

# The fourteen points of woodrow wilson

[History](#)



2 April The Fourteen Points of Woodrow Wilson The final period of WW I brought to understanding of the majority of its participants the simple fact that the War was effectively lost by the Central Powers. Germany and its allies were exhausted and, despite some brief attempts at securing the indisputable advantage over their Entente bloc adversaries, the Central Powers were no more able to turn the balance of forces in their direction. After the entry of the U. S. into the Great War on the side of Entente on 6 April 1917 it became clear to both sides that it is only the question of time when the military potential of the U. S. forces would bring an end to the Central Powers' military bloc. The impending termination of the hostilities caused the U. S. President Woodrow Wilson to ponder the problems of post-War settlement that might arise as the result of the Allied victory in the situation when the Central Powers' empires were crumbling to dust and the Russian state was in the situation of unprecedented political upheaval. With this in mind, the American government began drafting preliminary conditions for the peace accords with Germany and its to-be-vanquished allies. The results of these ruminations were eventually incarnated in the form of the famed Fourteen Points, presented by Wilson on 8 January 1918, during the session of the U. S. Congress. The speech pronounced by Wilson contained the main outline of the international order that was intended to be enforced by the victorious Allies after November 1918, and which was nevertheless never fully implemented. Therefore it is necessary to examine the basic feature of the supposed Wilsonian world order, with special focus on the European situation, as Woodrow Wilson's Fourteen Points were clearly aimed at the settlement of European affairs. The first items in Fourteen Points deal first and foremost with the issues of general interest. The principle of open

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diplomacy, which was frequently denied or breached by the European powers in the past, was solemnly affirmed as the core foundation of the international relations (point 1). The economic interests of the USA, which were best served by the affirmation of free trade and freedom of navigation as the main principles of international economic relations, were expressed in the respective provisions of the 2nd and 3rd provisions of Fourteen Points that dealt with specifically economic issues. The importance of the problems connected with disarmaments and regulation of armaments in general was expressed in the stipulation of the necessity of limitation of armed forces and armaments to the level adequate for maintaining domestic security.

However, the ambiguity of this point made it almost inapplicable within the situation that was characteristic of European powers in that period.

Therefore it was never really implemented by any state that later subscribed to the Treaty of Versailles. The following point had more far-reaching consequences, as the demand that the colonial issues be settled while taking into account the interests and aspirations of subordinate populations was a revolutionary breakthrough in the direction of the later affirmation of the sovereign right of any people to self-determination. Eventually the codification of this principle gave rise to the anti-colonial movements and decolonization as such. Concerning the Russian question, which was one of the most troubling ones in view of revolutionary developments then taking place under the Bolshevik government, the Fourteen Points proposed a rather vague program, which consisted mainly in demand for evacuation of German troops stationed in the territory of former Russian Empire, the provision for guarantees of the free and independent political development of future Russian political entity, and the implementation of assistance

program for the purposes of maintaining physical well-being of the beleaguered Russian people. The Fourteen Points solemnly proclaimed that the treatment of Russia by the other Great Powers would be indicative of the future conduct of these same Powers in the course of the post-War settlement in general; as it turned out, the Allied intervention in Russia and the events following in its steps proved that the intentions of the Great Powers, including the U. S., with respect to Russia were far less beneficial than it may be suggested from the text of Fourteen Points. The issues of other European nations were dealt with in a similar manner. For instance, Wilson's program of European settlement called for the evacuation and restoration of the state of Belgium, as this was viewed by the U. S. President as an important step toward ameliorating the injustices caused by the former European conflicts and wars. To the same category belonged the problem of Alsace-Lorraine, annexed by Germany in 1871, after the Franco-Prussian War. While the Fourteen Points clearly viewed the restoration of Alsace-Lorraine to France as a pre-requisite of European peace, in practice it became one of the lingering problems in Franco-German relations. The Italian problem was addressed in the same, rather vague way. While the Fourteen Points prescribed that the readjustment of Italian borders should be implemented according to the principle of nationality, the exact character of such readjustment was left unspecified and, as the lands adjacent to the state of Italy were highly heterogeneous in national respect, the real implementation of this provision proved highly problematic. In future, the controversy over the satisfaction of Italian claims after WW I became one of the sources of international frictions involving Italy and contributed to the rise of Fascism as a political regime and movement. Finally, and most

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importantly, the multinational empires of Austro-Hungary and Ottomans were to be dismantled and the independent Serbian, Montenegrin and Polish states restored. The national sovereignty of Poland, which was viewed as a nation most wronged by the past political processes, was considered by Wilson to be instrumental in affirming and safeguarding the principle of self-determination. However, as it would later turn out, the Polish state would be just as repressive towards national minorities, as its predecessors, and the internal conflicts that rove it enabled for its swift defeat in WW II. In general, the vision of Woodrow Wilson for Europe was that of the community of equal nations, respectful of international law and basing themselves on national self-determination principle. However, the subsequent processes and events would doom such project to failure, at least in the short term.