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## IN DEFENCE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STATE

*Az individuális állam védelmében*

*U odbrani individualne države*

Looking back on the history of mankind, we come to the surprising conclusion that the only merely two-hundred-year-old modern states simply do not have concrete historical precursors. In earlier ages people defined themselves in the world using other formatives. The birth of the modern states during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was viewed by contemporaries as a historical necessity whereas today's mainly Anglo-Saxon researchers usually see it as the half-fatal interplay of well-defined cultural, economic and social processes, in sum, as a mere coincidence. There are many who question the role of the individual state in keeping up the rule of Law, commonwealth, order, peace, and ultimately democracy in today's globalized world. Globalisation indeed undermines the authority of the individual state, weakens its power and the capacity to act. I will point out in the course of my essay that there are some social factors that make us consider the worthiness or desirability to transfer certain defining functions of today's states to a global level.

*Key words:* Höffe, democracy, globalisation, nation, state, post-national age

### 1. INTRODUCTION

My short essay is titled “In Defence of the Individual State”. Therefore the reader might think they are going to read a writing on political philosophy. I would like to point out that today's popular political papers and works on history of nationalism as well as any other field of research cannot function without applying the thousand-year-old pieces of experience of philosophy, for without that we can make numerous false statements or draw false or invalid conclusions in solving the different problems.

In my essay I will attempt to answer the following questions:

Why does the individual state need defence at all? What is Professor Otfried Höffe's standpoint regarding the connection between democracy and globalisation? Is there a difference between the concepts of nation and state? Is it ulti-

mately an advantage or a disadvantage for the so-called “nation-state” to be a cultural-social-political form, and do the theories on the coming end of the age of nationalism have any credit?

Looking back on the history of mankind we come to the surprising conclusion that the merely two-hundred-year-old modern states simply do not have concrete historical precursors. In earlier ages people defined themselves in the world using other formatives. The birth of the modern states during the 19<sup>th</sup> century was viewed by contemporaries as a historical necessity whereas today’s mainly Anglo-Saxon researchers usually see it as the half-fatal interplay of well-defined cultural, economic and social processes, in sum, as a mere coincidence. There are many who question the role of the individual state in keeping up the rule of Law, commonwealth, order, peace, and ultimately democracy in today’s globalized world. Globalisation indeed undermines the authority of the individual state, weakens its power and the capacity to act. I will point out in the course of my essay that there are some social factors that make us consider the worthiness or desirability to transfer certain defining functions of today’s states to a global level.

## 2. DEMOCRACY AND GLOBALISATION

In my opinion, in his book “Democracy in our age of Globalisation” (HÖFFE 2007). Professor Höffe remarks correctly that the social reality we live in, and the problems or global challenges we have to face, like economic crisis, environmental pollution, terrorism, or organized crime need such interventions that greatly extend beyond the borders of the individual states. It is clear today that for solving these problems half-contingent evolution and market forces are insufficient. Therefore the question of the possible creation of a global government inevitably emerges, which would be a world republic based on the principles of global democracy (HÖFFE 2007: 223–238). As Professor Höffe says: “Globalisation should not come at the price of political regression, the rolling back of democracy. Global democracy is a constructive compromise, which allows existing democracies to retain extensive rights and introduces an additional ‘continental’ level of government. Since global democracy consists in a complementary, subsidiary and federal world republic, insist on a global public, and recognises the rights of states, it avoids the danger of becoming a ‘global Leviathan’.” (HÖFFE 2007: 223–238).

Although I fully agree with this concept, I must note that for the realization of such a world republic based on global democracy we need real, functioning democracies in the first place. A good example would be Switzerland, where the basic principles of democracy can not only be found in the constitution or the laws, but are firmly rooted in the minds of her people. Real democracies, of which strictly speaking there are few in the world, have true citizens. These

citizens are self-conscious, confident, have the power to self-organize, and are able to act as one, overshadowing their own particular interests. Actual citizens of real democracies are interested in assuring the functionality of the given state. In a real democracy social justice is the pillar of the state's functionality.

In my estimation, these statements can only be told for example of Hungary, and apart from a few exceptions, the whole Central-European region with strong limitations. This is even truer for the countries of Eastern Europe. In the aforementioned countries the social layer capable of thinking and acting as real citizens is fairly narrow. If we just consider the Hungarian tax system, which is bleeding from several wounds, it immediately becomes clear to us that most of the people will simply do anything just not having to take part in the upkeep of the state. That is, they do not feel belonging to the state. This is not just a financial problem but the indicator of the lack of democratic thinking.

To strengthen democratic thinking, the involved countries need a high-level, high-quality education system. This high-level education, while taking the local special features and needs into consideration, must be provided by the individual state for her citizens. This is my main remark emphasizing the *raison d'être* of the individual state.

### 3. NATION AND STATE

It is important to observe that in late-19<sup>th</sup> century Europe two national concepts were used in the public speaking of the contemporary intellectual élite. One of them, the “French national concept” identifies the concept of nation with the geopolitical borders of the state. One of the most influential representatives of the notion was Renan (RENAN 1996: 41–55). The other, the “German national concept” included the Meineckean (MEINECKE 1970) perception of cultural nation, and defined common language and culture rooted in joint traditions as the criteria of belonging to a nation.

Contemporary authors show little sensitivity for this conceptual dichotomy. Although the work of Professor Höffe in this respect transcends the conceptual chaos of contemporary literature, even he seems to be confusing the concepts of nation and state in some places. This is not a negligible question, which I would like to point out with the following example:

In today's theories of nationalism the national perception of Benedict Anderson is widely popular. Anderson defines nation in the following way: “an imagined political community, whose borders and sovereignty are imagined as being innate [by members of the given community – P. Z.]” (ANDERSON 2006: 20).

This anthropological statement, however, induces several questions and problems, which make its acceptance for us very difficult. Anderson tries with an in-depth justification of his standpoint, namely with a more punctual illumination of certain elements of the definition.

According to Anderson, a nation is a community in the sense that her members are pervaded by a feeling of “deep, horizontal camaraderie, [...] fraternity” (ANDERSON 2006: 21). I agree with these ideas even though they are a little limited.

However, if we turn our attention towards the Andersonian criteria of “imaginedness”, the situation is completely different. According to him, namely, the nation is an imagined community because “even members of the smallest nation cannot know most of the other members of their nation [...]” (ANDERSON 2006: 20).

We immediately face the problem when we consider the following: if an imagined community in the Andersonian way exists, then there must be a “non-imagined” community as well, although the author never uses the expression anywhere. According to the definition above, members of the “non-imagined” community basically know each other. Nevertheless, we must ask the philosophically not-negligible question: What does it mean to “know” somebody? Anderson does not define the necessary criteria of “being acquainted with”.

In the philosophical sense, getting to know ourselves is a project that takes a lifetime. Think about the first line of the epigraph above the entrance of the famous Oracle of Delphi, it says: γνῶθισεαυτόν – Know thyself! I can know for example, the name of the grocer on the corner, I can know important phases of his life, but are these sufficient criteria of the Andersonian “being acquainted with”? At the same time is it possible that I have less information of my grandparents who live far away than of the aforementioned grocer?

Apparently the criterion of “being acquainted with” immanently carries an indefinability of a degree which makes it perfectly inappropriate in fulfilling its intended task. Of course, Anderson himself sensed the problem and formulates that “In reality every community, which is bigger than the original village based on personal relationships (or even that as well) is imagined” (ANDERSON 2006: 21). I represent the position that since strictly speaking all communities are imagined, not just the ones based on personal relationships but the one being acquainted with myself as well, the usage of “imagined” as a distinctive marker is perfectly meaningless.

Furthermore, Anderson defines the nation as a political entity with borders and sovereignty. It is true that even the greatest nation is bordered territorially, and beyond those borders live people belonging to other nations. Sovereignty, as the pledge of freedom is very important since the modern nations were born in an age where the Enlightenment and revolutions demolished the legitimacy of the hierarchic-dynastic empires based on divine order. However, if we give this a second thought, it quickly becomes clear for us that in the Andersonian sense it is states that have borders and sovereignty, not nations.

In my view, it is more worth discarding the concept of nation as a political entity, just as most of the German-oriented authors of the 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> centuries did, and instead interiorizing the Meineckean concept of cultural nation. Defining nations as political entities is not a sufficient explanation regarding why millions of people sometimes willingly sacrificed their lives for “the nation, or homeland”. It is hard to believe that many could have done this in defence of the borders and sovereignty of a political body which did not even exist before.

The key to understanding can be found in the national communality, “the deep, horizontal camaraderie”, or “fraternity” defined correctly by Anderson. It is those psychological motivators and forces through which some people feel that they have made a sacrifice for their “family” in a broader sense.

So, despite all efforts, after our analysis, in the spirit of the severity required by punctuality, the only thing that remains is that the nation is some sort of community and it also became clear that it is worth differentiating between the concepts of nation and state.

#### 4. POST-NATIONAL AGE?

If we accept the now popular thesis in theories of nationalism that the change in market trends played a decisive role in the creation of modern states, then it is also apparent that as a function of these changes the current, “national” form of humanity’s life can just as easily break up.

There are prominent representatives of social studies and humanities who agree that the breaking up of the states has already begun. We can mention Jürgen Habermas, who is the advocate of the “post-national era” (HABERMAS 1998), or the sadly recently deceased Eric Hobsbawm, who predicted the end of the age of nationalism decades ago (HOBSBAWM 1990).

There is no doubt that there are some macroeconomic and political processes in the world which point towards the fulfilment of the aforementioned visions. In my opinion, predicting the future of the “nation-state” is not that simple. Namely, the ghost of nationalism is out of the bottle now and fundamentally influences and defines our everyday thinking. At the moment our national affiliation is part of us innately just like, for example, our date of birth.

I think that behind the creation of nationalism and ultimately the birth of the “nation-states” lies a motive fundamentally characteristic to man. That is the necessity of a narrower group or collective identity. Today it is a cliché in social studies that humans are communal beings. Even the ancient Greek writers, like Herodotus (HERODOTUS 2013) make a difference between “us” and “them”. On the one hand, there are “us”, who speak and understand Greek, on the other, there are “them”, the barbarians (“βάρβαρος” – a foreigner, a non-Greek – P. Z.), i.e. everyone else who is outside this circle.

## 5. CONCLUSION

To draw a final conclusion from this short essay, my conviction is that the visions of disintegration of the “nation-states”, considering the daily appearance of national and ethnic conflicts will still remain building blocks of hazy theories for a time. I believe the individual state is the most effective tool for the defence of the nations as unique and unrepeatable cultural and historical entities from the negative consequences of globalisation.

Dividing humanity into nations does not just carry the known and acknowledged negative consequences at all. I share the notions of one of the greatest Hungarian philosophers, Bernát Alexander (ALEXANDER 1893), who thinks that if a national spirit stands out in something then it is also universal in that field. Contact between a given national spirit and other nations is expressively desirable. Namely, different national spirits receive more fertilizing impulses upon contact with other cultures, and this continuous competition and dialogue is not only what assures the survival of the given nations but also the growth and development of humanity’s cultural public property.

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*Az individuális állam védelmében*

Visszatekintve az emberiség történetében, arra a meglepő következtetésre juthatunk, hogy a csupán mintegy két évszázada létrejött modern nemzetállamoknak egyszerűen nincsenek konkrét történeti előképeik. A korábbi történeti korokban az emberek más identitásképzők mentén határozták meg önmagukat a világban. A modern nemzetállamok megszületését a 19. századi kortársak

történeti szükségszerűségnek tekintették, a mai – főként angolszász – kutatók bizonyos jól meghatározható kultúrtörténeti, gazdasági, társadalmi folyamatok sorsszerű összjátékának, tehát valamelyest a véletlen művének tekintik. Sokan vannak olyanok, akik szerint napjaink globalizálódott világában erősen megkérdőjeleződik az individuális állam szerepe a jogállamiság, a közjó, a rend és béke, végső soron a demokrácia fenntartásában. A globalizáció valóban aláássa az individuális állam tekintélyét, gyengíti erejét és cselekvőképességét. Amint arra esszémben rámutatok, vannak olyan társadalmi tényezők, amelyek megfontolásra késztetnek bennünket annak tekintetében, hogy érdemes-e, sőt kívánatos-e a mai államok bizonyos meghatározó funkcióit globális szintre utalni?

*Kulcsszavak:* Höffe, demokrácia, globalizáció, nemzet, állam, nemzetállam utáni éra

### *U odbrani individualne države*

Osvrćući se na istoriju čovečanstva dolazimo do iznenađujućeg zaključka da moderne nacionalne države nastale tek pre oko dvestotinak godina jednostavno ne poseduju konkretne istorijske presedane. U ranijim istorijskim razdobljima ljudi su drugačijim formativima identifikovali svoje mesto u svetu. Rađanje modernih nacionalnih država u 19. veku tadašnji savremenici su videli kao istorijsku nužnost, dok je današnji – većinom anglo-saksonski – istraživači uglavnom shvataju kao manje-više sudbonosno podudaranje nekih jasno definisanih kulturnoistorijskih, ekonomskih i socijalnih procesa, kao prostih koincidencija. Mnogo je onih koji smatraju da se u današnje doba globalizacije uveliko dovodi u pitanje uloga individualne države u očuvanju pravnog poretka, zajedničkih dobara, reda i mira, a u krajnjoj liniji i same demokratije. Proces globalizacije doista podriva autoritet individualne države, oslabljuje njenu snagu i moć delovanja. I – na šta se ovim esejem upravo ukazuje – postoje društveni faktori koji nas navode da razmislimo da li se isplati – šta više – da li je poželjno da se određene presudne funkcije današnjih država usmere na globalni nivo.

*Ključne reči:* Hefe (Höffe), demokratija, globalizacija, nacija, država, postnacionalna era

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