The Geography and Geopolitics of Europe's Fourth World

Dr. Richard A. Griggs, University of Cape Town

While the challenges posed by a world economy, global communications, transborder pollution, drugs, or defense have been used to explain the drive toward a new political architecture in Europe, few have commented on the role of Fourth World nations in this process. Globally some 6,000 to 9,000 nations lacking official recognition endure as distinct political cultures beneath the boundaries of 191 states. Of that number, some 120 belong to Europe (excluding Russia and Turkey as European). They have been both the building blocks of European states (state-building by nation annexation) and the political faultlines along which they break apart (e.g. Yugoslavia). Today these nations are organizing for a new European political geography based not on sovereign states but a federal "Europe of Regions." Understanding this effort requires an overview of both the geography and geopolitics of Europe's Fourth World.

The Geography of Europe's Fourth World

Barely ten percent of Europe's distinct nations are identified on the typical map of European states. Only Iceland, Ireland, Monaco, Andorra, Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, San Marino, Malta, Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Slovenia are recognized nations or "nation-states" (states composed of only one nation). The remaining 107 nations fit within thirty-five multinational states. Excluding the dominant nation cores of states (eg. Svealand dominates Sweden's nations; Castile dominates Spain's nations) and those nations with very weak political movements (eg. Pomerania), Fourth World nations can claim some thirty-seven percent of Europe's land area. They dominate more than half of Europe's coastline and form a concentrated core of little nations in the rugged heartland of the Alps.

Europe's Fourth World geography includes islands, deserts, coastal lowlands, steepelands, Alpine mountains, tundra, and temperate forests. These environments include

some of Europe's finest timber, fishing grounds, mineral resources, soils, vineyards, tourist facilities, and manufacturing centers. Flanders and Catalonia contain two of Europe's busiest harbors. The richest minerals in Europe are the oil fields offshore Shetland, Orkney, and Scotland. Brittany generates more than half the income France dervies from fishing. The Occitan nations that border the Pyrenees (Aquitaine, Languedoc, Central Occitania, and Provence) produce some of the world's finest wines. The most profitable manufacturing and service sector in Europe centers on Stuttgart, the capital and heartland of Swabia (Baden-Wurttemberg). Scotland is the largest assembler of integrated circuits in Europe, and the third largest worldwide.

In terms of wealth, the status of Fourth World nations varies from poor (eg. Sardinia) to wealthy (eg. Lombardy). Much of this depends on a nation's economic, geographic, and political relationship to the state. Unable to initiate their own economic policies, many nations are impoverished that should not be. On the other hand, some nations have for various reasons (eg. location or autonomy) remained the most powerful economic sectors in their respective states. Good examples are the four economic engines of Europe: Catalonia, Lombardy, Swabia (Baden-Wurttemberg), and Burgundy (Rhone-Alps, Savoy, and the French cantons of Switzerland).

Political sovereignty also varies among the European nations. Flanders, Wallonia, Catalonia, Euzkadi (Basque Country), and six nations with the status of a German länder (Thuringia, Hesse, Bavaria, Niedersachsen, Baden-Wurttemberg, and Schleswig-Holstein) enjoy their own parliaments and significant control over health, education, housing, roads, and the environment. Some nations like the Isle of Man or Jersey, mint their own currency and collect their own taxes. On the other hand, nations such as Wales and Scotland lack any national government and must function through central government bureaucracies. At the most extreme are nations whose existence is denied by the central government in both textbooks and legal institutions such as Skåneland.

Variation also occurs in terms of the size and population of Fourth World nations. Some are small like Jersey (barely over 100 square kilometers) yet Samiland is bigger than France. Populations vary too. There are more Bavarians than Danes, Swedes, or Portuguese yet Shetland includes fewer people than an average European town.

Most nations have suffered some loss of territorial integrity. Many have been partitioned between states (eg. Friesland), split into administrative halves (eg. Normandy), or had their cultural capital severed from the body of the nation by administrative boundaries (Brittany). Usually island nations (eg. Sardinia) or those with clear physical demarcations (the Tamar river dividing Cornwall from England) have fared best in maintaining their geographic shape for hundreds and even thousands of years.

Thus, what unites these nations, and attracts our attention, is not a shape, size, economic status, population, or degree of sovereignty that can be generalized and discussed. None of these factors explains Europe's Fourth World nations. The commonality is a geopolitical relationship to a state-claimant. These nations endure despite incorporation into an expansionist state.

Europe's Fourth world nations are powerful geopolitical players and the boundaries they claim are often the cultural faultlines along which states break-up (two or more states emerge from one state) or break-down (federation). The break-up of the Soviet Union in 1991 was largely attributed to national resistance to the state assimilationist policy of *sliyanie* (gradual sovietization). Fifteen nations emerged, six of which delimited the borders of a "New Europe" (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Belarus, Ukraine, and Moldova). In 1992 Yugoslavia collapsed as its submerged nations resurfaced (Serbia, Bosnia, Montenegro, Macedonia, Slovenia, and Croatia). New Years Day 1993 began with the break-up of Czechoslovakia into its two component nations (Czech Republic and Slovakia). Decentralization in Spain (1979), France (1982), Belgium (1993), and now Italy (ongoing) has seen these states break-down into autonomous nations like Catalonia, Alsace, Flanders, or Lombardy.

To reduce the threat to state stability, most European states promote an ideology that suggests that the state *is* the nation and that Fourth World nations lack any legitimate territorial claims. This is a legacy of the French Revolution when the Jacobins sought to corral the power of nationalism for demagoguery. At the time (1789) not even a third of the population of today's France could speak French. Any historic atlas demonstrates that more than a score of nations like Burgundy, Brittany, Normandy, Languedoc, or Alsace made up hexagonal France. The Jacobins and later Napoleon initiated massive programs (including wars, and the guillotine) to "Frenchify" all the nations claimed by the revolutionary government. Since France was perceived as the "nation," all remaining identities were relegated to the status of ethnic groups. Ironically, 200 years later, France is devolving power to twenty two official regions based on the nations that surivived from this period.

The geopolitics of Europe has returned to a period of decentralization after two centuries or more of state-building. The attempts to deliberately foster a state conciousness within the entire populace usually backfired. The violence associated with genocide, ethnocide, forced removal and colonization resides in the cultural memory of surviving nation peoples. Children learn from their parents about their proud heritage and thus nations endure. In fact, nations generally outlast several states. A generous figure for the geographical and political continuity of a European state is 500 years (Spain). Spanish claimed Euzkadi (Basque Country) may be 10,000 years old. Friesland predates all the states that claim her (Netherlands, Germany, Denmark) by more than a thousand years. By thumbing through the pages of any good historic atlas of Europe, one can see that state boundaries seem to flow like shifting sands across a bedrock of nations.

Fourth World Geopolitics

Understanding the geopolitics of Europe's Fourth World nations must center upon an understanding of Europe itself. There are three different geographical bases for anchoring

a definition of Europe: landscape, political boundaries, or cultural boundaries. No geographer has succeeded in defining Europe by an unchanging set of physical boundaries or landforms. One exhaustive effort to do so concluded, "Any attempt to divide Europe from Asia on a systematic physical-geographic basis is doomed to fail." The idea of a physical continent at the westernmost promontory of Asia is imaginative and, naturally enough, originated in Greek myth (the Goddess Europa).

Mythology endures if we see Europe as a political arrangement of state boundaries since this geography is dependent on the historic moment, the goals of politicians, and the arbitrary pens of cartographers. States expand, contract, and disappear continuously. For instance, in 300 AD as part of the Roman Empire, Europe embraced much of North Africa while everything east of the Rhine and north of the Black Sea was part of Asia. In 900 AD Europe would have embraced Anatolia but excluded the Islamic Iberian Peninsula. By 1492 just the reverse was true: Ottoman Turkey was subtracted from Europe and Spain added in. Now with the end of the cold war division between East and West, Europe is at its greatest conceptual extent ever ranging from the Atlantic to the Urals and from the Mediterranean to the Arctic.

A cultural definition can be problematic too if we regard European peoples as sharing the cultural legacy of Celts, Romans, Christians, and Indo-European languages. Major regions are excluded that we normally consider European and others are added in that we do not consider European. Germany and the Nordic regions were neither part of the Celtic nor Roman worlds. Turkey, Bulgaria, Bosnia, and southern Spain owe more to Islam than Christianity. Besides, Christianity embraces much of the world (eg Latin America). The Indo-European language definition excludes Basques, Finns, Estonians and Hungarians.

It may surprise some, but it is accurate to say that Europe remains to be defined. This helps to explain European geopolitics: who will define European boundaries, states or nations? This should not create the impression, that all nations seek statehood. Very few

want that. More than ninety percent of Europe's 130 Fourth World nations and city-states are seeking a role in a European Confederation. This means representation for nations and regions in European Union (EU) institutions and domestic autonomy consistent with EU goals. In this way, old nations long suffering from accusations of "atavistic nationalism" have turned the tables on their accusers. The bedrock nations are organized around the theme of European unity while states attempt to maintain old political boundaries that are being challenged by local and global forces.

These developments synchronize two geopolitical forces resulting in a squeeze on the state as the dominant from of political organization. On one side are old nations, regions and city-states seeking more appropriate and less centralized solutions for particularly local problems. On the other side are the proponents of a Federal Europe who argue that the individual state can no longer meet the problems posed by continental and global problems (eg. drugs, arms trade, pollution). The bridge between the two is the principle of "subsidiarity" in which decisions are taken at the scale most appropriate to the problem. The European Union would be large enough to wrestle with the big problems and the region or nation appropriate to the smaller ones. Middle scale problems would be handled by European Union commissions acting as facilitators between the nations, regions, or cities affected. The entire geopolitical vision is being called the "Europe of Regions."

With every scale of problem accounted for in the regional conception, it is hard to see the state as anything but a replicated tier of government. The demand for local control has equal footing with the demand for European levels of organization, and each foot awkwardly straddles an anachronism: the state form of organization. Thus, state officials are naturally resistant to all but a superficial degree of pan-European organization. For this reason, state leaders often advocate a wider, looser arrangement of state agreements than a deeper, more federal Europe. This kind of vison for Europe leaves small nations and regions stagnated politically and economically by centralist states, and their cultures smothered by the same Jacobin tendencies that built the present system.

Arguably the states could win this geopolitical struggle. This would result in a Brussels bureaucracy without teeth and continuous petty squabbling between sovereign states. This has already seen the collapse of attempts at monetary union and the watering down of nearly all substantial agreements to allow "opt outs" for states protecting their sovereignty.

On the other hand, the logic of economic geography rather than politics pushes European politics in the regional direction. Simply put, the European union must function in ways that make economic and geographic sense. As Jane Jacobs has observed, states are political and military formations, not the salient entitites of economic life. First, the physical geography of a region is not always appropriate to dominance by a state capital. In a wider Europe without state boundaries, the logic of geography would have Cornwall directly involved in Atlantic trade rather than economically marginalized by shipping raw materials by train to London-based manufactuers. Similarly politics rather than logical geography dictates that Skåneland should abandon its natural trade routes direct to adjacent Denmark and Germany to service an ill-situated manufacturing center hundreds of miles to the north at Stockholm.

The EU has identified this problem and has faciliated cooperative enterprises and partnerships between regions that is altering the economic geography of Europe. This is revitalizing natural and historic trading regions like the Atlantic and Mediterranean Arcs that connect nations like Cornwall, Brittany, Aquitaine, and Galicia or Corsica, Sardinia, Sicily, and Provence. Both "Arcs" correspond with past geographies that were propserous periods for these seaboard nations before they became tied to hegemonic cores that disrupted trade patterns.

Second, despite state boundaries, international businessmen do not make their investment decisions based on the competencies of "Belgium" but Wallonia; not "Germany" but Baden-Wurttemberg; and not "Spain" but Catalonia.

This set of economic and geographical relationships makes location a key determinant in shaping the politics of pan-European unity. Regional economic organization requires European-wide bodies to coordinate regional partnerships. Thus, those seeking power in Brussels encourage regionalism as enthusiastically as the regions themselves. To this end, nearly all the important treaties on Europe have in one way or another coaxed the Europe of Regions vision along. The Maastrict Treaty, for instance, established the Consultative Committee of the Regions, marking the first time Fourth World nations, city-states, and regions were admitted as partners in building a new Europe.

Behind these achievements lay a large number of significant pan-European organizations promoting the Europe of Regions vision. These include: the Federal Union of European Nationalities, the Assembly of European Regions, the Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organization, the International Institute for Ethnic Group Rights and Regionalism, the European Regionalist Network, the Association of European Border Regions, and the International Union of Local Authorities. Deserving special mention is the Council of Europe's Standing Conference on Local and Regional Authorities in Europe (CLRAE). This body has passed some 250 resolutions since 1957 to promote regional organization as the most democratic means of cooperative European planning. The Council of Europe fully anticipates the evolution of a "Senate of Regions" as part of the European Parliamentary system.

With the growth and harmonization of suprastate and substate forces, 120 Fourth World nations could find independence within a European political structure based upon free nations, regions, and city-states. However, this must be seen as a trans-generational project. The more predictable short-term result is a messy overlapping of authority between states, nations, regions, and the European Union.