

INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL CONTEXT OF IRREDENTISM

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Summary

The article deals with the role of irredentism in international politics. The author relies on the approach of T. Ambrosio, who proposes to take into account the international or regional context in the study of irredentism. Systematic and historical methods were used in the research. Irredentism is seen as a set of strategies and actions of the mother state and the national minority, which aim is to unite a divided ethnic community in one political body. Irredentism is a form of the political process, the implementation of which involves the use of several technologies. Modern irredentism can exist in “mild” and “hard” forms. The “mild” form implies the strengthening of the political, economic, and cultural influence of the mother state on kin groups, while the “hard” form involves the annexation of the territory. The origin of irredentism and its transformation conform to the changes in the system of international relations. The hypothesis that the role of the international community in the regulation of irredentist conflicts in the process of international relations development has been proved. The author analyses the current state of irredentism in Europe in the context of integration processes, and it is determined that the conditions for the accession to the EU and NATO restrain the manifestations of irredentism. The example of the Russian irredentist project reveals that the international legal framework does not clearly regulate the forms of countering irredentism.

Keywords: irredentism, mother state, national minority, polyethnic state, political process, political technology, international politics, system of international relations.

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1. Introduction

Recently, irredentist plans for the return of historic territories have become widespread in Europe, often in the form of the revival of a “Great Power” idea, which poses a potential threat to the territorial integrity of sovereign states. Irredentism arises when borders between two or more states divide one ethnic group. The most common version of irredentism involves the existence of the mother state and kin groups in neighbouring states. Therefore, an important place in modern international relations is occupied by the problem of organizing acceptable coexistence between mother states and kin groups, which can prevent conflicts based on irredentist grounds. This issue brings the phenomenon of irredentism to the international level.

The purpose of the article is to study the impact of irredentism on international political processes, which requires several tasks: to reveal the essence of irredentism, to characterize its structure, to explore the origins, evolution, and role of irredentism in modern world politics. Author’s hypothesis: in the process of development of international relations, the role of the international community in the resolving of irredentist conflicts is growing. The novelty of the study lies in a comprehensive approach to the study of irredentism; the author tries to identify tendencies in the transformation of irredentism in the context of changes in international relations.

The research methodology is based on the approach of T. Ambrosio, who offers a structural explanation of irredentism. In his opinion, it depends on the international or regional context whether an irredentist project will arise and how it will develop. The development of irredentism will depend on what will be chosen: state sovereignty or national self-determination. In the first case, any irredentist claims will be condemned, in the second – the inviolability of state borders will be abolished. “The dramatic increase in irredentist conflicts during periods of major international upheaval and normative reordering is seen as important evidence in favour of this position”. The major methods of the study are historical and systematic. The historical method is based on the dialectical principle of historicism, which requires considering each phenomenon in terms of how it arose, what stages of development took place and its state at the present stage. The systematic method allows one to consider irredentism as a set of strategic interactions of several participants, each of which pursues its own goals.

2. Irredentism as a process and as a technology

The vast majority of countries in the world are polyethnic, so the problem of minorities inevitably arises in each of them. Many minorities are part of so-called “divided peoples” and therefore have a mother or kin state, which tends to be interested in the welfare of kin groups. On this basis, irredentism may emerge as a set of strategies and actions of a mother state and irredenta – a national minority within a polyethnic state, whose goal is to unite in one political body of an ethnic community divided by borders between two or more states. Researchers appeal to the definition proposed by Donald Horowitz. He defines irredentism both as an attempt to separate the territory or population of one state to join another and as an attempt to separate the territory or population divided between more than one state to further unite them into a single newly formed state (*Horowitz, 1991: 10*).

Irredentism arises when the interests of a mother state and a national minority are combined, i.e. when an irredentist state appeals to the feelings of a kin group, emphasizing the division of the ethnic group as a problem, and the national minority accepts irredentist slogans and starts to focus more on the neighbouring state rather than on the country of residence. J.K. Füzesi believes that irredentism is “the bilateral and simultaneous pursuit by both parent state and its ethnically kindred brethren in a foreign state of ethno-territorial retrieval across inter-state borders” (*Fuzesi, 2006: 18*). This understanding of irredentism allows us to consider it as a kind of political process. The political process is a set of actions of its participants, which takes place within certain defined limits and which is aimed at maintaining and forming the political system and the destruction and undermining of established principles, norms, laws, and political systems. The area of influence and distribution covers not only the territory of a particular state but also the territories outside it (*Haidai, 2017: 86*).

Irredentism acts as a triad represented by the following subjects: the national minority-irredenta, the irredentist state, and the polyethnic state in which the irredenta resides. All subjects of the triad have their own goals and resources for their implementation. In our opinion, with the strengthening of integration and globalization processes in the world, it is possible to speak about the expansion of the parties involved in collaboration and the emergence of a fourth entity, namely international organizations that act as arbiters in political disputes and whose position can influence the actions of irredentists. It is worth mentioning the position of the EU and NATO on the prevention of membership in these structures, provided that there are unresolved territorial disputes in the candidate countries.

Irredentism as a political process always has an ideological basis. The core of the ethnic ideology of irredentists is the idea of the revival of the “Great Power”, in which the ethnic group dominates. The irredentist project also has certain stages of advancement, from the maturation of the idea to the attempts to implement it. As an example, it is worth mentioning the Greek irredentism, known as “enosis”. From the beginning of the 19th century, it was based on the “Megali Idea” (“Great Idea”), which provided for the unification of the Greek people in a state that would situate within the borders of the Byzantine Empire. Even then, it was clear that the irredentist project was not only unifying but also expansionist. The essence of the idea was revealed by V. Vinogradov, stating that “the Megali Idea, when the “gathering” of Greeks within one state had just begun, was a powerful unifying concept, but eventually contained claims to lands with ethnically mixed populations and territories where other peoples reside” (*Vinogradov, 1993*).

Greek authorities to implement a policy of irredentism resorted to various measures and methods, including military. In particular, during the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913 and the Greco-Turkish War of 1919-1922, it partially managed to satisfy territorial claims. Greek diplomacy also worked to achieve this goal. Therefore, we can mention the use of technology as a means of implementing irredentist policies. Political technologies act as a set of consistent procedures, techniques, and methods aimed at the most optimal and effective implementation of the goals and objectives of a particular party in solving a specific problem (*Solovev, 2009: 424*). We believe that technology is an integral part of irredentism as a process.

Signs of irredentism as a process and the use of several technologies can be seen in the example of Russian irredentism in Crimea. In our opinion, in this case, there were mutual efforts of the irredentist state and the kin group. According to the All-Ukrainian Census (2001), in Crimea, the ethnic Russian population prevailed with slightly more than 58% of the total population of the peninsula. Of course, not all ethnic Russians aimed at the Russian Federation, but a segment of the society responded actively to Russian influence in the region, which manifested itself in various forms: the activities of pro-Russian parties and civic organisations, the presence of Russian information product, implementation of measures to support compatriots. Ukrainian experts believe that Russia has pursued its own identity policy, which has proved to be quite successful. The consequence of this policy was that “the profile of the average resident of Crimea increasingly resonates with the profile of the average resident of the Russian Federation” (*Zhumadilov, 2014: 99*). Consequently, in 2014 the authorities of the Russian Federation took advantage of the difficult domestic political situation in Ukraine and annexed Crimea. Thus, we see an example of the implementation of an irredentist project, in which there were both mutual efforts of the participants and the use of technology, namely the annexation of the peninsula in violation of international law.

3. The emergence and evolution of irredentism

Irredentism arose in the nineteenth century when national liberation movements intensified and new nation-states were formed and were trying to implement the principle of “one state – one nation”.

From 1648, the Westphalian system of international relations protected the interests of the states. It was based on the idea of state sovereignty, which enshrined the principle of non-interference in the internal affairs of other states. However, with the purpose to realize its interests, each state actively pursued a policy of aggression. In order to adjust interstate relations in 1815, the Vienna system of international relations emerged. At the Congress of Vienna, leading

European states consolidated the territorial and political status quo in the region, agreeing to engage in diplomatic consultations on territorial or other issues. E. Gellner described the period of 1815-1918 as “nationalist irredentism” when the nationalist idea emerged as a political principle. At this stage, the formula “one culture – one state” was implemented (*Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action Adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in Vienna on 25 June 1993*). It was during this period that Germany and Italy were united.

International relations became complicated during the imperialist era at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, when the redistribution of the world began. After the First World War, the interwar Versailles-Washington system emerged. It took into account the interests of the victorious states and neglected the interests of other political entities. E. Gellner called this stage “the triumph and defeat of national irredentism”. The triumph is the emergence of many nation-states, and the defeat is the emergence of national minorities in new political entities, which in the past were part of large ethnic or linguistic groups. According to E. Gellner “the new status was unusual for them and caused natural outrage and resistance” (*Gellner, 1992*). These groups sought protection from their mother states.

A striking example of the “triumph and defeat of irredentism” is the situation with the Hungarian ethnic group. It was divided under the Treaty of Trianon in 1920 with more than two-thirds of Hungarians staying outside Hungary as part of other states. The Hungarians suffered the so-called “Trianon trauma”.

During the interwar period, the League of Nations existed to guarantee peace between peoples and was based on the idea of collective security. However, in some cases, the League of Nations was inactive, such as Germany’s annexation of Austria or the Sudetenland. It was obvious that the norms enshrined in the Charter of the League of Nations were openly violated.

Under the conditions of political instability, the preconditions for the transformation of irredentism from a purely unifying policy to an expansionist one have emerged. Declaring the need to resolve the issue of divided peoples served as a convenient and legal justification for territorial claims (*Semchenkov & Barash, 2009*). It was during the existence of the Versailles-Washington system that the origins of a significant number of modern irredentist conflicts were formed, as the very fact of the formation of new states in Europe deepened the problem of divided peoples and formed many territorial claims between states.

The Second World War revealed the crisis of the Versailles-Washington system. The Yalta-Potsdam system of international relations established a bipolar system of world order for several decades. Compared to the end of the 19th and the first half of the 20th centuries, the number of irredentist conflicts has decreased, as the UN and its higher institutions, first of all, the Security Council and the International Court of Justice, began to play an important role in resolving interstate conflicts.

During this period, international legal documents are formed with the objective to consolidate the basic principles of modern world politics, including the principle of territorial integrity of states, the principle of non-interference in the affairs of sovereign states, and the right of peoples to self-determination. The UN Charter (1945), the Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples (1960), the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (*Helsinki Accords, 1975*), and other documents are the basis for governing modern international relationships. The right of peoples to self-determination is often appealed to by separatists, but in order to clarify the problem of self-determination, the Vienna Declaration of 1993 states that this right applies to those peoples under colonial rule or foreign occupation.

The problem of irredentism reached a new stage in the late twentieth century when multinational states disintegrated and many new political units emerged. R. Brubaker noted that during that period instead of the expected decline of nation-states there was a revival of nationalism. He singled out a “related series” of modern forms of nationalism, namely: “nationalization” – the nationalism of the titular nations of new or reformed states; cross-border, conducted by the external national homeland; the nationalism of national minorities (*Brubaker, 2000: 4-6*). These nationalisms interact and clash, causing intrastate and interstate conflicts.

Each state formed its own model of ethnopolitics. According to M. Waterbury, immediately after the collapse of the socialist system, many analysts, knowing the troubling history of irredentism and ethnic violence in Central, Eastern and Southeastern Europe, expected new wars and conflicts, but, in contrast, a new paradigm emerged. It is based on the institutionalization of transborder cultural, political, and economic networks rather than active policies to change borders or reclaim populations (*Waterbury, 2013*). However, conflicts and wars with the irredentist component still can not be avoided, especially after the breakup of Yugoslavia, where several “great ideas” clashed, including political projects to revive “Greater Serbia” and “Greater Croatia”. Occasionally, the active stage included long-term irredentist conflicts in different parts of the world, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

G. Gokcek, according to whom irredentist conflicts are often provoked by sovereign states and not by minority irredentas, studied the specifics of interstate conflicts that arose on irredentist grounds. Considering that states have the military capability to fight full-scale wars, these conflicts tend to escalate or become international. At the same time, irredentist conflicts initiated by minorities do not escalate to interstate war (*Gokcek, 2010*).

The growing role of the world community in regulating modern irredentist conflicts is worth mentioning. Nevertheless, in the nineties of the 20th century, as S. Ushakov notes, there was a threatening precedent for resolving ethnic conflicts and condemning supporters of the ideology of irredentism not based on international law, but on the political will of one or more states with a fragmentary or often superficial application of international law (*Ushakov, 2009: 115*).

Thus, each system of international relations established new principles of world order, which, essentially, were the result of the decisions of the strongest states, and therefore contributed to the strengthening of their domination. Each international system corresponds to a certain model of irredentism: the Viennese system – unifying irredentism; the Versailles-Washington system – expansionist; the Yalta-Potsdam system – latent; post-bipolar system – moderate and expansionist.

4. Irredentism in European countries in the context of globalization

Modern irredentism is developing within new conditions, which are dictated by the modern system of international relations and international law. J.K. Füzesi estimated that in most cases irredentism is a European phenomenon, as at the beginning of the 2000s, out of 55 registered cases, 45 were European (16 of which took place in Western Europe, in a region seemed free of ethnonationalism), 5 in Africa, 4 in Asia and one in the Middle East case. Due to the absence of ancestral territory, irredentism did not form in America and Australia (*Fuzesi, 2006: 50*).

Radical nationalist parties in many European countries develop irredentist projects. Usually, they try to revive great-power ideas and in the long run to include in the state the neighbouring territories which were once a part of the state formation. If kin groups live there, the slogans of protection of ethnic groups are declared. For example, in Hungary, the great-power

idea is pursued by the Fidesz-Hungarian Civil Alliance, in Romania by The Greater Romania Party, and in Serbia by the Serbian Radical Party. Similar “Great Ideas” exist in Albania, Greece, Russia, and Croatia. In the era of globalization, when new systems of social, political, and national ties are being formed, great-power ideas are somewhat outdated, but still relevant because they influence the policies of some countries (*Ukraine and the “Russian World” project, 2014: 74, 75*).

The issue of resolving irredentist disputes in the context of European integration processes deserves special attention. On the one hand, the creation of a single European space allegedly removes the problem of division, because all divided peoples are included in one supranational political entity, which removes obstacles to free border crossing. However, in our opinion, the European security system itself guards the territorial integrity of states. For example, the Transylvanian problem, which is related to the compact residence of Hungarians in Romanian Transylvania, does not reach the level of open confrontation, as both states have certain international obligations.

In this context, NATO’s position requires attention. An important condition for joining NATO is the absence of ethnic or territorial disputes, because, as stated in the Alliance’s New Strategic Concept (1991), “risks to Allied security are less likely to result from calculated aggression against the territory of the Allies, but rather from the adverse consequences of instabilities that may arise from the serious economic, social and political difficulties, including ethnic rivalries and territorial disputes, which are faced by many countries in central and eastern Europe” (*The Alliance’s New Strategic Concept agreed by the Heads of State and Government participating in the Meeting of the North Atlantic Council, 7-8 Nov. 1991*). Hence, these disputes must be resolved peacefully under the OSCE principles; whether a country will join NATO depends on the solution of this problem.

The conditions for joining the EU for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe were developed by the Prime Minister of France É. Balladur and highlighted in the Stability Pact for Europe. Under this pact, during the European Council meeting in Copenhagen on 21-22 June 1993 the conditions for accession to the EU (Copenhagen criteria) were adopted. They enshrined, among other things, the requirement to resolve territorial, ethnic, and other conflicts based on international law (*European Council in Copenhagen 21-22 June 1993. Conclusions of the Presidency, 1993: 2*).

Therefore, most European countries control the lives of kin groups based on the norms of international law and interstate agreements. European countries that have kin ethnic groups in neighbouring countries are mostly limited to the so-called “mild” influence, which, however, can also have unpredictable consequences, as it involves the gradual involvement of ethnic groups in their political and legal field (illegal issuance of passports, participation in elections, etc.).

The actions of the Russian Federation, which in 2014 annexed the Ukrainian Crimea, were a certain exception. Russian irredentism clearly illustrates the contradictions of international law. For Ukrainians and the whole world, this is, of course, an annexation, though the Russian government presents Crimea as a sovereign part of the Russian Federation. The inclusion of Crimea in Russia contradicts the norms of Ukrainian legislation (illegal Crimean referendum due to the lack of a legal framework for its provision) and international (violation of the territorial integrity of the state, the use of force). Russia’s military aggression and annexation of Crimea have been strongly condemned by the UN General Assembly. The UN General Assembly Resolution of March 27, 2014 (68/262. “Territorial Integrity of Ukraine”) states that the General Assembly reaffirms its commitment to the sovereignty, political independence, unity, and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognized borders. It is also noted

that the referendum held in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sevastopol on March 16, 2014, having no validity, cannot form the basis for any alteration of the status of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea or of the city of Sevastopol (*Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 27 March 2014 [without reference to a Main Committee (A/68/L.39 and Add.1)] 68/262. Territorial integrity of Ukraine, 2014*). The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and other European institutions acted accordingly. Although certain sanctions have been applied against Russia, it remains an influential political participant.

5. Conclusions

Thus, irredentism should be characterized as a type of political process that has a purpose, structure, ideological justification, stages of formation, while the realization of the goal of participants is achieved through the use of certain methods and technologies, one of which is annexation.

Irredentism as a political process is determined by the nature of international political relations. Each system of international relations established new principles of world order, which were the result of the decisions of the strongest states, and therefore contributed to the strengthening of their domination. In the international context, irredentism looks like a contradictory phenomenon, the legal aspects of which are still unresolved. Irredentism can be a form of self-determination of peoples, but even in this case, leaving the state is legal only when the government violates the rights of ethnic or national minorities. The idea of self-determination is interpreted depending on the circumstances and decisions of the world's leading states.

In the era of globalization, the revival of irredentist projects shows the strengthening of the local factor in political processes. European legislation and requirements for joining NATO and the EU are an obstacle to the open implementation of irredentism policy in the European space. However, in the context of the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation, the world community needs to develop clearer and more rigorous mechanisms for dealing with irredentist policies. Consequently, it is necessary to introduce the concept of "irredentism" into the legal field and establish clear means to counter it. An important scientific task is to analyze the positive experience of settling relations between mother states and kin minorities and adapting it to the realities of specific polyethnic states.

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