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Internationalist Patriots? Minority Nationalists, Ethnic Minorities, and the Global Interwar Stage, 1918–39

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In the aftermath of the First World War state borders in Central and Eastern Europe were redrawn at the Paris Peace Conference. Large numbers of the region's inhabitants were thereby consigned to minority status within new, putatively national states, while the armed conflicts that subsequently broke out between various successor states, along with the progression of the Russian Civil War, also forced hundreds of ethno-nationalist and minority activists into exile. Many of those belonging to national and ethnic minorities could easily find refuge in their respective kin-states, from Weimar Germany to post-Trianon Hungary. They set up networks of political and cultural associations that served as the bases for stirring up irredentism, with official state support and often also with the collaboration of large portions of the homeland's revisionist and nationalist parties.

These activists were joined by many other ethno-nationalists with no motherland, who took refuge in former imperial centers such as Vienna and Berlin, as well as Paris, London, and Geneva. The latter acquired new visibility when the League of Nations was established there in 1920. All these cities became centers of agitation for ethno-nationalist émigrés, who tried to influence neutral public opinion in favor of their respective causes. Paradoxically, imperial capitals such as Paris or London, as well as former imperial cities like Vienna and Berlin, became “anti-imperial metropolises,” where anti-imperialist and anti-colonial agitation was triggered. Anti-colonialist students from the imperial peripheries had the chance to exchange views with Eastern European nationalist exiles, White Russians, social revolutionaries from Latin America, and irredentist activists.¹

As the preceding example illustrates, ethno-nationalist and minority activists did not only look to kin-states and their own diaspora networks when seeking to promote their cause internationally. They also came together within a variety of transnational alliances and organizations. The most notable among these was the Congress of European Nationalities (CEN), which provides the focus for the second part of this chapter. Established in Geneva in 1925, the Congress continued to meet

annually until 1938, bringing together around 300 spokespersons for twenty national minority groups from fifteen European states during the course of its existence. The prominent place of German minorities within the CEN meant that from 1933, the organization increasingly came under the sway of external influence from Nazi Germany. As such, it was understandably portrayed in highly negative terms after 1945, within a literature that generally cast ethno-nationalist leaders and émigrés more broadly as professional troublemakers and—willingly or unwillingly—fellow travelers of the Fascist powers.

The picture is, however, more complex and nuanced than previous accounts often suggest. As will be shown in this chapter, ethno-nationalist activists and exiles in fact identified with a wide range of different political creeds. Some certainly came under the influence of integralist visions of the nation and were subsequently seduced by the fascist worldview. In their eyes, fascist Italy and/or Nazi Germany incarnated the best of values such as the cult of the nation, while upholding a strong anti-communist stance. Indeed, early fascists such as Gabriele D'Annunzio identified sub-state nationalists and/or ethnic activists as possible allies for challenging the Versailles settlement.² In other cases, activists' allegiance to the ethnic and cultural concept of the nation led them to take strategic risks, or simply seal pragmatic alliances with Nazis and Fascists. Yet, the activist movement was also home to anti-fascists during the 1930s, while another strand found inspiration in the Marxist-Leninist approach to national liberation and was fascinated by the nationalities policy of the Soviet Union. In fact, Moscow became at times a pole of attraction for non-communist nationalist émigrés seeking external support, and until 1934 communist parties embraced the Bolshevik doctrine of self-determination following the Peoples' Conference of Baku (1920) and the first Soviet Constitution issued in 1924. To them, support for anti-colonial aspirations and national minority claims was highly instrumental in destabilizing and destroying the capitalist states.³

New groups of ethno-nationalist exiles also appeared in the 1920s and 1930s. These included Catalan, Basque, Galician, Sardinian, South Tyrolean, and Slovenian exiles from Spain and Italy, alongside Irish political exiles in the early 1920s (particularly *Sinn Féin* activists and later on Irish Republican Army members). These were accompanied by nationalist activists from the distant peripheries of the British, French, and Dutch empires (India, Vietnam, Indonesia), who frequently interacted with European ethno-nationalists.⁴ This latter group generally remained committed to democracy, while some leaned toward communism, and were much less susceptible to the "lure" of fascism than their Eastern European counterparts. Finally, the leaders of Jewish minorities in Central and Eastern Europe constituted another faction.

While activists from different parts of Europe could all be broadly labeled as "ethnic entrepreneurs," they often interacted and merged with liberal activists, academics, and intellectuals in Paris, London, Vienna, or Geneva, who intended to represent broader segments of European public opinion concerned with the pursuit of peace and the freedom of peoples, nations, and races. This interaction can be understood as a facet of the new internationalism that took shape after 1918.⁵ It was enhanced by the existence of the League of Nations, as well as by the implementation within the

League of a system of protection of minorities that, despite its limitations, established for the first time a transnational framework of principles and rules that attempted to prevent ethnic minorities from forceful assimilation by the ethnic majorities of their nation-states.

The first part of this chapter maps out these varied orientations within the activist movement, as well as its interactions with broader transnational networks concerned with finding solutions to the “minority problem” in interwar Europe. The chapter then proceeds to explore further the dynamics at work during this period through an analysis of the Congress of European Nationalities. It seeks to demonstrate that while the CEN certainly encompassed a broad spectrum of different orientations from the very outset, it was initially conceived and nested within the new international legal framework of minority protection embodied by the League of Nations. As such, leading CEN activists such as Paul Schiemann participated actively in European discussions of what minority rights were, what national, ethnic, and religious/racial minorities were, and how to reconcile the principle of state sovereignty with the accommodation of ethnic and national diversity. This in turn gave rise to a transnational discussion on nationality theory that paralleled the first steps of nationalism studies in the United Kingdom, Germany, France, and the United States, and that of the protection of human rights. To a certain extent, the transnational debate on minority protection picked up where the previous debate on the nationality principle during the conflict had left off.⁶ As the chapter will show however, the Congress—like other attempts to forge transnational alliances at the time—was hampered and ultimately undermined by the internal heterogeneity of its membership. It proved to be extremely difficult to reconcile the diverse demands stemming from divergent national claims, such as those of autonomist factions versus irredentist or pro-independence groups, or those of national minorities seeking reintegration into their motherland as opposed to groups seeking independent recognition of their nationalities.⁷

Mapping Transnational Activist Networks for Minority Rights in Interwar Europe

Nationalist émigrés and transnational activists had existed throughout the nineteenth century, from the Italian Giuseppe Garibaldi and his fellow leaders of *Risorgimento* nationalism to Romanian and Bulgarian exiles in London and Paris, Irish nationalists in the United States, and Polish émigrés in Paris. Until the end of the nineteenth century, they were overwhelmingly liberal or republican oriented.⁸ From the beginning of the twentieth century until the eve of the First World War, in great European capitals such as London and Paris new alliances emerged between nationalist émigrés and the British, Swiss, and French liberal left. Some republicans and radical liberals, many of them professional opinion makers, journalists, and academics, advocated the right to self-determination for European (and occasionally even non-European) nationalities, as a means to better achieve peace and freedom for all citizens of Europe. They criticized the purported oppression of national minorities

and stateless nations within multinational empires, particularly within the Ottoman and Austro-Hungarian (and sometimes Russian) domains, and established close links between the full democratization of Europe, the pursuit of peace, and the satisfaction of national demands all over Europe. Certainly, this was not deprived of some degree of national chauvinism. Macedonian, Armenian, Lithuanian, and other émigrés managed to establish some connections with broader segments of French and British public opinion through liberal associations such as anti-slavery societies. These and other associations had positioned themselves at the origins of organizations such as the *Ligue des Droits de l'Homme* (Human Rights League), the Fabian Society, and several peace associations that attempted to establish a transnational network. British “champions of nationalities” were eager to accept self-determination for Slovakia and Croatia, but not for Ireland. Their French counterparts firmly believed that France was ethnically homogeneous; therefore, as a full-fledged democratic nation-state it was entitled to raise the banner of self-determination.⁹

Alongside the defense of worldwide peace, tolerance, international cooperation, and human equality, Western European intellectuals and politicians became firm defenders of the rights of “oppressed nationalities,” though generally limiting self-determination to “civilized” peoples. Minority leaders did not always share this political agenda and were far more interested in attaining external support for their national freedom. In this respect, a contradiction emerged. The “champions of nationalities” were motivated by liberalism, the rejection of “backward” empires, and the search for a new international order based on the peaceful coexistence of nations. However, ethno-nationalists searched for strategic allies among those who embraced their cause, regardless of their political orientation.

This pragmatic strategy was fully developed during the First World War and became the norm among nationalist exiles after 1918. Being heard in the emerging sphere of international public opinion also became a parallel objective for political and intellectual representatives of “oppressed” nationalities. This strategy had led earlier to the emergence of international platforms such as the *Union des Nationalités* (1912), an initiative founded in Paris by some exiled Lithuanians, Jewish Zionists, and other nationalist émigrés from Eastern Europe, shortly after they had met one year earlier at the Universal Race Congress held in London. At the Congress, the founder of the initiative, the Lithuanian exile Jean Gabrys, had also met the French journalist, René Pélissier, who was committed to the cause of oppressed peoples and who would work later for the French information services. Gabrys and Pélissier also attracted some Irish and Catalan nationalists and enjoyed the support of British writers and journalists, along with prominent French intellectuals such as the historian Charles Seignobos.¹⁰

Political contradictions between nationalist activists and international pacifists became evident during the Great War. Both sides, but especially the Entente, presented the conflict as a war to liberate the small nations oppressed by the enemy. This strategy opened certain doors in the foreign ministries in London, Paris, and Washington for ethno-nationalist émigrés from the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, although ethno-nationalist exiles from the Caucasus and the Baltic countries first

attempted to win German support for their cause. They founded committees to carry out propaganda activities in Paris and London but preferred neutral soil, particularly in Switzerland. They first prioritized finding allies among the public opinion makers of the countries whose support they sought. They additionally looked for sympathizers with their cause who could “lobby” the staffs of the ministries of foreign affairs of those states. Good examples of this were the Czech nationalist leaders Tomáš Masaryk and Edvard Benes. Their contact with the British Foreign Office was facilitated by influential mediators who endorsed their cause, such as the historians Robert W. Seton-Watson and Edward H. Carr.¹¹ The US President Woodrow Wilson enhanced the new legitimacy of nationality claims in his speech on war aims in January 1918. The presentation of his “Fourteen Points” program gave some groups of ethno-nationalist émigrés new opportunities for proto-diplomatic agitation, which was now rhetorically reinforced by their appeal to Wilsonian principles: the term “Wilsonianism” was almost equated to national self-determination.¹²

The final break-up of European multi-ethnic empires was not only achieved by the direct influence of ethno-nationalist émigrés. The latter certainly benefited from exceptional geopolitical circumstances. Ethno-nationalist exiles and activists could rely on a robust propaganda network abroad and on mediators in the diplomatic staffs of the Entente powers. The academic advisors of the main delegations, who drew the new map of Europe at the Paris Peace Conference, were influenced to some extent by émigrés. The representatives of the Jewish minorities in Paris, such as the British journalist Lucien Wolf, also played a crucial role behind the scenes. First imposed on Poland, in part as a result of Jewish lobbying activities and of the impact on European public opinion of notorious antisemitic pogroms in late 1918 and early 1919, the minority treaties soon extended to all minorities “of race, language and religion” in the successor states of Central and Eastern Europe and the Middle East, as well as in some states already in existence before the war (Greece, Bulgaria, and Romania). This established the framework for an international system of minorities protection under the umbrella of the League of Nations.¹³

The elites of nationalist movements in Europe saw proto-diplomatic agitation in times of global turmoil as an important element for more effectively attaining their objectives.¹⁴ However, not all émigrés enjoyed similar opportunities. Irish and Indian nationalists sent delegations to Paris but were not allowed to present their claims at the Peace Conference because during the Great War they had opposed the eventual winners. Something similar happened with several political groupings from Catalonia to Brittany. They all attempted to send memorandums to the various delegations at the Peace Conference.¹⁵ Even so, the example of ethno-nationalists who succeeded in achieving their objectives after 1918 influenced the strategies of those who sought to follow in their footsteps. They learned the compulsory nature of setting up propaganda bureaus in the greatest European capitals; they presented their claims in multilingual brochures and journals to influence international public opinion. They sought to gain the support of intellectuals, journalists, and influential elites in London, Vienna, Paris, Berlin, or Geneva, and they established what amounted to a permanent siege of the fledgling League of Nations.

Nationalist, but Anti-fascist Émigrés

As the Catalan leader Joan Estelrich wrote to a fellow Catalanist in November 1927, “Europe is full of desperate people like us,” i.e., nationalist exiles in search of external support for their homelands. This was the reason why “our presence in international organizations” was the best way to “add value to our task.”¹⁶ In fact, many of them were sheer political opportunists able to seal an alliance with any great power ready to promise them national freedom. The “Promethean” networks promoted by Polish intelligence, and directly inspired by Marshal Pilsudski’s policy of contention of Soviet expansion, attempted to gather Ukrainian, Crimean Tartars, Caucasian, and Central Asian nationalists opposed to Moscow’s rule. “Prometheans” sustained the activities of the latter groups, as well as the publication of several journals and anti-Soviet propaganda, in Paris, Warsaw, and Istanbul, among other cities. Moreover, the research conducted by the Polish Institute of Oriental Studies (*Instytut Wschodni*) also served the objectives of the Prometheans. However, from the mid-1920s onward, two varieties of ethno-nationalist émigrés and activists consciously raised the banner of anti-fascism and attempted to combine an agenda of national liberation (or at least of gaining political recognition of collective rights for their territories) with opposition to fascist and authoritarian regimes.¹⁷

The first was a group that emerged from ethnic parties in Italy after the rise of fascism. It included some leaders of the Sardinian home-rule movement that had emerged in 1918, as well as representatives of the Slovenians from the Gorizia region. One example was Josip Vilfan, a lawyer from Trieste and former deputy in the Italian parliament in Rome. Until his exile to Vienna in 1928, he was a moderate who, along with the other Slovenian deputies from Gorizia-Trieste, aimed at a fruitful collaboration with the Italian majority.¹⁸ Unlike Sardinians, who opted for joining Italian anti-fascist platforms, exiled Slovenian and South Tyrolean leaders gave priority to defending their respective motherlands within the framework of European alliances. This strategy found resonance in German revisionism, which sponsored committees of fellow countrymen established in Germany and Austria, with the objective of agitating for the “recovery” of South Tyrol.¹⁹

Catalan, Basque, and Galician ethno-nationalist exiles constituted the second group. They were forced to leave Spain during the Primo de Rivera dictatorship (1923–30) and again after the rebel victory in the Spanish Civil War (1936–9). During the second half of the 1920s, Catalan émigrés were especially active in France, Belgium, and Latin America. However, they were politically very fragmented and followed divergent strategies. Conservative and moderate Catalanists in exile attempted to present Catalonia as a “national minority” not covered by the minority treaties. They denounced the oppression of the Catalan language by the dictatorship as a violation of the rights granted by the treaties, hoping to force the League of Nations to intervene. Catalanist moderate exiles established some links with French liberals and regionalists in the *Fédération Régionaliste Française* (French Regionalist Federation).²⁰ For their part, Catalan left-wing and radical nationalists found support among Catalan immigrants in France and the Americas, as well as among some groups of Italian anti-fascists in exile. Other relevant allies among the nationalist émigrés

and representatives in Paris included the Irish Bureau, the Committee of Jewish Delegations (*Comité des Délégations Juives*), and certain German representatives of the later Congress of European Nationalities founded in 1925 (see below). The *Estat Català* (Catalan State) group, led by Francesc Macià, represented the separatist faction of Catalan émigrés. They were the first to propose the creation of a League of Oppressed Nations that would bring together Irish, Galicians, Basques, and anti-colonial nationalists.²¹

Liberal and Pacifist Networks: A Platform for Minority Rights Advocacy

The emergence of an international system for protection of minorities under the legal umbrella of the League of Nations added to the newly acquired legitimacy of the nationality principle among broad sectors of organized public opinion in Britain and France.²² Liberal and pacifist associations such as the Human Rights League and the League of Nations Union helped shape a transnational space that gave a platform to the claims of representatives of national minorities. At least four partially overlapping international networks articulated that space.

The first was the international League of Nations movement, supported by left-wing and liberal associations in the most important European and American states. Their social impact was uneven in the various parts of Europe. In some countries, notably Britain, the League of Nations Unions enjoyed widespread social support. In other states, such as Germany, they were mostly supported by the government and amalgamated naïve pacifists, radical democrats, and liberals along with representatives of Protestant churches, all of whom sought to establish a new international order.²³ Before the consolidation of the minority protection system at the League of Nations, there were attempts at founding international committees for the defense of “peoples’ rights.” For example, the *Bureau International pour la Défense du Droit des Peuples* (International Bureau for the Defense of the Rights of Peoples) was active in Geneva between 1920 and 1922. Though presumably sponsored by the Polish government, it was directed by Swiss journalist René Claparède, who had been engaged in the pacifist movement. In theory, the Bureau sought to uphold the cause of national minorities within the framework of human rights and participated in the first meetings of the international League of Nations movement.²⁴

Minority activists soon discovered that founding League of Nations associations to represent their ethnic groups provided a good instrument for participating in the international conferences of the movement (renamed as the *Union Internationale des Associations pour la Société des Nations*, International Federation of League of Nations’ Societies, UIA), which annually hosted representatives from all over the world. The first president of the organization, French Law Professor Théodore Ruysen, was himself a defender of minority interests. He advocated a liberal concept of the nation based on the will of the people. Some British and continental champions of minorities had a prominent role in the UIA as well. Liberal MP Lord Willoughby Dickinson and the Dutch feminist Christina Bakker van Bosse paved the way for

the active commitment of the UIA to improving and expanding minorities treaties.²⁵ This turned the organization into an interesting platform for representatives of nationalities and national minorities, who saw the Union as an appropriate place for gaining visibility and respectability alike. The UIA set up an advisory body on national minorities alongside similar organs—often with the same protagonists—established by the Interparliamentary Union, the World Alliance for the International Friendship through the Churches and the International Law Association. These attempted to play an avant-garde role in the emerging field of minority law. They also served as informal advisors to certain governments, although they were usually met with indifference by the League of Nations.²⁶

Central and Eastern European émigrés and minority leaders played the card of cultivating the friendship of liberal internationalists. Thus, some British Labour and Liberal MPs committed themselves to defending the claims of Ukrainian minorities from Poland, or Hungarians from Romania.²⁷ French liberal and humanitarian internationalists also embraced the claims of European national minorities during the 1920s. Platforms could be found with links to the political factions of the French liberal left, such as the journal *Le Cri des Peuples*, edited by Bernard Lecache, a Jewish lawyer of communist leanings who was committed to defending the rights of the Jewish minorities.

A mixture of aesthetic avant-garde, revolutionary rhetoric, and petty-bourgeois non-conformism, the mouthpiece *Le Cri des Peuples* was first published as a weekly and later as a monthly journal between May 1928 and April 1929. From the very first issue, the journal proclaimed its aim of providing a “platform of solidarity” for “national, philosophic and religious minorities” around the globe. *Le Cri des Peuples’* commitment to national minorities reflected its liberal humanist stance. It held that weak individuals, groups, and minorities should be protected from states and gave priority to freedom of conscience and speech over all other matters. This did not mean that the journal embraced the nationality principle.²⁸ Furthermore, the journal also took an interest in the evolution of the minority question at the international level, first of all its management by the League of Nations. The journal addressed liberal internationalists, French Socialist and Radical-Socialist Party factions, anti-fascist, and nationalist exile committees, from Catalans to Egyptians. During the second half of 1928, *Le Cri des Peuples* increasingly reflected the claims and strategic demands put forward by the CEN.²⁹ However, in April 1929 *Le Cri des Peuples* ceased to exist. Though no evidence of German financial support has been found, the disappearance of the journal coincided with chancellor Gustav Stresemann’s diplomatic offensive in Geneva. But the Comintern also seems to have endorsed the publication.

Transnational Organizations of Ethnic Activists

There also were specifically transnational platforms that were set up to represent the interests of specific ethnic groups, nationalities, and/or national minorities at the international level, with the purpose of developing a paradiplomacy of their own. A first platform was composed of the propaganda network of British, French, and Eastern

European Zionists acting through the Committee of Jewish Delegations (*Comité des Délégations Juives*), which was established in Paris in 1919 as an umbrella office for coordinating démarches to favor the interests of Jewish minorities on the international scene. The Committee also followed up on Jewish minorities' petitions to the League of Nations and established regular contacts with political and cultural representatives of other ethnic minorities covered by the treaties, in part thanks to the activity of its representative, the Ukrainian-born Zionist exile Leo Motzkin.³⁰

A second network involved transnational organizations representing German national minorities from various Central and Eastern European states. The most representative was undoubtedly the Union of German Minorities in Europe (*Verband der Deutschen Minderheiten in Europa*, VDM), which was founded in Vienna in October 1922 and directly supported by the government in Berlin. It incorporated delegates from most moderate and pragmatic German minority parties in Central and Eastern Europe, and at its forefront were some Baltic German leaders who were in favor of achieving an enduring agreement with ethnic majorities in the states in which they lived, based on the mutual recognition of cultural autonomy for minorities and loyalty to the state.³¹ With discreet support from the governments of their respective motherlands, representatives of Hungarian and Polish minorities took similar initiatives, usually by means of the establishment of a delegation in Switzerland.

In fact, a dense network of institutes, associations, and journals seeking to defend the rights of "Germans abroad" (*Auslandsdeutsche*) supported a mid-range revision of the borders that had been drawn at Versailles. They set the German appeal in the context of a larger claim for European minorities' self-determination. Most German minority leaders were increasingly drawn to radical nationalist ideas. Yet they also wanted to enlarge the League of Nations' minority treaties to include all member states, as a step toward the revision of European borders according to the nationality principle. They also pressed the League of Nations to expand the rights granted to ethnic groups by the treaties. During the 1920s frequent calls to generalize the minority treaties to all member states of the League, and to make them more functional for the interests of the protected minorities, became common slogans for most ethno-nationalist and minority émigrés in Europe.

Short- and medium-term strategies of some ethno-nationalist émigrés and revisionist states could overlap at times. The German *völkisch* groups and their mouthpieces, as well as certain revisionist authors who were fiercely committed to defending the rights of Germans abroad, embraced the concept of Wilsonian self-determination, or at least pretended to advocate it. They mostly ignored its most radical democratic side and soon realized that promoting the ethnic deconstruction of Europe went hand in glove with their national interests.³² Some *völkisch* journals that championed the cause of German minorities abroad also devoted articles to the home rule demands of the Scots, the Bretons, and the Flemish. Furthermore, some radical *völkisch* nationalists attempted to found committees representing oppressed nations, where German minority leaders would supposedly cooperate with the exiles of Western European nationalities and even anti-colonialist leaders from Africa and Asia.³³

There also was a variety of modest bureaus established by ethno-nationalist movements without a kin-state, such as the Irish Bureaus in Paris and other capitals

at the beginning of the 1920s. They also established some contacts with substate nationalists from France and Spain, particularly Catalans and Basques.³⁴ Other examples include the Macedonian nationalist clubs in Vienna, the Ukrainian exiles in Paris, the Caucasian offices in Istanbul, and the Armenian associations in France and other countries.³⁵ Many of these relied on the support of their migrant diasporas as they attempted to access the ministries of foreign affairs in their host countries and gain the attention of international public opinion regarding the fate of their respective homelands.

The interwar ethno-nationalist émigrés included party leaders, elected deputies and senators, and representatives of cultural associations and institutions from national minorities scattered all over Europe. After 1919, they attempted to join some of the pre-existing international networks set up by liberal internationalists, the peace movement, and the emerging League of Nations movement. Certainly, not all of them were anti-fascists, and even fewer were fully convinced democrats. In fact, most Central and Eastern European émigrés were full-fledged anti-communists. Many shared antisemitic attitudes and sentiments with radical *völkisch* nationalists in Germany and found it convenient to look for support from Mussolini's Italy after 1925. A good example of this was Gustave de Köver, a former deputy of the Hungarian Party in Romania, who founded a *Bureau Central des Minorités* in Geneva, which set up delegations in Paris and in London (from 1938 on) with the cooperation of some exiled Ukrainians. It sought to mediate in Central European minority petitions to the League of Nations while seeking international visibility for the cause of Transylvanian Magyars.³⁶

The Congress of European Nationalities (1925–38): A Reassessment

The best example of joint cooperation between the political representatives of the German, Jewish, Magyar, and Slavic minorities covered by the minority treaties, along with Catalan nationalists and other groups, was the Congress of European Nationalities. The Congress was founded in 1925 on the initiative of the Estonian-German Ewald Ammende (its General Secretary until his death in 1936) and other VDM activists, and German representatives constituted by far the largest and most influential group within it. The strong German imprint meant that later historiography frequently characterized the CEN as never anything more than a Trojan Horse for revisionist German nationalism. Nevertheless, in the course of its existence this transnational umbrella organization brought together around 300 spokespersons for no less than twenty national minority groups from fifteen European states, and sought to consolidate itself as the main mediator between European minorities, the League of Nations, and state diplomatic corps.

The Congress of European Nationalities was a broad organization and included ethno-political activists embodying all of the currents described in the first part of this chapter. As discussed below, later behavior by Ammende and the aforementioned Josip

Vilfan³⁷ supports the hypothesis that minority activists often exhibited a high degree of opportunism in their interactions, allying themselves with anyone who would advance their cause internationally, irrespective of political orientation. Other founding CEN members such as Werner Hasselblatt, also an Estonian-German, would later show themselves to be integral *völkisch* nationalists who plainly viewed the organization as a means to the particularist end of German revisionism. The founding statutes of the Congress, however, explicitly rejected any change to the territorial borders drawn by the peace settlements of 1919–23. Participating minority organizations were required to pledge loyalty to their states of residence and commit to working positively within them. Accordingly, attacks on the policies of individual governments were forbidden—discussions were to focus on general principles that would improve the lot of all European minorities.³⁸ These requirements suggest that in its initial incarnation the CEN was motivated by a genuine liberal universalism that championed the rights of all nationalities and was committed to working with the League of Nations to improve the machinery of international minority rights protection.³⁹

That this was the case owes much to the leading role within the Congress of key Baltic German activists that had previously been instrumental in shaping VDM during 1922–5. Chief amongst these was Paul Schiemann—an implacably anti-fascist lawyer, parliamentarian, and newspaper editor from Latvia—whom Vilfan described as the “Thinker of the European Minorities Movement.”⁴⁰ Schiemann merits particular attention due to his central role in developing an alternative approach to addressing interwar nationality issues, which stimulated extensive debates at the international level during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Whereas Schiemann’s more conservative and *völkisch* Baltic German contemporaries dismissed the status of “*Minderheit*” (minority) as “*minderwertig*” (inferior), he accepted the changed realities arising from imperial collapse and advocated rapprochement and cooperation with national majorities within the newly created successor states of Central and Eastern Europe.⁴¹ His guiding philosophy can be summed up in his statement that “politics entails work for the good of the place one inhabits. Any diversion to other ends is suicide.”⁴² In common with other CEN activists, Schiemann was concerned to preserve the distinct cultural identities of ethnic minority communities, arguing that this required guarantees of collective as opposed to simply individual rights. Yet, as the emphasis on place within the preceding quote implies, satisfying particular minority claims was seen as a means to the ultimate end of forging overarching pluralistic state communities as a foundation for durable European peace and prosperity.

Non-territorial Autonomy as a Guiding Principle within the CEN

Schiemann’s prescription for reconciling state and nation was heavily influenced by the concept of national cultural (non-territorial) autonomy inherited from early-twentieth-century Austrian Social Democracy as well as from corporatist, self-governing traditions of Jewish and German communities within the former empires.

Uniquely in interwar Central and Eastern Europe, this concept was carried over into the newly constituted Baltic States, shaping Estonia's 1925 Law on National Minorities as well as a system of autonomous schooling for national minorities in Latvia.⁴³ A marked contrast to the narrowly nationalizing practices adopted by other new states in the region, this Baltic approach inspired Schiemann to propound the alternative of an *anational* state, defined as a territorial space shared by a number of autonomously organized ethnic groups. In line with this understanding, an early meeting of the CEN adopted the following resolution:

In European states containing other national groups, each national group must be authorized to preserve and develop its national individuality in organizations at public law constituted—according to circumstances—either territorially or on the basis of the personal principle. In the opinion of the delegates, the said right to autonomy offers a path to ensuring that the loyal cooperation of all—minorities and majorities—within the aforementioned states can take place without conflicts and that relations between the peoples of Europe are improved.⁴⁴

The model that Schiemann devised and propagated through the Congress therefore sought to break the conceptual link between ethnicity and exclusive ownership of territory, which lay at the root of continued nationality disputes in postwar Europe. Significantly, though, the 1925 founding declarations of the CEN underlined that minorities had both the right and the obligation to learn the dominant language of the state in which they lived, so as to enable their full participation in political life.⁴⁵ In this respect, Schiemann's conception of nationality rights was not—as some of his critics contend—entirely “state-free”: when he spoke of an “anational state,” he was essentially talking about a state that had an overarching civic identity but was as culturally pluralistic as it could possibly be.⁴⁶ It is notable also that, when advocating the creation of collective minority “organizations at public law,” the Congress followed the “personal principle” enshrined in Estonia's 1925 autonomy law—namely, such organizations were to be constituted on the basis of individual citizens freely choosing their ethnic affiliation and voluntarily enrolling on a national electoral register. While not all founding members subscribed to this principle, it nevertheless remained a key tenet of the CEN's program during the initial phase of the organization's existence. This can be seen in Josip Vilfan's speech at the 1932 Congress, where he declared that “the right to assimilate, although we oppose this idea, we grant to anyone who wishes to assimilate: the obligation to assimilation we reject.”⁴⁷

In Schiemann's words, then, the Congress was “striving basically for the inclusion of minorities in normal state life.” Moreover,

a minority that is more concerned with its own interests than with the general good acts against public interest and violates the fundamental idea of our Nationalities Congress, which seeks not to set minorities apart from the state but to engage them in its life. We want to show the world that granting rights to minorities does not threaten the state but strengthens it. We can only win this trust by taking an honourable line in all matters concerning the generality.⁴⁸

In looking at the CEN's founding declarations, it becomes clear that its primary goal was to create institutional mechanisms for majority-minority negotiation *within* states, so as to render external intervention by the League of Nations unnecessary.⁴⁹ At the same time, there can be no doubt that the organization arose out of the post-1918 internationalization of minority issues, framing its activity with strong reference to international law. In this regard, CEN leaders welcomed the League's engagement to address minority issues, declaring a "firm will to contribute as far as possible to [the achievement of this goal]."⁵⁰ As Ammende and Vilfan would later reiterate, even in the far less propitious international context of 1933, "the Congress does not envisage sweeping away the foundations in place, but rather seeks to increase the sturdiness of the existing edifice on a platform that is much bigger, better cemented and designed to satisfy everyone."⁵¹ The Congress was thus not conceived as "a type of competing organization to the dissatisfying League of Nations"⁵²; rather, it aspired to amend and improve League structures and procedures which—it insisted—did little to counteract the *de facto* assimilation or exclusion of minorities. The League Council was thus called upon firstly to replace the existing petitions system with a permanent Minorities Commission, and, secondly, to institute a generalized pan-European guarantee of minority rights applicable to all states, in place of a treaty system confined to Central and Eastern Europe. As was observed at CEN gatherings and elsewhere, this system elicited inevitable accusations of double standards which undermined the credibility of the League's claim to defend minorities.⁵³

The CEN, Minorities, and State Sovereignty

The Congress of European Nationalities' founding program also reflected its close coordination (and interpenetration) with the broader-based non-minority organizations mentioned earlier in this chapter—the International Federation of League of Nations Societies, Interparliamentary Union, and the International Law Association. Indeed, it was within these broader organizations that proposals for a standing minorities commission and generalized pan-European guarantees of minority rights first originated.⁵⁴ In this respect, the CEN emerged out of a broader international civil society network that aspired to work with and through the League of Nations. This would provide the necessary framework for moving beyond the status quo of minority protection toward a system that would *empower* minorities as active subjects in their own right, rather than leaving them as simply objects of international law.⁵⁵

As part of this assertion of political subjectivity, the Congress maintained already in the late 1920s that ethnic minorities could legitimately claim belonging not only to the state community (*Staatsgemeinschaft*) of their home state but also to a supra-state national community (*überstaatliche Volksgemeinschaft*).⁵⁶ This claim invites close scrutiny, given the instrumentalization of cross-border ethnic ties by states like Germany and Hungary during the interwar period and (especially) the connotations arising from the Nazis' use of the *Volksgemeinschaft* term. Yet, consistent with Schiemann's maxim that politics must be for the good of the place in which one resides, the CEN of the 1920s

insisted that trans-border relationships between minorities and external “kin”-states should be solely cultural and economic and most emphatically *not* political in nature.⁵⁷ In this sense, it was the state of residence that was assigned primary responsibility for ensuring that minorities enjoyed equal rights and possibilities for sustainable cultural reproduction: subsidies from the kin-state were envisaged as a means of supplementing the resources of autonomous minority communities committed to developing their own distinct cultural identities linked to the place they inhabited. External political interference, the CEN argued, was more likely to occur in cases where the state of residence did not discharge its responsibilities with regard to minorities, thus inflaming nationalist feeling in the “parent” state.⁵⁸ As well as anticipating contemporary post-Cold War debates around minorities in inter-state relations,⁵⁹ the Congress’ deliberations in this area call to mind the 1921 report on Eastern Europe that Sir Willoughby Dickinson submitted to the League Council, in which he observed:

It is noticeable that nearly all these states are concerned with minorities in a duplicate capacity:

- (1) As being responsible for the protection of minorities of foreign race within their own borders and
- (2) As being interested in minorities of their own race in foreign territories.

This is important because it shows that the question of the minorities is one of common concern, and, therefore every government should be anxious to reach a settlement as soon as possible.⁶⁰

This notion of “common concern” was central to the approach to nationality issues which Schiemann developed through the Congress. Arguing that a preoccupation with state sovereignty and narrow national interest lay at the root of the problem, Schiemann and other CEN activists (such as Estonian Russian Vice Chairman Mikhail Kurchinskii) nested their pursuit of minority autonomy within a commitment to building a future “United States of Europe.” According to Schiemann, national minorities were “good Europeans because of their fate.”⁶¹

Fractures within the CEN

A review of materials from the Minorities Section of the League of Nations Secretariat suggests that the initial CEN agenda found sympathy among officials working there. For instance, in 1932, Ludvig de Krabbe, a Danish official at the Secretariat who attended Congress’ meetings as an observer, wrote:

One cannot fail to be impressed by this meeting of ... minorities experiencing a political, economic and cultural situation which in too many cases is painful and unworthy of modern civilisation ... one could note in the speeches a spirit of respect for the law, human solidarity and high ideals to which the highest

respect is due ... Provided this spirit predominates within the Congress, it could create a place and an authority among the organizations working to develop international society.⁶²

At the same time, this emerging dialogue with League officials also sheds light on multiple fractures within the CEN that undermined its effectiveness and claim to represent the 40 million Europeans who belonged to national minorities with a single voice. At its meetings in 1930 and 1931, the Congress had devoted much attention to positive developments in Estonia following the introduction of its 1925 minority law. In light of this experience, it was argued, the League of Nations should consider the case for a Europe-wide application of national cultural autonomy.⁶³ Responding to this call, Krabbe acknowledged that the national cultural autonomy model merited serious scrutiny as a possible means of reducing frictions between majorities and minorities. He nevertheless concluded that the Congress leaders had failed to make a convincing case, for their arguments had not looked beyond the specific experience of Estonia's small and territorially dispersed German and Jewish minorities.⁶⁴ Krabbe's assessment seems entirely justified given the diverse range of minorities arrayed within the CEN. Advocating non-territorial autonomy as a panacea may have fitted with the circumstances (and guiding philosophy) of liberally minded activists from the Baltic States, but was a far less obvious option for larger, more territorially compact minority communities. Also, the accommodationist minority politics advocated by *Auslandsdeutsche* such as Schiemann did not resonate to the same extent with *grenzlanddeutsch* (border German) communities in Poland and Czechoslovakia that had been separated from or denied adhesion to the German Reich following the peace settlements and which would go on to attain much greater prominence within the CEN during the 1930s.⁶⁵ Moreover, as Krabbe also remarked in his report, far from all minority activists were sold on the desirability of institutionalized collective autonomy (as opposed to a more liberal conception of individual rights). In this respect, he cited the example of German minority representatives from Denmark (Northern Schleswig) and Hungary, who feared that enrollment on a national register might lead to minorities being viewed as a "caste apart," while simultaneously undermining minority identity by introducing an element of legal differentiation and dissension within the group.⁶⁶

Krabbe's 1931 report therefore usefully highlights the difficulties inherent in any attempt to mobilize disparate minorities transnationally around a common agenda, especially when inter-state disputes frequently spilled over into relations between particular groups. The latter dimension became apparent as early as 1927, when Germany's large Polish as well as other minorities formally left the Congress. Such episodes gave League officials and others who observed CEN proceedings cause to question the representativeness and legitimacy of the organization, as well as the democracy of its internal procedures.⁶⁷ The lack of real debate noted by observers, as well as the automatic adoption of resolutions at the behest of the leadership, may well have reflected the rule prohibiting attacks on specific governments. While this rule was adopted with the best of intentions, limiting the deliberations of the Congress to matters of general concern for all minorities appeared less and less credible as more and more examples of egregious nationalizing practices began to appear.

More importantly, the CEN leadership could not evade the growing rift between pro-democratic, anti-fascist factions and pro-authoritarian nationalists that became ever-more palpable from the start of the 1930s. As the VDM (headed by Werner Hasselblatt from 1931 onward) came under the sway of more *völkisch*-minded German activists, the latter began to make their influence felt within the wider Congress, where Germans constituted the preponderant group. With the VDM dependent on subsidies from the *Reich*, the German state was able to exert indirect control over the CEN, whose credibility and integrity were fatally compromised after the Nazis came to power. The decisive turn came at the Ninth Congress meeting in 1933, when Jewish minority representatives—finally breaking with the CEN’s precedent of not singling out individual states—tried and failed to obtain support for a resolution condemning the antisemitic policies of Germany’s Nazi government. Decisive in the rejection of this initiative was the position of German delegates at the Congress, who argued that the CEN’s opposition to assimilation necessarily precluded it from condemning “dissimilation.” At this point, Jewish activists—hitherto the second largest contingent of delegates—broke definitively with the Congress. Thereafter, the organization was obviously understood by its core German contingent as an instrument for Nazi German Foreign Policy, especially after the National Socialist Sudeten German Konrad Henlein assumed the leadership of VDM in 1935.

Among other things, the Ninth CEN meeting revealed the essentially opportunistic character of Ewald Ammende and Josip Vilfan. While both may have been sincere in their initial commitment to promoting the rights and interests of all minorities rather than simply their own ethno-national communities, neither proved willing to prejudice the main source of funding for the Congress by taking a decisive stand against the VDM in 1933. Following the meeting, Vilfan did at least try to persuade the Jewish delegates to remain within the Congress, the better to counter Nazi German influence. However, his argument that German Jews should redefine themselves as a national minority and seek guarantees of protection from the League understandably received short shrift. In this regard, Jewish representatives reminded Vilfan of his words at the Eighth Congress in 1932, when (consistent with the “personal principle”) he had stated that the CEN supported the right to assimilation provided this was undertaken freely. They also pointed out that Jews in Hitler’s Germany were not simply being ascribed a distinct ethnic identity but were being denied basic civil and human rights and suffering violent attacks on this basis. Ammende for his part did not appear inclined to pursue things any further with the Jewish representatives after the 1933 Congress.⁶⁸ As for Paul Schiemann, the 1933 meeting led him to break with both the CEN and the *Verband*. Three years later, Schiemann would go on to found his own alternative anti-Nazi *Deutscher Verband zur nationalen Befriedigung Europas*.

In light of these events, there has been an understandable tendency for historians to begin from the 1930s and work backward, arguing that, from its very inception, the CEN was nothing more than a vehicle for a *völkisch* nationalist VDM backed by a revisionist Germany.⁶⁹ On further inspection, however, a more nuanced picture seems to be in order. At its inception in 1925, the Congress of European Nationalities had the character of a genuinely transnational movement, with German-Jewish cooperation at its core. While hindsight shows that it encompassed all of the orientations found

within the broader field of interwar minority activism, the organization bore a strong liberal universalist imprint during the 1920s, bringing forth interesting alternatives to the then prevailing nation-state idea. In this respect, it is worth recalling Ludvig de Krabbe's 1931 report for the League of Nations, in which he declared that "the 'complete' solution to the minorities problem remains the development in countries of mixed population of a spirit of national tolerance and liberalism, a development ... which will become all the more difficult if a system of separatism in certain branches of the state becomes generalized."⁷⁰

With this comment, Krabbe rejects collective autonomy for minorities in favor of the liberal unitary nation-state model upheld by the treaties and the League of Nations. However, as Krabbe would himself admit the following year, CEN leaders were becoming increasingly frustrated with the League's minority protection system by the early 1930s.⁷¹ Though Krabbe was fully aware of the mounting problems arising from "nationalizing" state practices in Europe, he was left curiously unmoved when Paul Schiemann warned the 1931 Congress of the dangers posed by "irrational states" basing their policies on the "fictions" of economic autarchy and the idea that each could function as the bearer of a single national culture applicable to all residents. In reality, Schiemann argued, "thousands, millions have their own culture and if these are forced to bow to alien beliefs then the state will be threatened; hatred will be born precluding peaceful coexistence within it."⁷² Krabbe insouciantly dismissed Schiemann's speech as "purely theoretical and philosophical"⁷³; yet, it arguably encapsulated interwar Europe's drift toward the "new nationalist wave" of the 1930s.⁷⁴

Conclusion

As Rogers Brubaker has observed, the redrawing of territorial borders in Central and Eastern Europe through the Paris Peace Conference did not "solve" the region's national question, but simply "recast it in a new form."⁷⁵ The First World War had given impetus to the principle of nationality and the idea of national self-determination—the concept of states as being of and for particular nations, which meant that each nation had to possess a state of its own. However, the fact that the new successor states were not only poly-ethnic but multinational in character meant that they essentially recreated the problems of the old empires in miniature. Efforts to replicate what, in Western Europe, was called "nation-building" were experienced in practice as narrowly ethnic, "nationalizing" state policies, since they took place belatedly, and were not accompanied by upward social mobility for minority members and the establishment of citizenship as a main criterion for building nationality, as had (in theory) happened in Western Europe. Solutions designed for the Bretons or the Welsh did not work in the same manner for the Ukrainians in Poland or the Magyars in Transylvania. For defeated powers, most notably Germany and Hungary, the redrawing of borders also entailed the "loss" of large co-national populations, creating fertile ground for irredentist nationalism committed to overturning the terms of the peace settlement. Caught between two competing forms of state nationalism, newly created minority populations in the region became the focus of what was immediately dubbed the

“minority problem”—though, as the discussion of Catalan and other Western nationality claims within this chapter makes clear, this “problem” was by no means confined to Central and Eastern Europe during the interwar period.

The foundation of the League of Nations, supported by liberal public opinion and activism across Europe, nevertheless gave hope that a new internationalism might prevail and that minorities might obtain legal protection of their collective rights within a prevailing spirit of democracy. This chapter has examined how ethnonational minority activists navigated this nexus of relationships linking their home states, “kin”-states, international organizations, and wider international civil society within the postwar European order. To some extent, transnational activists for the cause of minority rights followed the path opened during the Great War by nationalist exiles, and benefited from the new international audibility that now was granted for private, i.e., “non-governmental” international organizations that gravitated around the League of Nations, though not being formally part of the new international system created by the Versailles Treaties. By bringing to light the wide range of different political orientations and particular agendas that motivated this activism, the chapter has shown that the commitment of many groups to internationalism (and, indeed, democracy) was questionable at best. At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that these activists cannot be uniformly painted as nothing more than “professional troublemakers.”⁷⁶ Certain individuals among them displayed a genuine commitment to transnationalism and the development of universal principles of minority rights alongside the defense of individual rights and the pursuit of peace that merits renewed scrutiny today. It was this commitment that drove the CEN—Europe’s largest transnational umbrella organization of minorities—during the 1920s, when Paul Schiemann’s influence plotted a course based on democratic accommodation within existing states, and leading members of the Congress of European Nationalities simultaneously participated in the wider structures of international civil society represented by organizations such as the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) and the International Law Association (ILA). Ultimately, however, the differences within the CEN (and the transnational minority camp more broadly) inevitably undermined its capacity for effective transnational mobilization around common principles. Equally if not more detrimental to its cause was the unstable European environment of the day, which, by the 1930s, shifted the balance away from minority activism and liberal nationalism toward exclusivist ethnonationalism, under the shadow of the emerging Third Reich and other Fascist and para-fascist states.

Notes

- 1 See Michael Goebel, *Anti-imperial Metropolis: Interwar Paris and the Seeds of Third World Nationalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015).
- 2 D’Annunzio had already planned to set up a league of “oppressed peoples” on the occasion of the occupation of Fiume in 1919–20. He regarded the inhabitants of all Italian irredenta as potential members of a new coalition of European, Asian, and African peoples, which also included Irish, Flemish, Egyptians, and Macedonians.

- However, these plans were never realized. See Enric Ucelay-Da Cal, “Cómo surgieron las internacionales de nacionalistas. La coincidencia de iniciativas sociales muy diversas, 1864–1914,” in *Patrias diversas, ¿misma lucha? Alianzas transnacionalistas en el mundo de entreguerras (1912–1939)*, ed. Enric Ucelay-Da Cal, Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, and Arnau González Vilalta (Barcelona: Bellaterra, 2020), 25–66.
- 3 This was the case with the League against Imperialism and Colonial Oppression, founded in Brussels in 1927 by thirty-four anti-colonialist and communist groupings and parties from Europe, America, Africa, and Asia, among them the Indian National Congress, Indonesian nationalists, the French communist intellectual Henri Barbusse, and the Senegalese leader L. Senghor. Yet, this alliance was short-lived and hardly operative: following its Frankfurt Conference (1929), the political agreement between Communists and “bourgeois” anti-colonial activists entered into crisis. See Martin Mevius, ed., *The Communist Quest for National Legitimacy in Europe, 1918–1989* (London: Routledge, 2011), as well as Klaas Stutje, *Campaigning in Europe for a Free Indonesia: Indonesian Nationalists and the Worldwide Anticolonial Movement, 1917–1931* (Copenhagen: NIAS Press, 2019).
 - 4 Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-determination and the Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
 - 5 See Glenda Sluga, *Internationalism in the Age of Nationalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015). See also Glenda Sluga and Patricia Clavin, eds., *Internationalisms. A Twentieth-century History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017).
 - 6 See Stefan Dyroff, “From Nationalities to Minorities? The Transnational Debate on the Minority Protection System of the League of Nations, and Its Predecessors,” in *The First World War and the Nationality Question in Europe: Global Impact and Local Dynamics*, ed. Xosé M. Núñez Seixas (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2020), 245–65.
 - 7 For a general overview, see Heiner Timmermann, ed., *Nationalismus und Nationalbewegung in Europa, 1914–1945* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1999); Ugo Corsini and Davide Zaffi, eds., *Die Minderheiten zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1997); Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *Entre Ginebra y Berlín. La cuestión de las minorías nacionales y la política internacional en Europa, 1914–1939* (Madrid: Akal, 2001); Mathias Beer and Stefan Dyroff, eds., *Politische Strategien nationaler Minderheiten in der Zwischenkriegszeit* (Munich: Oldenbourg, 2014).
 - 8 Joop Leerssen, *National Thought in Europe: A Cultural History* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2006).
 - 9 Jean-Michel Guieu, *Le rameau et le glaive. Les militants français pour la SDN* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 2008); Thomas Davies, *NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 - 10 See Charles Seignobos, *Les aspirations autonomistes en Europe* (Paris: Felix Alcan, 1913); Jean Gabrys (E. Demm, ed.), *Auf Wache für die Nation—Erinnerungen* (Frankfurt am Main: PL Academic Research, 2013); Georges-Henri Soutou, “Jean Pélissier et l’Office Central des Nationalités, 1911–1918: Un agent du gouvernement français auprès des nationalités,” in *Recherches sur la France et le problème des nationalités pendant la première guerre mondiale (Pologne, Ukraine, Lithuanie)*, ed. Georges-Henri Soutou (Paris: Presses de l’Université de Paris-Sorbonne, 1995), 13–38.
 - 11 Hugh Seton-Watson and Christopher Seton-Watson, *The Making of a New Europe: R. W. Seton-Watson and the Last Days of Austria-Hungary* (London: Methuen,

- 1981); Frank Hadler, ed., *Weg von Österreich! Das Weltkriegsexil von Masaryk und Benes im Spiegel ihrer Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus den Jahren 1914–1918. Eine Quellensammlung* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1995).
- 12 See Derek Heater, *National Self-determination: Woodrow Wilson and His Legacy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994).
- 13 For a reappraisal of the Peace Conference, see Margaret Macmillan, *Peacemakers: The Paris Conference of 1919 and Its Attempt to End War* (London: Murray, 2003). For the role of Jewish organizations, see Carole Fink, *Defending the Rights of Others. The Great Powers, the Jews, and International Minority Protection, 1878–1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), and Simon Rabinovitch, *Jewish Rights, National Rites: Nationalism and Autonomy in Late Imperial and Revolutionary Russia* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 258–71.
- 14 See, e.g., the reflection by the Catalanist leader Antoni Rovira I Virgili, “Necessitat de que tot nacionalisme tingui una política internacional,” *Revista Anyal*, 1915, reproduced in *El catalanisme i la Gran Guerra. Antologia*, ed. David Martínez Fiol (Barcelona: La Magrana/Diputació de Barcelona, 1988), 79–85.
- 15 Stephen Bonsal, *Suitors and Suppliants. The Little Nations at Versailles* (Port Washington: Kemikat Press, 1969); Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, “Wilson’s Unexpected Friends: The Transnational Impact of the First World War on Western European Nationalist Movements,” in *The First World War and the Nationality Question*, ed. Núñez Seixas, 37–64.
- 16 Letter of Joan Estelrich to Hipòlit Nadal i Mallol, n. p., November 10, 1927 (Joan Estelrich Papers, National Library of Catalonia, Barcelona).
- 17 See Zaur Gasimov and José M. Faraldo, “Las alianzas desde arriba: los nacionalismos antirrusos y antisoviéticos (1914–1939),” in *Patrias diversas*, ed. Ucelay-Da Cal, Núñez Seixas and González Vilalta, 173–95; Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, “Unholy Alliances? Nationalist Exiles, Minorities and Antifascism in interwar Europe,” *Contemporary European History* 25, no. 4 (2016): 597–617.
- 18 Joze Pirjevec, “Die politische Theorie und Tätigkeit Josef Wilfans,” in *Die Minderheiten*, ed. Corsini and Zaffi, 167–74.
- 19 See some references in Claus Gatterer, *Im Kampf gegen Rom. Bürger, Minderheiten und Autonomien in Italien* (Vienna: Europa-Verlag, 1968), as well as Sandro Fontana, ed., *Il fascismo e le autonomie locali* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1973).
- 20 See Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *Internacionalitzant el nacionalisme. El catalanisme polític i la qüestió de les minories nacionals a Europa (1914–1936)* (Valencia: Afers/PUV, 2010), 115–21.
- 21 G. Cattini, *Nel nome di Garibaldi. I rivoluzionari catalani, i nipoti del Generale e la polizia di Mussolini (1923–1926)* (Pisa: BFS Edizioni, 2010).
- 22 As a whole, the League of Nations has recently been reappraised from a more positive perspective, and seen not only as a failure. See, for instance, Peter Hilpold, “The League of Nations and the Protection of Minorities—Rediscovering a Great Experiment,” *Max Planck Yearbook of United Nations Law*, 17 (2013): 87–112.
- 23 Marta Petricioli and Donatella Cherubini, eds., *Pour la paix en Europe. Institutions et société civile dans l’entre-deux-guerres* (Berne: Peter Lang, 2007).
- 24 René Claparède, *L’Organisation de la Lutte pour la Liberté des Peuples* (Geneva: Publications du Bureau International pour la Défense des Droits des Peuples, 1921).
- 25 See Théodore Ruysen, *Les minorités nationales d’Europe et la guerre mondiale* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1924); Willoughby H. Dickinson, *Minorities*

- (London: League of Nations Union, 1928). See also René Fabre, “Un exemple de pacifisme juridique. Théodore Ruysen et le mouvement ‘La Paix par le Droit’ (1884–1950),” *Vingtième Siècle* 39 (1993): 38–54.
- 26 See Daniel Gorman, “Ecumenical Internationalism: Willoughby Dickinson, the League of Nations and the World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 45 (2010): 51–73, and Stefan Dyroff, “Avant-garde or Supplement? Advisory Bodies of Transnational Associations as Alternatives to the League’s Minority Protection System, 1919–1939,” *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 24 (2013): 192–208.
- 27 Stefan Dyroff, “Minority Rights and Humanitarianism. The International Campaign for the Ukrainians in Poland, 1930–31,” *Journal of Modern European History* 12 (2014): 216–30.
- 28 G. Renard, “Pourquoi et dans quelle mesure nous défendrons les minorités,” *Le Cri des Peuples*, May 30, 1928.
- 29 Bernard Lecache, “En suivant les travaux du IVe. Congrès des Nationalités,” *Le Cri des Peuples*, September 5, 1929.
- 30 Fran Nesemann, “Minderheitendiplomatie. Leo Motzkin zwischen Imperien und Nationen,” in *Synchrone Welten. Zeiträume jüdischer Geschichte*, ed. Dan Diner (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2005), 147–74.
- 31 See John Hiden, “Der Verband der Deutschen Minderheiten in Europa 1922–1936: Von der Verteidigung der deutschen Minderheiten zum Werkzeug des Nationalsozialismus,” in *Politische Strategien*, ed. Baar and Dyroff, 297–308. See also Marina Germane’s chapter in this volume.
- 32 Bastiaan Schot, *Nation oder Staat? Deutschland und der Minderheitenschutz. Zur Völkerbundpolitik in der Stresemann-Ära* (Marburg a. Lahn: Herder Institut, 1988).
- 33 A good example were the various “committees of violated [sic] peoples” supported by the Hungarian government during the early 1920s. Projects were also put forward by the Viennese Law Professor Viktor Otte, who in 1925 attempted to hold in Berlin a conference of oppressed peoples ranging from German minorities in Romania to Armenians. Around the same date, some *völkisch* activists in Berlin sponsored the secretive “Committee of Oppressed Peoples” and invited exiled Catalanists to join them. See, e.g., Viktor Otte, *Die unterdrückten Völker der Welt: Gegen Lüge und Gewalt* (Vienna: Ostmarken-Verlag, 1926).
- 34 See Dermoth Keogh, “The Origins of the Irish Foreign Service in Europe (1919–1922),” *Études Irlandaises* 7 (1982): 145–64. On the links between the Irish nationalists and Catalan, Basque, and Galician nationalists, see Xosé M. Núñez Seixas, *Patriotas transnacionales. Ensayos sobre nacionalismos y transferencias culturales en la Europa del siglo XX* (Madrid: Cátedra, 2019), 121–53.
- 35 Stefan Troebst, “Wien als Zentrum der mazedonischen Emigration in den Zwanziger Jahren,” *Mitteilungen des bulgarischen Forschungsinstituts in Österreich* 2, no. 2 (1979): 68–86; Jean-Bernard Dupont-Melnyczenko, *Les Ukrainiens en France. Mémoires éparpillées* (Paris: Autrement, 2007), 44–64; and Michael Esch, *Parallele Gesellschaften und soziale Räume. Osteuropäische Einwanderer in Paris, 1880–1940* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2012), 411–27.
- 36 Gustave de Köver, *Histoire d’une trahison: le calvaire des minorités nationales et la Société des Nations* (Geneva: Éditions du Bureau central des minorités, 1939).
- 37 Vilfan served as CEN President from 1925 to 1938.
- 38 John Hiden, *Defender of Minorities. Paul Schiemann, 1876–1944* (London: Hurst, 2004), 127.

- 39 On the different orientations within transnational discussions of the “minority problem,” see Núñez Seixas, “Unholy Alliances,” 597–600.
- 40 Hiden, *Defender of Minorities*, 127.
- 41 Michael Garleff, “Nationalitätenpolitik zwischen liberalem und völkischem Anspruch. Gleichklang und Spannung bei Paul Schiemann und Werner Hasselblatt,” in *Reval und die Baltischen Länder. Festschrift für Hellmuth Weiss zum 80. Geburtstag*, ed. Jürgen von Hehn and Csaba-Janos Kenez (Marburg: Herder Institute, 1980), 113–32. In this regard, it is notable that the German Association formed in 1922 was initially entitled *Verband der deutschen Minderheiten*, before being renamed the *Verband der deutschen Volksgruppen* in 1928.
- 42 Paul Schiemann, *Ein europäisches Problem. Unabhängige Betrachtungen zur Minderheitenfrage* (Vienna and Leipzig: Reinhold-Verlag, 1937), 31.
- 43 David J. Smith and John Hiden, *Ethnic Diversity and the Nation State* (London and New York: Routledge, 2012).
- 44 “Résolutions adoptées par les Congrès des Nationalités Européennes,” League of Nations Archives, Geneva (LONA), R1686-R1687/41/30181.
- 45 “Resolutions of the European Nationalities Congress,” Российский государственный военный архив [Russian State Military Archive], Moscow, F.1502, O.1, D.113, 34–35.
- 46 Hiden, *Defender of Minorities*, 143. For a critique of Schiemann’s “anational state” concept, and a response to this, see Ivars Ījabs, “Strange Baltic Liberalism: Paul Schiemann’s Political Thought Revisited,” *Journal of Baltic Studies* 40, no. 4 (2009): 495–515, and David J. Smith, “Why Remember Paul Schiemann?,” in *Latvia—A Work in Progress? One Hundred Years of State- and Nation-building*, ed. David J. Smith (Stuttgart: Ibidem-Verlag, 2017), 71–90.
- 47 Sabine Bamberger-Stemann, *Der europäische Nationalitätenkongress 1925 bis 1938* (Marburg: Herder Institut, 2000), 176–7.
- 48 From Paul Schiemann’s editorial “Minderheitenziele,” *Rigascher Rundschau*, April 23, 1927. Cited in Hiden, *Defender of Minorities*, 139.
- 49 “Résolutions adoptées par les Congrès des Nationalités Européennes,” LONA R1686-R1687/41/30181.
- 50 Ibid.
- 51 Letter from Josip Vilfan and Ewald Ammende to Pablo de Azcárate, August 29, 1933, LONA 4/6731/6638. On the reaction of Azcárate and other members of the League’s Secretariat to this letter, see Núñez Seixas, *Entre Ginebra y Berlín*, 385–6.
- 52 Volker Prott, *The Politics of Self-determination. Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917–1923* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 288.
- 53 “Zur Gründung einer permanenten Minderheitenkommission beim Völkerbund, n. d. (1929),” Bundesarchiv Koblenz, Vilfan Papers.
- 54 On the proposals made by the CEN and other non-governmental organizations to improve the system of protection of minorities, see Núñez Seixas, *Entre Ginebra y Berlín*, 353–7.
- 55 Dietrich Loeber, “Die Minderheitenschutzverträge. Entstehung, Inhalt und Wirkung” in *Ostmitteleuropa zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen, 1918–1939*, ed. Hans Lemberg (Marburg: Herder Institut, 1997), 189–200.
- 56 “Résolutions adoptées par le 4-ème Congrès des Nationalités Européennes, Genève, août 1928,” LONA R1686-R1687/41/30181; L. Krabbe, “Le Congrès des Nationalités Européennes à Vienne, 29 Juin-1 Juillet 1932,” LONA R2161/4/37541/3817; Krabbe to Pablo de Azcárate, August 5, 1932. LONA R2176/4/38372/38372.

- 57 “Relations culturelle entre les minorités et leurs peuples d’origine, en savoir l’ensemble de leurs nations,” LONA R2176/4/6738/3817; “Le VIIe Congrès des Nationalités Européennes,” Elemér Radisics, Section d’Information, le 5.IX.1931. LONA R2161/4/31096/3817. Schiemann would himself later lament how the concept of *überstaatliche Volksgemeinschaft* was poisoned by the totalizing conception that the Nazis attached to it. See Núñez Seixas, “Unholy Alliances,” 615.
- 58 See, for instance, Ammendé’s report on “the unsolved minority problem and the peace of Europe,” presented at the Seventh Congress meeting, August 1931. LONA R2161/4/31096/3817.
- 59 See: Andreea Udrea and David J. Smith, “Minority Protection and Kin-State Engagement: *Karta Polaka* in Comparative Perspective,” *Ethnopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2021): 67–82; Myra A. Waterbury, “Divided Nationhood and Multiple Membership: A Framework for Assessing Kin-State Policies and Their Impact,” *Ethnopolitics* 20, no. 1 (2021): 39–52.
- 60 Sir Willoughby Dickinson, note to the President of the Council of the League of Nations “on the position of the minorities in Eastern Europe under the recent minorities treaties,” November 14, 1921, LONA 41/17505/7729, 3.
- 61 Hiden, *Defender of Minorities*, 225. On Kurchinskii, see David J. Smith, “Retracing Estonia’s Russians: Mikhail Kurchinskii and Inter-war Cultural Autonomy,” *Nationalities Papers* 27, no. 3 (1999): 455–74; Martyn Housden and David J. Smith, “A Matter of Uniqueness? Paul Schiemann, Ewald Ammendé and Mikhail Kurchinskii Compared,” in *Forgotten Pages in Baltic History: Diversity and Inclusion*, ed. Martyn Housden and David J. Smith (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2011), 161–86.
- 62 L. Krabbe, “Le Congrès des Nationalités Européennes à Vienne, 29 Juin-1 Juillet 1932,” LONA R2161/4/37541/3817.
- 63 “Le VIIe Congrès des Nationalités Européennes,” Elemér Radisics, Section d’Information, le 5.IX.1931. LONA R2161/4/31096/3817. “Deuxième jour de séance. Séance de l’après-midi,” LONA R2161/4/31096/3817.
- 64 L. Krabbe, “L’Autonomie culturelle comme solution du problème des minorités,” Note de M. Krabbe, November 18, 1931, LONA, R.2175-4-32835.
- 65 David J. Smith, Marina Germane and Martyn Housden, “‘Forgotten Europeans’: Transnational Minority Activism in the Age of European Integration,” *Nations and Nationalism* 25, no. 2 (2019): 523–43, here 529.
- 66 Krabbe, “L’Autonomie Culturelle.”
- 67 “Le VIIe Congrès des Nationalités Européennes,” Elemér Radisics, Section d’Information, le 5.IX.1931. LONA R2161/4/31096/3817; L. Krabbe, “Le Congrès des Nationalités Européennes à Vienne, 29 Juin-1 Juillet 1932,” LONA R2161/4/37541/3817.
- 68 Smith and Hiden 2012, 88–9. On Ammendé’s difficulties in reconciling the particular interests of his own national group with the general interests of minorities, and in navigating the relationship with Germany through VDM, see Martyn Housden, *On Their Own Behalf. Ewald Ammendé, Europe’s National Minorities and the Campaign for Cultural Autonomy, 1920–1936* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2014).
- 69 This view is expressed most graphically by Samuel Salzborn, *Ethnisierung der Politik. Theorie und Geschichte des Volksgruppenrechts in Europa* (Frankfurt and New York: Campus, 2005); however, see also Bamberger-Stemann, *Der Europäische Nationalitätenkongress*.
- 70 Krabbe, “L’Autonomie Culturelle.”
- 71 Krabbe, “Le Congrès des Nationalités Européennes à Vienne, 29 Juin-1 Juillet 1932.”

- 72 Discours du délégué, M. Le Dr. Schiemann. LONA R2161/4/31096/3817.
- 73 Krabbe, "L'Autonomie Culturelle." See also Núñez Seixas, *Entre Ginebra y Berlín*, 485–9.
- 74 "The New Nationalist Wave" was the title of the final speech Schiemann delivered to the VDM on June 26, 1932. Paul Schiemann, "Die neue nationalistische Welle. Rede gelegentlich der Jahrestagung des Verbandes der deutschen Volksgruppen, Baden bei Wien, 26 Juni 1932," *Nation und Staat*, 12 (September 1932): 1–13.
- 75 Rogers Brubaker, *Nationalism Reframed. Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 3–4.
- 76 CEN's activity during the 1920s, for instance, should qualify the initial negative assessment of the organization by League of Nations Secretary General Sir Eric Drummond, who, on hearing of the first congress, remarked that "a meeting of this kind shows that the Minorities who come to it do not appreciate their obligations of loyalty towards their new countries." Drummond to Colban, October 5, 1925. LONA R1686-R1687/41/30181.