar Alexander II and the anniversary of the emancipation of serfs that took place in 1861. The peace agreement, however, violated one point of the secret Austro–Hungarian–Russian treaty signed in 1877; the one that prohibited the establishment of a strong Slav state in the region. This was a demand formulated by the Monarchy, the leadership of which was worried about the powerful influence that such a state could have had on the Slavs of the Monarchy. At the same time, it was clear that Bulgaria would guarantee firm Russian influence in the peninsula.

Neither the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, a party to the secret treaty, nor England, which opposed Russian expansion in general, could overlook this. Their governments joined forces and made the Russians agree to the organisation of an international conference for revision of the peace treaty. Russia, which had suffered 200,000 losses in troops during the war, had no choice but to yield to this demand. This conference, following venues like Vienna and Paris, was held in Berlin, with German Chancellor Bismarck volunteering to moderate the negotiations. However, the political weight of the united Germany formed in 1871 was also an important consideration in the selection of the venue.

The congress, following the month-long, sometimes rather strained negotiations, accepted a substantial amendment to the peace treaty. Originally, the document would have established the borders of the Bulgarian state based on the territories that belonged in the exarchate, the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, independent of the patriarch of Constantinople and formed in 1872. This territory and its population were considered Bulgarian in those times. It included the territory of the ancient Macedonia as well, which would give rise to various disputes in the future. Yet, the decision nevertheless indicated that to a certain extent and for a certain period, the demands and endeavours of a minority were indeed considered. In the end, however, the territory was divided into three parts, one of which, namely, Macedonia, was put under direct Ottoman control once again. The great European powers, therefore, continued their practice of making arrangements in the continent at their pleasure, disregarding the ethnic principle. To put it differently, ethnic minorities were not significant factors in the eyes of the great powers' governments and other governments either.

In fact, governments did not have regard for the existence of ethnic minorities on the international political-diplomatic stage. To see whether public opinion react-

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ed to their existence at all or whether there were some among the intellectuals who considered this question important, one can look at Louis Léger, professor at Sorbonne University in the second half of the 19th century. He examined every Slav nation and their history, he wrote a lot about them, and, following 1918, the old professor could even enjoy their gratitude a bit. William Seton Watson and Scotus Viator also dealt with these minorities at the turn and the first decades of the 20th century. Their findings, however, remained their private opinion until 1914 and 1918, and acquired importance only following the world war.

It is clear that minorities, and first of all ethnic minorities, had no importance neither on the level of the governments nor as far as public opinion was concerned. Let us turn to lower layers of society now, to examine the situation there. For the working class, there existed the 2nd International, established in 1889, which did not stand for a mere vision of a few revolutionaries only. In economically developed countries, which had a modern political system as well, the working class expanded by the end of the 19th century and formed a significant slice of the society. Labour parties were founded everywhere (with the exception of a few eastern states, where the political system had not been modernised), with a considerable membership. They even made it into Parliament sometimes, though did not play a key role there. These parties represented those in the lower ranks of society; they were in contact with the masses. Let us consider their approach to minorities.

In principle, these parties, together with the 2nd International, were based on the principle of internationalism; the name of the organisation derived from it, not to mention the underlying denotations. Marx remained the central figure, though Engels was there in the first years of the congress' (thanks to technical progress, he was even photographed while drinking beer in some restaurant with the delegates at the congress). Naturally, the International was not simply an international organisation any more; it was the union of the parties from various countries. These parties became increasingly more independent of the power centre, they copied each other's practices concerning certain political issues, and copied more and more the German and the Austrian Social Democratic Parties. At the same time, they paid careful attention to have only one party in every country for the sake of the unity of the working class. In cases, where there were several countries within an empire, as was the case of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, there the "one party – one country" principle was observed on the level of the countries. In a sense, this followed from the French example that expressed the "one country – one party – one ethnic group" principle. The leaders of the Hungarian Social Democratic Party observed it untroubled that workers of various nationalities tended to become Magyarised in an urban environment. Yet, for the sake of propriety, sections were established within the party for the nationalities. In the case of the Croatians no section was needed, for Croatia was a separate country with a separate party.

Minorities had to be taken into consideration in the Cisleithan territories only, where ethnic minorities, for example the Polish and the Czech, had considerable

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weight both politically and economically. The theoreticians of the party drew the conclusions from the multinational character of the country and came forth with the principle of cultural autonomy. Everybody could be part of a national community, independent of where he lived within the country, even perhaps at a place completely isolated from his own nation. No doubt, this would have been the correct solution in empires of multinational population, for no fair territorial divisions could be implemented because of the mixed population (this became evident following 1918). The leaders of the International, however, were strongly against this on the basis of western examples (by then, France had become monolingual as a result of the continuous pressure from the government). Lenin believed that sharing these ideas with the national bourgeoisie was a shame. He subordinated the national element to class struggle, as we can see in his numerous articles. Maybe he did not realise it either that once this would once be used for the Russianisation of peoples in the new societies.

As it could be seen, ethnic minorities had no place in the greatest international organisation of the turn of the century, the 2nd International. Evidently, they had even less in the activities of the intergovernmental institutional system that led to the establishment of the International tribunal in the Hague. The design of the Russian government and Czar Nicholas II, was in the background of these activities. They sought to divert attention from the Russian expansion in the Far East with their activities in Europe that, officially, aimed at the preservation of peace. The international organisation was made up by countries, which automatically excluded the consideration of the interests of ethnic or other minorities.

Even if the existence of ethnic minorities became more clearly visible by the turn of the century than in the first half of the 19th century, they could not become an international factor. Naturally, the activity and endeavours of the Irish and the strong ethnic motivation in the background was widely known. However, according to the general practice of the time, the Irish question belonged among the internal affairs of England. That is, nobody else had anything to do with it.

Since the appearance of Zionism, the Jewish minority could not be considered a religious minority only. At the same time, nobody (but themselves) cared about the Ukrainians, who made up the most numerous ethnic minority of that period. Although the Russian Academy of Sciences declared it in 1905 that Ukrainian was an independent language and not a Russian dialect, it hardly influenced the situation of the Ukrainians; it did not decrease the number of those who chose to emigrate to the United States. Furthermore, who would have taken notice of smaller ethnic minorities besides the country, in which they lived?

It is doubtless, religious minorities did not cause problems any more. Their presence rendered everyday politics and the educational system more variegated in those countries only, the population of which belonged to more denominations. The issue of women was also present around the turn of the century, with suffragettes in Western Europe who very aggressively tried to secure suffrage for women. Their movement, however, did not spread to countries, where the peas-

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ants made up the majority of the population (and most of the European countries were like that back then).

One more motif has to be touched upon. It was considered to be natural throughout the 19th century that the human race meant the White, for their countries had a say in international politics and it was the White who were endowed with various rights. Persons of colour, the population of the colonies, even in the most moderate views, were looked upon as “children”, unable to take responsibility for their actions. That was why they needed the colonial system. Naturally, there were thinkers who refused to accept this, but they were unable to change public opinion.

In sum, minorities, any kinds of minorities, were considered unfortunate exceptions to the general rule. It took the horrible experience of the First World War for the minority issue to come to the limelight as an important political and international problem.