Foreign law students in France in the Great War

Foreigners' law studies in France

The vast majority (nearly 80% in 1902) of foreign students enrolled in 1913 at the Paris Faculty of Law were taking bachelor's and/or doctorate level courses, after having presented a secondary school diploma recognized as equivalent to the French baccalauréat; a small number (18%) were simple registrants who sought only a certificate of attendance that could be used in their country, often jurists in search of professional development. Some 60 Egyptians who had begun their studies at the French School of Law in Cairo and who came to take their examinations in Paris are added to the list because of their numerical importance. In the last years of the 19th century, in hopes of preventing foreign graduates from setting up a professional establishment in France – this applies above all to medical doctors, more than to jurists, who were generally unable to practice in France – university degrees were introduced on the initiative of each French faculty. The program and level of study of university degrees are in principle equivalent to those of the corresponding State-delivered diplomas. Law bachelor's degrees and doctorates were not established at the University of Paris until 1912, well after those in medicine, science and humanities. Foreigners may also take classes at technical institutes attested by a certificate: in Paris, the courses in criminal sciences and administrative and financial studies.

Foreigners in French academia in 1914

When war broke out in August 1914, most of the foreign students enrolled in French universities had returned to their home countries for the summer. Few of them returned to be registered in France at the beginning of the new academic year in November, either because they had been mobilized in their country, or because the trip was made difficult by the conflict, or because their parents feared sending them to a warring

country. Some countries, including Russia, repatriated their nationals. As a result, the number of foreign students fell sharply in 1914-1915, albeit to a lesser extent than for the French ones, and with a number that began to rise again in 1916: compared with the figures of 1913-1914, -69, 5% in 1915 and -61.2% in 1917, with 1,885 and 2,399 foreign students respectively. In 1918-1919, their numbers returned to the level of 1913 (6,044). There were few female foreigners in French faculties: only 1,707 out of 42,037 in 1914 (4%); however, they accounted for 40.1% of the total female student population.

In law schools

The 16,465 law students of the French faculties represented nearly 40% of the total student population in 1914, well ahead of students of the faculties of medicine, science, literature and pharmacology. However, the law faculties had fewer foreign students than the other faculties: in 1913-1914, they accounted for only 14.7% of the law student population, compared with 16% in medicine, 25% in science and most importantly, 26% in literature. The number of foreign law students (1,179 in 1914) decreased by 80% in 1914-1915 (to 359), and remained almost stable until 1918-1919. It returned to 1914 levels in 1919, at 1,185. Like French female law students, foreign female law students constitute a small minority (0.4% in 1913-1914): their number drops from seventeen in 1915 to fifteen in 1917 and only rises in 1920 to forty.

In Paris

In all Parisian faculties, foreign students experienced a sharp decline in 1914-1915 (-71.2%) and regained places in 1916. On the other hand, it was female foreign students, mainly because most of them were Russian, who suffered the greatest haemorrhage: compared to 1913, almost -74.8% in 1915 and -80% in 1917.

On the eve of the war, the Paris Faculty of Law brought together 46% of all law students in France. On the other hand, there were relatively few foreign students (886), accounting for only 11.7% of all its students in 1913-1914. Their number fell by three quarters in 1914-1915 and doubled in the following years. The 61 foreign female law students represented only 0.12% of all students on the eve of the war, and there were only 10 in 1919 and 40 in 1920. After the Armistice, the Faculty of Paris rapidly increased its student population: it welcomed 3,834 students in 1919 and 6,975 students in 1920, which is close to pre-war numbers (7,569).

Beyond the capital

The number of foreigners in most provincial universities increased as a result of the war. However, with the exceptions of Grenoble (40.25% then 38%), Montpellier (52.4% then 33.4%) or Toulouse (28% then 21.1%), their weight remained low in the student population. Lille was occupied by Germans. As for Nancy, in 1915-1916, “le voisinage du front [la] place dans une situation d’insécurité particulièrement défavorable, d’autant plus qu’au cours de l’année scolaire, la ville a été bombardée à maintes reprises de jour et de nuit [the vicinity of the front places [it] in a situation of particularly unfavorable insecurity, especially since during the school year, the city was bombed day and night]”: the law school welcomed only fifty-five students, including one foreign woman. For the year 1916-1917, the rector’s office reported the scarcity and dispersion of students, hence their small numbers, “en raison du peu de sécurité qu’offre la ville et du danger des voyages en train dans une région qui est zone de guerre [because of the insecurity offered by the city and the danger of traveling by train into a war zone]”: there were only forty-seven law students, none of them foreigners.

During the years of the war, the number of foreign law students became scarce: in Bordeaux they went from eight to thirteen between 1915 and 1917; in Grenoble, from ninety-four in 1913, they fell to thirty in 1916 and to twelve in 1917; in Lyon, they went from forty-seven to seventeen between 1913 and 1917.

The different nationalities in law schools

What were the nationalities of law students studying in France throughout the war? During the war, German and Austrian students were almost completely absent in French universities, but there remained a large number of Russians and Romanians who had not returned to their country.

The reports that the deans had to provide to the rector’s office, who passed them on to the ministry, give us more precise clues. For example, in Aix in 1914-1915, there were twenty-two foreign law students: four Belgians, two Bulgarians, nine Egyptians, five Greeks and two Tunisians. In 1914-1915, three foreigners were studying in Algiers, two Italians and one Romanian, as well as five Muslim natives; in 1916-1917, there were ten, including an Englishman, a Spaniard, an Italian, four Tunisians and an Annamite (Vietnamese). In Bordeaux in 1915-1916, there were ten foreigners, including one

woman: two Serbs, one Russian, two Montenegrins, one Persian and three Egyptians; in 1916-1917, four Egyptians, two Montenegrins, one Persian, one British and one Serb; and in 1917-1918, three Egyptians, three Montenegrins, one Persian and one Serb. The faculty of Lyon offers several details: in 1914-1915, it attracted twenty-five foreigners including eight Egyptians and seven Bulgarians; in 1915-1916, this number fell to seventeen, including four Serbs, two Russians, five Egyptians, two Japanese and two Italians; in 1916-1917, two Russians, ten Serbs, one Japanese, six Egyptians, three Tunisians. In Grenoble, in 1916-1917, six Italians were enrolled in law at a university that attracted many. The University of Dijon, which reported in July 1915 that 36 law students had been killed, reported that practically no foreign students had been admitted in 1915; however, its report for 1916-1917 indicated the presence of 18 Serbs enrolled in law. In Toulouse, in 1915-1916, there were two Russians enrolled in law.

Because of the small number of foreign students in law faculties, this data does not reflect all the nationalities present during the war in French universities. For example, in Toulouse in 1915-1916, the university welcomed three Argentines, one Belgian, fourteen Brazilians, fourteen Chinese, one Indochinese, three Egyptians, twenty-four Spaniards, one American, ten Greeks, five Italians, one Mexican, seventeen Portuguese, one Romanian, fifty-five Russians, one Serb, two Swiss people; that is, the Mediterranean countries that were very present before the war, Spain, Greece or Italy, the Egyptians, Turks, Persians, South Americans and Chinese, as well as colonial students from Indochina and Tunisia. The case of Serbs, Montenegrins and Belgians is special, as they were among the refugee nations. Students from Belgian universities were thus allowed to enroll in French universities free of enrollment, registration or library fees as none of the Belgian universities were able to resume their classes.

The Serbian case

The report of the Rector of Lyon for 1916-1917 states that “’augmentation du nombre des étrangers est due à la centaine d’étudiants serbes accueillis par l’Université, dont la moitié suivait les cours de PCN (certificat d’études de sciences physiques, chimiques et naturelles), l’autre moitié les cours de droit. Ces Serbes ont été accueillis avec sympathie par la ville, d’autant que plusieurs avaient pris part à la tragique retraite d’Albanie [the increase in the number of foreigners is due to the hundred or so Serbian students received by the university, half of whom attended the physical, chemical and

natural sciences classes, the other half the law classes. The city welcomed these Serbs warmly, all the more since several had been a part of the tragic retreat from Albania]".

The second Austrian offensive against Serbia at the end of 1915 had led to the defeat of the Serbian army, and to a retreat carried out in terrible conditions in the middle of winter through Albania in part towards Corfu, in another part towards Thessaloniki. Evacuated from Corfu and Thessaloniki by various French, British and Italian ships, in late 1915 and early 1916, partly under the aegis of the Red Cross, some of them had arrived in Brindisi and from there left via train through Italy towards Modane then Aix-les-Bains, from where, in small groups of 10 to 25 students, they were sent to different schools in France. Another part had landed on the Frioul Isles in Marseille before being sent to Bastia in Corsica. Finally, a third group (140) had been sent to Algeria and, like the previous ones, began their higher education there. This retreat brought together fighters of all ages, but also young people – students sometimes aged 10 and under, high school and university students. A large part died in this turmoil.

On August 1st, 1918, over 17,000 Serbs and Montenegrins were in France. Following this defeat, France decided to provide assistance to civilians. The National Office of French Universities and Schools (ONUEF) decided to welcome over 4,000 Serbs into its universities, secondary and vocational schools as part of a rescue program for Serbian youths who were unable to study in a war-torn country. This program was implemented by the Committee for Serbian Youth Education in France, which ensured the dispersal of young people in various French cities. These students were able to enroll and register free of charge, and exemptions from degrees or schooling are granted as a courtesy. The July 1917 issue of *Le Semeur*, a newspaper published by Protestant students, gives the distribution of 423 Serbian students by discipline: 176 medical students divided between Paris, Montpellier, Bordeaux and Besançon, 147 law students divided between Poitiers, Montpellier, Rennes, Paris, Dijon and Bordeaux, 100 humanities and science students divided between Paris, Clermont, Dijon, Grenoble and Toulouse. The small university of Dijon housed many Serbs: in 1916-1917, there were eighteen out of eighty law students, seven out of fifty-nine in humanities; in 1917-1918, nine out of seventy-three in science and four out of forty-six in humanities. The report of the University of Clermont-Ferrand for 1916-1917 indicates a significant increase in its faculty of humanities due to the contingent of Serbian students attached to it (thirty-seven, including six girls). One of them died in January, exhausted by the deprivations

“qu’il avait endurées pendant la retraite lamentable d’Albanie [he had endured during the miserable retreat from Albania]”. The accommodation and upkeep of these students were organized by the patronage committee, and the girls were welcomed at the Lycée Jeanne-d’Arc; parties and receptions were organized by the notables of the city. The Faculty of Humanities organized courses in French and a certificate of French higher education for them, and had them supervised by a professor from the University of Belgrade.

For the use of Serbian university and high school students in various French cities, the Franco-Serbian Committee published from 1916 to 1918 a journal entitled *La Patrie Serbe* [The Serbian Homeland], which published articles on Serbian history and ethnology, stories, news, poems, as well as information on Serbian groups in France and tributes to Serbia’s French supporters and friends. Serbian student committees were established in Paris and other university cities (Bordeaux, Clermont-Ferrand, Dijon, Grenoble, Lyon, Nantes, Nice, Poitiers, Rennes). In May 1917, the Paris Committee created a relief committee for Serbian students who were prisoners of war or internees.

The fate of foreign students

For foreign students caught up in the war, depending on their nationality, the dilemma was whether to stay in France or return home. Those who hailed from an enemy country, such as Germany or Austria, had a duty to return home and enlist in the army of their country; if they were from Russia, an ally of France, they had to join the Czar’s army; finally, they could choose to enlist in the French army. The fate of certain groups of foreign students who remained in France was concerning: in March 1915, Miss Kellermann, the general secretary of the General Association of Students of Paris, declared: “Les étudiants étrangers doivent nous préoccuper, les étudiants slaves sont encore nombreux à Paris, ils reçoivent peu ou point de subsides de leurs familles [Foreign students must be of concern to us. Slavic students are still many in Paris, and they receive little or no subsidies from their families]”.

Most of the countries from which the students come are involved in the war, which has consequences on the nature and size of the nations represented at the faculty of Paris, whether they are allies or enemies. In the case of Greek students, for example, one study notes the economic dependence of these students on remittances from their

families as “à l’égard de leur État national, avec lequel ils se trouvent liés en tant que mobilisables, soumis comme les autres nationaux expatriés à l’obligation de défendre la patrie à l’appel de leur gouvernement, même aux dépens de leurs projets d’études [to their national state, with which they find themselves bound as mobilizable, subjected like other expatriate nationals to the obligation to defend the homeland at the summon of their government, even at the expense of their academic projects]”. The situation of the war on French territory worried Greek families, who were increasingly reluctant to send their sons to study in France. Some opted to send their children to Switzerland. Greek students in the French faculties, like others, were faced with the problem of financing their studies, which depended on postal communications, but also the inability to return to Greece because of the difficulties of sea and land transport. Some enlisted as volunteers in the French army, but many dropped out of school in order to work. Charities in favor of students from allied countries or victims of the war were created by the universities: in 1916, a reception office for Czechs was opened in Paris by the ONUEF on the premises at 96, boulevard Raspail.

Demobilization and resumption of class

After the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, the re-entry of the faculties took place with a limited number of students, with the exception of female students, veterans and young men who had not fought in the war. Most students did not return to school until February 1919. Demobilization proved to be very slow. Once peace was restored, the resumption of studies for French and foreign students was not immediate. Many remained in the armed forces and, for foreigners from countries at war, transport and communications were not immediately restored. The slow return to school of demobilized students and the delays in the repatriation of foreigners explain why in 1918-1919, foreign law students made up 15% of the student population, whereas that proportion would fall to only 10% in 1919-1920.

The beginning of the 1919-1920 academic year was the starting point for a significant increase in the number of foreign students in most universities, particularly in the law schools. The total student population in France rose from 29,800 students in 1919 to 45,117 in 1920 and 49,931 in 1921. In this total, the number of foreign students evolved less rapidly, as they took longer to return to the benches of the faculties: they went from 6,044 in 1919 to 5,081 in 1920 and to 6,477 in 1921.

Students returning to law schools after the Armistice rose from 7,735 in 1919 to 13,948 in 1920 (+80%); among them, foreigners grew more modestly, from 1,185, of whom only 16 were women, to 1,405, of whom 40 were women. The Paris Faculty of Law welcomed 3,834 students in 1919 and 6,975 in 1920 (+82%); among them, foreign students rose from only 567, including ten women, to 897, including thirty-two women (+58%).

Foreigners and law studies after the war

The decree of January 10, 1919 provided privileged conditions for demobilized students of the 1917 and earlier classes: for example, in January 1919, candidates of the 1917 and earlier classes in the military were admitted to the first or second part of the humanities baccalauréat if they were eligible for the sessions opened before or during the hostilities. Foreigners may benefit from the provisions of this decree provided they had fought for allied nations. However, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs admitted that Turks and Bulgarians could benefit from this text, “as an individual measure”: the assembly of the Paris Faculty of Law of 30 March 1922 expressed its opposition to this measure.

In the midst of the war years, the university authorities began to concern themselves with the reorganization of higher education at the end of the conflict, and in particular with the education program for foreign students. For their part, some Allied countries expressed the wish to send their students to the French faculties upon the return of peace: in March 1916, the Paris Faculty of Law received a request from England and the United States to grant “facilities” to students that they would send after the war.

In 1917, the the Parisian faculty’s assembly took up a reform project which would concern the law studies of both French and foreign students. The aim was to transform the bachelor’s studies by introducing, as was already the case in science, special certificates and a diversification of bachelor’s specializations. The question of the transformation of the law bachelor’s and doctorate was also raised. The bachelor’s degree in law would be obtained through the possession of a group of three specialized certificates that would give access to a “graduate law degree”. This system should not affect the studies of foreigners: if the education given to them was not to be identical to that of French bachelor students, they were to be given “la plus grande partie des connaissances qui résultaient de cet enseignement et ne pas instituer des grades dont

ils pourraient ne pas vouloir, car l'expérience montre que des diplômes spéciaux à eux réservés ne les tentent guère [most of the knowledge resulting from this teaching, and not degrees that they might not want, as experience shows that diplomas specific to them hardly tempt them]". Moreover, "pour les étudiants étrangers qui auront commencé leurs études de droit chez eux, il pourra y avoir des équivalences de scolarité [for foreign students who started their law studies at home, there may be schooling equivalencies]". With regard to the university doctorate of law, there was no question of making it a "doctorat recherché, car plus facile [doctorate sought after because it is easier]", it had to keep the same requirement.

This new system was introduced in 1922. The bachelor's degree in law, which required three years of study, was reformed by the decree of August 2, 1922, intended to raise the level of legal studies, which instituted four degrees of higher studies, two of which were necessary to obtain a doctorate in law: Roman law and legal history; private law; public law; political economy. The decree of May 2, 1925 transformed the law doctorate, which consisted of only two sections (legal sciences, political and economic science) by creating four higher education diplomas required to prepare for this degree, chosen from the four higher education diplomas corresponding to the four teaching diplomas: Roman law and legal history, private law, public law, political economy. Two of these degrees were required to apply for a doctorate. Foreign students were able to apply with only one of the four degrees.

Measures to welcome foreign students after the war

Numerous measures were taken to facilitate the stay and studies of foreign students returning to study in France. Sponsorship committees for these students were set up in each university city; student associations multiplied, scholarships were awarded to them by ministries and university cities, or even by sponsors; foster homes and student housing were opened for them; courses in French language and civilization were set up at the initiative of universities and sponsorship committees. The Paris Faculty of Law created for them a certificate of general studies in French law and national economy. Certain categories of needy students were the object of the solicitude of mutual aid organizations such as the Protestant-inspired International Academic Assistance, and in particular Russian, German, Balkan and even Chinese refugees, marked by wars.

The post-war era invented the “American student soldier”. In the midst of the war, political and academic authorities had agreed to offer courses after the war to Allied soldiers who had come to fight in France. In February 1918, the French National Office of Universities and Schools (ONUEF) called on French universities to welcome American “student soldiers” after their demobilization. Most faculties of humanities responded favorably by organizing special courses in French and accommodation for American students. In Paris, all faculties participated in this program, including the Faculty of Law, which hosted 450 of them. Americans were housed in French families or in modest boarding houses. The University of Toulouse responded to the call by accepting to host 1,223 students; Paris hosted 2,000, Bordeaux 350, Rennes 130. In April 1919, 5,867 American students were distributed among the universities. These courses were discontinued in June 1919.

The law faculties of France continued to flourish in the Interwar period by opening up to all the nations of the world: in 1928, before the economic crisis, they welcomed 2,172 Europeans (mainly Russians, Romanians, Poles, Greeks and Germans), but also 551 Africans (including 365 Egyptians and 127 Tunisians), only 61 Americans (including only seventeen citizens of the United States and fourteen from Central America), and 444 Asians (including Chinese, Indochinese, Turks and Syrians), in all 3,228 foreign students out of a total of 12,279 present in all faculties, or more than a quarter of all the foreign students on the territory (26.3%).

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