

# TRANSFORMATION OF THE ROLE AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STATE IN GLOBALISATION ERA

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## **Abstract**

The aim of this article is to outline, in a synthetic form, the changes of the role and significance of state institutions in the international arena. According to some researchers the development of globalization processes have to lead to the disappearance of national states. Such statements appear to be too categorical and radical. Nothing indicates that the states are to be vanished in foreseeable future. Modern national state as a product of industrial civilization (industrial and national revolution) comes across the new challenges, characteristic for the postindustrial era. Due to this fact and in the face of progressing globalization the processes, the roles and the operational possibilities of modern states are being transformed.

**Key words:** *nation state, globalization, postindustrial civilization, international relations*

National state has been the main and in principle the only fundamental subject of international reality for almost 400 years. Traditionally perceived as the unity of the three elements: territory, population and highest authorities has constituted the basic organizational form of political life, the most organized social group and the most important subject of international relations [Polak 2000: 35]. Currently, under the influence of broadly defined processes of globalization, one can hear voices questioning the necessity and even legitimacy of such defined institution of state. From about the beginning of seventies – as it is pointed by S. P. Sałajczyk – there is a growing number of researches who claim that here we witness the weakening, obsolescence, decline and even demise of the state as the participant of international relations” [Sałajczyk 1995: 160]. It is frequently pointed that one of the necessities of globalization, in its current form, is deconstruction of the power and autonomy of the state [Pinder 2011]. Being the subject of numerous disintegrating forces the national state finds itself in the centre of changes in modern global order, becoming at the same time – as it seems – one of the primary victims of these changes. Being the product of modern industrial and national revolution it encounters the whole new challenges which are relevant for the post industrial era [Modrzejewski 2009]. The

increase in the intensity of connections, rules of global economy, new forms of threats and growing significance of non-state parts result in the situation where it is more and more difficult for the state, as the territorial-political unit, to fulfill its assigned tasks. Opinions appear that national state cannot cope with some problems because it is too big for them to act effectively while it is too small for the other problems [Kennedy 1994: 152]. The conclusion is that one of the fundamental premises contributing to the limiting of the role and significance of the state in the international system is the decreasing usability of state-national scale. D. de Rougemont seeks for the reasons of failure exactly in this, saying that states are at the same time too small when considered in the global scale and too big when considering their inability of reviving regions and providing their citizens the real recognition in political life, to which they claim monopoly [de Rougemont 1995: 138]. According to some researchers entities which are smaller, like regions and cities (example: Shanghai, Hongkong, Los Angeles) and bigger entities (vide the European Union), which – when using economic jargon – possess “a major competitive advantage” especially in economic dimension and adapt more easily to new conditions. The different geopolitical and geo-economic reality shaping at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries largely transforms the traditional state – centric international system. According to this fact individual researchers create various scenarios concerning the future of states. Let it be mentioned – some scenarios are pretty radical. For example a French political scientist and diplomat Jean – Marie Guehenno points to the fact that in the present century the era of national states is to be superseded by an era of empire, which in a way resembles the times when the Roman Empire superseded the Republic [Anioł 2002: 6]. Another interesting prognosis was proposed by R.L. Heilbroner, according to whom the state is to fall prey to great, transnational corporations (Heilbroner 1988). These vastly skeptical visions of the future appear to be highly exaggerated (at least in the nearby future). From the other hand as it is pointed by A. and H. Toffler: “actual power leaks from nations and pulverizes among non-states, unnational groups and centers of power” [Tofflers 2000]. For it is impossible to miss that modern changes of the world order have created new non-state entities – participants of the international relations (i.e. transnational corporations, government and non-governmental organizations, international movements, churches and religious associations, local societies etc.), which by demonstrating their aspirations for a greater participation in international life begin to compete for “power and influences” with the traditional state organisms. According to some observers this situation is an analogy with the period of Middle Ages, where the world resembled a mosaic of diverse states, cities, counties, duchies, papal or imperial territories, where the particular powers coexisted or overlapped and loyalty was not bound to the principle of “nationality” but was somehow dispersed<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand U. Beck claims that modern global system is a specific and qualitatively new *metagame of world politics*, where old world politics – having well shaped and well known rules – is intertwined with a new one – which modifies the rules – therefore

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<sup>1</sup> In the seventies it was pointed by H. Bull in his book *The Anarchical Society: A study of Order in World Politics*, New York 1977. Contemporarily very interesting works on this topic were created by: J. Potulski, A. Modrzejewski, *New Tribalism in Europe*, "Perspective politice" 2014, vol. VII, no. 2, p. 5 - 12.

creating a specific synthesis of passing classic national era with the rising and only just forming era of cosmopolitan politics [Beck 2005: 20]. In spite of the different and very diverse views concerning the future of national state we can accept that – as it was written by one of the researchers paraphrasing Mark Twain – the message of his early demise appears to be precocious and highly exaggerated [Anioł 2002: 6].

Without the shadow of a doubt modern civilizational processes dramatically change – like in the kaleidoscope – the logics of global order causing changes in organization, functioning and meaning of particular participants of international relations, including the states. R. Kuźniar points that it displays in at least three ways:

- due to the change of the position, role and functioning of the state;
- due to the increase in the importance of non-government participants of international life;
- due to the increase of pluralism of the subjects (actors) participating in international relations [Kuźniar 2004: 156].

In relation to state organisms globalization contributes, in the large extent, to the change of previously stable and seemingly solid relations between their three compounds, it is the population, territory and power as well as external environment. When it comes to the territory states become more sensitive to external events and their borders become attenuated (become perforated) what increases their permeability. It concerns not only the goods and people but above all the information, ideas and cultural patterns. There is a direct connection between diminishing of the protective role of borders and the formation of new, previously unknown channels of communication and interaction such as i.e. the Internet or satellite television. It is accompanied by the increasing freedom of activity for various non-state entities (non-governmental organizations, foundations, transnational corporations, sects etc.), which in numerous cases are only branches, units or sections of some transnational entity. It all leads to the progressive deterritorialization of state organisms, it is the loss of control over the processes within their territories. In consequence the differences between internal and external politics wane, and the margin of the state independence regarding “the disposal” of its own territory is significantly narrowed. Likewise, the power of the state in regard to its population is weakened, whereas sometimes it concerns also the possibility of ensuring effective protection (especially in the situation of so called asymmetrical or hybrid war). It is fostered by the development of international and domestic normative regulations increasing the range of rights and freedom for both citizens and foreigners (which should be generally considered a positive tendency) and the increase of mobility and relative easiness of movement of the population. The specific problem appears mainly when the immigrants – usually originating from different cultures – not displaying the will of assimilation in the new environment (or being deprived of the possibility of “proper” assimilation) close themselves in their enclaves, rejecting the customs and culture, and what is worse sometimes even the existing judicial system (as an example one can give the Muslims in France or the Mexicans in the USA). The influence of the state power on such isolated communities is limited and its legitimization (in the eyes of these communities) is generally nonexistent. Another important issue is the relative ease (due to the development of technology and unsophisticated message of so called mass culture) of influencing the consciousness of the population by external factors. Due to the transfer of ideas or cultural patterns one can – as it seems –

influence to some extent not only the identity of particular individuals but also the whole communities. In the end the processes of globalization directly touch also the state power effecting in “a peculiar incapacitation of state governments” [Kuźniar 2004: 156]. The state control over its potential and instruments of politics is gradually diminishing, resulting in the situation where it is more and more difficult to creatively shape the economic, social and safety policy. “The state enforces and defends its rights stemming from the principle of sovereignty to lesser and lesser extent within its borders and due to the autonomous decisions of the highest state authorities. These decisions are, to a greater and greater extent, only adjustments to external tendencies, regulations, expectations and pressure” [Kuźniar 2000: 14]. The development of technology and broadening social and economic interactions have resulted in the situation where state organisms, or more accurately their authorities, lost the position of monopolist in regard to the control over information flow and economical or scientific-technical development. In the result of the integration processes and the growing number of international legal regulations the state narrows, and even partly loses (as it is in the case of the European Union) its monopoly and autonomy in the range of lawmaking. For example S. Clohen distinguishes 5 ranges of limitation of contemporary state authority which are:

- the loss of monopoly of information;
- inability of protecting its citizens during war;
- the loss of monopoly of lawmaking;
- inability of securing the economic prosperity of the citizens;
- autonomy of local communities [Polak 2001: 167].

However, modern civilizational processes are not limited only to the reduction of the state’s freedom of action. The growing scale of connections and interaction creating “the web of mutual relations” effects in the situation where it is more and more difficult to foresee the long-term consequences of the policies pursued or even a single decision made. It is pointed – maybe in a bit too alarmist manner – by A and H. Tofflers writing that “(...) nowadays mutual relations are so tangled and complex that it is almost impossible, even for the smartest politicians and experts, to understand the primary and secondary consequences of their decisions. In other words – excluding the most direct sense – our decision makers do not know what they are doing” [Toffler 1997: 309].

The entities which are especially exposed to the negative influence of globalization in both economic and political dimension are mainly the democratic states, and being precise the democratic institutions and democracy itself<sup>2</sup>. It refers chiefly to the growing domination of economy over politics what makes the foundations of democracy erode. It happens because: “The power of “economy”, as the matter of fact the power of great capital, is in its essence alien to the nature of democracy” [Kuźniar 2000: 15]. One can even say that “economism”, the economy understood as a political ideology, is the feature of our times<sup>3</sup>. The state, once the main guarantor of order and

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<sup>2</sup> See: E. Polak, *Instytucje demokratyczne i ich słabość wobec wyzwań współczesnej cywilizacji*, „Przegląd Politologiczny” 2001, no. 1 – 2; idem, *Wpływ globalizacji na system demokratyczny*, „Gdańskie Studia Międzynarodowe” 2003, no. 1.

<sup>3</sup> The term of "economism" is using R. Dahrendorf in his essay *Perspektywy rozwoju gospodarczego, społeczeństwo obywatelskie i wolność polityczna*, in *U podłoża globalnych zagrożeń*, ed. by J. Danecki, M. Danecka, Warszawa 2003, p. 34.

stability, is nowadays to an increasing extent opting out of many social-economic spheres leaving their regulations to the law of the market – not always with the benefit for the citizens<sup>4</sup>. Moreover the fate of the state, condition of its economy and welfare of society do not yet depend only on the conscious decisions of politicians but are the resultants of plenty “external” factors. Due to this fact pursuing a constructive policy becomes more and more difficult and also less legible and intelligible for an average citizen. At the same time it is accompanied by corruption scandals, unclear connections between the world of politics and business as well as the alienation of politicians, who frequently seem to lose contact not only with their electorate but also with the whole society. It all contributes to the crisis of trust for the state and democratic institutions best manifesting itself by voting absence and (which is especially dangerous) yearning for the strong-arm government.

“Thus we are witnessing – as it says R. Kuźniar – a peculiar disaggregation of the state but not its decay. The state becomes fragmented and its particular sections become the parts of various international regimes (systems of regulation), both regional and universal: trade, financial, investment, environment protection, social matters, human rights, in the sphere of defense etc.. All of that does not create one cohesive whole but it abides by its own rules, obligations, interdependencies and dependencies, forces of various vectors which “push” the wholeness known as the state in different directions” [Kuźniar 2004: 157]. Simplifying all that, these forces may be divided into two opposite but self-determining and coexisting tendencies, it is globalization (identifying external forces) and inner disintegration (relating to the internal forces – centrifugal).

In view of the foregoing states are somewhat forced to resign to double self limitation in the sense that they have to shift some of their powers both “up” – to the international level (international institutions and organizations) and “down” – to the subnational level (local authority).

The expression of the first aspect is the participation in various integration formations and transferring of some part of its competences to international agreements while the second aspect fulfills itself by decentralization of state power, it is transferring some prerogatives from the decisive center to the lower levels – to local authorities [Polak 2002: 16]. Decentralization is especially important in case of multinational, multiethnic states or the states consisting of regions that possess rich cultural traditions and well developed regional identity. In the era of “fashion of ethnicity” (as a countertendency for progressing cultural unification) it allows to defuse the internal tensions and conflicts “at the lowest cost”.

Globalization also brings certain reevaluations in the range of external politics and the state security. When it comes to external politics it manifests itself through the necessity of changing its methods, tools and strategy. Above all it is the result of:

- extension of the range of external relations of the state;

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<sup>4</sup> R. Dahrendorf writes on this matter that the introduction of pseudo economical motives and categories to the public sphere deprives it of its basic attributes. National health service, public universal education, guaranteed minimum income become – differently called – the victims of economism, which totally loses control over itself. It comes as no surprise that public transport, environment protection and public safety suffers from it. (R. Dahrendorf, *op. cit.*, p. 42).

- extension of the range of domestic and foreign affairs which are regulated multilaterally;
- incorporation of foreign non-state organizations to politics;
- increasing importance of public diplomacy and social diplomacy [Kuzniar 2000: 24-25].

Transformations occur also in the approach to the question of security and military force. As early as a half of century ago J. Hertz pointed to the fact that under the influence of military technology the state, as a territorial-political entity, loses the possibility of effective fulfilling of its basic task, which is ensuring security and protection to its citizens, and due to this fact it should be substituted by bigger sociopolitical units [Symonides 2004: 130]. In the traditional international order strength and military potential of the state were a main determinant of the position, role and prestige in the international arena. Nowadays military potential is still an important but only just one of many factors determining the significance of the state organism. It is bound to “diversification” of threats and the change of their character – for example the possibility of international conflicts (at least regarding the majority of regions) is decreasing, however the risk of terroristic activity (asymmetric war) or exerting economical pressure is increasing and conventional armed forces are rather powerless when dealing with them<sup>5</sup>. Presently it is possible to distinguish at least six sectors of security, it is: military, political, economical, social, ecological and informational [Paruch 2005]. As the result of the increase of mutual connections the economical dimension of security is growing in significance [Lubbe 1997] although globalization of the threats such as: terrorism, environmental degradation, growth of organized crime, drug addiction or the possibility of spreading sinister infectious diseases that could cause pandemic also significantly determines the security policy and forces the states to coordination of actions and close cooperation. “Simplifying it a bit it might be said that the protection of the state’s own territory ceases to be the main determinant of security policy. Yet it is determined, to a great extent, by the defense of such interests as ensuring economical security, political or social stability, ecologic safety etc. It is worth noticing that realization of that kind of interests requires, to a greater extent than the defense of territorial integrity, active and diversified actions outside its territory” [Anioł 2002: 19]. In this matter it is indicated that over the last several decades the importance of so called “soft” factors determining the state’s power is increasing. They result from its economical or cultural potential, financial capacities or technological development [Barber 2000]. In this way – as it was written by J. Nye – so called “hard power”, referring to military and economical strength, is being reinforced by so called “soft power”, it is the ability to influence other states by attractiveness of one’s culture and ideology [Nye 1990]. As it stems from the preceding deliberations the globalization processes affect the state in various spheres and dimensions, starting with the cultural field to the military ground. The causes of this situation can be found primarily in the rapid growth of technology, which penetrates all the areas of human activity, and (what is

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<sup>5</sup> As it is written by one of the authors the functions of punitive expeditions and gunboat shelling are being assumed by programs of economical aid, transfer of weapons, CIA-type operations and developed propaganda. (I. Popiuk – Rysińska, *Suwerenność w rozwoju stosunków międzynarodowych*, Warszawa 1993, p. 217).

connected with the technological revolution) in the triumph of global character of contemporary economy.

Despite the disintegrating forces affecting the state organisms which are depicted above, and which are connected to the advance of globalization, states are still the dominant actors in the international arena. "Although the power of states is relatively decreasing – notices W. Anioł – in absolutistic categories it remains most severe, also in the field of control and regulation of globalization processes" [Anioł 2002: 10]. Several factors contribute to this situation. First of all it is still for the states to make the most important decisions, the states are parts of the most significant international treaties or agreements. The states constitute major international organizations and are no subjects to any supreme authority (world government). Secondly, states play important roles of mediators and strategic agents between domestic and international spheres. In the third place, as the elementary source of social order and monopolistic disposer of coercive measures, the state is still the most efficient guarantor of stability and security. Fourthly, it is constantly the best environment for the development of democratic processes and legitimization of authority. In the fifth place, it cares (but with growing difficulties) for the quality of such public goods like property right, rule of law, universal education etc. Sixthly, it still appears to be necessary in defusing various tensions and conflicts between capital and labour. Seventhly – last but not least – it is also one of the most important foundations of the sense of collective identity [Anioł 2002 :9]. Contemporary world has not yet surrendered to the processes of deterritorialization and national states are still the very basic subjects in the frame of global governance system, however obvious it is that the global regulative organs such as International Monetary Fund, World Bank, United Nations or the European Union limit the classically understood sovereignty of the state [Holton 2011]. It is difficult to hide – as the prior deliberations depict – that globalization is drastically changing the structure of world order causing reevaluations in the possibilities of operation and the functions of state organisms (as an example Z. Baumann – in relation to the world of global finances – attributes to them the role of only "a bit more elaborate police station" [Baumann 2000: 141]. One has to realize that national states are no longer the only actors in the international environment. The current political arena is a kind of unstructured complexity in which a lot of actors play key roles in policy making [Lakić 2011: 6]. Among the most important changes in the shaping of the majority of state policies one can nowadays observe – as it is written by T. Łoś – Nowak – the evolution "from the exposed function of ensuring internal security, reduced to its military dimension, towards the economical and civilizational tasks" measured mainly by the level of development and society's welfare [Łoś – Nowak 1999: 125]. Once the state might have secured its important role in the international system and a relatively high standard of living for its citizens with the concurrent preserving of the field of autonomy. Nowadays it is impossible. Globalization processes, in some measure enforcing on the state organisms the necessity of joining the structure of the shaping global order (together with all the negative consequences), at the same time cause the limitations of their independence. Obviously the states may not yield under this pressure and close to the widely understood globalization but it will be tantamount to their marginalization and political, social, economical and cultural degradation.

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