

Nation States: Stronger in Europe than Elsewhere?

Written by Dumitrache Andrei

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

Nation States: Stronger in Europe than Elsewhere?

<https://www.e-ir.info/2011/02/22/nation-states-stronger-in-europe-than-elsewhere/>

DUMITRACHE ANDREI, FEB 22 2011

Europe, a continent considered by many to be the cradle of civilization, has imposed its intrinsic identity and revolutionary social and political values and models worldwide, transforming many of them in global standards, shaping the lives of billions of people. As Outhwaite (2008:13) put it: 'Europe...can be seen as a crucible in which social and cultural forms, whether indigenous or imported, are warmed up and (re-)exported to other regions of the globe, where they develop in ways which often eclipse their European variants'. It is within the European geographical space that a large number of the world's greatest empires have developed and some of humanities most valuable technological, spiritual, cultural, economic or political advancements have been achieved. Developing on these historical facts it was to a certain extent predictable that the pattern for organizing human society into the future will spring from this old continent, from the heart of 'Old Europe' (Preuss, 2003 in Levy et al., 2005:170). The continent's historic heritage has created the premises for strong nation-states in Europe not only in the 20th and 21st century but all the way back to the times following the historic Treaty of Westphalia. Building on the above incipit presumptions, this essay will seek to proof that European nation-states have been by far superior in their strength, compared to other national administrative structure elsewhere on Earth. In order to do so, there is a basic, initial need to first define the concept of the "nation-state" and consecutively present and analyze each of the main factors that have made Europe such a fertile land for nation-states.

It is commonly agreed that the 1555 Augsburg Treaty and the 1648 Peace of Westphalia are the main contributors to the rapid development of nation-states in Europe. It is these two treaties that have provided the 'alternative form for structuring political authority'(Tilly, 1975 in Boix and Stokes, 2007:219) and detached from the political reality the 'theocratic claims' (Spruyt, 2007 in Boix and Stokes, 2007:219) of German emperors or Spanish rulers seeking to either revive the Roman Empire or expand the Spanish one. Starting with the end of the Thirty Years' War, major European political administrations have embarked on a bold path, away from the medieval 'Societas Christiana' (De Bethune, 1761 in Donelan, 1978:30), path that in the present days has lead to the birth of the modern state system. Some IR theorists such as Osiander (2001:281) would suggest that more important were the French Revolution and the industrial revolution, rather than the two treaties previously mentioned. In both cases it is appropriate to mention that the state has evolved along time from 'a concentration of power, of brute strength, of basic (military) force' (Treitschke, 1916/1963 in Brown and Ainley, 2009:72) to a 'sovereign, territorially-based political unit characterized by a central decision-making and enforcement machinery formed of a government and an administration'(Brown and Ainley, 2009:70). The nation-state on the other hand has a slightly different connotation within the International Relations vocabulary. The specific character of a nation-state has been best edified by Archie Simpson (in Imber and Salmon, 2008:56) when affirming that 'the concept itself encompasses the idea of a marriage between the nation and the state'. Having established some of the theoretic particularities of the term, it is now the time to expose the main factors that have made nation-states stronger in Europe than elsewhere in the last two centuries. In order to identify some of the basic elements that have made possible the successful implementation of states based on ethnicity in the European context, a research into the continent's agitated history is necessary to be done. International Relations theorists such as Tilly (1975) or Bean (1973) consider war to be one of the main contributing factors to the rise of solid nation-states in Europe. His theory is based mainly on the definition Max Weber (Gerth and Mills, 1946 in Tilly, 1992:70) used, when he described the state as 'a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory'. Developing on these prospects it is arguably correct to consider that initiatives such as the Tudors in England to 'suppress private armies, reduce the princely power of great lords along the Scottish border, contain aristocratic violence, and eliminate the fortress-castles that once

Nation States: Stronger in Europe than Elsewhere?

Written by Dumitrache Andrei

announced the power and autonomy of the Great English magnates' (Stone, 1965 in Tilly, 1992:69) have made the incipient European states capable of 'monopolizing the effective means of violence' (Tilly, 1992:68-69). This trend has chronologically expanded, as an ever increasing number of rulers within Europe were understanding and more important, experiencing the benefits of having a standing army. These benefits also involved the economic sphere of societal organization. This way, trade and mostly the taxes imposed on it had become the main driving mechanism of monarchs or dukes to institutionalize more and more areas of their domestic powers. Spruyt (in Boix and Stokes, 2007:216) also identifies trade as one of the main generative factors of politically consolidated states and ultimately of the capitalist system. Regarding the 16th century rise of the capitalist system it is interesting to highlight that this early development is identified also by Immanuel Wallerstein (1979, in Chase-Dunn, 1981:19). Both trade and war have therefore played vital roles in the construct of what was to become once with the rise of nationalism in the 18th century, the nation-state. As we have previously seen basic state structures in Europe have solidified across the 16th and 17th century, only for them to suffer further dramatic transformations in the Period of the Enlightenment (18th century) which has imposed the idea that 'the only legitimate form of state is the state that embodies and represents the nation' (Brown and Ainley, 2009:73). It is starting this moment in history that we can talk about 'national security' (Buzan, 1991:70) and a maternal link between 'the security of the nation and the state' (ibid). The development of European empires such as the British Empire, Spanish Empire, Dutch Empire or Portugues Empire has played an important role in solidifying in the subconscious of different European nations the self-identification with the state and with its specific culture. It is important to mention at this point the strong stream of ethno-nationalism fueling the imperial powers public domestic and foreign policy. Proof of the extent to which European values were considered to be by far superior to those of colonized territories is visible in Edward Saids words when stating that 'there was virtual unanimity that subject races should be ruled, that they are subject races, that one race deserves and has consistently earned the right to be considered the race whose main mission is to expand beyond its domain' (Jones, 2006:2). Regarding this aspect it is important to highlight that Sandra Halperin (in Jones, 2006:8) has stressed out the extent to which even the field of international relations theory is based on European, colonial values, making it highly Eurocentric. By the beginning of World War I Europe was already composed of states with a high level of 'ethno-nationalism' (Breuilly, in Baylis and Smith, 2008:404), phenomenon enhanced all over the European Continent by Napoleonic expansionism in the 18th and 19th centuries (Outhwaite, 2008). Outhwaite (2008) also suggests that all these developments have led to the cemented Western European nation-states, with a certain development peak being reached in the aftermath of the WWI settlement.

Having seen why nation-states have been powerful in the 20th and 21st century, it is now time to present clear examples of how they have manifested this strength, and this way enforce the position adopted in this paper. According to Peter Baldwin (2005:17) European nation-states can be said to have been so far the strongest ones both in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, from the point of view of taxation. Here he gives example states such as the United Kingdom, France or Germany who have developed the institutional capacity for high levels of GNP extractions. A grotesque example of strong policy in a European nation-state could be represented by Hitler's racial doctrine that led to the mass-murder of millions of Jewish, Rroma, Polish or Serbian ethnics. Together with the end of World War II, the European integration process has slowly but promisingly started. By the end of the 20th century the signs of a strong European supra-national state were clearly visible. The European Union has now become one of the most important voices on the global arena, being considered a unique project through its internal administrative developments and the values it stands for. Even though officially all the member states of the European Union promote values such as tolerance or diversity, William Outhwaite (2008:21) has identified a certain 'European privatism' when it comes to accepting influences from outside the traditional geographical space. This approach is reflected also into the social tensions existing and increasing in the European society. Such tensions refer mainly to the general suspicion directed towards members of the Islamic community or towards the 'European identity' itself. A more special example of successful European nation-states would bring forward Scandinavian countries such as Norway, Sweden or Finland. It is these states that have 'been able to harness the sentiments of nationalism away from the drive for power, and towards a concern for the welfare of the people' (Brown and Ainley, 2009:74). Another example of how powerful nation-states have been and still are on the old continent is the policy promoted by both the Hungarian and the Romanian government. As a result of the Treaty of Trianon both countries have developed for different reason strong and sometimes violent nationalistic policies. This way Hungarian nationalism has traveled a long way from 'middle-class credo' (Sassoon, 2006:862) to a 'populist and rural tinge'. On the other hand Greater Romania launched a country wide process of 'nationalization' (ibid) aimed at the integration of regions aquired in the

Nation States: Stronger in Europe than Elsewhere?

Written by Dumitrache Andrei

Trianon Treaty. It is in such historical moments that 'pre-existing sentiments and senses of identity' (Breuille, in Baylis and Smith, 2008:414) come to light and unveil the rigid face of the European nation-states. Westphalian sovereignty has been the cause of many conflicts between European states. It is because of this 17th century concept that in some aspects the European Union faces difficulties in developing the proper supra-national administrative and legal machinery. Combining Westphalian fears of having 'external factors involved in domestic authority structures' (Krasner, 1999:20) with state level nationalism and we get the main impeding factors of a more dynamic EU wide integration process. This is also a clear example of how strong nation-states in Europe remain in the dawn of the 21st century. So far we have seen how historic variables have managed to build the solid structures nation-states are at this moment on the European continent and how these states have manifested this power along the 20th and 21st centuries. These theoretic approaches have provided a large span of arguments supporting the discussed thesis and are now opening the way towards the concluding arguments of this essay.

Having identified the context and the reasons why we can firmly say that nation-states and especially ethno-national states have been stronger in Europe than elsewhere, it is now safe to present in a general conclusion the objections that might arise regarding the issue in discussion. One such objection would invoke the very recently adopted Lisbon Treaty as proof to the fact nation-states in Europe are constantly and rapidly diminishing their power, despite the voices of nationalist groups in domestic civil societies. Another example that would be brought forward would be the power states such as the USA or Japan have attained along the 20th and 21st centuries, power many times larger than that of European states. Both arguments are discussable, although it is more than obvious that it is only in the case of Japan that we can talk about a strong nation-state in the traditional sense. As a concluding argument, I will accept some of the opposing arguments and express my belief that although nation-states have been indeed stronger in Europe than elsewhere, they have embarked on a path that slowly diminishes their national sovereignty or may we say 'their freedom to make decisions of wide historical importance' (Naumann, 1915 in Carr, 1981:211), be it this freedom 'jurisdictional or political' (James, 2000:457).

Bibliography:

John Baylis and Steve Smith, eds. *The Globalization of World Politics*. 4rd Edition. London: Oxford University Press, 2008; Chapter 23

Chris Brown with Kirsten Ainley, *Understanding International Relations*. 3rd Edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2005; Chapter 4.

Stephen Krasner (1999). *Sovereignty: Organized Hypocrisy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999; Chapter 1, pp. 3-42 (particularly pp. 9-25 on the four meanings of sovereignty).

Reus-Smit C., and Snidal D., (eds.) *The Oxford Handbook of International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2008), Chapter 2

Spruyt, H., 'War, Trade and State Formation' in C. Boix and S. Stokes eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Comparative Politics* (Oxford University Press)

Tilly, C., *Coercion, Capital and European States, AD 990-1992*, especially Ch. 3 'How War Made States and Vice Versa'

Salmon C. Trevor with Imber Mark, *Issues in International Relations*, Taylor & Francis, 2008

E.H.Carr, *The twenty years' crisis, 1919-1939: an introduction to the study of international relation*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2001

Donelan M., *The Reason of States*, Allen & Unwin, 1978

Branwen Gruffydd Jones, *Decolonizing International Relations*, Rowman & Littlefield, 2006

Nation States: Stronger in Europe than Elsewhere?

Written by Dumitrache Andrei

Buzan B., *People, states and fear*, ECPR Press, 2007

Lévy D., Pensky M., Torpey C.J., *Old Europe, new Europe, core Europe: transatlantic relations after the Iraq war*, Verso, 2005

Sasson D., *The culture of the Europeans: from 1800 to the present*, HarperPress, 2006

Christopher Chase-Dunn. *Interstate System and Capitalist World Economy: One Logic or Two?* *International Studies Quarterly* 25 (1981): 19-42.

Andreas Osiander, 'Sovereignty, International Relations and the Westphalian Myth', *International Organization* 55:2 (2001), pp 251-287.

Alan James, 'The Practice of Sovereign Statehood in Contemporary International Society'. *Political Studies* 47:3 (2000), 457-473.

—

Written by: Dumitrache Andrei
Written at: Royal Holloway, University of London
Written for: Stephanie Carvin
Date written: February 2011