

History of International Relations

The Role of Congress of Vienna in the Emergence of Multilateralism

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Abstract: The aim of this paper is to analyze the Congress of Vienna, which is considered the first forum in the history of diplomacy, as the main event where the multilateral diplomacy was introduced and the framework of international organizations, as an important actor of international relations, were created. Multilateral diplomacy is defined as the approach of administration of international relations through the direct contact of negotiations at different forums such as conferences or congresses by representatives of at least three sovereign countries. The paper will contain two main parts. In the first part the analysis will be focused in the Congress of Vienna as the main event where the application of multilateral diplomacy started. In the second part of the paper, the Congress will be viewed through the lenses of the main event which marked the beginning of the creation of international organizations in world politics. Many scholars claim that the beginning of international organizations was in 1919 or 1945. The methodology used in this paper is based on discourse analysis – which, before everything, is focused in collection and analysis of different historical and political materials. The paper concludes that the Congress of Vienna contributed not only to re-draw borders of Europe after the French Revolution and Napoleonic Wars, but, even though unintentionally, played fundamental role in introducing multilateral diplomacy and creating the framework for establishing international organizations as the main principles of political and diplomatic practices in modern history of international relations.

Keywords: The Congress of Vienna; multilateral diplomacy; international organizations

1. Introduction

The creation and the evolution of nation-state system, which started from the Treaty of Westphalia (1648), is considered the main component which influenced

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the evolution of diplomacy from bilateral to multilateral diplomacy. Many authors argue that changes of the human history have occurred in two particular circumstances: 1). as a consequence of war, or 2). as a result of technological innovations. These developments almost always have had impact in the life of people, in the life of states and of the international relations between states too. So, wars, and the consequences that they produce, are considered as a strong factor influencing international relations. After the Napoleonic Wars, the Concert of Europe was created. After the First World War, the League of Nations was the consequence of it. And, the Second World War resulted in the creation of United Nations. However, what is common for all these events, after each war, victorious states attempted to organize the global system in that way which contributed to preserve their gains they achieved and, for as much as it is possible, to save the *status quo* and prevent the future wars that would damage the created status quo (James, Muldoon et. al, 2005, p. 8).

The aim of this research paper is to analyze the Congress of Vienna from a perspective of the history of diplomacy. The literature of the history of international relations shows that the Congress played a very important role not only in historical processes, but it is considered as the foundation of the multilateral diplomacy and of the *momentum* of the creation of international organizations. The paper will be not focus only, and exclusively, in narrative description of the event, but will deconstruct the importance of the multilateral diplomacy and international organizations (as one of the main actors of international relations) in the globalised and interdependent. Structurally, the paper is composed by two main parts: in the first part the Congress of Vienna is viewed from historical lenses where the main actors, causes and results were analyzed and explained. Whereas, in the second part of the paper, the Congress is studied as the main event where the application of multilateral diplomacy started and as an event which marked the beginning of the creation of international organizations in world politics.

2. Short Historical Consideration of the Congress of Vienna

The Congress of Vienna, organized 200 years ago, represents the first and the main serious endeavor to institutionalize the regular calling of conferences in order to facilitate relationships between the most powerful states (James, Muldoon et. al, 2005). What is more important, this is considered the main development in the history of diplomacy which shifted the modality of approaching diplomatic practice

from bilateral to multilateral diplomacy. The Congress, which was held in Austria from 1814 to 1815, was conference of ambassadors. The main objective of the Congress was to create a plan which will ensure peace and security in Europe with the aim of resolving conflict situations which were created by the French Revolutionary Wars and the Napoleonic Wars (James, Muldoon et. al, 2005). However, many authors argue that the aim of the Congress was not simply to end a conflict, but, what was more important, to recalibrate the main powers in Europe so they could balance each other and create a constellation which will provide peace and security for them for long time (Webster, 1919).

The Congress was a fundamental event where some European countries lost their power and their influence, and together with that they lost territories, but some other states managed to gain power and territory too. For instance, France lost all its recent conquests, while Prussia, Austria and Russia made major territorial gains. Prussia added smaller German states in the west and 40% of the Kingdom of Saxony; Austria gained Venice and much of northern Italy. Russia gained parts of Poland. The new Kingdom of the Netherlands had been created just months before, and included formerly Austrian territory that in 1830 became Belgium (Padmanabhan, 2008). These territorial shifts changed the “balance of power” too.

There are authors who argue that the concept of “balance of power” – as one of the old “formulas” for ensuring stability in international relations initiated and promoted theoretically by the theory of Realism in International Relations – was not very stable and reliable. One of them who strongly supported this idea is Paul Schroeder. In his paper, *Did the Vienna settlement rest on a balance of power?* he supports the idea that the Congress of Vienna avoided them and instead set up the rules that produced a stable and *benign equilibrium* (Schroeder, 1992). In this regard, The Congress of Vienna was the first meeting of a series of international meetings that were known in the history of diplomacy as the Concert of Europe, which is considered an attempt to install a peaceful balance of power in Europe (Ghervas, 2014). What is more important, the Congress, and the results this event produced in history, diplomacy and in science too, served as a model for the establishment of the later international institutions such as the League of Nations in (1919), after the First World War, and the United Nations (1945), after the Second World War (Schroeder, 1992).

Nevertheless, there are authors that do not consider the Congress of Vienna as a Congress at all. Their technical interpretation of the event for not considering it as

a Congress is the fact that participants were never met in the plenary session, but the main dissections were done in another much more informal way. Thus, face-to-face meetings were the main diplomatic approach used in the Congress between the Great Powers of Austria, Britain, France, Russia, and sometimes Prussia (Nicolson, 1946). Delegations of other countries had very limited participation in the negotiations. In addition to this, the Congress is considered the first event in the history of diplomacy where, on a continental scale, representatives from different nations sit together and, through negotiations, agreed to formulate treaties (Nicolson, 1946). In this regard, the Congress of Vienna, aside from changes which caused in the European constellation of states, established the framework in which pathway international politics operated until the beginning of the First World War in 1914.

3. From Bilateral to Multilateral Diplomacy

Literature of International Relations and of diplomacy offers a lot of definitions for the term of “diplomacy”. There so many definitions of this term today, such as it creates an impression that every scholar in the field “created” its own operational definition for it. Nevertheless, a largely accepted definition which, in one way or another, tends to include main elements and characteristics of it, defines diplomacy as a method which nation-states use, through their authorized agents and institutions, to maintain mutual relations, communicate and to create and maintain political, economic and legal transactions and relationships with each other (Jönsson & Hall, 2005).

Even though it is considered that the diplomacy, as a practice of human interaction, exists from the beginning of the organized society, in fact the beginning of diplomacy as an institution – which is organized and well structured – started to exist only from the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. This event marked the origin of diplomacy in organized way because, among other achievements, this date symbolize the beginning of European nation-state system of the sovereign states and at the same time the establishment in a codified manner of rules of conduct among sovereign and legally equal states (James, Muldoon et. al, 2005). What is more important, it can be argued that the main principles which were established with the Peace of Westphalia – states sovereignty and the territorial state integrity – are considered as a basis of today’s multilateral diplomatic system. However, it was only in the Congress of Vienna where this practice of diplomatic life and

interaction was applied in its final and more institutionalized way form that we know today.

According to scholars of the history of diplomacy, the diplomacy, as a practice, is divided between the “old diplomacy”, which has been widely used until the twentieth century, and the “the new diplomacy” which started its application in the nineteenth century and reach its peak in twentieth century (Berridge, 1995). The “old diplomacy” is also known as the “bilateral diplomacy”. This kind of diplomacy dominated the international relations for almost 300 years and was leaded by the so called “French system of diplomacy” (James, Muldoon et. al, 2005). It is in this period of time where the key characteristics of modern diplomacy where established such as: resident ambassadors, secret negotiations, ceremonial duties and protocol, honesty and professionalism (Berridge, 1995). Nevertheless, the “old” (bilateral) diplomacy was limited only in the practice of conducting relations on state-to-state bases through the resident missions where the ambassador representing the sending state is the main actor and factor (Jönsson & Hall, 2005).

There are a lot of definitions of the term of “multilateral diplomacy”. One of the most accepted and used definition in academic environment describe multilateral diplomacy as a diplomacy which is conducted through conferences attended by at least three or more states on the bases of generalized rules of conduct (Berridge, 1995). The “new” (multilateral) diplomacy, which was created in ninetieth century and evolved gradually and was massively applied in world politics in twentieth century, is divided from the “old” diplomacy by two themes which, according to scholars, constitute the main distinction between old/bilateral and new/multilateral diplomacy. First attribute is the demand that the diplomacy should be more open to the wider public. And, second attribute is that the projected establishment of an international organization which would act as a forum for peaceful resolution of conflicts and as a deterrent to the waging of aggressive war (James, Muldoon et. al, 2005, p. 2).

Twentieth century is a period of time characterized by apocalyptic events (political, economic, technological and socio-cultural) in world politics which contributed significantly that the bilateral, so called old diplomacy, to lose its power and importance in politics. The most important marks of “old diplomacy” rapidly lost their light into the background after the World War II, when the “standing diplomatic conference” – or as it is well known in today’s literature of political

science as international organization – and multilateral diplomacy blossomed (James, Muldoon et. al, 2005, p. 2). The period of Cold War made the international arena very complex environment where the actors and factors influencing events were multiple. Thus, the traditional approach of bilateral diplomacy was not sufficient for the states. This complex situation contributed that in order to resolve problems more effectively and with the aim of achieving the maximal impact with fewer efforts, states started to create international and regional organizations with clear defined rules and procedures, permanent secretariats and permanently accredited diplomatic missions (James, Muldoon et. al, 2005). These events transformed diplomatic approaches and methods from traditional bilateralism to multilateralism. This transformation of diplomatic approach and method changed not only international relations, by establishing international organizations as new and very influential actor and factor of international environment, but modified forever skills and knowledge that diplomats are required to have in order to fulfill their duties and responsibilities.

4. Multilateral Diplomacy in XXI Century

Even though the beginning of the application of multilateral diplomacy can be traced back to the IXX century when the Concert of Europe sat around the table together at the Congress of Vienna (Moore, 2012), this method of conducting diplomacy was developed in its final and more advanced form only in XX century after the World War I with the establishment of the League of Nation. In more open and obvious way the multilateral diplomacy can be encountered after the World War II with the establishment of the United Nations. Today, in world politics, United Nation has a worldwide membership. What is more, the existence in large number of regional and international organizations, such as World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund European Union etc., made the multilateral diplomacy as one of the main methods used in contemporary diplomatic relations between states.

However, at the beginning of XXI century the multilateral diplomacy was going through a period of crisis where it was not applied as much as it used to be. This period is known in literature as the “crises of multilateralism” (Moore, 2012). After the September 11 2001 terrorist attacks of Al Qaida against the United States, the United Nation Security Council in one voice supported the United States in its effort against the war on terrorism. Nevertheless, United States, leaded by the

President George H. W. Bush, conducted a foreign policy which ignored United Nation Security Council and other relevant international organization. Their policy against the “axis of evil” and “war on terror” (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2015) was focused in unilateralism and thus, the multilateral diplomacy was totally ignored. When the Security Council refused to authorize a US attack upon the allegedly nuclear-armed Iraq, the United States launched the attack anyway without the UN approval (Moore, 2012).

The approach of the US foreign policy started to change when Barack Obama became President in 2009. He as a President was very devoted in returning values of multilateralism in the U.S. foreign policy. This shift of approach was reflected in the best way possible in the 2010 National Security Strategy where it is clearly stated that “United States achieved their success in the post World War II era by pursuing its interests and objectives within multilateral forums like the United Nations, and not outside of them”. (National Security Strategy, 2010). What is more, in order to emphasize the importance of multilateral diplomacy, not only for U.S. foreign policy but for the international community of states also, the Strategy recognizes the fact that institutions that aggregated the national interests of many nations would never be perfect, but it is clear that they are an indispensable vehicle for pooling international resources and enforcing international norms. Indeed, the basis for international cooperation since World War II has been an architecture of international institutions, organizations, regimes, and standards that establishes certain rights and responsibilities for all sovereign nations (National Security Strategy, 2010).

In XXI century the smaller the world becomes due to development of technology, means of communications and economical interdependence, the further the multilateral diplomacy will be developed as a main and more important tool for international and regional cooperation (Moore, 2012). The creation of a considerable number of regional organizations in different parts of the world such as: African Union and Eurasian Union is playing an important role in enforcing the importance of multilateralism (Moore, 2012). The European Union, as the largest organization in the world, despite its difficulties, is continuing its enlargement and thus promotion of inter-governmentalism and interdependence. The Europe’s attachment to multilateralism – and to the United Nations, as the pivot of the multilateral system – will help determine whether, and how, the institutional architecture established in the years after World War II can continue to serve as the bedrock of the international system (Commission of the European Communities ,

2003). A fully integrated and stable Europe, which is specialized in soft and smart power, can be a great advantage to the multilateral system and contribute to the international community (Moore, 2012).

In the XXI century the importance and relevance of multilateral diplomacy seems to be unavoidable. In a globalised world, where threats and challenges are common for a lot of sovereign states, multilateral diplomacy remains the only efficient answer. The global financial crises of 2008 have demonstrated how inter-dependent economies of the western world are, thus by emphasizing the importance of multilateral cooperation for overcoming these obstacles are a true necessity (Moore, 2012). What is more, considering the fact that, as it is stated by many authors of the theories of international relations, today the global constellation of states is going toward multipolar world, the multilateral diplomacy becomes very important. In his 2011 speech on TED.com Lord Paddy Ashdown, a British politician and former diplomat who served as Leader of the Liberal Democrats from 1988 until August 1999, clearly explained that “the global shift of power” posits that the emergence of a multipolar world today not only resembles the nineteenth century “Concert of Europe”, but also places the onus on states for the need to cooperate not just upon common values, but upon common interest (Austyn5, 2015).

Taking into the consideration the interdependence between states in a globalised world (Keohane & Nye, 2011), the fact that United States since Barack Obama became President started to apply multilateral diplomacy massively, especially within the UN, it looks like the multilateral diplomacy will continued to be relevant in XXI century. In this regard, the main and most important institution which will lead this process will be United Nations, as the leading institution for international cooperation, despite critiques on UN for lack of reforms especially related to the outdated system which is applied in the Security Council which aim is to “maintain the international peace and security” (Moore, 2012).

5. Conclusion

The Congress of Vienna is the main event which contributed significantly in the history of diplomacy by introducing new approach of diplomatic practice: multilateral diplomacy. Since then, multilateral diplomacy remains relevant in the world politics and will continue to be so in the future. Prior to the application of

multilateral diplomacy, which in literature is known also as “new” diplomacy, states in their interactions applied massively bilateral diplomacy, known as “old” diplomacy. In fact, the bilateral diplomacy dominated in the international relations of states until the twentieth century. From then, more precisely from The Congress of Vienna, the application of multilateral diplomacy started to be applied. In addition to this, The Congress is considered as the main event which marked the creation of international organizations. The main place where the multilateral diplomacy is applied is in international organizations.

However, states today, depending on their national interest, apply both types of diplomacies: bilateral and multilateral. Thus, even though multilateral diplomacy is widely applied, the bilateral diplomacy never stopped of being applied.

At the beginning of XXI century the multilateral diplomacy went through a crisis. For instance, after 9/11 foreign policy of United States of America was led based exclusively in unilateralism by ignoring United Nations, as the main international organization where the multilateral diplomacy is applied. When Barack Obama became president, the character of US diplomacy started to change toward multilateralism, especially within international organizations such as UN.

However, taking into the consideration the fact that common nature of the threats which states are facing in twenty-first century in a globalised world and the interdependence – as defined by Keohane and Nye – between states, it can easily be concluded that multilateral diplomacy is and will continue to be relevant in the international relations of states and international organizations.

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