

2 The Making of Nationalism in Europe

If you look at the map of mid-eighteenth-century Europe you will find that there were no 'nation-states' as we know them today.

What we know today as Germany, Italy and Switzerland were divided into kingdoms, duchies and cantons whose rulers had their autonomous territories. Eastern and Central Europe were under autocratic monarchies within the territories of which lived diverse peoples. They did not see themselves as sharing a collective identity or a common culture. Often, they even spoke different languages and belonged to different ethnic groups. The Habsburg Empire that ruled over Austria-Hungary, for example, was a patchwork of many different regions and peoples. It included the Alpine regions – the Tyrol, Austria and the Sudetenland – as well as Bohemia, where the aristocracy was predominantly German-speaking. It also included the Italian-speaking provinces of Lombardy and Venetia. In Hungary, half of the population spoke Magyar while the other half spoke a variety of dialects. In Galicia, the aristocracy spoke Polish. Besides these three dominant groups, there also lived within the boundaries of the empire, a mass of subject peasant peoples – Bohemians and Slovaks to the north, Slovenes in Carniola, Croats to the south, and Roumans to the east in Transylvania. Such differences did not easily promote a sense of political unity. The only tie binding these diverse groups together was a common allegiance to the emperor.

How did nationalism and the idea of the nation-state emerge?

2.1 The Aristocracy and the New Middle Class

Socially and politically, a landed aristocracy was the dominant class on the continent. The members of this class were united by a common way of life that cut across regional divisions. They owned estates in the countryside and also town-houses. They spoke French for purposes of diplomacy and in high society. Their families were often connected by ties of marriage. This powerful aristocracy was, however, numerically a small group. The majority of the population was made up of the peasantry. To the west, the bulk of the land was farmed by tenants and small owners, while in Eastern and Central Europe the pattern of landholding was characterised by vast estates which were cultivated by serfs.

Some important dates

1797

Napoleon invades Italy; Napoleonic wars begin.

1814-1815

Fall of Napoleon; the Vienna Peace Settlement.

1821

Greek struggle for independence begins.

1848

Revolutions in Europe; artisans, industrial workers and peasants revolt against economic hardships; middle classes demand constitutions and representative governments; Italians, Germans, Magyars, Poles, Czechs, etc. demand nation-states.

1859-1870

Unification of Italy.

1866-1871

Unification of Germany.

1905

Slav nationalism gathers force in the Habsburg and Ottoman Empires.

In Western and parts of Central Europe the growth of industrial production and trade meant the growth of towns and the emergence of commercial classes whose existence was based on production for the market. Industrialisation began in England in the second half of the eighteenth century, but in France and parts of the German states it occurred only during the nineteenth century. In its wake, new social groups came into being: a working-class population, and middle classes made up of industrialists, businessmen, professionals. In Central and Eastern Europe these groups were smaller in number till late nineteenth century. It was among the educated, liberal middle classes that ideas of national unity following the abolition of aristocratic privileges gained popularity.

2.2 What did Liberal Nationalism Stand for?

Ideas of national unity in early-nineteenth-century Europe were closely allied to the ideology of liberalism. The term ‘liberalism’ derives from the Latin root *liber*, meaning free. For the new middle classes liberalism stood for freedom for the individual and equality of all before the law. Politically, it emphasised the concept of government by consent. Since the French Revolution, liberalism had stood for the end of autocracy and clerical privileges, a constitution and representative government through parliament. Nineteenth-century liberals also stressed the inviolability of private property.

Yet, equality before the law did not necessarily stand for universal **suffrage**. You will recall that in revolutionary France, which marked the first political experiment in liberal democracy, the right to vote and to get elected was granted exclusively to property-owning men. Men without property and all women were excluded from political rights. Only for a brief period under the Jacobins did all adult males enjoy suffrage. However, the Napoleonic Code went back to limited suffrage and reduced women to the status of a minor, subject to the authority of fathers and husbands. Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries women and non-propertied men organised opposition movements demanding equal political rights.

In the economic sphere, liberalism stood for the freedom of markets and the abolition of state-imposed restrictions on the movement of goods and capital. During the nineteenth century this was a strong demand of the emerging middle classes. Let us take the example of the German-speaking regions in the first half of the nineteenth century. Napoleon’s administrative measures had created out of

New words

Suffrage – The right to vote

countless small principalities a confederation of 39 states. Each of these possessed its own currency, and weights and measures. A merchant travelling in 1833 from Hamburg to Nuremberg to sell his goods would have had to pass through 11 customs barriers and pay a customs duty of about 5 per cent at each one of them. Duties were often levied according to the weight or measurement of the goods. As each region had its own system of weights and measures, this involved time-consuming calculation. The measure of cloth, for example, was the *elle* which in each region stood for a different length. An *elle* of textile material bought in Frankfurt would get you 54.7 cm of cloth, in Mainz 55.1 cm, in Nuremberg 65.6 cm, in Freiburg 53.5 cm.

Such conditions were viewed as obstacles to economic exchange and growth by the new commercial classes, who argued for the creation of a unified economic territory allowing the unhindered movement of goods, people and capital. In 1834, a customs union or *zollverein* was formed at the initiative of Prussia and joined by most of the German states. The union abolished tariff barriers and reduced the number of currencies from over thirty to two. The creation of a network of railways further stimulated mobility, harnessing economic interests to national unification. A wave of economic nationalism strengthened the wider nationalist sentiments growing at the time.

2.3 A New Conservatism after 1815

Following the defeat of Napoleon in 1815, European governments were driven by a spirit of **conservatism**. Conservatives believed that established, traditional institutions of state and society – like the monarchy, the Church, social hierarchies, property and the family – should be preserved. Most conservatives, however, did not propose a return to the society of pre-revolutionary days. Rather, they realised, from the changes initiated by Napoleon, that modernisation could in fact strengthen traditional institutions like the monarchy. It could make state power more effective and strong. A modern army, an efficient bureaucracy, a dynamic economy, the abolition of feudalism and serfdom could strengthen the autocratic monarchies of Europe.

In 1815, representatives of the European powers – Britain, Russia, Prussia and Austria – who had collectively defeated Napoleon, met at Vienna to draw up a settlement for Europe. The Congress was hosted by the Austrian Chancellor Duke Metternich. The delegates

Source B

Economists began to think in terms of the national economy. They talked of how the nation could develop and what economic measures could help forge this nation together.

Friedrich List, Professor of Economics at the University of Tübingen in Germany, wrote in 1834:

‘The aim of the *zollverein* is to bind the Germans economically into a nation. It will strengthen the nation materially as much by protecting its interests externally as by stimulating its internal productivity. It ought to awaken and raise national sentiment through a fusion of individual and provincial interests. The German people have realised that a free economic system is the only means to engender national feeling.’

Source

Discuss

Describe the political ends that List hopes to achieve through economic measures.

New words

Conservatism – A political philosophy that stressed the importance of tradition, established institutions and customs, and preferred gradual development to quick change

drew up the Treaty of Vienna of 1815 with the object of undoing most of the changes that had come about in Europe during the Napoleonic wars. The Bourbon dynasty, which had been deposed during the French Revolution, was restored to power, and France lost the territories it had annexed under Napoleon. A series of states were set up on the boundaries of France to prevent French expansion in future. Thus the kingdom of the Netherlands, which included Belgium, was set up in the north and Genoa was added to Piedmont in the south. Prussia was given important new territories on its western frontiers, while Austria was given control of northern Italy. But the German confederation of 39 states that had been set up by Napoleon was left untouched. In the east, Russia was given part of Poland while Prussia was given a portion of Saxony. The main intention was to restore the monarchies that had been overthrown by Napoleon, and create a new conservative order in Europe.

Conservative regimes set up in 1815 were autocratic. They did not tolerate criticism and dissent, and sought to curb activities that questioned the legitimacy of autocratic governments. Most of them imposed censorship laws to control what was said in newspapers, books, plays and songs and reflected the ideas of liberty and freedom

Activity

Plot on a map of Europe the changes drawn up by the Vienna Congress.

Discuss

What is the caricaturist trying to depict?



Fig. 6 – The Club of Thinkers, anonymous caricature dating to c. 1820.

The plaque on the left bears the inscription: 'The most important question of today's meeting: How long will thinking be allowed to us?'

The board on the right lists the rules of the Club which include the following:

1. Silence is the first commandment of this learned society.
2. To avoid the eventuality whereby a member of this club may succumb to the temptation of speech, muzzles will be distributed to members upon entering.'

associated with the French Revolution. The memory of the French Revolution nonetheless continued to inspire liberals. One of the major issues taken up by the liberal-nationalists, who criticised the new conservative order, was freedom of the press.

2.4 The Revolutionaries

During the years following 1815, the fear of repression drove many liberal-nationalists underground. Secret societies sprang up in many European states to train revolutionaries and spread their ideas. To be revolutionary at this time meant a commitment to oppose monarchical forms that had been established after the Vienna Congress, and to fight for liberty and freedom. Most of these revolutionaries also saw the creation of nation-states as a necessary part of this struggle for freedom.

One such individual was the Italian revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini. Born in Genoa in 1807, he became a member of the secret society of the Carbonari. As a young man of 24, he was sent into exile in 1831 for attempting a revolution in Liguria. He subsequently founded two more underground societies, first, Young Italy in Marseilles, and then, Young Europe in Berne, whose members were like-minded young men from Poland, France, Italy and the German states. Mazzini believed that God had intended nations to be the natural units of mankind. So Italy could not continue to be a patchwork of small states and kingdoms. It had to be forged into a single unified republic within a wider alliance of nations. This unification alone could be the basis of Italian liberty. Following his model, secret societies were set up in Germany, France, Switzerland and Poland. Mazzini's relentless opposition to monarchy and his vision of democratic republics frightened the conservatives. Metternich described him as 'the most dangerous enemy of our social order'.

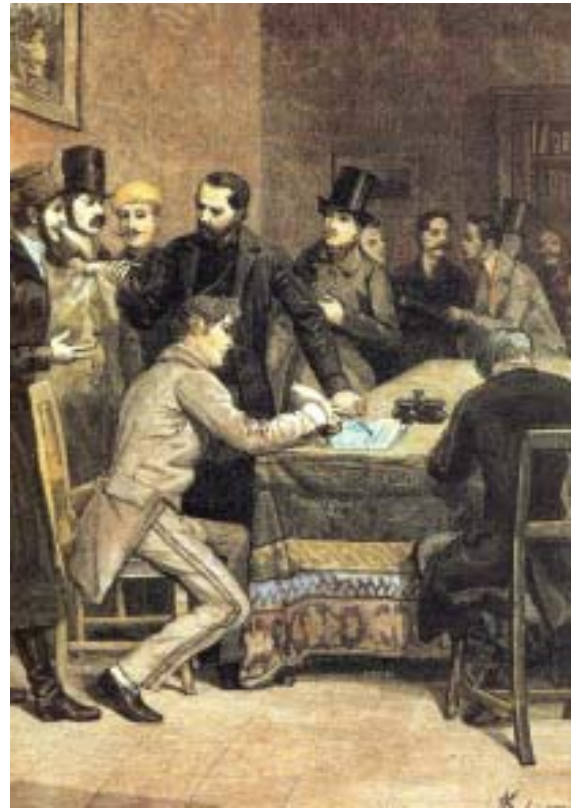


Fig. 7 – Giuseppe Mazzini and the founding of Young Europe in Berne 1833.
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