Fiche d'activités
dossier pédagogique

Consigne

Représenter à l'aide de productions graphiques quelle a été la place de l'Europe dans le système international et les expliquer dans une présentation orale.

<u>What is an International system?</u>

The international scene is not reducible to a simple conglomeration of powers. It can be considered as system; a system is based on a collection of values, rules and practices that are shared by the different actors, and that enable their coexistence as well as the easing of tensions and the resolution of conflicts. […] The notion of system requires going beyond a purely mechanical order to consider relations among the powers, their power dynamics, and their conviction of having a shared destiny. A system has a transcendental dimension that surpasses the specificity of each of its members, in order to make up a more or less coherent whole of countries that observe common rules, and adopt common practices.

Europe in the International System

Key question

What has been the place of Europe in the international system from the early modern period to today ?

FROM CHRISTIANITY TO EUROPE, THE EMERGENCE OF AN INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM

The ideal of the Respublica christiana was the first manifestation of a system making it possible to conceive of a certain unity within diversity. The universal mission of Christianity and the heritage of Roman law provided the foundation for a structure that could not yet be qualified as international, but that at least made it possible to introduce a certain order in the coexistence of political units. […] Christianity as a system of states was based on shared values, chief among them the ideal of peace. Yet we can also observe the emergence of a feeling of community among those who embraced the Christian faith, notably in opposition to Muslims. The very term of Christianity entered relatively common usage beginning in the eleventh century, during the first call for the Crusades. The desire to conquer Jerusalem is thus indicative of the dream of providing Christianity with a capital. During the Middle Ages, the notion of empire was an essential reference in conceiving relations between different political units. The secular power transcending that of

sovereigns passed, via Charlemagne, to the Holy Roman Emperor, while spiritual power belonged to the pope in Rome, the vicar of Christ. [...]

A monarchical system During the sixteenth century, the dream of Christian unity permanently evaporated with the advent of the Reformation, the crystallization of national identities, and the increasingly forceful affirmation of various sovereignties. The notion of the Empire, as it was still present during the first half of the sixteenth century with Charles V, seems to have been left behind in favour of the model of balance of power. The Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) was an important turning point in the emergence of an international European system. It was the first conflict with a genuine continental dimension, and its resolution at the Congress of Westphalia brought together representatives from virtually every state on the continent. Through their simultaneity and the scope of their dispositions, the peace treaties of 1648 validated certain principles of relations among European powers. What has retrospectively been called the "Westphalian order," marked the birth of an interstate system based on the sovereignty of states, and on their equality in law. Balance of power* subsequently imposed itself as the new paradigm for European political life. It can be defined as a collective vigilance toward any state seeking to secure the force to impose its will on all of the other states. This common interest involved reinforcing representations and diplomatic combinations. The intensification of interstate dialogue, and the increase of commercial exchanges, contributed to the development of norms that prefigured the emergence of a genuine international law. [...]

During the second half of the seventeenth century, Louis XIV's policy of conquest challenged the interstate system. Denunciation of his ambitions of hegemony, and of his aspiration for the "universal monarchy," were the basis for numerous coalitions opposing France. The Peace of Utrecht (1713) explicitly focused on the balance of power as expressed in article II of the treaty between Great Britain and Spain: "to settle and establish the peace and tranquillity of Christendom by an equal balance of power." The central principle of the European interstate system was never more present than in this instance.

THE MATURATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

During the eighteenth century, the balance of power in Europe underwent a number of changes. The first was linked to the emergence of new powers, such as Russia and Prussia, which made the equation of continental balance of power more complex. The second change was the geographical expansion of the international system. The exacerbation of colonial rivalries and commercial competition, notably between France and Great Britain, extended reflections on the international system to the world level. The Seven Years' War (1756-1763) was particularly important in this regard. It was the first conflict among European powers whose direct origin was located outside of Europe. The French and British fought one another on the seas as well as in North America, the West Indies, and India. The conditions of the Treaty of Paris (February 10, 1763) resolved the overseas disputes that had been accumulating for a half century. Importantly, the French drafters denounced the English ambition of a "universal monarchy of the seas," which was a danger for all countries. With respect to the third major change of the eighteenth century, it involved the very nature of the international system.

[...] At the end of the eighteenth century, the European international system was also reflected in a group of proven diplomatic practices and usages. Despite the recurrence of wars, European states developed a modus vivendi nevertheless allowing them to coexist. Even though the policy of force was never abandoned, international relations were inscribed within a legal approach. The recurrence of legal discourses intended to establish the legitimacy of various demands shows that the actors of the time did not believe they were living in an anarchic world, but rather in an organized system with shared references and values. However, in the early 1790s, the French Revolution challenged the foundations of this monarchical Europe

THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM FACED WITH THE UPHEAVAL OF THE REVOLUTION AND THE EMPIRE

In 1790, the National Constituent Assembly made a "declaration of peace to the world," whose foundations originated in the cosmopolitanism of the Enlightenment and the principle of balance of power. But the temptation to establish itself as a model, and the idea that international law lay in the hands of nations and not solely those of sovereigns, quickly disrupted the foundations of the international system. For the French, the war that began in 1792 had to transform the Europe of tyrants into a Europe of nations, thus making it into an ideological crusade for liberty. Beginning in 1793, the founding of sister Republics, as well as French annexations motivated by adoption of the principle of natural borders, shifted the discourse on the natural right of peoples toward a discourse on the natural right of nations. Aside from strictly territorial considerations, the central issue of the war opposing France and its enemies centred on the legitimate origin of international law and balance of power. From these two points of view, France was considered as a disruptive element of the European body politic. Even though Bonaparte gave the impression of abandoning the cosmopolitan approach in order to propose a new balance of power, the basis of Europe's international system remained uncertain. The transition of the republican "Great Nation" to the Napoleonic "Great Empire" ended hopes of seeing Europe transformed into a confederation of democratic and sovereign republics, with none being superior in relation to the others.

The France of 1812 and its vassals directly or indirectly reunited half of Europe's inhabitants under the authority of a single master. This situation stemmed from a model for an international system that was an alternative to what had been practiced in preceding decades. The states involved certainly had similar overall organization and institutional structures. Yet there were two core factors that undermined the international system as Bonaparte preferred it. The first was the former principle of balance of power, which prompted threatened states to become allies in order to create a counterweight and to resist. The second was the emergence of national sentiment that led to rejection of foreign domination. The French defeat at Waterloo (June 18, 1815) opened the way for a recomposition of the European system, which was the purpose of the Congress of Vienna. The reflection of diplomats was based on a number of prerequisites: the enduring weakening of France, the establishing of a new balance of power, and the struggle against revolutionary ideas. In the new European system, interstate cooperation had to help guarantee the continent's stability and therefore prosperity. Evocation of "great common interests" required the adoption of shared norms and law on the contracting powers, as well as an obligation of solidarity that went beyond their individual interests.
[...]

CONCEIVING EUROPE IN THE WORLD-SYSTEM

The Concert of Europe established at the Congress of Vienna in 1815 was an elaborate version of the order founded on balance among the major powers. It was based on "values of a shared civilizations", chief among which were Christianity and the legitimacy of monarchy. […] The core cause of the Concert's failure, perhaps more so than the assertiveness of nationalism or the construction of systems of restrictive alliances, can be found in its inability to adapt to the changes in the world order, and to free itself from exclusively Eurocentric representations. The exportation of its principles to the rest of the world by way of imperialism—whether colonial or not—clashed in the mid-nineteenth century with the emergence of the American counter-model, and with the military victory of Japan over Russia in 1915. European leaders in 1914 believed that the Austro-Serbian conflict could once again remain localized, and understood even less that a European war henceforth would eventually and inevitably involve the whole world.

With the creation of the League of Nations and later the United Nations, along with the spread of an institutionalized multilateralism and a globalized diplomacy, the twentieth century attempted to replace European balance with an order on the world scale founded on law and collective security. If the ambitions of the LN were certainly universal, its structure remained dominated by Europe—with half of its members and its headquarters in Geneva—and primarily by the United Kingdom and France, as a result of the refusal of the United States to participate. The main difficulty was in designing links between the regional and universal levels. The Locarno Treaties of 1925 were thus inscribed in the framework of the LN, but partially revived the logic of the Concert on the scale of four great European powers—with the United Kingdom and Italy guaranteeing the inviolability of the French-German border.

The process ended after 1945: this time the United States took on the responsibilities conferred on it by its power, imposing itself at the head of the New York-based United Nations, and the UN system sought by president Roosevelt. The arrival of the Cold War, the emergence of the Third World, and the end of colonial empires—which the LN had not dared to truly challenge on principle—made it impossible to continue thinking of Europe as a whole, and even less as the epicentre of the international system.

The great complexity of the Cold War system must be emphasized. This system dominated international relations from 1947 to 1990, and combined—in the framework of a multidimensional confrontation that was as much geopolitical as ideological—elements connected to balance (in the form of nuclear rivalries, a bipolar and later multipolar world, etc.), empire and law. In radically different ways, the United States and the USSR each asserted their supremacy in their camp, and sought to extend their influence in the name of a universal ideology, although the UN and its affiliated organizations continued to play a more important role than was long believed. Dominated in this context by two largely foreign superpowers—even if the USSR also remained a European power—Europe was firstly a victim of the Cold War. Before the conflict took on a global dimension, Europe was the primary stakes and the nerve centre, as the partition of Germany and the fate of Berlin perfectly illustrated for the whole world. Recent research has nevertheless clearly shown that the very term blocks reflected propaganda more than reality—the blocks were hardly homogenous—and that the grip of the superpowers on their allies was far from being absolute,

including in the East. Certain European countries, such as Yugoslavia from 1948, France with de Gaulle, or the FRG with Willy Brandt's Ostpolitik, took advantage of the Cold War to distinguish themselves, take initiatives, and play an active role on the international scene. The importance of exchanges and circulations between the East and the West, even beyond the détente years, moreover made it possible to establish bridges between both sides of the wall. The Cold War ended where it had begun, in Europe with the resolution of the German question and the 1990 meeting in Paris of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE): all of the continent's countries officially declared that "the era of confrontation and division" had ended, and agreed on a common definition of democracy and individual freedoms. Dreams thus began of a unified Europe that, in the framework of a new world order based on law, could play a role commensurate with its power.

EUROPE, A GLOBAL POWER?

The two world wars, along with their consequences and their memory, were directly behind the emergence and affirmation of a notion of Europe during the twentieth century, one that became a reality starting in 1950 with the construction of the European Community. The desire for peace and the "fear of decline" were, according to Robert Frank, the two drivers for European consciousness. They were joined by the requirement of freedom after the Second World War and the beginnings of the Cold War—a united Europe could no longer be imagined without it being democratic. The perception of the economic and political decline of the "Old Continent," whether real, imagined or exploited, as well as the conviction that nationalism had twice pushed its peoples into fratricidal and suicidal confrontation, led a certain number of intellectuals and militants—and after 1945 political leaders as well—to persuade themselves that only a union of its constituent states, whatever its form or nature, would succeed in maintaining Europe at the top of the international scene. Gaston Riou offered a pithy summary of this in 1929: "Unite or die." The Monnet/Schuman plan of 1950, which founded European construction, opted for a federal and integrated structure that initially favoured concrete achievements in the world of economics; the resounding failure of the European Defence Community (EDC) in 1954 confirmed that it was hardly realistic at the time to commit to a different path. At the height of the Cold War, Western Europe thus essentially placed its security in the hands of the United States, in the framework of an Atlantic Community* whose ideological and cultural foundations largely surpassed the bounds of a simple military alliance.

How should Europe as a power be conceived in the post-Cold War world, now that the European Union (EU) has grown to include former Communist block countries and encompasses almost the whole continent, and also enjoys since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 the legal instruments and operational means enabling it to define and conduct Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP)? The EU is without a doubt a very major economic, commercial, financial and monetary power, yet it struggles to carry weight on the diplomatic level, as demonstrated by its impotence during the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s, by its divisions during the US intervention in Iraq in 2003, and by its slow and highly measured reactions in the face of the Arab Spring. The Treaty of Lisbon created the position of High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and provided the EU with the genuine diplomatic apparatus of the European External Action Service, as well as broadened the field of action of its common defence policy. However, the EU will never

be a power in the traditional sense of the term as long as it is not a state, and cannot be the ultimate guarantor of its own security. Perhaps the terms should be inversed by starting from what Europe actually is, in an attempt to emphasize a different approach to power that is more in conformity with recent changes in a world order, in which states must continually come to terms with a host of other actors. Zaki Laïdi thus reminds that the European project was created against war and force; the notion of peace defended by the EU is neither based on empire nor on balance—which would require military capacities it does not and does not intend to have—but rather on its ability to impose norms. This "tranquil power" (Tzvetan Todorov), which is exercised more through influence than through coercion, and which does not forcibly have recourse to the classical attributes of hard power, all told did not prove to be less effective than that of the United States, whose activities in Iraq and Afghanistan largely ended in failure. It demonstrates Europe's capacity to henceforth adapt to the evolutions of the international system, as well as to contribute, today as in the past, to building and renewing it.

From ENHE, 2015, Stanislas Jeannesson, Éric Schnakenbourg