

THE CONGRESS OF EUROPEAN NATIONALITIES AND THE PEACE PROBLEM

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In the discussions and conclusions of the Congress of the European Nationalities the relations between the problem of nationalities and the European peace were often brought forward. Are these relations still so important to-day? Do they exist at all? It may at first sight appear idle in the midst of the serious crisis which Europe is at present undergoing to examine this question. The threatening clouds seem to be looming from quite different parts of the political horizon. And yet I am firmly convinced that these matters are by no means solved and that they deserve to-day more than ever the full attention of statesmen.

In the following I shall attempt to set forth the reasons for my convictions. With these explanations is naturally connected the memory of the late Secretary General of the Congress of Nationalities, Dr. Ewald A m m e n d e. Much which here must be advanced was first uttered by him or at least advocated by him with his extraordinary strength of mind and will.

First of all I think we must be at least fairly clear as to which state we conceive as one of real peace. It seems to me essential for a real peace that it should be a lasting and constant state of affairs resting upon normal and regulated relations between the powers. It may indeed be occasionally disturbed by incidents and by conflicts of interests which may arise. At all events a real peace cannot possibly exist in circumstances where constant tensions and frictions bring about, as it were, a chronic disease in the relations between two or more countries.

Just as the characteristics of real peace require here in my opinion to be indicated in short, the contrasting representation of the problem of nationalities must really be set forth in detail. In the limits of a short article, however, it must be confined to the universal principles¹. One could, therefore, proceed

¹ On the other hand, I cannot resist attempting in the form of a footnote to make in advance some notes on the terminology which is at our disposal in dealing with this material.

When I once spoke in the Italian Chamber of Deputies of National minorities, Salandra, I think it was, shouted to me that there were no national minorities in Italy. And yet there were at the time 9 deputies in all sitting in the Chamber of which 5 had been returned to Parliament by Jugoslavian (Slovenian and Croatian) and the rest by German (South Tyrolese) voters as national representatives. Therefore if Salandra did not recognise these two fractions of the population of the Kingdom as national minorities, it could not mean that he denied their existence but that the meaning he understood from the expression differed from mine. Such experiences make one careful. If someone asks me, as Slovenian, if I regard the Slovenians, Croatians and Serbs as one nation or three separate nations, I at once ask him in return what one is to understand by the word "Nation". The answer to my question—if I get one at all—makes the answer to the first question either superfluous, at the most very easy, or impossible. It is anticipated by the accepted definition of the conception "nation" and to a large extent answered

with the following reflection: Let us first of all imagine the multitude of states on the European continent amalgamated into a single state. This airy vision does not by any means include a disappearance of those differences which exist amongst the European nations. Even in the framework of an individual state would the nations continue to remain individual communities. Their cartographical representation would at all events be much more difficult than the dividing up of the surface of our continent into the territories of the various countries. In the political map of Europe the lines are clearly and sharply defined by the frontier marks. But how could the areas inhabited by the individual nations be indicated and finely and clearly separated by lines on a map of this imaginary state comprising all Europe? The concrete size of a nation and the extent and boundaries of its settlements change according to the definitions of the word "nation" and to which denotation or combination of denotations one gives preference. As the most important, the following denotations may be cited only as examples: Historical unity, the unity determined by geographical boundaries, common traditions, customs and practices, the bond of descent, of language, of a peculiar and strongly pronounced civilization, the existence of collective consciousness and feeling as well as of a collective will towards self-assertion, a social structure built upon special foundation and community or economic interests.

Still more, however, would the mutual delimitation of the nations on this map be rendered difficult by the fact that the settlements of the neighbouring peoples are not everywhere sharply contrasted. In wide stretches of territory various peoples live mixed together. Elsewhere runners of one nation project fairly deep into the territory of another nation or indeed whole nations are surrounded on all sides like islands by another nation. This is especially the case in Central, and in Eastern Europe. On this hypothetical map of Europe could consequently only the central areas of the individual nations be clearly indicated as their own particular territories with the exception of the Jewish people who lack entirely any such territory.

The problem of the European nationalities arises above all from the fact that the order of the European continent, its division into state territories in-

advance. In the other case it is evident that we two, the questioner and I, do not use the expression "nation" for the same thing.

A thing is actually properly indicated only when the expression used can, in a certain context, have universally but one meaning. As soon as one leaves the sphere of a single language, this is necessary with regard to each of the various languages to which one reverts either directly or with the help of a translator. The so-called termini technici need not be identical in each language, but must refer each in the sphere of their own language to, the same thing, the matter in question.

Even between experts belonging to the same nation are there differences of opinion as to the definition and correct indication of one or other of the conceptions in the department with which we are dealing here. All the more so, since in political affairs terminology is often itself a part of policy, one of its instruments. For the material at hand there is in particular a lack of the necessary congruity in the terminologies of the various languages. It is advantageous constantly to make the reader aware of these difficulties which the subject in treatment presents with regard to terminology as well as in the matter of translation into another language.



clines, on the one hand, in almost every case towards the boundaries of the nation, but fails, on the other hand, nearly always to correspond to them exactly. In the shape in which the World War has left it, the political map of Europe shows us almost exclusively states which raise the claim to be the organised community of a single nation, namely the nation which holds the power. The present, and certainly the near future as well, belong without doubt to the principle of nationalism which demands a state for every people which must comprise this people completely and exclusively.

That the principle of nationalism was not consistently realised at the last reorganisation of Europe, after the World War, cannot be entirely ascribed to the fact that it stood or fell by more or less established considerations determined by other standpoints. Owing to the natural causes described above, the state of affairs exists on the European continent especially in Central and Eastern Europe that there is practically no single state which does not include to a more or less extent considerable numbers of population which do not belong to it according to the strict principle of nationalism and of which the majority have their own national states elsewhere. It also happens that a whole nation without a state of its own is split up among the national states of other nations or, to repeat the simile, imbedded like an island in the settlement and state territories of another nation.

Is some statistical data to be presented up here? A very malicious observation places the establishments of statistics in the same ranks as other—lies. If this statement is justified at all, it is with reference to the statistics of nationalities. Through the official national censuses it can be gathered that in more than a third of the states of our continent the part of the population which must be ascribed to other nationalities than the governing nation exceeds 10%, and in the case of Poland, Spain and Czechoslovakia even 30%. In reality the size of the national minorities in several states will be not inconsiderably greater than can be ascertained from the official data. In a lesser percentage, however, all the other states of the European continent show an admixture of national minorities, with regard to which I must at this point stress that the numerically unfavourable ratio of a minority to the major nation, especially in the case of compact settlements, need not be of decisive importance. For, as I said once before, an oakwood remains as such, however great the pinewood may be which surrounds it. The nationalities or national minorities in the various European states are parts of the population which have lived on the soil on which they have settled for centuries, in most cases indeed from time immemorial. They regularly possess a cultivated social structure. The majority form on their restricted native land a compact community. Where this is not the case, and the minorities live together with the ruling nation, the cohesion of the individual nationalities is still with few exceptions so strong that one can still talk of united social communities.

The number of peoples in Europe who come under the heading of nationalities or national minorities in the accepted sense of the word is doubtless not overestimated at a round 40 million. In it, the Soviet Union is naturally not taken into consideration. Although this number does not indicate any united and tangible people which could step forward as a power into the ranks of the other powers of this continent, it cannot be overlooked that it has reached the census-total of a number of European great powers and that by its size alone raises to the importance of a "European question of the first rank" the problem of nationalities.

But to appreciate the whole weight with which the problem of nationalities falls into the balance, one must realise the degree of passion which the national feeling has reached on the European continent. There are high spiritual values which men, individually and collectively, feel as the result and as the expression of their belonging to a certain nation. For the essence of everything which this national feeling comprises, to fight, to suffer and if necessary to give up one's life is for everyone, who has enough sense of community to be capable of making a sacrifice for anything, a natural duty.

It is in fact no mere transitory phenomenon that almost all nations in political writing and science are most intensively engaged in, and have at their disposal special institutions and organisations for the fostering of, everything that they look upon, outside the state boundaries, as bound to them by a community *sui generis*. In this matter of community national feeling knows no boundaries. For this reason what happens to an external national minority is felt by the whole nation to be a wrong or a benefit. Therefore the numerical size of the minority plays a very subordinate role. Dr. A m m e n d e explains very satisfactorily in the introduction to the book "The Nationalities in the States of Europe", published by the Congress of Nationalities, which he edited, that it is often just those small groups of people in whose fate a nation takes most passionate interest.

The connection between the question of a real peace in Europe and the problem of European nationalities is clearly manifest if one keeps the essentials of both constantly in view. The genuine peace presupposes a solution of the problem of nationalities, the unsolved problem of nationalities threatening the peace. The primary element of international relations is still the state. Where the will and capacity of a state to preserve itself are not present in a sufficient degree or are lacking, the exterior pressure gains the upper hand and forces in the walls of the state-building. For this reason we must also consider the question of peace and the problem of national minorities in this perspective and often ask ourselves the question: Are the national minorities in themselves, merely because they exist, and by virtue of their existence making the claim for their maintenance valid, a danger to the state? Can they endanger the state by their influence directed against it? Does the continued existence of foreign nationalities especially when they are settled on the state boundaries create or in-

crease the dangers which can threaten a state from without? By which procedure towards the national minorities within their frontiers can the states lessen or increase the dangers which threaten them on this side?

These questions, from which we will pass over to the consideration of the consequences which arise from the connection between the problems of nationalities and peace, require practically in each individual case an especial examination. At this point only some quite general statements can be made. Firstly this, that even the right of the states in question to exist or at least their right as opposed to that of the extra-national parts of their population is brought into question if one admits that the existence of the national minorities in itself threatens the integrity or even the existence of the states. And moreover, that it cannot be, for reasons of humanity and morality and in fact out of considerations of expediency, a right and an interest of the states to fend off suspected, supposed or real dangers at the price of the existence and right to live of the extra-national parts of the population. With regard to the so-called irredentism it must be at once admitted that appearances of indirect or direct aspirations of this kind in latent or open form whether it be in the interior of states or directed against them from without is to be noticed here and there in the age of the principle of nationalities before and after the World War. I nevertheless believe, however, that irredentistic aspirations can never by themselves alone lead to success, but that their realisation depends upon a concourse of circumstances in which much more powerful forces work together, and against one another, on a much larger scale. And I believe in addition that the introduction of such a concourse of circumstances would not be arrested but only expedited, their pernicious effects not mitigated but only aggravated, if the irredentistic danger is combatted by the suppression of the national minority in question.

I need not speak here of the state of the problem of nationalities before the War. The time of devastating storms which, in the first few years, swept over the majority of national minorities in its wake, was succeeded, with at all events but few exceptions, by a period of relative calm. Here and there, solutions were found to parts of the problem of which one should hope that they will stimulate emulation. To-day it appears again as though a new wave of intolerance and suppression, progressing from state to state, is about to break upon the national minorities. It is a tragic consequence of such unfortunate methods that mistrust increases mutually. A circumstance operates here which really, on rational consideration, should lead to a compromise of the two extremes. Doctor A m m e n d e constantly lays special emphasis on the fact that, with regard to the problem of nationalities, almost all European nations find themselves in a twofold situation. On the one hand, in their own national states, where the extra-national elements of their population play the part of opposition to the governing nation, and, on the other, in foreign states, where parts of their own national population experience the fate of national minorities. From its own relationship towards its kindred minorities each nation can estimate how sensi-

live the nerve-strings are which bind all parts of a nation together. The seed which is sown on both sides of the frontier by measures taken against the existence and right to live of national minorities does not always spring up quickly. It is soon choked amongst the germs of confidence and esteem out of which alone real peace can grow.

This knowledge was one of the deciding motives for the creation of the international protection of minorities. A protector should be given to the minorities in the League of Nations who is himself uninfluenced by national passion. By his mediation amongst other things a spoke would be put in the wheel of the intervention of individual states on behalf of kindred peoples or any other closely connected minorities. To-day it can be no longer withheld that the League of Nations has done little, or, if one takes a general standpoint, no justice to this great task of peace.

Concerning the present state of affairs one might ask oneself if it were not perhaps just a question of a painful period of transition, and would the measures of suppression not lead one day to a coincidence of the state and national boundaries? In that case the policy of suppression would not be less detestable but it would at least bring with it this advantage, namely, that a moment of tension in the relations between the nations and the states would be avoided. Now experience should have shown quite clearly that the societies known to us as nations, nationalities or national minorities can never be annihilated by measures of suppression however much the people who live in them may be persecuted, even physically. There are unfortunately examples of this, but, thank God, they have not been imitated in Europe.

The resolution of the problem of nationalities, which Europe must seek, can only be found on the basis of mutual tolerance and esteem between the nations. It can only come to pass when the nations, whether living in their own national states or not, are guaranteed that right to live which the claim of our continent to have a moral and cultural mission grants them. This solution must take the form of a legal arrangement in which is taken for granted loyalty to the national community on the one hand and loyalty to the state community on the other, and that, where these do not correspond, no contradiction should be implied. To advocate this idea and to elaborate in detail the implications resulting from it, the European Congress of Nationalities was called into existence. Its work signifies an important contribution towards progress along a path which amongst others must be traversed and which cannot be avoided namely, the path by way of the solution of the problem of nationalities to the realisation of a genuine European peace.

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