

## THE PRINCIPLE OF SELF-DETERMINATION BEFORE 1919

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**Abstract.** *This paper aims to examine two interpretations of the principle of self-determination before the Peace Treaty of 1919 and the extent to which they underpinned the peace treaties during and immediately after the First World War. As such, it examines the two principal ways of defining the principles on which the peace treaties were based: the principle of self-governance, which guided the negotiations at the Versailles Peace Conference through President Wilson's Fourteen Points, and the principle of self-determination used in The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk and sustained by "the official socialism."*

**Keywords:** *principle of self-determination, national self-determination, self-government.*

The current denotation of the principle of self-determination is that of the right of peoples to dispose of their own territory, a denotation which is compatible with that of the principle of the sovereignty of people and with the purpose of establishing national states. As such, since 1918, the principle of self-determination constituted, "alongside the principle of sovereignty of the people, the only valid principles of modern legitimacy."<sup>1</sup> As self-determination of the "people," it is the "dominant organizing principle of the international system" and "intrinsically connected to the nation as 'national self-determination'."<sup>2</sup> It constitutes one of three pillars on which the international law system of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is based, together with the sovereignty of the state and the inviolability of its borders.<sup>3</sup> This paper aims to examine two interpretations of the principle before the Peace Treaty of 1919 and the extent to which they underpinned the peace treaties from the end and following the First World War.

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<sup>1</sup> Pierre Kende, "Autodeterminare în Europa de Est ieri și azi" (Self-determination in yesterday and today Eastern Europe), *Altera*, Year I, no. 1, 1995, p. 1. <http://www.altera.adatbank.transindex.ro/?cid=4>.

<sup>2</sup> Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, *Inside the Politics of Self-Determination*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 11.

<sup>3</sup> Pierre Kende, *loc. cit.*, p. 9. <http://www.altera.adatbank.transindex.ro/?cid=4>.

*Self-determination, self-government  
and a “popular misunderstanding”*

It has become a commonplace that one of the instruments by which Woodrow Wilson endeavoured to implement his conception on an “new world order” of the equal states cooperating for their common security<sup>4</sup>, his “new diplomacy” toward Austro-Hungary, the Bolsheviks... and toward his own allies” in Europe<sup>5</sup> and the general basis of the peace terms, was the principle of self-determination. Wilson is considered the most prominent exponent of the vision of “a just international society based on the principle of self-determination,” appearing thus “for a brief but crucial moment” – “the Wilsonian moment” – “to be the herald of a new era in international affairs.”<sup>6</sup> As such, it is considered that Wilson – “within the context of two of the most cataclysmic events of the twentieth century: the First World War and the Bolshevik revolution”<sup>7</sup> – “launched the transformation of the norms and standards of international relations that established the self-determining nation-state as the only legitimate political form throughout the globe, as colonized and marginalized peoples demanded and eventually attained recognition as sovereign, independent actors in international society.”<sup>8</sup> His “Fourteen Points,”<sup>9</sup> presented on January 8, 1918, in his address to the joint session of the United States Congress<sup>10</sup>, which comprised “the ideas of the essential nature of a post-World War I settlement,” reflects his and the United States’ role in the dissolution of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, in the rise of nations in Central and South-Eastern Europe, in the creation of new states such as Poland and Czechoslovakia and in considerably enlarging others, such

<sup>4</sup> See in this regard Erez Manela, *The Wilsonian Moment: Self-Determination and the International Origins of Anticolonial Nationalism*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2007. Manela considers that “the Wilsonian moment” began the process of “expansion of international society” in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. *Ibidem*, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> Betty Miller Unterberger, *The United States, Revolutionary Russia, and the Rise of Czechoslovakia*, with a new introduction, Texas A & M University Press, 2000, p. XIII.

<sup>6</sup> Erez Manela, *op. cit.*, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Betty Miller Unterberger, *op. cit.*, p. XIII.

<sup>8</sup> Erez Manela, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

<sup>9</sup> “The Fourteen Points” in the speech were developed by Wilson from a set of diplomatic points formulated by a research team of about 150 advisers – Inquiry – gathered and led by foreign-policy adviser Edward M. House. Predominantly they were targeting topics that could be reached in an already anticipated peace conference. Their effort was remarkable, given that “Few had any detailed knowledge of, for example, the disputed frontiers of Romania, Hungary or Bulgaria, still less of the history and ethnography of Poland or the Ottoman Empire.” Godfrey Hodgson, *Woodrow Wilson’s Right Hand: The Life of Colonel Edward M. House*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2006, p. 160. Colonel House played a crucial part in defining American aims in The Fourteen Points, whereas Walter Lippmann, as research director, “prepared with his colleagues on the Inquiry’s executive committee, Isaiah Bowman, Sidney Mezes, and David Hunter Miller” “a draft which became the master plan for the Fourteen Points” especially concerning the secret treaties. Lippmann also “coordinated the charts with national political movements to see how each group could be given national self-determination without exacerbating ethnic rivalries.” *Ibidem*, pp. 163-164.

<sup>10</sup> “The Fourteen Points” (January 8, 1918) were completed with “Four principles” (February 11), “Four Ends” (July 4), and “Five Particulars” (September 27). See for these issues Primary Documents – President Wilson’s Addendum to the Fourteen Points, 11 February 1918.

[http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/fourteenpoints\\_wilson2.htm](http://www.firstworldwar.com/source/fourteenpoints_wilson2.htm). See also Full text of *The Ordeal of Woodrow Wilson*, books by Herbert Hoover. [https://archive.org/stream/ordealofwoodroww028046mbp/ordealofwoodroww028046mbp\\_djvu.txt](https://archive.org/stream/ordealofwoodroww028046mbp/ordealofwoodroww028046mbp_djvu.txt).

as Romania, in the holding of plebiscites, the establishment of internationalized areas, like the Saar region and Danzig (Gdansk), disarmament and so on<sup>11</sup>.

“The Fourteen Points,” especially those eight related to territorial issues, were, in fact, “the justification for the breaking apart of the Austro-Hungarian Empire”<sup>12</sup> because, as required by point 10 of the document, “The peoples of Austria-Hungary, whose place among the nations we wish to see safeguarded and assured, should be accorded the freest opportunity to autonomous development” and, as required by point 11 of the document, “Romania, Serbia, and Montenegro should be evacuated; occupied territories restored; Serbia accorded free and secure access to the sea; and the relations of the several Balkan states to one another determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality; and international guarantees of the political and economic independence and territorial integrity of the several Balkan states should be entered into.”<sup>13</sup> In these two points of Wilson’s speech, as can be observed, and in the others of Wilson’s address, the phrase “self-determination” does not appear, nor does it appear in his public pronouncements of the war years.<sup>14</sup> Likewise, in The Fourteen

<sup>11</sup> See in this regard Volker Prott, *The Politics of Self-Determination: Remaking Territories and National Identities in Europe, 1917-1923*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2016, p. 3sq. It is of interest to only briefly mention a critical ideological perspective that emphasizes the “dark aspects” of the Versailles Peace Treaty, the difficulties of the negotiations and the severity of some of its provisions, including those relating to compensation, as well as those of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk. In his Preface to French and German editions (dated October 1921) of “Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism” (January-June 1916), published under the title “Imperialism and Capitalism,” Lenin considered that the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk was dictated by the German monarchists and that the Treaty of Versailles, “the subsequent much more brutal and despicable,” was “dictated by the democratic republics of America and France and also by «free» Britain... who, although they call themselves pacifists and socialists, sang praises to «Wilsonism», and insisted that peace and reforms were possible under imperialism.” V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 22, December 1915-July 1916, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964, p. 189. From a completely different perspective, “the Calvary of peace” or “the realization of the Napoleonic conditions with Wilsonian means,” “the significant harm to the boundaries promised to Romania through 1916 alliance Treaty with the Entente and particularly damaging to the interests and future of the Romanian nation,” “the political and economic obligations that were harmful and offensive to an independent country,” “the lucrative economic interests that mingled with political issues” – since, as Ion I. C. Brătianu pointed out, “In the backstage of the Conference, floated a pronounced smell of oil” (Constantin Kirițescu, *Istoria războiului pentru întregirea României* (History of war for the reunification of Romania), vol. II, Bucharest, Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică, 1989 (1022-1923), pp. 474, 474, 479), are also presented (in memories and correspondence) by the Romanian representatives at the negotiations in Versailles and at the signing of the Treaty of Trianon, especially by Ion I. C. Brătianu, *Raportul cu privire la situația României* (Report on the situation of Romania, February 1, 1919, Versailles Peace Conference) and *Discursul rostit în Ședința Adunării Deputaților din 16 februarie 1919* (Speech delivered at the meeting of the Assembly of Deputies of February 16, 1919), Alexandru Vaida-Voevod, *Memorii* (Memories, 4 vols., 1994-1997), but also by authors like R.W. Seton-Watson in *Europe in the Melting-Pot* (1919), Harold Temperley in *A history of the Peace Conference of Paris* (6 vols., 1920-1924), Stephen Bonsal in *Unfinished Business* (1944) and *Suitors and Supplicants – The Little Nations and Versailles* (1946), John Maynard Keynes in *The Economic Consequences of the Peace* (1919), or Jacques Bainville in *Les conséquences politiques de la paix* (1920).

<sup>12</sup> Kathleen Gallagher Cunningham, *Inside the Politics of Self-Determination*, Oxford/New York, Oxford University Press, 2014, p. 12.

<sup>13</sup> “Fourteen Points: United States Declaration.” <https://www.britannica.com/event/Fourteen-Points>. See also “The Path to Peace,” in *Woodrow Wilson and the World War: A Chronicle of Our Own Times*, by Charles Seymour, Toronto: Glasgow, Brook & Co., New York: United States Publishers Association, Inc., 1921, Textbook edition.

<sup>14</sup> Trygve Throntveit, “The Fable of the Fourteen Points: Woodrow Wilson and National Self-Determination,” *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 35, No. 3, June 2011, p. 446. As such, the phrase “self-determination” is absent not only from “the Fourteen Points,” but also from Democratic Platform of 1916, the “Peace without Victory” speech of early 1917.

Points there is no explicit motivation or argument concerning the dismembering of multinational states and the boundaries according to ethnological criteria. The question is whether the terms Wilson used: *autonomous development, restoring the occupied territories* (understood as annexed territories), *lines of allegiance and nationality, independence and territorial integrity* – intentionally imprecise – are subsumable under the concept of self-determination.

One of the most interesting and well documented reports on this issue is that belonging to Trygve Throntveit who argued in this respect that “the national self-determination” or the ethno-nationalist connotation assigned to Wilson’s political ideal was not explicitly sustained by Wilson and did not belong to his conception. As such, Throntveit considered that Wilson allowed “millions worldwide to believe that the post-war order he envisioned privileged the ethnic nation-state above all forms of political organization” and that “this popular misunderstanding has distorted the historiography of the Wilson era in ways that are rarely obvious, yet nonetheless profound.”<sup>15</sup> Instead, Throntveit argued that the American President’s vision was not an ethnic nation-states arrangement of the entire world, but a radical internationalist one, an integrative internationalism epitomized in the design of a League of Nations (point 14 of his January 1918 speech). From another perspective, Wilson’s conduct of American foreign relations is considered as being characterized by both universalism and unilateralism, President Wilson applying “the idea of international social control to American foreign relations, [and] promoting collective security to restrain national egoism.”<sup>16</sup> This perspective is somewhat consonant with Throntveit’s view, with Wilson considering national self-determination only a means for self-government – a “means with limited applications, of fostering conditions under which citizens could help shape the policies and goals of their governments – conditions he considered crucial to achieving the democratic relations among states that would ultimately guarantee peace.”<sup>17</sup> Throntveit specified that the development of Wilson’s political philosophy, the background to his enunciation of the Fourteen Points, and his subsequent efforts for peace lead to this conclusion.

In what concerns Wilson’s political philosophy, in Throntveit’s analysis Wilson appears as a promoter of the civic nationalism which had *self-government* as a basic principle. Wilson idealized *self-government* as the right of all to help direct their society’s public affairs and promoted “the civil right of *self-government*, by which he meant participation, by all members of a polity, in determining its public affairs.”<sup>18</sup> Since “every state is a nation-state,” the ideal nation-state being both organic and civic (product of history, of historical circumstances and of

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 446. Because Wilson “left his ideas vague, quietly ignoring the false ascription of «self-determination» to his famous utterance” (*Ibidem*, p. 450), Throntveit considered that this misunderstanding positioned “self-determination” as “shorthand for Wilson’s diplomatic agenda [and this] has encouraged the adoption of a bifocal lens, through which statehood and subjection appear as the only alternatives he offered to human populations.” *Ibidem*, p. 448.

<sup>16</sup> Lloyd E. Ambrosius, *Woodrow Wilson and the American Diplomatic Tradition: The Treaty Fight in Perspective*, Cambridge/New York/Port Chester/Melbourne/Sydney, Cambridge University Press, 1987, p. 2.

<sup>17</sup> Trygve Throntveit, *op. cit.*, p. 450.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 446.

habits, of spirit of civic duty, of civic commitment to common goals), a nation develops the capacity for self-government in the people themselves, as a “form of character” and, in its essential form, as a “habit of deliberative discourse over public affairs.”<sup>19</sup> The principles of right which compose “the universal conscience of mankind” and the translation of this conscience into “a moral sense and a community among states” are fundamental and vital for the international order. As such, Wilson’s political thought, liberal and organicist, and internationalist at the same time, was not entirely congruent with the principle of national self-determination. Throntveit specified that Wilson was not interested in self-determination as mere drawing of territorial boundaries, but “as a matter of practical political ethics, that all people should have a voice in the governments,”<sup>20</sup> namely in self-government.

In what concerns the background to Wilson’s enunciation of the Fourteen Points, the Allied governments’ cold reception of the “Peace without Victory” address has to be mentioned, which “indicated the gulf between their aims and Wilson’s,”<sup>21</sup> the assimilation of the rhetoric of national self-determination by some Allied statesmen (the revolutionary Russians, Bolsheviks, and even Lloyd George<sup>22</sup>), the demanding of a “peace of no annexations” under and “a super national authority” comprising an international legislature” (British Labour Party), the insistence on revising the Allied governments’ war aims such that they “to reflect the ‘international justice’ for which they claimed to fight” (French Socialists).

Even if the Fourteen Points were not a “contra-manifesto” to the “Declaration of the Rights of the Peoples of Russia,”<sup>23</sup> issued by Lenin on November 15, 1917, in Throntveit’s view, “the Bolsheviks’ pronouncements that every ethnic-nationalist aspiration must be realized in a sovereign state” it must have been “an affront to Wilson’s civic-nationalist ideal of variegated communities forming common purposes through ‘common counsel’.”<sup>24</sup> As a consequence, The Fourteen Points were Wilson’s attempt to show that his goal was to create an international environment with self-governing institutions, “a settlement providing a stable psychological and political basis for international, cooperative responses to change.”<sup>25</sup> Throntveit’s study mentions the analysis of Wilson’s internationalist aim through the connection between the philosophical pragmatism and progressive-era democratic theory (James T. Kloppenberg) and the analysis of Wilson’s peace program from 1918 on (Michla Pomerance) as “a fusion and confusion of several ideas’ about ‘self-determination,’ including ‘freedom from ‘alien’ rule (‘external self-determination’), freedom to select one’s own form of government

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 453.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 455.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 457.

<sup>22</sup> Who asserted that the “general principle of national self-determination is therefore applicable in their cases as in those of occupied European territories.” David Lloyd George quoted in *The New York Times*, January 6, 1918, 1-2, apud Trygve Throntveit, *op. cit.*, p. 459. Besides, Throntveit considers that “Lloyd George’s speech on January 5 greatly enhanced the power of Lenin’s centrifugal concept of national self-determination to distort Wilson’s centripetal ideal of global self-government.” *Ibidem*, p. 475.

<sup>23</sup> Which promised all “non-Russian nationalities in Russia, full freedom, including freedom of secession.”

<sup>24</sup> Trygve Throntveit, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 462.

(‘internal self-determination’), a form of continuing self-government (democracy), [and] the principle of one nation-one state.’ ”<sup>26</sup> This analysis argued that the fundamental principle from which the other permutations, derived applied in varying contexts was “continuing self-government.” This fundamental principle is sustained inclusive by his reiteration “privately” of his ambivalence toward the idea of self-determination. In a letter send to Secretary of State Robert Lansing on January 29, 1918, Wilson confessed that “While, as you know, I am strongly inclined to nationality as the basis for territorial limits... I believe that it cannot be invariably adopted.” “In certain cases... strategic boundaries must be considered and must modify boundaries based on nationality” to protect self-governing nations from militaristic autocracies<sup>27</sup>.

The ideas that (a) Wilson’s general model and objective was “the polyglot, patchwork United States,” or what we might call a non-ethnic American paradigm<sup>28</sup>, that (b) his pragmatic focus was “on fostering self-government through various, situation-specific political and economic arrangements” – inspired by Lippmann’s conception on “flexible, highly adaptive machinery by which the ‘political method’ could trump ‘pretensions to sovereignty’ in a world of increasingly obsolete geographical barriers”<sup>29</sup> –, that (c) he lacked interest in political independence for stateless nationalities and in drawing boundaries according to ethnological criteria, and that (d) he was afraid that the extreme application of the principle of self-determination “would mean the disruption of existing governments to an un-definable extent,” are highly plausible and can account for his deliberate imprecision in the terms used in The Fourteen Points and for their deliberately confusing character, which in their turn account for a imprecision of the message conveyed. Since ethnology was not central to the points regarding the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires, as Throntveit interpreted by using the Inquiry Memorandum, the call for “autonomous development,” from point 10 of The Fourteen Points, in fact was not an encouragement to break the two Empires apart, but for “federalism” in Austro-Hungary, of ending their “vassalage” to Germany and of destruction of autocracy within and between nations. Certainly, from this point of view Wilson “again subordinated nationalist aspirations to deliberative politics, regional stability, and freedom from foreign intrigue.”<sup>30</sup> In the same key is also intelligible, from point 11, the urge to Balkan states to relations “determined by friendly counsel along historically established lines of allegiance and nationality,” to settle border disputes and not to establish new nation-states, to base their ultimate relationship “upon a fair balance of nationalistic and economic considerations applied in a generous and inventive spirit after impartial scientific inquiry.” As such, it can be rightly argued, with Throntveit, that “Wilson’s territorial points

<sup>26</sup> Michla Pomerance, “The United States and Self-Determination: Perspectives on the Wilsonian Conception,” *American Journal of International Law*, 70, January, 1976, pp. 1-27, esp. 20, apud Trygve Throntveit, *op. cit.*, p. 461.

<sup>27</sup> Trygve Throntveit, *op. cit.*, p. 475.

<sup>28</sup> In an interview on December 28, 1918, Wilson rejected the ethnic descriptor “Anglo-Saxon” for American culture. See Trygve Throntveit, *op. cit.*, p. 463.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 462.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 465.

were designed to identify the major problems that would face peacemakers at war's end, and to exemplify – not codify – pragmatically internationalist solutions”<sup>31</sup> and, with Miller, that for Wilson “the peace of the world is superior in importance to every question of political jurisdiction or boundary.”<sup>32</sup>

The conclusion of this analysis is that Wilson's Fourteen Points express the American civic-nationalist tradition of self-government rather than European ethnic-nationalist ideas of self-determination and that the strange distinction made by Wilson between self-government and self-determination<sup>33</sup> – “National aspirations must be respected; peoples may now be dominated and governed only by their own consent” – explains to a great extent why it is an serious misunderstanding to believe that Wilson was a supporter of the principle of self-determination and why Wilson's phrase “self-determination” – “not good enough as a right standard for the determination of sovereign authority” – was removed from Article X of the League of Nations Covenant.

### *The right of nations to self-determination*

The principle of self-determination was instead an important concern for “the official socialism” – near the London International Socialist Congress of 1896<sup>34</sup>, between 1903-1913 in Russian Social-Democrats discussions and, especially, during the war – and the *Works* of Lenin reflects “the struggle between the trends among socialists abroad” and from Russia, he personally dealing with this theme in his writings – especially in “The discussion of self-determinations summed up” (July, 1916) and “The Junius Pamphlet” (July 1916), in his correspondence and in congressional works he edited, especially in “Resolution on the national question” (May, 1913) and “The Socialist Revolution and the right of the nations to self-determinations: Theses” (January-February 1916).

In 1913, in “Resolution on the national question” – part of the Resolutions of the Summer, 1913, Joint Conference of the Central Committee of the R.S.D.L.P. and Party Officials (September 23-October 1, Poronin, near Cracow), edited by Lenin –, the right of nations oppressed to self-determination is defined as a right to secede and form independent states. Championed “unquestionably” by the Social-Democratic Party, this right is motivated as being “dictated by the fundamental principles of international democracy in general, and specifically by the unprecedented national oppression of the majority of the inhabitants of Russia by the tsarist monarchy...”<sup>35</sup> The right of nations to self-determination, namely

<sup>31</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 467.

<sup>32</sup> David Hunter Miller, *The Drafting of the Covenant*, Vol. II, New York and London, G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1928, p. 99, apud Trygve Throntveit, *op. cit.*, p. 472.

<sup>33</sup> Known only to his closest advisers. See Trygve Throntveit, *op. cit.*, p. 477.

<sup>34</sup> When Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Kautsky and “the Polish independents” represented three different views. See “The discussion of self-determinations summed up,” in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 22, December 1915-July 1916, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964, p. 320sq.

<sup>35</sup> “Resolution on the national question,” in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 19, March-December 1913, translated from the Russian by George Hanna, edited by Robert Daglish, Moscow, Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963, p. 428.

the constitutional guarantee of an absolutely free and democratic method of deciding the question of secession,” which “must under no circumstances be confused with the expediency of a given nation’s secession”<sup>36</sup>, is attainable, according to the Resolution, “only under a consistently and thoroughly democratic republican system of government which guarantees full equality of all nations and languages, which recognises no compulsory official language, which provides the people with schools where instruction is given in all the native languages, and the constitution of which contains a fundamental law that prohibits any privileges to any one nation and any encroachment whatsoever upon the rights of a national minority.”<sup>37</sup>

In February 1916, in the theses concerning “The Socialist Revolution and the right of the nations to self-determinations,” the right of self-determination or “the right to free political separation”<sup>38</sup> is defined as belonging “wholly and exclusively to the sphere of political democracy,”<sup>39</sup> as involving “complete freedom to agitate for secession and for a referendum on secession by the seceding nation,” namely “a consistent expression of struggle against the all national oppression.” The text specifies that this freedom is not equivalent of a demand for separation, fragmentation and the formation of small states, that the desire for separation is reduced in a democratic state system that allows freedom of secession and in a large democratic state which “afford indisputable” economic and social advantages. Likewise, it appears that the recognition of self-determination is not synonymous with recognition of federalisation as a principle, but federalization is preferred “to national inequality as the only way to full democratic centralism. It was from this standpoint that Marx, who was a centralist, preferred even the federation of Ireland and England to the forcible subordination of Ireland to the England.”<sup>40</sup> Eastern Europe: Austria, the Balkans and Russia are included in these types of countries with respect to the self-determination of nations, where national movements were developed and the national struggle intensified and where “the tasks of the proletariat... cannot be carried out without championing the right of nations to self-determination.”<sup>41</sup>

In the same year, in the Second International Socialist Conference at Kienthal (April 11-17, 1916), critically discussing “the peace programme” and the allegedly unanimous recognition of the struggle against *old* and *new* annexations, namely the appropriations of territories *against the will* of the populations of those territories, Lenin considered the concept of annexation as being inseparably bound up with the

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 429.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 427.

<sup>38</sup> “The Socialist Revolution and the right of the nations to self-determinations,” in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 22, December 1915-July 1916, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1964, p. 143.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 145.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 146. Certainly, in the socialist perspective of the document, “In the same way as mankind can arrive at the abolition of classes only through a transition period of the dictatorship of the oppressed class, it can arrive at the inevitable integration of nations only through a transition period of the complete emancipation of all oppressed nations, i.e., their freedom to secede.” *Ibidem*, p. 147. Also, in this perspective, “The proletariat must struggle against the enforced retention of oppressed nations within the bounds of a given state, which means that they must fight for the right to self-determination.” *Ibidem*.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151.

concept of the *self-determination of nations*<sup>42</sup>, chauvinism and annexationism, including the official socialist parties, especially of those of “great powers”<sup>43</sup> requiring to be extensively combated. Also in the same year, in “The discussion of self-determinations summed up” (July, 1916), the annexation is defined as “*violation of the self-determination of a nation*,” as “the establishment of the state *frontiers contrary to the will of the population*,” but using means of force, oppressing that nation, and violating of the *status quo*.<sup>44</sup> Lenin specifies that “to be against annexations,” “to be against the forcible retention of any nation in a given state” (annexing state) and to be committed (as a party in power) “to *renounce retention by force*” “*means to be in favour of the right to self-determination*.”<sup>45</sup> According to Lenin, the dual transformation in the political sphere – the full equality of the nations within the state and freedom of political separation, with reference to the demarcation of state frontiers – is connected with the liberation of oppressed nations.<sup>46</sup> A nation which is only “autonomous” does not enjoy rights equal to those of the “ruling nation.” So, as he pointed out, only a revolutionary change, which undermines the foundations of power, and not a reformist programme, will abolish *all* the privileges of the ruling nation, will establish complete equality and will abolish national oppression *in all its forms*.<sup>47</sup>

Undoubtedly, this Bolshevik precise language of self-determination, the “Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia,” issued by Lenin on November 15, 1917, the demands of left-wing movements in Europe and The Treaty of Brest-Litovsk, signed in March 1918 – the first international agreement having as a base the principle of self-determination – have attracted a real “diplomatic and ideological revolution,” namely the Entente’s polyvalent efforts to counteract their attractiveness.

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<sup>42</sup> “The Second International Socialist Conference at Kienthal, April 11-17, 1916,” in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 41, 1896-October 1917, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1969, p. 373.

<sup>43</sup> For instance, the English socialists who fail “to struggle for freedom to secede for Ireland, India, etc...” *Ibidem*, p. 374. Lenin considered that, in some socialist parties’ case, the expressed “grave dilemma – the interests of the fatherland or the international solidarity of the proletariat – the tragic conflict which prompted our parliamentarians to side, «with a heavy heart», with the imperialist war, is pure imaginary, it is a bourgeois nationalist fiction...” “The Junius Pamphlet,” in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 22, December 1915-July 1916, *ed. cit.*, p. 315.

<sup>44</sup> “The discussion of self-determinations summed up,” in V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Volume 22, December 1915-July 1916, *ed. cit.*, p. 328.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 328-329.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 322.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 344.

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