Internationalisation and the nation-state: Four issues and three non-issues

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Abstract. The significance of the nation-state in an era of globalisation and European integration remains the subject of competing conventional wisdoms: what some consider obvious is to others a myth. The issue is both explanatory and prescriptive: it is about the significance of state action for explaining outcomes as well as about the validity of arguments put forward in defence of the nation-state against the threat of internationalisation. From an explanatory point of view, attention needs to be devoted to the power of states relative to other actors, the autonomy of states in the sense of their possibilities for action, and the collective identity of states decisive for their viability. Since these are complex matters of degree, and since there is reason to expect variation between countries as well as policy areas, broad generalisation needs to be replaced with detailed empirical research. From a prescriptive point of view, there is a need for the detailed study of the relation between the nation-state, on the one hand, and psychological wellbeing, cultural pluralism, welfare policy, and democracy in various senses, on the other.

The reason for contributing yet another paper about whether the nation-state is obstinate or obsolete (Hoffmann 1968) is the continuing opposition between conventional wisdoms about this matter.[1] One, found in the literature about globalisation and European integration, is that the nation-state is becoming irrelevant. The 'pillars' of the 'Westphalian temple' have long been 'decaying' (Zacher 1992), and now the temple is about to collapse, in a widespread view. Another view, no less widespread, is that the demise of the nation-state is superficial. David Miller, political philosopher, maintains that 'the majority of people are too deeply attached to their inherited national identities to make their obliteration an intelligible goal' (Miller 1995a: 184). Alan Milward, economic historian, characterises European integration in a book title as *The European Rescue of the Nation-State* (Milward 1992). Linda Weiss, political scientist, calls her book *The Myth of the Powerless State* (Weiss 1998). Or, to cite the headline of a columnist's reflections on an Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) meeting about internationalisation and the future of governance: 'Despite Global Changes, National Sovereignty Remains King' (Pfaff 2000). It is a key question for the descriptive theory of politics which view is more nearly correct.[2]

There is also disagreement about the prescriptive issue. Here too globalisation and European integration are at the core of the argument. The traditional opposition between liberal internationalism and conservative realism is being replaced by one between an internationalism which is liberal, socialist, or conservative and approves of globalisation whilst favouring European integration, and a neo-nationalist reaction emphasising the virtues of the nation-state in a perspective that is different from that of traditional realism and may be characterised as left-wing just as much as right-wing. The validity of the neo-nationalist case is becoming a crucial question for prescriptive political theory in an era of internationalisation.

The aim of this article is to specify the descriptive and prescriptive issues that need to be considered. A notion confusing matters is 'state-centrism', an established concept in international relations scholarship. It is necessary to consider this concept before moving on to the main issues.

State-centrism as non-issue

Over the years, the insignificance of the nation-state has been transformed from an analytical proposition to an article of faith or, better, an identity marker. This is due in part to the ascendance of Kenneth Waltz to the position of being the most criticised person in political science. Waltz used the term 'state-centrist' to characterise his approach in his book *Theory of International Politics* (Waltz 1979: 93–5), a fact that helps explain why 'state-centrist' is nowadays used derogatorily about scholars or approaches devoting what is taken to be undue attention to the state to the detriment of other actors, forces, structures, institutions or concerns. This rhetoric has served to obscure questions that are in need of reflection. Three plausible interpretations of 'state-centrism' will be briefly mentioned here in an effort to separate issues from non-issues.

The state as object of study

One interpretation of what it means to be 'state-centrist' is concern with the structures, functions and modes of operation of states instead of other matters. Now it cannot reasonably be an issue in political science whether the institution of the state is worth studying, not even against the background of globalisation and European integration. Just as it is obvious for sociologists to study society, for economists to concern themselves with economics, for cul-

tural anthropologists to focus on cultures, and for people in business admin-istration to devote attention to business, it is a self-evident preoccupation of political scientists to explore the state.

One may object that there is a difference between political science and international relations (IR) in this regard. A focus on the state is built into the very conception of political science, most obviously where the field is called 'Staatswissenschaft' or something similar, but also when the term 'political science' is used.[3] This is arguably not the case with the field of international relations, especially not when IR is seen as a separate discipline or an inter-disciplinary field. One could argue that what is self-evident in Staatswis-senschaft may be an open question in IR. Be that as it may, it cannot be a matter worthy of debate whether IR should or should not devote effort to the study of the structures, functions and modes of operation of states. It is point-less to criticise scholars for their curiosities. If scholars are interested in explor-ing the institutions of foreign policy and interstate politics, so be it. Chacun à son goût. If we find 'state-centric' writings irrelevant for our own concerns, we need not read them.

Explaining state action

What is sometimes characterised as 'state-centrism' is not the study of the insti-tution of the state but the assumption that the state is rational and unitary. This assumption is rejected on two grounds in the literature. Decision makers, it is maintained, are not rational, since cognitive and organisational factors exercise a major influence on decisions. State policy, it is further argued, results from confrontations between opposing domestic forces: differing political ori-entations, bureaucracies with their respective roles and procedures, groups with incompatible interests, and so on (Vasquez 1998: 156–66). Following this argument, ignoring psychology, organisation and domestic politics is to be overly concerned with the state as such and hence to be incapable of explain-ing state action.

Several questions are raised here. One is about the concept of rationality, which may mean anything from the mere consideration of alternatives to the application of objective mathematical utility functions; it is not clear what par-ticular assumption is to be considered 'state-centric' in this regard. A second question pertains to the meaning of 'unitary'. Not only rational-choice type analysis may be characterised as 'unitary' but also, for example, the theory of the 'democratic peace', by which the constitution of a country causes its leaders – all leaders, not some – to perceive things in a particular way, not to mention the assumption that political culture, a feature of an entire country, affects all

its political actions uniformly. A third question is what a satisfactory explanation of action is like – whether the famous black box needs to be opened, and what to look for if it is.

These are worthwhile questions, but they have nothing to do with the descriptive and prescriptive significance of the nation-state. The proper approach to explaining state action – a major concern of those who criticise others for being 'state-centric' – is irrelevant when it is a matter of what is happening to the nation-state under conditions of globalisation and integration.

The conceptual inevitability of the state

Text and language became the concerns of many political scientists in the 1990s. 'The text is all and nothing exists outside it' – this extreme position was adopted by some (Derrida, cited in Rosenau 1992: 35). Truth, as it was also put, is a linguistic convention, an 'effect of discourse'; 'what we call the mind or reason is only an effect of discourse' (Flax, cited in Rosenau 1992: 78, 81). According to an author in the field of IR, attempts to 'think otherwise about political possibilities' are 'constrained by categories and assumptions that contemporary political analysis is encouraged to take for granted' (Walker 1992: 5–6). Conceptualisation, in a nutshell, prevents us from thinking differently.

Since this conviction remains widespread in the academic community, it is worth taking note of the fact that the concept of state is implied, if not logically unavoidable, even in concepts we use for denoting its disappearance (cf. Bartelson 2000). 'Discursive state-centrism' is not a bad term for concern with this matter.

The very concept of 'international' presumes that states exist. The state in the sense of nation-state is a defining feature of 'international'; if the state did not exist, neither would international relations (Ferguson & Mansbach 1989: 2). Furthermore, not only 'international' but also 'transnational' and 'supranational' are inherently 'state-centric', in spite of the fact that they denote phenomena beyond the state. This is true, it has been argued, about political theory generally: the concept of state enters through the back door whatever attempts theorists from Engels to Easton have made to throw it out through the front entrance (Bartelson 2001).

'State-centrism' of this kind is even more striking in the case of a concept like 'internationalisation', which denotes the weakening if not the eventual disappearance of the nation-state while presupposing its existence. An even better illustration of the paradox is the concept of 'unification', which logically presupposes the existence of separate units that are to be unified. 'Internationalism' similarly is a programme for the enmeshing of nation-states in a

tightening network of institutions and interdependencies and perhaps even their eventual replacement by a higher authority, and yet the existence of nation-states is implied in the very concept of 'internationalism'.

The concept of 'globalisation' may seem to be different on this score, but this difference is illusory. 'Globalisation' is defined in a variety of ways, ranging from the global expansion of the market to the worldwide spread of American television to the growth of transborder pollution. The nation-state, if involved at all, is seen either as a victim or as a countervailing force. It is uncommon, however, to refer to increased relations between British Columbia and New Brunswick, or between St Petersburg and Vladivostok, as 'globalisation'. Vast distances do not suffice. What is special with 'globalisation', apart from vast geographic scope, is the crossing of interstate borders. There is no globalisation without states.

Is it a problem that the concepts we use for considering what is happening to the state presuppose the state's continuing existence? Does this prevent us from analysing the significance of the state in an unprejudiced manner? The answer, in my view, is no. The paradoxical features of concepts like 'internationalism' and 'globalisation' are amusing but not much more. What I have called 'discursive state-centrism' does not render a world without states unthinkable. If we are concerned with the significance of the state under contemporary conditions, language is not the issue.

The explanatory significance of the nation-state

The main non-normative issue about the contemporary role of the nation-state I take to be its significance for explaining outcomes. The issue is whether it is useful to take nation-state action into account when we seek to explain something we want to explain, for example the dynamics of European integration, the level of social inequality or the reconstruction of collective identities. It is a common assumption that matters such as these used to be decisively affected by nation-state action, for example, in the form of the setting up of the European Economic Community, the creation of the welfare state and the mobilisation of public-service radio and television. In the present era, many argue, European integration has its own dynamics, while globalisation has deprived governments of options in the area of social and economic policy and Americanised commercialisation dominates broadcasting. The significance of the nation-state has diminished accordingly. The issue is whether this is true.

A fully 'state-centric' view – probably taken by few in this strong form – comprises three assumptions: (1) nation-states are powerful enough in rela-

tion to other actors to exert a decisive influence on outcomes, (2) nation-state action is autonomous, and (3) nation-state identity is sufficiently well-entrenched to make the power and autonomy of states enduring conditions of politics. If nation-state action is increasingly ineffective, if it increasingly mirrors other factors or actors, or if its basis in the minds of men is becoming undermined, the nation-state is indeed losing in explanatory significance. Thus the issue is about the power, autonomy and identity of contemporary nation-states.

The power of nation-states

'Nation-states or their decision makers are the most important actors for understanding international relations' – this is Vasquez's way of phrasing what he considers to be Morgenthau's fundamental assumption in *Politics among Nations* (Vasquez 1998: 37). The assumption is widely seen as the epitome of the 'state-centrism' imputed to the entire field of IR. It is worth recalling, therefore, that Morgenthau assumes interest to be perennial, but not the nation-state. The 'contemporary connection between interest and the national state is a product of history' and is 'bound to disappear', he writes, 'the present division of the political world into nation states will be replaced by larger units of a quite different character, more in keeping with the technical potentialities and the moral requirements of the contemporary world' (Morgenthau 1961: 10).

It is also worth pointing out that Waltz, whose *Theory of International Politics* embodies a 'state-centrism' even more consistent than Morgenthau's, asserts that 'states are not and never have been the only international actors' and that 'structures are defined not by all of the actors that flourish within them but by the major ones'. The importance of non-state actors and the extent of transnational activities are obvious, he writes, but this does not make 'the state-centric conception of international politics obsolete'. Just as economists choose to define markets in terms of firms, Waltz makes the analytical choice of defining 'international-political structures' in terms of states (Waltz 1979: 93–4).

Hence, while Morgenthau and Waltz agree that 'nation-states or their decision makers' are 'the most important actors' in international relations, they do it with rather considerable qualifications. For Morgenthau the dominance of the nation-state is a historical contingency, for Waltz it is an analytic simplification. One does not have to reject Morgenthau and Waltz, therefore, to pose the question whether we are entering an era different from the one they theorised about. Today, arguably, 'nation-states or their decision makers' are getting less important than they used to be, and 'larger units of a quite differ-

ent character' are in the process of taking over, as Morgenthau expected that they would. The question is especially pertinent so far as the European Union is concerned. In Waltzian terms, the issue, equally pertinent – it is essentially the same issue – is whether a useful simplification is turning into a not-so-useful oversimplification.

If we are to investigate this matter empirically, as we should, there is no way of circumventing a problem of method familiar to generations of political scientists but sometimes ignored when the relative power of states and non-states is debated and the likes of Morgenthau and Waltz are criticised on this score. Power, in a classical view – which is presumably the view of those who make assertions about the insignificance of the nation-state – is a causal relation between intentions and outcomes.[4] The problem of method lies in the difficulty of demonstrating causality, which is what the issue about the relative power of states and non-states is about. For one thing, if the exercise of power by a particular actor is anticipated by others, it may decide the outcome without occurring; this may lead us to underestimate the power of states vis-à-vis non-states. For another thing, a particular outcome may be due to factors other than the power of a particular actor, for example, a commonality of interest among all concerned; if this possibility is not taken into account, we are prone to overestimating the power of states in relation to non-states. These are standard insights in the study of politics. The analysis of power over outcomes is important but difficult.

This may help explain why it is difficult to see in what precise way contending views about the power of the contemporary nation-state differ from each other. A field in which the matter has been discussed with a reasonable degree of concretion is European studies. A reminder of the controversy about the role of intergovernmentalism in the European Union (EU) may make it easier to see what is at issue, and what is not.

The concept of multilevel governance (MLG) has been proposed as an alternative to the intergovernmental analysis of European integration. MLG, in the opinion of its proponents, differs from the state-centric model on three accounts:

1. Decision-making competencies are not monopolised by nation-state executives but shared with supranational institutions; one 'must . . . analyse the independent role of European level actors to explain European policy-making'.
2. Collective decision-making among states implies a loss of control for individual nation-state executives; 'lowest common denominator outcomes are available only on a subset of EU decisions, mainly those concerning the scope of integration'.

3. Subnational actors operate not only in national but also in supranational arenas; 'states do not monopolize links between domestic and European actors, but are one among a variety of actors contesting decisions that are made at a variety of levels' (Marks et al. 1996: 346).

How different in fact is this approach from one departing from the assumption that 'nation-states or their decision makers are the most important actors for understanding international relations'?

We may first take note of a matter of confusion pertaining to point (2) about majority voting in the EU Council of Ministers and informal constraints on the use of the veto, which are key features of the MLG approach. There is a need to distinguish here between the question of the significance of the nation-state in general and the question of the significance of particular states in particular conditions. Neither majority voting nor the non-use of the veto changes the fact that decisions are taken by state representatives, and neither makes nation-state action less significant for outcomes relative to other influences. They do affect the balance of power between states, but that is a different matter: it is true of all organisations that changes in decision rules affect the balance of power between their members. Disagreement about intergovernmentalism in the EU hinges in part on the failure to distinguish between participation in and rules for the making of decisions.

So far as the balance of power between states and other actors is concerned, it is immediately obvious that the opposition between the MLG concept and the state-centric model, from which MLG authors dissociate themselves, is less dramatic than it is made to appear. On the one hand, even Waltz, the epitome of state-centrism, rejects the assumption that decision-making is 'monopolised' by governments. On the other hand, the MLG approach encompasses the view that 'state executives and state arenas . . . remain the *most* important pieces of the European puzzle' (Marks et al. 1996: 346, emphasis in original), a phrase almost identical with Vasquez's account of Morgenthau's assumption. We are dealing with a difference that is one of degree, and not a very dramatic one at that – a worthwhile observation in view of rhetoric to the contrary.

It is instructive to compare the MLG approach to that of Andrew Moravcsik, considered a leading state-centrist by MLG advocates and others. It turns out that there is literally no contradiction between MLG and Moravcsik with regard to the operation of the EU. Moravcsik's main conclusion is that supranational institutions have wielded little influence over key intergovernmental decisions, that the transfer of authority to EU institutions has not been an unintended consequence of previous decisions but their primary purpose and

that government preferences have remained essentially unaffected by the progress of European integration (Moravcsik 1998: 489–93). It is important to note that this conclusion pertains merely to fundamental decisions about the structure and authority of European institutions: Moravcsik has examined the negotiations leading to the Treaty of Rome, the Common Agricultural Policy, the European Monetary System, the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty, and that is the basis for his conclusion that matters remain under the control of nation-state governments. The MLG argument, for its part, is explicitly limited to the day-to-day workings of the EU: state executives, as a matter of fact, are said to play a 'decisive' role so far as big decisions are concerned and to be less dominant only 'in most areas of day-to-day policy-making' (Marks et al. 1996: 352). There thus is no opposition at all between MLG and Moravcsik so far as the significance of the nation-state in EU policy-making is concerned.

There remains a difference pertaining to the dynamics of European integration: the MLG approach implies that the accumulated effect of day-to-day decisions is to reinforce integration beyond the control of governments, while Moravcsik maintains that he has found this not to be the case. That in turn reflects the fact that the MLG approach is in the neo-functionalist tradition, while Moravcsik's analysis departs from political realism. But how, more precisely, do the two approaches differ in their account of the dynamics of European integration?

The MLG approach implies two things. First, the day-to-day operation of the EU affects states' interests, and therefore the observation that nation-state interests determine the big decisions need not imply that big decisions are independent of previous integration. Second, integration is not merely a matter of big decisions but also of the actions of the European Commission, the European Court of Justice and the European Parliament, which are essentially autonomous in relation to nation-state governments.

Now on the former point Moravcsik turns out to be less insistent than he may appear. He writes, as a matter of fact, that 'integration [has proven to] have politically significant consequences, notably shifts in the preferences and institutional environment in which future decisions are made' and that 'intended . . . "lock in" effects [are] a secondary force behind regional integration'. He even accepts for a fact the occurrence of such a paradoxical phenomenon as shifts in preferences that have been 'foreseen, intended, even desired' (Moravcsik, 1998: 494). Hence Moravcsik's assertion that government preferences have proven to be unaffected by the progress of integration is qualified: he first makes a bold assertion but then retracts half of it. What remains is a subtle matter of degree pertaining to the extent to which envi-

ronmental change – ongoing integration – affects the definition of national interests by governments, and the degree to which this effect is inadvertent rather than intended.

The second point, which is about the kind of integration brought about by the Commission, the Court and the Parliament, is not a main concern of Moravcsik's. He appears to define European integration as that which is decided by Member State governments. From this point of view, the task of explaining the dynamics of European integration is the same, more or less, as accounting for government decisions about this matter. If the *explanandum* is defined more broadly, the relevance of EU institutions as *explanantes* increases. Thus the issue is not about how to explain a particular phenomenon but about what to explain.

Two suggestions may be made against this background.

First, the assertion that there is a radical and systematic difference between state-centrists and others should not be taken seriously. There is no need to choose between extreme positions so far as the role of states in bringing about outcomes is concerned.

Second, the significance of nation-state action depends on what outcomes we want to explain. There is agreement that there is a difference between major policy decisions and lesser things. There is a difference, furthermore, between accounting for specific decisions, as Moravcsik does, and explaining complex processes such as European integration in a broader sense. There is reason, it is important to add, to assume that differences obtain between policy areas (Scharpf 1999: 116–20). General assertions about the significance of nation-state action for explaining outcomes are not meaningful. Differentiated analysis is necessary.

The autonomy of nation-states

In order for 'state executives and state arenas' to remain 'the *most* important pieces of the European puzzle', as even MLG proponents argue, states must be not only influential but also independent. Judging from recent literature, the nation-state is no longer independent enough to be worth considering for the purpose of explaining outcomes. The nation-state used to be an independent source of political action and hence of political outcomes but is now becoming a mere intermediary, in this view. The globalisation of the economy, the internationalisation of the media, the revolution in communications and the growth in international organisations are subverting the nation-state, it is asserted. The challenge is said to come both from above and from below: integration and fragmentation are said to go hand in hand. This is the main theme in Rosenau's theory of 'governance in a turbulent world' (Rosenau 1997) as

well as in the theory of *Denationalisierung* proposed by Zürn and his associates (Zürn 1998; Beisheim et al. 1999). I shall focus on the implications of internationalisation for nation-state independence while bypassing the related question of fragmentation.

The key to the argument I propose to make is a distinction between four dimensions of the concept of national independence, or four ways in which a nation-state can be more or less independent with regard to: (1) its sovereignty in the sense of a legal right, (2) its autonomy in the sense of actual independence, (3) its autarky in the sense of self-sufficiency with what is needed for survival and (4) its self-determination in the sense of the right of a nation to determine its allegiance and governors. It is obvious, I have argued elsewhere, that autarky has ceased to be a relevant objective for all or almost all states. It is equally obvious that national self-determination remains as widely accepted in principle and as difficult to apply in practice as it has always been. Sovereignty, furthermore, remains a foundational principle of international relations even though modified with regard to supranational organisation and humanitarian intervention. The main issue with regard to independence, therefore, pertains to national independence in the sense of autonomy: 'actual' independence, the 'real' thing (Goldmann 2001: 74–89).

Then, what is 'actual' independence? To answer this question is not a matter of finding the proper way of using the concept of 'autonomy' but of specifying what is at issue in the controversy about the nation-state. The issue, I submit, is about the possibilities for effective nation-state action – that is, about the menu for choice available to nation-state governments and citizens. This can be taken further in two ways. Autonomy in one sense is a matter of the availability of action possibilities. Autonomy in another sense is a matter of the extent to which one's action possibilities are unconstrained by others. Autonomy in the latter sense is simply the opposite of interdependence. Hence, if international interdependence is a feature of our times, it follows by definition that states are getting less autonomous. When it comes to autonomy in the first sense – in the sense of action possibilities in general rather than action possibilities unconstrained by others – the matter is less obvious.

This is so because there is no definitional relation between interdependence and autonomy in this case. It is, on the contrary, an old insight that international exchange has a two-sided impact on the action possibilities of states. You lose some options, but you gain others. There is less your country can do without concerning itself with others, but there is more it can do together with others. Specialisation makes for dependence, but it also makes for resourcefulness. You are getting more dependent on others, but you are getting less dependent on nature, so to speak. Interdependence reduces the capacity of state governments to govern, but it also increases the range of national policy

(Kreile 1999: 614–5). Some economic policies are getting less effective, but others are getting more effective (Lindbeck 1989). The relation between autonomy and internationalisation is not zero-sum (Weiss 1999: 60). International exchange generates dependence while providing capabilities and hence action possibilities. International organisations reduce the freedom of action of countries while giving them a degree of influence over the freedom of action of others.

This more complex conception of autonomy has been called 'state-centric' in the literature and has been rejected on this ground in favour of equating autonomy with a lack of interdependence (Marks et al. 1996: 350–1), thus making the assertion that nation-states are losing their autonomy true by definition. To repeat, however, the issue is not about the proper definition of 'autonomy'. Nor is the issue about the existence of international interdependence or about definitional implications of this fact. The issue is the empirical one of the balance between governmental action possibilities that have been lost and those that have been gained in an era of economic globalisation and European integration. The greater the loss in relation to the gain, the less significant the nation-state.

This issue poses a first-order empirical challenge, but some matters are evident. It can be taken for granted, first of all, that there is variation between countries and policy areas and hence that there is little basis for generalisation. Gains and losses, furthermore, are not easily assessed even when it is a matter of relatively specific matters, as shown elsewhere with regard to the retention of the European welfare state, the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU, the protection of the environment and the prevention of international crime (Goldmann 2001: 91–8). Assessing gains, in particular, proves to be a subtle matter. Among the subtleties are:

1. International policy making, even when provided for, may be inhibited by the difficulty of reaching agreement among those who must consent. Whatever the institutional structure, four factors inhibit agreement on the EU-level regulation of the market for the sake of the welfare state according to Scharpf (1999: 112–3): ideological disagreement, differences in the level of economic development, structural differences in welfare spending and institutional differences. Now, is the difficulty of mobilising political support a relevant consideration, when it comes to the assessment of action possibilities?

2. International policy making, even when successful in providing national governments with action possibilities they would otherwise have lacked, may lead to sub-optimal arrangements and hence to the diversion of resources that could have been used for other purposes.[5] This arguably

is the case with the Common Agricultural Policy, widely seen to be wasteful in economic terms. Are costs deriving from the inefficiency of particular policies to be taken into account, when the balance between action possibilities gained and lost is to be assessed?

3. The action possibilities of governments and citizens may be inversely related, as suggested by European cooperation in the area of environmental policy: what governments lose, their citizens may gain in the form, for example, of the access of their organisations to supranational institutions (the European Commission in the case of the environment; Greenwood 1997: 185–92; Marks & McAdam 1996: 113–5). Are we to be concerned with governments or citizens in our assessment of action possibilities, or with both?

4. Organisational complexity may be a feature of international problem-solving, as suggested by the 'regulated chaos' reported to obtain in the area of crime prevention (Krause 1998; Wolters 1997). Should this be taken into account, when we set out to assess what may be gained at the international level?

This is scraping the surface, but the bottom line is obvious: if we are concerned with the significance of the nation-state under contemporary conditions, the detailed study of action possibilities gained and lost in a variety of policy areas is needed – a less glamorous undertaking than making points about state-centrism, but one carrying the promise of improving our understanding of the subtleties of internationalised politics.

The identity of nation-states

In post-Cold War Europe, the *Zeitgeist* was one of nationalism (Hedetoft 1995: 4) while threats to national identity were pictured as posing a problem of national security on a par with invasion and occupation (Wæver et al. 1993). The viability of a nation-state arguably presumes a minimum degree of community (i.e., of perceived common identity) and the issue is whether such identities are being threatened by internationalisation and hence whether internationalisation is eroding the basis on which the nation-state rests. The normative significance of this issue is considered in the next section. Here I am limiting myself to the empirical question: is national identity in fact being eroded in the contemporary world?

It is useful to distinguish between collective identity in the sense of the individuality of an object in relation to other objects, and with reference to its particular characteristics regardless of its degree of individuality.[6]

To possess identity in the sense of individuality is to be separate and different from the environment. National identity in this sense is the same as the perception of similarity among 'us' and of difference in relation to 'them'. The strength of this perception may vary, and change in this regard is one of the matters at issue with regard to the contemporary nation-state.

An identity may be strong in the sense of being widely shared in a collective, and in the sense of being afforded more significance than competing identities. It has been widely assumed that national identities are strong in both of these ways. A well-established tendency is considered to exist among men and women to think of themselves as members of a nation with a special identity that is different from that of other nations, a tendency to seek to ensure 'the preservation of [their] nation as a vital and active community', and a tendency to afford special significance to the expression and protection of their identity (Tamir 1993: 73–5). The ubiquity of concern with national identity is explained in both psychological and political terms in the literature – in terms of its mental necessity as well as its political utility. National identity is the 'currently dominant variant' of mankind's 'tribalism', which is rooted in 'our need to create something coherent out of ourselves and our own lives' (Glover 1997: 14–6; see also Bloom 1990; Miller 1995a: 184); this is the psychological aspect. National identity, from a political point of view, is 'any given set of language practices, myths, stories, and beliefs propagated to justify a dominant group in maintaining power, or to justify a competing group in replacing them or shifting power among them' (Price 1995: 15). It is common to emphasise the remarkable power of national identity: its 'commitment to a social abstraction which is historically unique', its implication of a 'willingness to kill – or to die – for the good of a plainly artificial collective form' (Appadurai 2000: 129). Whether nation-state identities remain as strong as they may once have been, and whether they retain the power over men and women they once may have had, is now at issue.

So much for identity in the sense of individuality. Collective identity in the other sense just mentioned is a matter of the characteristic features of a collective regardless of its individuality. Writings about national identities are not only about the strength of the 'we'/'they' distinction but also about the specific features characterising this or that nation. One's concern in this case is not with the strength of the feeling of being British, Danish or Dutch, but with beliefs about what is particular about the British, what is special with regard to 'Danishness', what it means to be Dutch.

Whereas there is much theorising in the literature about the ubiquity and significance of national identity, there is less theory about the substantive content of the phenomenon presumed to be ubiquitous and significant. Parekh

is unusual among theorists in going into detail about this matter. The political
identity of a community, he suggests, is about

> the way political life is constituted, and includes the manner in which it
> conceptualises and demarcates its political life, organises and manages its
> collective affairs, structures its legal and political institutions and con-
> ducts its political discourse. It also includes the values to which the polity
> is collectively committed, and the qualities of temperament and charac-
> ter it admires and on which it relies . . . [and] refers to its deepest fears,
> ambitions, anxieties, tendencies, dominant myths, traumatic historical
> experiences and collective memories. (Parekh 1995: 260–1)

Identity in the sense of individuality logically implies the existence of
an 'Other'. It is common to conceive of the construction of the Other as
crucial for the formation of identity in the sense of individuality, and it is
even assumed that the Other is necessarily perceived as threatening or
unpleasant: 'reification and demonification of "the other" is business as usual
in international relations' (Neumann 1996: 159). The concept of identity in
the sense of characteristics has no such implication. Parekh rejects the incli-
nation to equate identity with the presumption of an Other: 'Identity is logi-
cally and ontologically prior to difference . . . If others were to become like
us . . . that would not in the least affect our identity' (Parekh 1995: 256).
Whereas individuality presumes difference, the possession of particular
characteristics does not. The issue so far as identity in the latter sense is
concerned, I suggest, is whether widespread conceptions of national identity
remain as consensual, articulated and focused on the uniqueness of one's
nation as they may have been in the past, or whether they are now getting
more controversial, more implicit or more likely to be expressed in terms of
universal values.

    What do we know about these matters? In the 1990s it was a recurrent
theme in the literature that the identity of this or that country was charac-
terised by crisis, vacuum or controversy. This was suggested to be the case, for
example, with the UK (Doty 1996; Marquand 1995: 189; Miller 1995b: 161–4;
Schnapper 1994: 131), Germany (Fulbrook 1999: 3; Hedetoft 1993: 289;
Schnapper 1994: 137), Russia (Uhlig 1997: 1191), France (Jenkins & Copsey
1996: 110; Safran 1991; Schnapper 1994: 132–3), Sweden (Johansson 1997: 183)
and other countries. A search for explicit conceptions of national identity in
the politics of Austria, Belgium, Ireland and Sweden led to the finding that
such conceptions were relatively uncommon in all four countries (Goldmann
& Gilland 2001: 167–9). This evidence, weak as it is, indicates that there may

be something to be said in support of the hypothesis that nation-state identi-
ties are getting less articulated than they used to be.

Be that as it may, what we do know is that there is variation between
countries. *Eurobarometer* surveys demonstrate large differences between the
peoples of the EU in their conceptions of national versus European identity,
with the UK and Sweden at one end of the scale and France, Luxembourg and
Italy at the other (see Table 1). It is legion in the literature, furthermore, to
point out that there are differences in conceptions of national identity between
France, Germany and the UK (e.g., Jenkins & Sofos 1996; McCarthy 1993;
Risse et al. 1999; Schauer 1997). According to the study of Austria, Belgium,
Ireland and Sweden just cited, there were differences on the civic/ethnic
dimension, and hence implicitly about uniqueness, between these four coun-
tries, and between them and a comparable country like Hungary (Goldmann
& Gilland 2001: 168–9, 175–6).

A two-pronged research programme emerges from this argument. One line
of enquiry is about the strength of national identities, and changes in this
regard; the issue is the salience of the 'we'/'they' distinction or, if you wish, the
degree of national cohesion, under the pressure of globalisation and European

Table 1. Conceptions of identity, April–May 2000 (percent)

	National	Mainly national	European/ mainly European	Don't know	Total
United Kingdom	64	27	6	3	100
Sweden	60	34	6	1	101
Ireland	56	37	6	2	101
Greece	55	40	5	0	100
Finland	55	41	4	1	101
Austria	53	34	11	3	101
Denmark	46	44	8	2	100
Portugal	46	48	5	2	101
Germany	45	39	12	3	99
Belgium	40	39	19	2	100
Netherlands	38	53	8	1	100
Spain	27	58	13	3	101
France	27	53	16	5	101
Luxembourg	27	47	21	5	100
Italy	25	60	14	1	100

Source: *Eurobarometer*, No. 53, 2000, Table 6.3a.

integration. The other line of enquiry pertains to the conceptions held in a nation about itself as nation: are such conceptions becoming more inclusive, or maybe more exclusive, than formerly? We do not really know whether to assume accelerating internationalisation or nationalist backlash in either respect, only that there is likely to be variation between countries, and hence much to investigate.

Such research should not be limited to survey data, historical essays and the content analysis of political texts, as in the examples cited here. There is reason to also focus on what are considered to be the main socialisation agents in the literature on nations and nationalism: the schools (Gellner 1994: 56–8) and the mass media (Anderson 1991: 34–6). The study of national identity became *à la mode* in the 1990s and attracted many scholars, but there is much that remains to be done so far as the systematic empirical investigation of the relation between internationalisation and national identity is concerned. This is crucial for the assessment of the significance of the contemporary nation-state.

The prescriptive significance of the nation-state

I turn now from the explanatory to the prescriptive significance of the nation-state. State-centrism is like other '-isms' insofar as being a normative position to oppose and not merely an explanatory approach to question. The view known as 'liberal internationalism' departs from the assumption that the anarchy of the interstate system is a source of conflict and war, and that peace and security will benefit if states are enmeshed in networks of communication and exchange and are held in check by common institutions. State-centric authors like Kenneth Waltz and Hedley Bull have been criticised not only for being mistaken descriptively but also for being conservative politically. Not without reason insofar as Waltz did not hesitate to write about the 'virtues of anarchy' (Waltz 1979: 111–4) while Bull thought that the interstate system ought to be retained in the interest of international order (Bull 1977).

This debate between liberal internationalism and state-centric conservatism belongs to the past. Liberal internationalism may be alive and well, but state-centric opposition now comes from a new direction. Globalisation, it is argued in a vast literature, has taken power out of the hands of national governments, and this is an unfortunate development and constitutes, among other things, a threat to democracy and welfare. In the EU, it is further argued, authority has been transferred to supranational institutions that cannot be submitted to effective democratic control because democracy can only work at the national level. The contemporary view of the virtues of nationality and

the nation-state may be called 'neo-nationalist' to make it clear that it is a matter of something other than the state-centrism of a Kenneth Waltz or a Hedley Bull, not to mention nineteenth-century style conservative rhetoric and twentieth-century style aggressive expansionism.

It should be emphasised that to label a view 'nationalist' is not to insinuate that it is reactionary, dangerous or immoral. Nationalism has historically been associated not only with authoritarianism and expansionism but also with liberalism and democracy; it is handbook knowledge that national self-determination was a liberal principle in nineteenth-century continental Europe (e.g., Roberts & Edwards 1991: 74; Leach 1991: 57; see further Østerud 1994). The views here called 'neo-nationalist' have little in common with those of an Adolf Hitler or a Slobodan Milosevic.[7]

There is no unified body of neo-nationalist texts, and nothing approaching a neo-nationalist programme. Even the term 'neo-nationalism' is uncommon; I have seen it used only once or twice. What follows is an attempt to summarise the gist of a variety of arguments put forward by a variety of authors questioning globalisation or European integration from a variety of viewpoints, or discussing arguments to that effect. The neo-nationalist case, pieced together in this way, is partly psychological, partly cultural and partly political.

The *psychological argument* is that national identity satisfies a psychological need or performs a psychological function. Nationality provides meaning and context; it promotes fraternity across generations; it gives protection against alienation and anonymity; and it is a source of self-respect and pride if not immortality (Tamir 1995: 432–7). National belonging offers a 'social home', a shield against 'existential aloneness' (Weiler 2000: 183–4). Man is characterised by 'tribalism' in the sense of 'our need to create something coherent out of ourselves and our own lives', a need going 'very deep in our psychology', and nationalism is now its dominant form (Glover 1997: 16–19). This has been termed the 'flourishing argument': the belief that human beings, in order to flourish, need to identify with a group beyond their family (Lichtenberg 1997: 160).

The implication is that there is reason to caution against globalisation and integration for the sake of human wellbeing. If the special features of one's nation are increasingly diluted; if relations across its borders are increasingly intense and varied; if decisions about the life of one's national community are increasingly taken abroad; if, in short, the borderline between 'us' and 'them' is disappearing, then this will make one's life and the lives of one's compatriots that much more lonely and pointless. The idea of national community as a source of personal satisfaction and security is rarely put in such strong terms, but it does deserve consideration.

The *cultural argument* is that each nation possesses a unique culture that must be protected not only in its own interest but also in the interest of mankind as a whole. The plurality of cultures is a resource for all human beings. By borrowing from one another 'we make ourselves better without being the same' (Walzer, cited in Tamir 1993: 32). Language is at the core of this argument, since language is traditionally associated with nationality whilst being central to culture. Irreversible extinction threatens a majority of presently existing languages, hence the case for linguistic self-defence (Fletcher 1997).

This is an argument in favour of caution with regard to some forms of transnationalisation in the first instance. It pertains to satellite television and to the Internet but also, for example, to business relations, student exchange and, not least, to the internationalisation of the social sciences that tends to make the English language the sole medium of advanced thinking about society. It has wider indirect relevance, however. Since only a few languages are available for multilateral intergovernmental communication, and since even the EU may have to relinquish the principle that every Member State's language is an official language of the organisation, the cultural argument pertains to international organisation generally and to European institutions in particular.

The *political argument* is in essence that the nation-state is a necessary pre-condition for the democratic welfare state. Several authors argue that supranational democracy cannot work and that the much-discussed democratic deficit of the EU is inherent in supranationality and not a matter of the specific features of European institutions. There must be sufficient community and mutual loyalty in order for democratic institutions to work properly and for rational debate to be meaningful, following this line of thought. This cannot obtain other than at the level of the nation-state: *demos* is a prerequisite of democracy (Dahl 1999; Kielmansegg 1996; Miller 1995a; Østerud 1994; see Zürn 1998: 232–55 for a review of arguments).

What is more, it is argued, solidarity-based politics is impossible except on the basis of common national identity. Regardless of whether partiality toward nationals can be justified on universalist grounds (Tamir 1993) or whether universalist ethics are based on an unrealistic assumption about what people are like (Miller 1995a), the neo-nationalist conclusion is the same: the nation-state needs to be defended because it is a condition not only for democracy but also for solidarity. Specifically, the European welfare state can be maintained only at the national level, since common nationality is a necessary condition for a society in which people take care of each other (Scharpf 1999; Streeck 1996).

The question of the validity of arguments such as these makes for a rich research agenda. It is a matter, first of all, of reconsidering key concepts in

political theory, including the concept of 'democracy'. For example, so-called 'deliberative democracy' (Elster 1998, Eriksen & Fossum 2000) has been set against so-called 'liberal democracy' in the debate about European-level democracy, a debate that is far from concluded. It is also important to examine the validity of means-ends assumptions forming the basis of the neo-nationalist case. Psychological assumptions such as the 'flourishing argument' appear to be lacking in hard evidence (Lichtenberg 1997: 162) and need to be tested. For a political scientist, the conditions for democracy – deliberative as well as liberal – are of particular interest: fundamental theoretical and empirical issues about collective identity and political community, often swept under the carpet in political theory and comparative politics, need to be raised (Zürn 2000 is an example of what is needed).[8] It is a challenge to the social sciences, and political science in particular, to explore if the decreasing significance of the nation-state – which many think is a feature of our times – will have the negative consequences that neo-nationalists expect and, obviously, if those consequences are more important than the positive gains which the demise of the nation-state may also entail.

Conclusion

There is reason to question the continuing significance of the nation-state, especially the European nation-state. This insight does not suffice to justify criticisms of some for their interest in the way in which nation-states operate, nor the rejection of particular ways of explaining state action or concern with the state-centric features of the vocabulary of political science. It is important instead to focus on four issues that do pertain to the question of the significance of the nation-state whilst calling for further research.

One is the significance of nation-state action for outcomes one may want to explain. This is a complex matter, bordering as it does on the methodological minefield of power studies. Little can be taken for granted about the power of states over outcomes other than that broad generalisation should be avoided and that there is variation not only over time and between countries but also between policy areas. Detailed study is needed.

A second issue is about the autonomy of the contemporary nation-state. If 'autonomy' is defined in terms of action possibilities, as suggested in this article, it is obvious that internationalisation has a dual impact: there are both gains and losses. This too calls for detailed empirical study: there is little use for clichés about the rise and demise of the nation-state.

A third issue is about collective identity. It is not clear whether national identities are strong and entrenched enough to set limits to the further inter-

nationalisation of nation-states, or whether they are increasingly undermined by this very process. There is evidence suggesting that there is variation between countries also in this regard. Hence there is reason for the further comparative study of political cultures, to be enriched by affording socialisation agents such as schools and mass media a prominent place.

A fourth issue, prescriptive in essence, implies an empirical research programme of a kind different from the other three. The nation-state – traditionally seen by internationalists as the essence of the problem of peace and security, and traditionally defended by nationalists on grounds regularly dismissed as mythical in the literature – is becoming promoted with new arguments against the background of globalisation and European integration. If we are going to explore the validity of the contemporary case for the nation-state, we need to go into the relation between democracy and welfare, on the one hand, and collective identity, on the other. Again, what is needed is not bold assertion but detailed study.

Notes

1. This article draws in part on a recent textbook intended mainly for advanced undergraduates (Goldmann 2001). The object is to contribute some suggestions made in this text to debate about the proper role of the state in the theory of politics. I am indebted to Hans Agné, Henrik Enroth, Kjell Engelbrekt, Maria Hellman, Ersun Kurtulus, and Ulrika Mörth for their comments on an earlier draft, as well as to participants in a seminar given at the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs and to an anonymous *EJPR* reviewer.
2. 'State' and 'nation-state' are used essentially as synonyms in this article, as is often the case in the debate to which the article is meant to contribute. See Goldmann (2001: 56–8) for a comment on the difficult concept of 'nation-state'.
3. Political science (*Politikwissenschaft*, *science politique*) is commonly defined to be about the state and state-related matters in the first instance. The definition given in the *Concise Oxford Dictionary of Current English* (1990) is 'the study of the State and systems of government'. Definitions given in dictionaries of political science also emphasise state and government, albeit with qualifications (Roberts & Edwards 1991: 104–5, 107; Schmidt 1995: 734–8; Goldmann et al. 1997: 260–1). True, the discipline is always urged from one direction or another to broaden its scope beyond the study of state and government: 'the personal is political', as the saying goes at present (Humm 1989: 204; Jaggar 1983: 101, 143; I am indebted to Maud Eduards for these references). It must be reasonable to take the centrality of the state for the discipline of *Staatswissenschaft* for granted nonetheless.
4. Classical statements include Dahl (1957: 202–3) and Simon (1953: 516). For a detailed analysis of power as causality see Nagel (1975).
5. I am indebted to Hans Agné for pointing this out.
6. This distinction is suggested but not systematically applied by Risse et al. (1999: 154–5). See further Goldmann (2001: 68–70).

7. The term 'neo'-nationalism may be misleading insofar as some of this body of thought may be traced back to liberal thinking in the nineteenth century and was revived rather than invented under the impression of globalisation and European integration.

8. The relationship between internationalisation and democracy is considered in more detail in Goldmann (2001: 141–77). See Karlsson (2001) for a detailed consideration of key issues in the theory of democracy as they relate to the EU.

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