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Minorities History*Emil Niederhauser***The 1905 Russian Revolution  
and Ethnicity**

First of all it should be explained that Soviet historiography forbade the use of the term Eastern Europe; since other synonyms were also banned, Eastern Europe simply did not exist, as can be confirmed by those who are still around to remember.

Having got rid of the restrictions imposed on by the party state, we can now freely talk about Eastern Europe of which Russia itself comprises one third, the Balkans another third, and to the remaining third belonging to those western type countries at the western edge of the region, which, geographical terminology permitting, could be referred to as west Eastern Europe.

Since the whole region of Eastern Europe is underdeveloped, there were numerous inside weaknesses, social problems, not to mention ethnic diversity; the latter was usually left out of consideration at the beginning of the 20th c. as only social antagonisms were accepted as legitimate, ethnic differences were regarded as deplorable sidetracking. If a revolution was actually expected in the region, according to the concept of the times it had to be a social one and never one on nationalistic basis, the latter would have been regarded improper.

The staunchest reactionaries would have been satisfied even with a national revolution; however, these kinds of differences were neither overt nor unambiguous for a long time. If there was anyone reckoning with a revolution – any kind of it – they were not numerous. After all everything was under control in the region, everybody knew his task from the emperor down to the beggar: what for then a revolution?

All the same, it broke out, and especially where it was least expected because of the greatest order (i.e. the greatest oppression), in Russia. Later generations, not without Soviet prompting, regarded it as an epic event; others took hardly any notice of it. If anyone wanted to consider the reasons, they were numerous inside and outside alike, the poverty of the masses, the enormous abyss between the upper and lower classes. Others saw the hot-headed revolutionaries as the key figures. What indeed happened was the fall of the last absolute state and changed over to modern bourgeois democracy, which was a satisfactory result and the problem seemed to have been solved.

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Only few had recognized the major controversy of the region, since this problem was not in the foreground anymore. It was considered evident that in a poor backward country only social antagonisms could be the trigger of revolution; therefore it had to be a social revolution. Especially those who devoted their lives to the cause accepted that it was socialist as well. In Russia there were many conceptions as varied and different as were the thinkers.

All things considered it was a social revolution, and it did was not regarded as a scare elsewhere in Europe, not anymore, and the revolutionaries themselves did not believe that it would happen either. The social situation was similar all over the region, however, in other aspects there were considerable differences. Though bourgeois development had started in Russia there were still many obstacles to be cleared away. Since the bourgeois transformation had started earlier in various countries, it seemed foreseeable what turns it was going to take. The bourgeois system worked well in neighbourhood under Franz Joseph (at least the majority were satisfied with it), why should it not work under Nicholas II., who came out better in comparison to the very old Austrian monarch.

In reality the underdevelopment in Russia was more serious than it was estimated. Every-day life was very much the same in Russia as in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy or in the small Balkan states, which being national states, prided themselves in being most up to date. However, in this 2/3 part of the region many problems had already been solved what still were present in Russia. During the party-state era it was not allowed to admit that those countries were more forward in many respects, especially in their social and political systems. Even twenty years ago it was still believed that, allowing some advanced development in some aspects in those countries, the Russian Empire was the most developed in general, especially because it was an empire; moreover it was more homogeneous than the greatly varied Austro-Hungarian Monarchy. It was the great number of Russian inhabitants (about the half of the population) that gave a uniform Russian colouring to the whole empire which could not be regarded as anything else than Russian.

The inside political system of states could be very varied in these times; not two countries resembled exactly to one another; the main difference lay in the characteristics of their political systems. In Russia for example the absolute state had still its formal presence and it counted as an anachronism in Europe at the turn of the 19th-20th cc.; the paternalism in

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Russia was so much familiar even abroad that it was not recognised as a backward aspect.

Outside Russia it was acceptable to state that the great developments of the 20<sup>th</sup> c. had already appeared in other parts of the region, in Russia, however, were still to come. There was again the objection: how could a great political power be less developed than small countries? An empire cannot lag behind a small state. This great-power approach would be familiar to those who still remember the party state. In other words, the Russian revolution, which started in January 1905, must be a model to Eastern Europe, which shares similar features.

According to the theory Russia was a great power, the 1/6 of the world (a slogan already fondly used by Nicholas II.) thus the rest of Eastern Europe had to follow the path laid out by the Russian Revolution as closely as possible. In reality no such thing happened, there was no revolutionary outbreak in the other 2/3 part of Eastern Europe; Russia's insistence was not heeded.

In what way could they have followed suit? The establishment of the bourgeois system, which was introduced, at long last in Russia, was carried out after around 1848 or somewhat later; still it was an event of the 19th c. This meant a change in the political system; called for a constitutional system, for parliamentarism, contest among parties (even if they fought over simplistic problems). On the other hand there was hardly any difference in the everyday of the economy; the standard of living was of course different in each country, but so was elsewhere too in Europe. Eastern Europe was always the rearguards in material matters; the fact was not only recognized but also openly declared. In the Balkans there were no great power aspirations yet. Even the peoples of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy did not consider themselves to especially progressive just for being a part of a great power; their great thinkers had already realized that the great-power status of the Monarchy has little importance in the national developments of their own countries. Since there were no immediate changes in Russia, the role model of the Russian revolution was not taken too seriously.

There was one momentum of interest, however, for contemporary Europe: that the revolution had weakened Russia as a great power, thus its influence over Europe could have been diminished. The faltering the great Russian power was certainly agreeable for the leaders of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but was also welcome to the small Balkan states, they had been accustomed to the situation where the Russian

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power devoured small states. The great powers on the other hand did not let it alter their dealings among each other.

The European public opinion took interest in this question, since changes in the power role of Russia and its influence could not be indifferent for any European statesman belonging whichever side of the political spectrum, whether progressive or conservative, or even modern revolutionary. Some were even inclined to believe that the weakening of Russia could strengthen the progressive side.

Still the question is the significance of Russia for Europe, and not only for Eastern Europe. However, this was not the sole problem. There was the question how to follow suit with national changes and modifications as set by the Russian revolution. Without doubt, party-state historiography appointed special importance to the Russian factor; but what about following suit? It was an issue insisted upon by the party-state after all WWII. Russia's European arbiter role became dogmatized and thus it had to be treated as a focal aspect and could not be left out of consideration. And following the Russian example was part of these considerations. How and in what sense should the Russian have been followed? In the actual historical research this question did not play any important role, it was quite enough to stress the fact of following and was not necessary to directly explain it.

What about possibility of imitating bourgeois transformation, i.e. adopting the political system of Russia? Both the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the new Balkan states had already finished their actual bourgeois transformation in realizing a kind of European system. It was another question whether this transformation had indeed created a civil society or borrowed merely overt features. A parliamentary system had developed all over the continent, only the Osmanly Empire was the exception, but by 1905 this also changed. A civil society in a strictly western sense was not achieved even by the system of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy (neither in some European countries as Germany). There were no considerable changes in the every-day realization of the development in Russia either what could have been imitated.

If regarded from the Russian 'national' point of view, Eastern Europe failed to follow the Russian model because it had already surpassed it. It was a fact that could not have been denied even by party-state historiographers but it was felt necessary to stress how consciously and carefully planned the Russian changes were carried out. Thus at least one level was found where Eastern Europe could be compared to Russia and the

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Russian great power ambitions could be satisfied at a later date. This way it was possible to lump Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Balkan states together; Russia came out this way as no way less developed than the rest of Eastern Europe and the problem was quite satisfactorily solved.

This is one aspect of the question, how the differences between Russia and the other Eastern European states could be, and must be treated from a party-stated point of view. Now the really important question was whether they could or should have to follow the Russian example. They had to, there was no question about it, only the methods could be argued about. It became evident that the only acceptable solution would be the repetition of the Russian revolutionary experience in some form. If historians did not want to depart from historical facts entirely, they could operate with the time factor. This proved to be a real help since Eastern Europe did follow the Russian example at some later time; there were revolutions at a later date, which were appropriate to be called socialist and which, in this respect, were indeed repetitions of the Russian events, even though started at a lower level. During WWII and especially afterwards the Eastern European countries had to go all the way Russia went following her own inner motivations; in this sense the Eastern European countries indeed followed suit.

This, however, was not quite what the party-state(s) expected around 1905. By historical standards Eastern Europe did follow the Russian model; the obfuscation is evident, the countries went their way under outside (Soviet) power pressure, no inner motivation could be established (but that was unimportant anyway).

This is the sense it can be claimed that the countries of Eastern Europe followed the Russian model of 1905. Of course, the suggested modification in the dating of the process went against the expectations in Eastern Europe around 1955. If we want to play upon words (and that was the most that could be done at the time) it can be ascertained that Eastern Europe had indeed followed the Russian model – and than no date was mentioned; or that it did not follow because by around 1905 (in reality around 1955) it did not seem quite so important. In the latter case the time is clearly established and the form of disobey defined.

Looking back, the imitation of the Russian (Soviet) model seemed to be greatly important and it was imperative to document the relationship in satisfactory forms. If we want to interpret the situation free of former or present emotions we cannot state that on the short term, i.e. between

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1905 and 1907 the Eastern European countries, or even the whole of Eastern Europe lined up to follow Russia on the revolutionary path. It would be more than difficult to establish such a quick and straightforward reaction, however important it was deemed to be. Historically speaking it is evident that there were similar processes in the development of Russia, the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy and the Balkan states which made easy to compare these features and helped equating them; this is something quite independent of the party-state attitudes; other European countries had also developed similar relationships on various levels, parallel or similar developments resulting from the contact of many centuries, e.g. between Britain and France, without any need to suspect authoritarian regulations. Unfortunately Hungarian society took the party-state regulations for granted and cannot, would not get rid of them. It is well known that interference from the higher spheres were common practice but it does not automatically deny the reality of parallel or similar developments among the Eastern European countries; the various states of Latin America come to mind as a parallel, where the similarities of the inner social and political structures are the result of their historical developments and not illicit meddling in their historiography.

So far reaching conclusions can be drawn when the process and influence of the 1905 Russian revolution are analysed. Though the party-state authorities frequently drew artificial parallels to justify political theories or measures, it would be a mistake to ignore or misrepresent such facts.