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NATIONALITY AND LOCAL AUTONOMIES: THE GALICIAN CASE STUDY

Galicja in Polish history

After the three partitions at the end of 18th century Poland disappeared historically as a State. Historic Poland (the Polish-Lithuanian *Rzeczpospolita*) had been what we would now call a multinational state. After the Congress of Vienna the division of Poland in Austrian Poland, Prussian Poland and Russian Poland was confirmed. These three systems were quite different. In particular, in the period we are talking about (1867-1918), they had quite different electoral systems. This continued to be the case even after the Russian Revolution of 1905.

In Prussian Poland universal suffrage was introduced for the Reichstag elections (but not for the regional assemblies) with the creation of unified Germany in 1870. It is not easy to distinguish a the Polish point of view in German Poland because of the closeness between Polish political parties and German political parties. During Bismarck's *Kulturkampf* (and after) Polish Catholics and German Catholics had to work (and vote) together. Polish Social Democrats and German Social Democrats also had to work together. It is therefore very difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish the electoral behaviour of Polish population in the eastern part of Germany from that of German Roman Catholics. This is true for Poznan, particularly true for Upper Silesia in which of course the term of ethnic identities was very contested. (Even today it is not at all clear what exactly Silesian identity is.)

The lands of Russian Poland were of course very backward from a political and social point of view (though not necessarily from the economic point of view). These territories comprised many different contexts for the Polish populations and elites, ranging from the special status of Congress Poland (the Kingdom of Poland) to lands that were treated as purely Russian provinces.

Russian Poland and Prussian Poland were always present in the eyes of the Polish Galician elites, although not necessarily by Polish populations. There is an interesting remark in the *Memoirs* of Jan Słomka (1911) who said that close to the Russian border, until quite late, the peasants on the Galician side of the border were not even aware that the people across the border spoke Polish. This shows that at the time communication between the different Polish lands was quite difficult. The consciousness of the Polish political and ethnic elites must therefore not be confused with the ethnic and political consciousness of the peasants of this region.

Galicja in the Habsburg context

Let us now examine Galicja. For the period before the *Ausgleich* Polish historiography (I cannot speak for Ukrainian historiography) has tended to concentrate very much on the political aspects of the history of Galicja. After the Congress of Vienna the first turning point in Polish and Galician history was the insurrection of 1830. Galicja was also affected by the events of 1846 in Western Galicja. There is still a historiographical discussion on the failed insurrection organised by Polish democrats in 1846. Did the 1846 insurrection fail basically because the peasants instead of supporting the interaction turned against the insurgents or was there in fact a Machiavellian policy by the Austrian government that actively encouraged peasants to turn against the insurgents? As Alan Sked has pointed out, the rumour that circulated around Europe after 1846 was that the

Austrian Government *had* encouraged this peasant rebellion against the landowning nobility. Another point of reference in Galician history was also the subsequent course of events in Russian Poland and particularly the emancipation of serfs in 1861 and the Polish insurrection of 1863.

The general picture that Polish historiography gives of the political and institutional history of Galicia between the 1814 and the *Ausgleich* was one of a centralist administrative domination of Galicia by Vienna. But in the period following the Franco-Austrian war of 1859 there was a long period of constitutional development in Austria and also of negotiation between the various local regional elites throughout the Monarchy. To put it simply, the Polish elite of conservative landowners managed to negotiate a very favourable deal with Vienna. In effect Galicia obtained the highest level of provincial autonomy through of all Cisleithania, second only to the autonomy and virtual independence of Hungary. Crucially, this deal negotiated between the Polish elite and the Habsburg government allowed the Polonisation of the administrative structure in Galicia. This meant not only the *control* by the local elite but also ensuring that the actual administration was *composed* of Polish-speaking elements. Not only did the Polish elite achieve this very advantageous deal in Galicia, it also managed to achieve a very significant representation *in Vienna*: a Polish minister in the cabinet and certainly a presence in certain fields of high administration, including the military. Poles were an accepted and a recognised part of the establishment in Vienna. For the whole of the dualist period in Galicia you have a very strong Polish Galician autonomy.

Let us now point out some of the peculiarities of Galicia. Galicia, together with Bosnia Herzegovina, was the only case in which a Habsburg territory (outside the Hereditary Lands) was acquired through annexation rather than voluntary union. I think that the thrust of professor Stourzh's work is to underline the importance we should accord to the institutional aspect of the Habsburg system, and I think we should do that also in this case. The fact that Galicia was acquired through annexation rather than a voluntary union had important constitutional consequences. In a way it simplified very much the relationships between Galicia and Vienna. One can see the importance of this simplification if one compares it with, for example, the relations between the lands of the Crown of St. Wenceslas and Vienna. There you had a voluntary union, but at the same time, all the political debate and the ethnic struggle in the lands of Bohemian crown was connected with the specifics of this voluntary union.

In the case of Galicia you had a plain annexation and then of course also a formal justification of it that is different from other territories. The second big important element is that the Habsburg Empire acquired Galicia *after* the loss of Silesia in the middle of the 18th century. As Robert Kann has pointed out, this loss was the sign and determined a shift to the east of the centre of gravity of Habsburg Empire. In other words, the Habsburg Empire that acquired Galicia is a very different empire from the empire that existed before the loss of Silesia. There is a significant difference in the timing of the annexation of Galicia to the Habsburg Empire. After the loss of Silesia the Theresian and Josephine reforms. To put it in a simplified manner, these were centralising and modernising reforms, and precisely for that reason they were also germanising, which from the point of view of modernisation was a perfectly logical step (it was not Germanising in any late 19th century sense). But there is another set of a factor that makes a difference for in the way in which Galicia fitted into the Habsburg system. Before the *Ausgleich* the monarchy also lost most of the Italian lands (Lombardy and Venetia). This was a very important loss for the entire economy of the Habsburg monarchy.

An even more crucial aspect is that Galicia was virtually the only crownland in Cisleithania without a significant German population. One might object that the same applied to the *Küstenland*. But that area had always had a quite different institutional relationship with Vienna. Galicia was never included in German Confederation. The *Küstenland* was. (Dalmatia always remained marginal in the imperial context.) This absence of a German problem made it much easier for

Vienna to concede autonomy. Of course there were some German settlements in Galicia (“German Christians”, just to make it clear that one was not talking of Yiddish-speaking Jews). So Galicia was different not just because of its constitutional structure but also for the absence of this “German factor”.

In what sense was Galicia important and in what sense was it not important? It was not important because Galicia was politically marginal and it was economically marginal: the poverty of Galicia was proverbial. But why was it important? It was demographically important and it had some strategic importance, as was made clear during the First world war (as the frontline of Russian border). It was also institutionally important because of the special status of autonomy that the Galician province had in the Habsburg Cisleithanian system. So it was important not only because of its strong autonomy, not only because of its presence in Vienna, but also because the development of the parliamentary system in Vienna (at the Reichstag level for the whole of Cisleithania) where the Polish party (the Polish circle) became an important lifeline for the Vienna Government. The strength of the Polish lobby in Vienna was confirmed even at the time of the electoral reform in 1906-1907, when the Polish elite made sure that the electoral system of Galicia would have a specific clause made to protect Polish interests in Eastern Galicia.

Ethnic maps should never be taken too seriously because they can never give enough details of the situation on the ground at the local level. But if one looks at the map of the ethnic division of Galicia one can see a very classic division between western Galicia and eastern Galicia which approximately corresponds to the present division between the territory of Polish republic and Ukraine. In Eastern Galicia there was an Ukrainian/Ruthenian majority and in Western Galicia there was a Polish majority. There was a sort of archipelago of Polish settlements throughout the whole of the eastern Galicia. What did these Polish settlements represented from a social point of view? The Polish group was of course the ethnically and socially dominant group, and particularly in Eastern Galicia. These people were a minority, but when it came to political power the Polish conservatives of eastern Galicia counted a lot.

Galicia also contained a significant Jewish population. This was typical of many parts of Central Europe, but the difference was that in Galicia the percentage of Jewish Population was much higher (roughly 10%). As professor Stourzh has pointed out, in the Bohemian lands for example, you never had such a presence of Jewish settlements. In Bohemia you never had an influx of the so-called *Ostjuden* that was relatively widespread spread in Vienna and also in Budapest. One should always remember the nature of the Jewish community in Galicia was quite different from that of the Jewish community elsewhere. The Jewish population was therefore present in small village settlements, quite different from the Jewish neighbourhoods of Vienna and Budapest. The nature of Galician settlements was quite different from those in Tsarist Poland because in any case the institutional settings in Russia were so different. One should always remember that the Jewish community in Galicia was always radically different from other Jewish communities.

Galicia was important for all the three main ethnic groups (Poles, Ukrainians and Jews.) It was important for the development of the Polish national movement because Galicia represented freedom: the possibility of organising cultural activities, universities (the university structure and the primary educational structure were basically polonised. So cultural autonomy covered all aspects of the educational fields and all the Polish political parties had their bases in Galicia (connected to their branches in Russian and Prussian Poland).

Secondly, Galicia was important for the Ukrainian/Ruthenian national movement, for practically the same reasons. It represented freedom compared to Tsarist Ukraine and so the Ukrainian/Ruthenians institutions that developed in Galicia played at least an equivalent role for the Ukrainian national movement. (Ruthenian was the formal description for the Ukrainian population, so there is a formal reason for the use of Ruthenian, and there was also a political reason for using

Ruthenian in the sense that within the Ukrainian speaking population community there was a division between people who preferred to use the label Ruthenian and people who already wanted to use the label Ukrainian close to the position of the more radical nationalist movement in the Ukrainian context.) Galicia was simultaneously a Piedmont for the Poles and for the Ukrainians.

The Jewish community in Galicia was a specific case for the reasons previously mentioned. As in other regions people from the Jewish community could operate in certain economic sectors, very often acting as mediators between Polish landowners and the peasants population or both the Poles and Ukrainians. The Jewish community developed its first political parties (as professor Stourzh pointed out, not necessarily Zionist). In the Galician case this function of intermediaries was particularly developed and a significant number of Jews succeeded not only economically but also even socially because they sometimes substituted the landowners, becoming Jewish landowners.

There is nowadays a tendency to project backwards what happened in Galicia in World war One (and in World war Two). It is very comprehensible that historians now want to look at the history of Galicia looking at the picture of the XX century as a whole, but one of the functions of historians is to introduce and to maintain a historical perspective. The Galicia of the Dualist era is not the Galicia of the first world war and obviously. One way for arguing this is to look at the electoral data. The Galician system on the eve of the First world war was a political system with a very strong political content in which the ethnic national identities were crucial for political affiliation. But it was far from been an irremediable situation of ethnic conflicts leading to the subsequent catastrophes.

There are two crucial historical facts that changed the picture irretrievably. Firstly, World war One. As I said right until 1914 the constitutional legal equilibrium of the Habsburg system was maintained. The First world war changed everything, changed because of the invasion of the Tsarist troops that also acted against the civilian population that was a novelty, but instead when the first world war comes to this region concentration camps are introduced, together with the victimisation of the civilian population. Ukrainian nationalists also suffered, because they represented a serious danger from the Tsarist point of view. So there was an outside effect of the first world war. There was also a general phenomenon within the Habsburg monarchy of the policy of interning suspect political figures in the Habsburg monarchy. This was a violation of *de facto* rule of the Habsburg system; this applies especially to Cisleithania. This was, for the monarchy, the beginning of the end. The whole period from 1914 to 1920 is a progressive sliding in this direction, and certainly many of the problems of the Galician border region in a way matured in this period of the first world war. Prof. Stourzh also referred to the question of the immigration of Galician Jews in Vienna at the beginning of the war. (He demonstrated very well how crucial this episode was in the subsequent development of anti-Semitism both in Austria and Germany.)

“Historical” and “Non historical” nations

The distinction between “historical” and “non-historical” nations or nationalities continues to be controversial. When the Ukrainian intellectual and politician Dragomanov published an article in Italy on this problem in Italian translation the expression “unhistorical nations” was rendered as “*nazioni plebee*” which is a perfectly accurate. There is a more relevant sense in which this distinction can be questioned and that is that it doesn’t fully hold in terms of generalisation. Going back to the classic example of the Kingdom of St. Wenceslas, the Czechs were technically speaking a non-historical nation but they certainly had a strong position and they used the rights of the Bohemian crown as the basis for their struggle. But it is impossible to find any other region

(Crownland) in which a non-historical nation would use this as the basis for its struggle. This was certainly not the case in Galicia, in which the institutional framework was safely in the hands of a historic nation, the Poles. Professor Stourzh has rightly pointed out the inaccuracy of the label (historical nations). The Bohemian Czechs were not a historical nation and yet they were able in a way to use the institutional infrastructure of the Habsburg apparatus to defend the case of a non-historical nation. On the other side perhaps we should put Bohemia in a separate category. Too much the current vision of national conflicts in the Habsburg era is conditioned by Bohemia, and by the (verbal) violence of the conflicts.

In fact, the Bohemian Crownland was the only Crownland in which a non-historic, non-hegemonic, ethnic group, managed to challenge the dominant position of the hegemonic German-speaking group. But this was absolutely untypical of ethnic conflicts in the monarchy. For understanding the ethnic conflicts one should look at the behaviour and the development within the *historical* nations: the Germans, the Italians, the Poles, and the Hungarians. What happened in *that* camp proved decisive for the monarchy. Unhistorical nations, whatever their intimate feelings about the Habsburg monarchy, were not responsible for the fall of the Habsburg monarchy. The monarchy collapsed because of the conflicts within the *dominant* groups.

The electoral system in Cisleithania

There were basically three phases in the development of the electoral system. From the *Ausgleich* until 1897 the development follows the lines of the “curial” system which reflected social and income categories defined in different ways according to the period, now the curial system was designed to favour the German speaking population but it was not an ethnically discriminating system, it was a socially discriminating system. This means that it was open to accept the results of social and economic advancement of non-historical nations. When the Czechs acquired control of local government they did not do anything illegitimate. They simply operated in the system.

So the *curial* system was not a system that necessarily prevented the emergence of non-historic groups. Of course in the social economical historical reality of the Cisleithanian system this was an improbable event except in Bohemia. In this face of the development of the electoral system you have the paradox that the provincial assembly (*Lantag*) in the different Crown lands openly tried to resist the creation of the Reichstag system. In a way it was a struggle between local autonomy and centralising power. But at the same time it is also the establishment of a more widely-based political suffrage against a provincial system which was still based on a much more restricted suffrage (and which was much more biased against the non dominant ethnic groups). Without idealising the Vienna government and what can be called “central” government, the fact remains that between 1867 and 1897 a wider electoral system was created.

The establishment of the fifth curia in 1897 was a back door way of introducing universal suffrage, because in the fifth curia everybody could have the suffrage. It was in effect a compromise that left open the door to the introduction of universal suffrage. The non-hegemonic ethnic groups saw this, and from 1890 on the development of the political parties in Cisleithania increased dramatically. The situation throughout Europe made it quite clear that the universal suffrage was coming. The effects of universal suffrage began already with the introduction of the fifth curia.

The electoral reform of 1906 was the result of a chain of events, of which the most important were the Hungarian constitutional crisis of 1905-06 and the Russian revolution of 1905. With Russia apparently establishing some kind of democratisation, the political demands on the Habsburg monarchy increased correspondingly. The subsequent Reichsrat elections in 1907 and then in 1911 demonstrated the success of the reform. This can be shown from the level of

participation, particularly in an area like Galicia. In certain parts of Cisleithania (significantly in Christian social areas) there was some sort of compulsory voting but in the most of Cisleithania there was no compulsory voting. In Galicia the Polish landowners had no interest in compulsory voting because it would have encouraged the Ruthenian peasants to vote.

The Galician case is an interesting illustration of the need to separate economic and social development from political development. David Good basically proved in his study on the economic development of the Habsburg monarchy that the monarchy was not an economic failure. But he then proceeded to conclude that the monarchy must have collapsed for political reasons. In fact the success of the electoral reform of 1907-1911 shows that the system was reasonably able to reform itself and at least until the eve of the First world war it had the instruments for reforming itself and for maintaining the system.

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