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**ON NATIONS AND INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES  
– THE EUROPEAN CASE**

**Abstract:** It seems that our world is made of mainly nation states – independent states based on one particular nation, sometimes with some minorities in that state. Thus the model seems to be ‘a nation is establishing its boundaries’. On the other hand, our world also has the ‘boundaries that made a nation’ model, in which a nation was created after boundaries were drawn. Most independent European countries belong to the first model but Spain, Belgium, and five tiny states belong to the second model.

**Key words:** international boundaries, nations, Europe.

**1. INTRODUCTION**

The European continent is divided today between more than 40 independent states. The number varies according to the way people are looking at the inclusion of Georgia and Armenia in Europe as well as the attitude toward the independent status of Kosovo. The political map of Europe was created during a long historical process, which is a never ending process. Each independent country has its special historical context concerning its existence. Anyhow, a basic historical-geographical model can present the current situation, although without predicting the future.

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## 2. NATION STATES AND NON-NATION STATES IN THE GLOBAL CONTEXT

Our world is divided today between more than 200 different independent countries and the number seems to continue growing (CIA 2010). Those countries have more than 300 territorial boundaries between them, defining their territory (Biger, 1995). Many of them, especially the new independent states which were established during the last decades, were formed according to national criteria. Thus united multi-national Yugoslavia became six or seven (the independence of Kosovo is still under debate) independent national states as well as the sixteen new national states created out of the former Soviet Union. The creation of the Czech Republic and Slovakia as well as of East Timor, were also based on the national criteria. Moreover, the revival of ethnic nationalism, with many peoples claiming and fighting for political freedom and territorial integrity on the basis of ethnic identity and solidarity, can create more independence states in the future. On the other hand, there are many independent states, such as Canada, South Africa or even Belgium, established in the late 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century, which are not based on national or ethnic criteria. Establishment of the European Union as a multi-national entity, as well as the world-wide discussion about 'borderless world' might point to another direction, in which the national identity would not be a major characteristic of a state.

## 3. NATIONS AND PEOPLES

There is not a single definition of what constitutes a people, nation or ethnic group. The Oxford American dictionary described nation as 'a large community of people of mainly common descent, language, history, etc., usually inhabiting a particular territory and under one government' (McKear, 2005). Thus 'people' are the persons composing a community or tribe or race or nation. Lanyi and McWilliams said that 'a nation implies a common culture, common symbols, and a particular view of the world which is distinct from other world views. What makes a nation different from other cultural groups, however, is that one of the symbols associated with the values and attitudes is a particular piece of territory' (Lanyi and McWilliams, 1966). The *Encyclopedia of the Peoples of the World* (Gonen, 1993) used some criteria for the definition of a people, either alone or in combination. Thus common history; distinct language, shared traditions, religion, or folklore; common identity maintained in the face of strong pressures to assimilate; self-designation; and territorial concentration, are all used in defining a nation. Using these criteria this encyclopaedia presented about

2,000 entries dealing with different peoples, nations and ethnic groups which still exist in our world. Comparing it with less than about 150 nation-states, raises the question of who is entitled to have an independent state of its own, but this article does not deal with this issue.

The basic characteristics of an independent state were defined as: a territory of its own, defined by recognised boundaries, population, governability and an international recognition as a sovereign state (Muir, 1975, p. 28). Thus the aim of this presentation is: first, to deal with two of those components, namely the territorial boundaries and the population, by examining the overall pattern of the nation states vs the non-nation states from a world-wide perspective, with a particular focus on the relations between nations, boundaries and states, and second, to look at the European case.

#### **4. NATION STATES VS MULTINATIONAL STATES**

The majority of independent states existing today in the world are those which are based on their national character. Back in 1975, Muir (1975, pp. 88–89) presented, after Minogue (1967, pp. 13–17), three forms of nationalism which are attached to the existence of nation state (originally six, but the other three are not within a state):

1. Ante-state nationalism which developed before becoming a nation state.
2. Post-state nationalism which was developed from integration of diverse cultures, cocooned within an existing state.
3. Third-world nationalism, which is the nationalism of peoples who came together under a program of resistance to colonialism.

As the world knows now more than one new state which emerges without resistance to a colonial power, the second and the third category can be mingled into one. Thus a world-wide view can present two main models for the relation between nations and states. One is a European-Asian (the Old World) model, and the other is the American-African (the New World) model. As one of the main characteristics of a modern state is its international boundaries, which marks its territorial sovereignty, one can present this nation-state model as the nation-boundaries model.

#### **5. THE NATION-BOUNDARIES MODEL**

There are two simple situations which can describe the relation between nations and boundaries. The first model presents the classical nation-state – a situation in which a nation existed long before its state's international boundary is demarcated, and the

boundary is established in order to include as much as it is possible of the people of that nation inside the boundaries of the independent state.

The second model presents a situation in which the demarcation of the boundary is the basic force in creating a nation. In this situation a new state is formed, with boundaries which have nothing to do with the dispersion of tribes, peoples or nations, and the inhabitants of this particular political area, became, through a long process, a nation, which never existed before.

## **6. THE NATION-BEFORE-BOUNDARY MODEL**

Examples of the 'nation before boundaries' situation are Italy as the country of the Italian nation or Sweden and Thailand as the countries of the Swedish and the Thai nations. In a world-wide view, this model applies mainly to the European and the Asian continents. The Old World, Europe, which will be discussed later, is basically a nation-states continent. Asia's independent states mostly fit this pattern. Thus Japan is the country of the Japanese nation, China is the country of the Chinese nation, with some minorities. The Laotian nation and Cambodian nation, as well as the Uzbek and the Kazakh nations existed long before the modern boundaries of their independent states of Laos, Cambodia, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were established. The same hold true for Mongolia, Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and other east and central Asian states. The Vietnamese nation, as well as the Korean nation, were cut into two separated independent states, but today united Vietnam is a nation state while we still have two Korean states. Even India and Pakistan were formed according to the dispersion of the Hindu and the Muslims living in the Indian sub-continent. All those independent states have some national minority, which do not see themselves as connected to the dominant nation, within their political boundaries, but they are based on a majority of one ethnic nation. Although most of the present boundaries of the Asian states were formed by the European colonial powers, they basically were drawn according to the dispersion of the dominating nation inhabiting the area. There are, however, some exceptions in the Asian continent, mainly in the Middle East, a situation which will be discussed later.

## **7. THE BOUNDARIES-BEFORE-NATION MODEL**

The 'boundaries-before-nation situation' can characterise the American and African continents – the New World countries. Thus the Argentine and the Canadian nations, as well as the Nigerian and the Kenyan nation were created

as mingling by those who live in the area demarcated by a line, as they never existed as a special nation before. Although there are, in Africa, some exceptions, it seems that in all independent countries on the American continent, from Canada to Chile, all of which nowadays try to present their nationhood, no nation that ever existed before the independent state were created, got its independence (Giro, 1994). The pre-Colombian map of America has nothing to do with the modern political map of the American continent of today. There never had been a Colombian nation or Guatemala nation before independence (Ireland 1971) and even the American nation was created by people who lived and are still living between two boundary lines, the northern one with Canada and the southern one which separates the United States and Mexico. Some of the local tribes and nations, together with new immigrants from all over the world, mingled and created the new American nation.

In Africa the process was a bit different. With some exceptions, like Ethiopia, and to some extent Morocco and Egypt, most of the new African states were created as emerging from the administrative colonial lines, which never took into consideration the existence of nations and tribes. The modern political map of Africa is an outcome of the colonial division of the late 19th century, combined with local imperial divisions of mainly the British and the French colonies of Africa (Brownlie, 1979). Thus, nearly all African independent states have a multi-national or multi-peoples society, which is trying to form a united nation within its boundaries. From South Africa in the south, through Namibia, Zimbabwe, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda to Congo, Chad, Mauritania, Ghana and others (Touval, 1972), all the countries fit to this pattern.

The European states of Spain, Belgium, Switzerland, which will be discussed later, and the Middle East region can be said to fit this model, although they are not situated in the New World realm. The Middle East, apart from Egypt, is in the south-western part of the Asian continent. As the cradle of civilisation, it belongs, in historical sense, to the Old World. Anyhow, its nation-boundaries relations fit more the New World model rather than the Old World Model. Up to about a 100 years ago, the whole area was inhabited mainly by one nation – the Arabs, with some minorities, all under the regime of the Turkish Ottoman Empire. The main exceptions were the Turks, a nation which migrated from central Asia and became Muslims, and the Persians, another non-Arab Muslim nation. European Mandatory regimes, mainly held by Britain and France, dictated lines that separated the Middle Eastern Arab nation into different mandate territories, later becoming independent states (Biger, 2008). The mandatory powers never looked at the dispersion of inhabitants of the area, thus creating independent states none of which had its unique old history.

By this process, which took place in the 1920s, the states of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan (then called Transjordan) and Palestine (Biger, 2004) were created, 'out of the blue'. This process led to the creation of the Syrian, the Lebanese, the

Jordanian, and the Iraqi nations which never existed before and were created by the boundaries imposed on the Middle East by the Europeans. Most of those independent states are trying to develop their unique nationhood but it seems that the tribal, religious and other attitudes have prevented it so far. The same holds true for the Palestinians. A true Palestinian is one, or a descendant of one, who lived in the area which Britain created in 1920 and called Palestine, a name which did not exist in any formal division of the Ottoman Empire (Biger, 1981). Those who lived in British Palestine in between 1920 and 1947 and their offspring are Palestinians, never were united as a nation before Britain created Palestine. Later on, the boundaries in the Arabian peninsula were established according to the areas ruled by local tribes' leaders and not according to any national characteristics (Al Baharam, 1975).

## **8. THE EUROPEAN CASE**

Of more than 45 independent states of Europe, only eight are not built around a dominant nation. The others, from the northern Scandinavian states of Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark to the southern states of Portugal, France, Italy, Malta, Greece and others, are 'nation states' built around a dominant nation. The same holds true for most of the west-east axis of Europe, from Ireland, *via* the Netherlands, Germany, Poland, Latvia, Estonia to Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Moldova and Romania. Bulgaria, the other Balkan states of Slovenia, Serbia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Croatia (Englefield, 1992) as well as Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Lithuania, all are nation states. Armenia – the country of the Armenian nation, as well as Georgia, can be included in that model. Many of those countries have some ethnic or even national minorities. Thus the Laps of the north, the Austrians in south Tyrol of Italy, the Scots and Welsh people in Britain, the Basques in France, the Hungarians in Romania, the Gypsies and now, the millions of Muslims living all over Europe.

The exception to that model are the five tiny states of Lichtenstein, Luxemburg, Monaco, Andorra (the only country in which the Catalan language is the official language of the country) and San Marino, which are not classic nation states. All of them were established as a continuation of the old Middle Ages regime of an area ruled by local noble family.

Thus the local 30,000 Monegasques of Monaco (Gonen, 1993, pp. 408–409) became a nation of those who lived inside the boundary between France and Monaco, which is one of the oldest boundaries in the world, established in 1070 under the Grimaldi family (Biger, 1995, p. 227).

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg was established in 1815 but its boundaries were changed in 1831, after the Belgian revolution, and its final boundaries were established in 1839. The Luxembourgers who had never been a nation but a mixture of Celtic, Germanic and French origin, became a people with a collective identity, supported by a separate German dialect (Letzeburgish) and later became an independent state, living within the created boundaries.

The story of Liechtenstein began in 1342, when the County of Vaduz became a separate political territory. Its political independence was established in 1806 but its boundaries with Austria and Switzerland were established earlier, in 1719. Thus the people who lived in that area became a nation, without any pre-characteristics of a nation. (Kranz, 1981).

San Marino, the tiny state located in the Appenine Mountains of central Italy, completely surrounded by Italian territory, was a medieval city state, in which Italian people lived under a special independent regime. Its independence was recognised in 1740 by the Papal State, in 1797 by Napoleon I and by the Congress of Vienna in 1815. Its 25,000 people are one of the smallest European nations.

Andorra, which is situated in the Pyrenean mountain range between France and Spain, which drew its boundaries, was established back in the Middle Ages, in 1278, to calm the French-Spanish border area. Its 60,000 Andorrans are Roman Catholics and their only unique national characteristic is their language. They are using the Catalan as their official language, but also Spanish and French.

The other three exceptions to the 'nation-before-boundaries' model are Belgium, Switzerland and, to some extent – Spain.

Belgium was created in 1830–1831 as a buffer state between Catholic France and Protestant Netherlands. Thus it is a two-nation states, in which the Flemish people and the Walloon people, both mainly Catholic, live in an independent country, trying to form a national identity of those who are living within its boundary line, but with a non-predicted future regarding the continuation of this situation.

Switzerland was formed back in the Middle Ages, in 1 August 1291, when the three forest cantons established the 'eternal alliance'. By 1353, five other cantons had joined the confederacy. All these allies were called Swiss. The 7 million Swiss (Scweizers, Suisses, Svizzeri) are divided among the speakers of German (70%), French (20%), Italian (c. 4%) and Rheto-Romanche speakers. The Swiss are about evenly divided between Catholics and Protestants. Although they have a long historical tradition, their nationhood was created inside their borders, established first by the 1648 Peace of Westphalia at the end of the Thirty Years' War. Its present boundaries were established in 1815, at the Congress of Vienna, following the Paris Peace conference of 1814. Its boundaries were guaranteed for the first time in the Federal Pact of Zurich in 1815 (Heller and Long, 1970). Thus the Swiss nation is formed by those who are

living within those boundaries. More than 1 million foreigners, mainly Italians, Spaniards and Middle East Muslims, cannot become citizens, even if born in Switzerland.

The case of Spain is special. The Spanish state was formed in 1492 by the marriage of Isabella of Castile and Ferdinand of Aragon and its boundaries with Portugal and France were established in 1297 and 1479 (with Portugal) and in 1659 with France. Thus Spain's united territory is more than 350 years old. Anyhow, the Spanish nation, the 40 million Spaniards (Españoles) which today are overwhelmingly Catholic, have an extremely heterogeneous background. The contemporary Spanish people are composed of the Andalusians, Castilians, Catalans, Galicians, Basques and Gypsies. The Basque people are resident also in southern France, the Gypsies are dispersed all over Europe, the Catalans form the majority of those living in Andorra, the Galicians form part of the Portuguese nation and only the Castilians and the Andalusians are living only inside the boundaries of modern Spain. Thus although the Spanish nation seems to present one nation, it is an agglomeration of many different peoples, living in one united territorial area. As such, it represents the 'boundary-made-nation' category rather than the 'nation-creates-boundary' situation.

## 9. CONCLUSIONS

Although the Model presented above cannot predict anything about the future, it can point to the way the independent states of today were established. As the future is not to be seen, and the present situation is such that on one side the European Union is created, trying to avoid the nation-state idea, and on the other side nations continue to achieve their independence, one cannot predict the future political map of the world, but, using the Model, we can see the way our political map was established. The notion of the nation state as a basic model is best known, the case of the boundaries which created nations is less discussed, and never those two models been presented as a *continent* pattern. The presenting of the Two-Way Model can help to understand the political map of the world and by this, might enlarge our understanding of our fragmented world.

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