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### **EUROPEAN STATE FORMATION 1900-2000**

**Birthe Hansen**

This paper focuses on twentieth century European state formation. The purpose is to present a survey of these, to point at significant patterns, and to offer an explanation of why the states were formed.

State formation arguably relates to major changes in the relative distribution of aggregate international strength, conceptualized as *systemic change*. In other words, outcomes are expected when the number or constellation of great powers changes. In this paper, the purpose is not to develop a full, causal explanation but to demonstrate systemic change as an important factor behind state formation and to argue why, by means of an abstract-systemic international political theory with an emphasis on power and strength.

In the twentieth century three cases of what is here conceptualized as systemic change took place:

In 1918, following the end of World War I, the previous multipolar order was replaced by another multipolar order that consisted of different great powers.

In 1945, following the end of World War II, the multipolar order was replaced by a bipolar order.

In 1989, following the end of the Cold War, when the bipolar order was replaced by a unipolar order.

The emphasis on strength and systemic change might even harass the established concept of 'Europe'. It could be argued that even regions are subject to consequential transformations in the case of a systemic change. Actually, there is little doubt that the political demarcation of Europe has changed accordingly. Yet it appears useful to lean on a conventional perception of Europe and to hold it constant. The purpose is not to discuss the extension of Europe but to compare internal developments in Europe across time.

'Europe' is, consequently, understood according to the conventional geographic construction (discourse) and is thus separated by the Arctic Ocean in the North, the Atlantic Ocean west of the British Isles to the West, the Mediterranean and the Black Sea (and River Kuma) in the South and South East, and the Urals and River Emba and the Caspian Sea to the East (cf. Encyclopedia Britannica). Of course, even the geographic demarcation is merely a construction, but it is a convention, and if applied historically, at least the regional demarcation of Europe can be held as a constant. Politically, regions apparently vary according to the same

variables as do state formation. However, the geographic boundaries of Europe create two problems when focusing on which states to be included. Russia is situated across Europe and Asia. It will be categorized as a European state as its point of gravity (around Moscow) is clearly in the European zone. Kazakhstan, on the other hand, which became independent after the collapse of the Soviet Union, will be excluded from Europe, as more than half of it is beyond the geographic scope of Europe, and as a thinly and sparsely populated state has no obvious European center in contrast to Russia<sup>1</sup>.

It should be emphasised that the following analysis is limited to state formations in Europe after 1900. Some of the hypotheses that are presented may prove valid to previous or extra-European state formations as well but only with some qualifications. However, the task here is only to investigate twentieth century European state formations.

### **A survey of European state formation from 1900 to 2000**

Eighteen European states were in existence in the year 1900<sup>2</sup>: Austria-Hungary, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Luxembourg, Montenegro, the Netherlands, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. By the end of 1999 the number had risen to thirtyfive. A large number of these came into being in the last decade of the millennium: Belarus, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Slovakia, Slovenia, and Ukraine. Germany is not included in the list even though both the German Democratic Republic and the Federal Republic of Germany were replaced by the reunited state of Germany. This is because the merger took place without any re-writing of the constitution (only necessary up-dating). Rather than a new state formation, the German reunification is interpreted as the enlargement of the Federal Republic of Germany. Neither is Russia included, although the possibility exists. The Soviet Union collapsed and ceased to exist, and Russia rose as the centre in the ashes of the empire. One could choose to count Russia as three different states in the twentieth century, namely Czarist Russia, the Soviet Union, and Federalist Russia. Here it is seen as an expanded and later reduced empire, however this a matter of definition. Belarus, which emerged from the breakdown of the USSR, became an independent state closely connected to Russia, and already during the first decade after independence it got still closer, resulting in a union. However, formally, it was a sovereign state at the end of 1999.

These states were not the only new-comers between 1900 and 2000: Norway received full independence from its union with Sweden in 1905. Following were Albania (1912), Austria (1918), Czechoslovakia (1918), Estonia (1918), Finland (1917), Hungary (1918), Ireland (1921), Latvia (1918), Lithuania (1918), Poland (1918), Yugoslavia (1918), Iceland (1944),

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<sup>1</sup>Malta, Cyprus and the Central Asian, Transcaucasian post-Soviet republics are thereby excluded.

<sup>2</sup>The numbers are based on an elaboration of the survey in Lane and Ersson (1996).

Germany DR (1949), and Germany FR (1949). Figure 1 provides a survey of new states coming to formation in the twentieth century:

**State formation in Europe 1900-2000**

Norway	1905	Germany FR	1949
Albania	1912	Belarus	1991
Finland	1917	Croatia	1991
Austria	1918	Estonia	1991
Czechoslovakia	1918	Latvia	1991
Estonia	1918	Lithuania	1991
Hungary	1918	Macedonia	1991
Latvia	1918	Moldavia	1991
Lithuania	1918	Slovenia	1991
Poland	1918	Ukraine	1991
Yugoslavia	1918	Yugoslavia (reorganized) <sup>3</sup>	1992
Ireland	1921	Bosnia	1992
Turkey	1923	Czech Republic	1993
Iceland	1944	Slovakia	1993
Germany DR	1949		

**Fig. 1**

Some states appear twice on the list, as they were formed, disappeared and reappeared. The disappearance was often a result of annexation. Reappearance has taken different forms (cf. the Baltic States compared to the Balkan states). Nevertheless, they were ‘out’ and thus their formation has to be counted twice.

In the course of the century, states also vanished. Austria-Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Estonia, pre-WWII Germany, the two post-World War II Germanies, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Serbia, and the Soviet Union. Some of these states were later re-born or re-emerged in different versions, this can be seen with reference to figure 1. The goal is merely to illustrate the fact that the twentieth century Europe witnessed a series of state formations as well as disappearances of states. The next task, however is to identify patterns of state creation.

### **Patterns of state formation**

What immediately grabs attention is the pattern in terms of ‘*state proliferation*.’. Between 1900 and 2000 the number of European states almost doubled, from 18 to 35 states. Furthermore, the

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<sup>3</sup> Serbia and Montenegro

trend was stable in the sense that the number steadily and incessantly rose. The European pattern of state proliferation is similar to the global pattern (Boniface 1998).

Another evident pattern describes the tendency of *clusters* of state formation. Except for the case of Norway becoming a fully sovereign state in 1905, Albania, which succeeded in obtaining independence already in 1912 and Iceland in 1944, all state formations between 1900 and 2000 took place within five year intervals following the end of serious power struggles between the international great powers. In neorealist theory, a 'systemic change' covers an analytically identified change of great powers in the international system brought about by a redistribution of aggregate strength (Waltz 1979; Hansen 1995). A systemic change usually occurs subsequent to a hot war but as nuclearity brought about a systemic change without, this is not necessarily the case (Hansen 1995).

When applying neorealist theory, systemic changes have occurred in 1918 after the end of World War I, after the end of World War II in 1945, and after the end of the Cold War in 1989. These specific years were followed by intervals of clustered state formation, and only a couple of states were formed in Europe outside these intervals.

A third pattern is revealed when looking at the geopolitical dimension of state formations: the vast majority of new states were formed within the boundaries of the losing powers and their networks of alliances or at the borderline between the fronts. These are labelled as the *zones of defeat*. Norway<sup>4</sup>, Ireland, and Iceland are exceptions.

After World War I, Albania, Austria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Yugoslavia were formed within the range of the collapsing Austria-Hungarian empire. (Poland, stemming from the defeated Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia while Finland and the three Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania benefited from the territorial surrender of Czarist Russia). In terms of the balance of power, which is an essential notion in the neorealist theory, the great power system was reorganized. The redistribution of strength led to realignment, including new opportunities for some groups aspiring for statehood and the loss of opportunities of others, previously depending on then defeated and/or weakened allies.

After World War II, the great loser, Germany, was dissolved and parted into two new states, German Democratic Republic (GDR) and Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Iceland achieved independence during the war.

The end of the Cold War between the international system's rival great powers (it was a war-like conflict, although a cold one, probably due to the introduction of nuclear weapons and the later obtained second strike capability) sparked more state formations to occur within the 'zone of defeat': Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine seceded from the collapsing Soviet Union; the Czech Republic, and Slovakia were formed out of Czechoslovakia, a member of the former Soviet led alliance, the Warsaw Pact. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, FYRO Macedonia and Slovenia seceded from Yugoslavia, all formerly non-aligned during the Cold War. However, Yugoslavia was situated at the borderline between the two blocs in Cold War

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<sup>4</sup> Norway may be dealt with as an effect of the Napoleonic wars, in which case Norway fits all expectations (a systemic change and Denmark being part of the zone of defeat). However, there is still an unexplicable time lag.

Europe.<sup>5</sup>

As previously stated, Norway does not fit into the patterns, while Albania and Iceland were a little early<sup>6</sup>.

In summary, however, this study of the 1900-2000 state formations in Europe reveals the following three patterns:

A growing number of states.

State formations in clusters following international systemic change.

The majority of state formations were found within the 'zones of defeat' at the borderlines.

While not being fully explored yet, two additional patterns appear concerning the presence of nationalism and the collapse of empires versus the collapse of states.

First, nationalism was strongly present in almost all the state formations after World War I. The two major World War II related state formations took place against nationalist sentiments. After the Cold War, the formations represented several groups, those with strong nationalism, those without, and those formed against competing nationalist sentiments. This indicates the lack of any strong pattern of nationalist presence across the three clusters of state formation in the twentieth century.

Another finding is that the defeat of empires produced more new states than the defeat of states. This is probably not surprising at all, since empires typically are much larger than states and since they are less coherent.

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<sup>5</sup> Germany is a border case; if the German reunification is considered a mere subordination of Germany DR (in the defeated zone) to Germany FR (in the winning zone), the case might be clear. A state vanished in the defeated zone while another, in the winning, was enlarged. If, however, post-Cold War Germany was categorised as a 'new' state formation, the case is a mixed one as one part of it belonged to the defeated coalition while the other part belonged to the winning. The Germans were, similar to Yugoslavia, at the borderline of the opposing blocs in Cold War Europe.

<sup>6</sup> Iceland obtained full independence from Denmark in the last phase of World War II when Denmark was occupied by (Nazi-) Germany - which, on the other hand, was not able at that time to maintain control with Iceland in the North Atlantic Sea.

## Conclusions

The above reflections pave the way for these preliminary conclusions concerning state formation in Europe between 1900 and 2000:

In respect to the patterns: the formations have multiplied, they have taken place in clusters following the systemic changes, and they have primarily taken place within the zones of defeat

When looking for an explanation of the patterns, a neorealist approach appears useful, as it emphasises the variable of strength. Redistribution of strength is obviously a key explanatory factor behind the state formations

It could be argued that the reflections above do not include any analysis of the role that nationalism plays. The justification is, that whether or not nationalism plays a role, systemic change seems to provide the explanation. However, a cautious view on nationalism indicates that it is not a decisive factor in the formation of states: in some places, strong nationalism has been present without the group in question having succeeded in obtaining statehood (e.g., the Basques), while other groups lacking nationalism have succeeded or have been forced into obtaining statehood (e.g. the two Germanies after World War II, or Bosnia and Herzegovina after the Cold War). On the contrary to both, nationalism has been present in some areas and only led to statehood in the context of systemic change (e.g. the Baltic states).

According to neorealist theses on alignment, the weaker parts tend to ally against the stronger. This might explain the formation of the Kingdom of Yugoslavia after World War I. The Slovenians feared Italy, the Croats feared Hungarian revanchism (A. Lane 1996:31-36), and Serbia, at this particular time in history, thus appeared as the lesser evil with the lesser ability of dominance. The merger, therefore, appeared the favourable strategic option and became the possible one because of the great powers' wish to see a strong Balkan state in order to balance Germany.

Nationalism, as a whole, appears to be a strong feature of the post-World War I state formations, almost not represented in the post-World War II formations, and partly represented in the post-Cold War formations. Among the states formed after the Cold War, it seems as if those based on nationalism so far have been doing quite well, while those lacking nationalism have been facing major problems: Ukraine, Belarus, and Bosnia and Herzegovina (all with strongly competing nationalisms).

Another challenge to the conclusions arises when looking at state formations in the so-called Third World. They have taken place continuously after the end of the World Wars. Basically, they are related to the decline and defeat of the European great powers, and to the decolonization process that emerged along with the rise of bipolarity. In spite of the emergence of the Cold War, the US and the Soviet Union had similar interests in limiting the influence of the former great powers. However, they were also interested in the build up of alignments and their

spheres of interests and therefore, in several cases, were reluctant in respect to putting pressure on allies. Twentieth century state formation outside Europe took place with a 'delay' in comparison to Europe. A preliminary view on the extra-European formations reveals that they are also related to the international redistribution of strength, i.e., the systemic changes. The effects, however, occurred more indirectly and later on. Firstly, this does not challenge the explanatory power of the hypothesis derived from neorealism, as the five year-limit is merely an operational limit. Secondly, it makes way for a sub-hypothesis: the closer to the centre of a systemic conflict line, the more powerful the impact of a systemic change will be, and consequently the quicker state formation will follow.

The analysis has been restricted to the twentieth century. It could have been extended backwards. The reason for limiting the analysis here has been that it appears reasonable to analyse the twentieth century as a stable period also in other respects: globalization was important, capitalism was spreading, and the 'enlightenment' had taken place in Europe. Yet a comprehensive analysis should be extended to the period since the signing of the Westphalian Treaty in 1648, as the treaty marks the emergence of the European state system.<sup>7</sup>

Finally, the observations and conclusions regarding the so-called 'zones of defeat' needs a comment. When looking at the patterns, the vast majority of state formations took place within such zones. Some of them, however, could be sub-classified as have taken place within the 'peripheral' zones of defeat, that is the border line between the rivals (most notably, this goes for the break-down of Yugoslavia). It seems as if state formation is taking place only with the greatest difficulties and with the shed of most blood among the 'peripheral losers'. However, this is an empirical generalization based on few cases, and it needs further exploration.

## **Perspectives: The European Union from the Arctic to the Sahara? Or an Euro-Russo Alliance?**

In the debate on the future of the European Union and European state formation, it is often argued that history, culture and identity will play a major role. For instance, the argument

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<sup>7</sup> In fact, one should also carry out an investigation of control regarding divergent polarities: different polarities might well provide a different space for state formation. Multi- and unipolarity are likely providers of a greater space, while bipolarity might provide a lesser space due to the zero-sum game between the great power rivals. Other interfering variables could be globalization (which makes it easier to obtain statehood because of decreasing demands to classic physical demands to infrastructure and self-reliance); and, returning to unipolarity, the need to gain accept from greater neighbouring powers and, most of all, the great powers of the international system. In the case of unipolarity, the unipole does not need to take into consideration the competition of rivals and can therefore decide for other reasons. The case of Kosovo might become interesting: Kosovo was, by 1999, too late for the obtaining of statehood. If, however, unipolarity should be considered a lenient constellation of power, or, if Kosovo is analysed as having third world qualities and therefore a time-lag, the chances of statehood should be seen as increasing. Most probably, the Kosovars will have to wait for a more favourable systemic change, but they are definitely in the state-look-alike-group.

forwarded by Samuel Huntington (1993) on the clash of civilisations is often applied to explain why Turkish efforts to join the EU were seriously jeopardised in the 1990's. The reasoning is as following: Turkey is Muslim state. As Islam is part and parcel of popular Turkish culture, Turkey will, consequently, not be welcomed within the community of Christian Europe with its Athenian democratic roots. Similarly, it appears unlikely that the Muslim North African states might join the EU - being even more non-European, culturally speaking. A state like Libya has not even pretended to enhance democracy, and Algeria broke down in civil war in the 1990's.

Yet there might be a reason not to reject (*à priori*) the EU initiative of a free trade zone, so far planned to be implemented by the year 2010, that would include the EU and all the Southern littoral Mediterranean states. There might also be a reason for keeping open the possibility of an enlargement of the EU with these Southern countries. The argument that is derived from neorealist theory is that states are willing to cooperate if they face strong external competition. That is, if the competition from third parties appears worse than the loss of autonomy inflicted by close mutual cooperation.

Usually, neorealist theory emphasises the risk of armed conflict and focuses on the formation of alliances, accordingly. It has been shown that the perception of a threat is the most important factor when explaining the formation of alliances and that it exceeds other factors like ideological similarity (Walt 1990). However, in some cases, the threat to the position of states, measured in terms of relative, aggregate capabilities, may not be a military one but rather that of economic competition. If this argument is taken into consideration, the result may be closer cooperation rather than the formation of alliances, and, in the case of Europe, rising competition with, for example, Asia, may lead to the build-up of capabilities by means of political enlargement.

To opt for increasing relative, aggregate capabilities is seen as a strategy against the risk of conflict as well as other kind, of competition. Historically, the strategy has sometimes been carried out by military means and the occupation of additional territory and other assets as well, like additional population, possibilities of economic growth, resources, and defence options.

By the turn of the second millennium, expansion by military means appears to be a less likely option. The 1945 introduction of nuclear weapons marked the beginning of an interstate process, in which the risk of warfare became reduced due to the war-negating effects of nuclear weapons. The effect was enhanced by the horizontal and vertical proliferation of nuclearity, and until nuclear-negating weapons have been introduced (as an effective and much enlarged version of the Strategic Defense Initiative), war between nuclearized states appears improbable. With respect to Europe and Asia, nuclear weapons are present in both places and beyond.

In order to maintain its position in the competition between several strong Asian powers or the United States in the longer term, the EU may choose to enlarge. China and India



are both very strong in a series of capabilities, even if they lack sufficient economic development. However, they are in a phase of take-off and modernisation, and they might become serious competitors. The United States already has all features of a serious competitor, and if the world order is bound to change, this may pose big problems to the EU-states.

The incentive to enlarge the EU with even non-European Mediterranean countries is consequently seen to depend on an increased competition from other states like China and India, which assumes that they do not themselves break down in the process of modernization or on a possible break-down in the unipolar world order.

Another factor should be taken into consideration. The opportunity of the EU to integrate might well have depended on the presence of a great power, the United States, literally in the middle of Western Europa since the end of World War II. In neorealist terms, the strong presence has virtually offset the dynamics of the international anarchy working between the European states (in the first place among the bipolar, Western part of Europe, and after 1989, in Europe in general). The commencement of the integration process is thus explained by the presence of a rare phenomenon, namely the presence of an 'authority' among a group of states (in contrast to anarchy), accepted by them all because of the fear of the Soviet Union and present because of its own determination to contain the Soviet Union. The implication is that if this presence comes to an end, e.g. in the case of US retreat from its unipolar position or the arise of other challengers endangering the world order, the EU will face even stronger external competition. The dilemma thus arises between the need to deepen the integration process externally or to enlarge itself even further and to act without the American moderation of European anarchy.

The purpose of these reflections, which are and cannot be anything but reflections, is to put into perspective also the European development as a whole. Current arguments on, for instance, the problems of closer European cooperation with Turkey, not to mention Turkish EU membership, often focus on the differences between Turkish and European identity. These differences may, however, turn out to be less important than other factors.

The same kind of argument could be applied to the Euro-Russian relationship. Rather than focusing on the current, political differences between the EU and Russia, one could focus on the possible common interests of the two in the case of the emergence of a multipolar international system. Russia and the EU might then be possible allies in the competition with rising Asian powers. However, such a scenario is dependant on many additional factors, and the outcome is, indeed, indecisive. However, it is important not to rule out 'unholy' alliances beforehand because of current, divergent identities.

## Summary

My objective was to investigate European state formation in the twentieth century in order to identify and explain potential patterns. The findings were analysed and three conclusions were drawn regarding possible patterns: 1) States are proliferating, 2) state formation takes place in clusters following systemic change, and 3) the probability of state formation increases in cases of the candidates being situated in zones of defeat (including the border zones between former rivals). A hypothesis derived from the systemic-structural neorealist theory, saying that systemic change leads to state formation, appeared to hold a strong explanatory power regarding the European 1900-2000 case. It was stated that the hypothesis needs elaboration to include extra-European cases and that a comprehensive analysis has to depend on further historical evidence (back to the Westphalian Treaty of 1648). Nationalism was found to have played a minor and not decisive role.

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