

EDITORIAL

POLITICS, SOVEREIGNTY AND GLOBALISATION

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This editorial deals with the impact an increased level of globalisation may have upon state sovereignty and politics. In the era of globalisation the political leaders of a Nation State could make choices which might affect people they are not accountable to and the converse is also true: a national government can be called before some international organisation because of situations originating within the national jurisdiction. Therefore issues of justice no longer arise solely within the context of the relationship between a state and its nationals. The author focuses his attention upon his country, Italy. He observes that Italian politics is based upon the concept of the Nation State. Only the technological and economic consequences of globalisation are noticed, without grasping its fundamental political essence. Yet the Pinochet saga highlights the crisis of the model of national sovereignty and our new responsibilities. Thus, the European Union is a political reality which is not simply given by the sum of the wills of its individual member states. It is argued that flexibility and ductility in international relations can coexist with national sovereignty, provided that this be supported by active political subjects, parties, movements, and currents of thought. Italy is deprived of such strong references rooted in its national history. This is why, in the age of globalisation, Italy as a nation runs the risk of evaporating. The strength of Europe lies in its strong political identities, its heritage of experiences and capacities, values and memories, and also of myths and symbols.

Do we still need the concept of “sovereignty”? The language of Italian politics – and of Political Sciences – as well as its practice seems to be moving within the boundaries of the concept of sovereignty. A perfect coincidence and symmetry between decision takers and recipients is still taken for granted and national and international politics are exclusively carried out bearing in mind the paradigm of the Nation-State. The universe in which the political class takes its decisions is extremely limited when compared to the universe of the Country-system. This might eventually result in a perception of politics as totally divorced from society, to the point

where reforms are no longer seen as necessary albeit impossible to be carried out, but simply as useless. The country will have found its own way forward, maybe guided by technocrats or else relying on a kind of social Darwinism.

Let us ask ourselves what a policy based upon the concept of the "Nation-State" is. Policy-making with the concept of national sovereignty taken for granted means to assume that the fate of the Nation-State is totally in the hands of those political subjects who are born within the legal and political horizon traced by the Nation-State itself. Therefore the only recognised "Outside Subjects" are other "Nation-States". All political and institutional changes are seen as variations within the "Nation-State", which remains the framework for all political projects: in short, a kind of "monad". No attention is given to the changes taking place in international law, in the economy or in the technology of globalisation. Or, to put it better, only the technological and economic consequences of globalisation are noticed, without grasping its fundamental political essence.

In Italy, for example, the Pinochet story caused great sensation in the public opinion. Nevertheless, the political debate, which followed those events, was predominantly ideological. On the contrary, that story should have made us think about the changes in international law, the crisis of the model of national sovereignty, and our new responsibilities. Another example: how can our Constitution still contain a provision forbidding the entry into Italy of the male members of the former Italian royal family, the Savoia, given that they already live in France; on the territory of a state which falls, as Italy does, within the jurisdiction of the European Union, which prevails over the national jurisdictions of individual member States. Anyone wishing to do so may appeal to Sections 2 and 10 of the Italian Constitution, as well as to the Schengen Treaty, in order to declare that provision inapplicable. This is just a minor example.

Sometimes there are some conditioned responses, which give rise to funny situations. In the debate on TV electoral commercials, it has been suggested to introduce a rule envisaging a limitation to campaigning on the Internet, as if it were just a different form of television broadcasting, instead of being a totally independent form of communication, which ignores what we define as the "Nation State". The consequences of globalisation are subject to a "domestic-oriented" interpretation; as if the world was all contained within the Italian Nation-State. But this world, where policy-making

reigned and everything was in the hands of the sovereign state, no longer exists; as does the entire public life developed within the boundaries of the sovereignty paradigm. Politicians still relying on such assumptions would be like the blind man of Bruegel's painting, who drags all his fellows with him down in the abyss, feigning himself capable of seeing what he could not see.

As a further example, we could consider the malfunctioning of the judicial system. The Italian political system has not yet "realised" that justice is no longer confined within the relationship between the Italian State and its nationals. Many years ago the civil liability of Magistrates was introduced in Italy by referendum. Soon afterwards the Parliament passed a law, which, *de facto*, nullified the results of the referendum. Policy makers preferred not to clash with a judiciary, which, at that time as it is today, was likely to argue with the Legislative and the Executive whenever its corporate interests were at stake. That position, which was shared by the magistrates and politicians alike, was based on the assumption that the repercussions of their decisions and the consequences thereof were to be perceived only within the national state. Italy has been proved guilty hundreds of times by the European Court of Human Rights for having violated the citizens' rights because of the extreme length of trials, for the unscrupulous use of preventive detention, or for the imbalance between prosecution and defence prerogatives. In most cases Italy has opted not to stand trial, preferring instead to comply with the Court's requests. In short, citizens got their compensation. After a while, the Italian *Corte di Cassazione* came out asking for those repayments to be justified. It is most likely that the magistrates who were responsible for the violations of the citizens' rights will ultimately be the ones who are called to pay back to the Italian State the amounts due. What lesson can we draw from this example? International law, accompanied by a partial giving up of sovereignty due to our European membership, is, *de facto*, reintroducing the provision on civil liability, which Italian policy-makers had repealed for the sake of a "pragmatic" attitude vis-à-vis the Judiciary. This is a typical example of asymmetry and inconsistency between decision takers and recipients. We know that, in the era of globalisation, the political leaders of a Nation-State could make choices which might affect people they are not accountable to: i.e. the citizens of a neighbouring state (for example by adopting lighter measures in the field of drug addiction, or setting up new nuclear plants...) The

contrary is also true: a national government can be called before some international organisation because of situations originating within the national jurisdiction.

Generally speaking, today national governments are sometimes called to tackle situations, which cannot be ascribed to the traditional domain of their competence or to any "predictable" occurrences. The countries, which fail to keep the pace with, these changes risk losing their political autonomy. Indeed, large economic groups see policy-making as a hinder to human progress. In December 1999 the World Trade Organisation Summit took place in Seattle. The parties failed to reach the agreements they were seeking, and the summit had an unsuccessful outcome; nevertheless a clear-cut picture of today's situation emerged from that event. In the first place, Europe is trying to impose its "political management of globalisation", although a unanimous consensus is hardly reached on any of the issues on the table. The United Kingdom, for instance, has opted for a pro-American stance; when it declares itself favourable to an overall decrease of the safety and quality standards on the European market, so as to allow Asian goods to circulate in Europe. However, the European Union is a political reality which is not simply given by the sum of the wills of its individual member states. Hence the government of London itself acts along the lines of the European policy, even though with some reservations. The European policy is oriented to defend its independence within the process of globalisation. The point is not just to prevent "hormonised" beef and the like from being sold in Europe. France has insisted, for instance, that "culture" be deleted from the list of commodities, so as to curb the circulation of American audio-video products in Europe. Hegemony, in that case, would be inevitable, and a fully applied market law would lead to the dominance of American writers, directors, movie-makers and, eventually, to the lapsing into oblivion of the French language. Germany, on its side, emphasises the importance of social issues, demanding that the process of liberalisation take place in full respect of trade union freedom, the safeguard of the rights of children and women, and, generally speaking, of the weaker strata of society.

The U.S. Administration, on the contrary, is strongly urging for the fall of all European barriers to the process of globalisation. In this endeavour, the U.S. can rely on many like-minded Asian countries, where safety standards and the rights of the "weak people"

are totally neglected, thus keeping the cost of labour at the lowest levels imaginable, and making the goods manufactured extremely competitive. However this matter is controversial also in the U.S. In the American society there is a growing concern about the consequences of the process of globalisation on a system of civil rights, built during two centuries of democracy, and on the every-day life of citizens. So far, civil rights and consumer protection movements have played on their power to orient the vote of citizens. What if the elected representatives will no longer be able, for example, to prevent a multinational company, or simply a company without any national ties, from ignoring human rights, safety at work or the quality of commodities? There is a widespread concern regarding the harmful consequences on the environment and on health of a market, which has no relations with national governments. Bill Clinton was apparently well aware of these fears and risks when he tried, and partly succeeded, to start a dialogue with protesters in Seattle. Furthermore, a renewed growth of trade union activity is being recorded in the U.S. The American lay-man is trying to find the appropriate tools to counter the negative effects globalisation is likely to have on his life. The economic system is increasingly eluding the control of national governments and parliamentary assemblies.

Globalisation is not only evident at the international, but also at the local level. It is not just the development of the interaction between different political, social and economic realities above and beyond the Nation-State; it is also a growing interaction and interdependence between society, technology, government, policy, economy and culture. Globalisation, in other words, means the affirmation of a new model, in all social relations, - a model which ignores the concepts of "centre" and "periphery", the model of the "network". Does this mean that policy is doomed to lose its incisiveness on public life? No, but only if policy will be able to go beyond the horizon of the Nation-State. The problem is to understand how this new policy should be shaped.

Insofar as politics operates within the framework of the Nation-State, it will very likely prove unable to regulate ongoing social and economic changes. Politics might continue to "formally" govern the change, but society, technology and economy operate beyond those formal limits, and, quite often, are oblivious of politics. If politics risks vanishing together with the Nation-State, it will be very important to reconsider the relation between the State "and"

the Nation. The British experience teaches that a Nation can preserve its sovereignty even when the scope of the State is extremely narrow. Flexibility and ductility in international relations can co-exist with the strength of a nation, provided that such strength (a fundamental precondition to ensure the primacy of politics) be represented and supported by something else. For the U.K. this strength is represented by a civic and patriotic tradition, which often plays the role of a "quasi-religion". For Europe, namely continental Europe, the strength of a nation depends on the political subjects, parties, movements, and currents of thoughts, which gave birth to national identities and political systems.

The "Italian case" is an exemplary one. People abroad wonder how Italy is not capable of making the reforms strongly sought for her by public opinion. The answer is that reforms can only be made when solutions to still unresolved political questions are found. These questions are tightly intertwined with the problems of globalisation. Italy is among the countries which could suffer the most from the risks of globalisation, because in Italy there has been a form of statism without a State. After the State-Party of the Fascist period, there were the State-parties of the Republic. As a matter of fact, the party system has been destroyed, and the country is deprived of strong references well rooted in its national history. This is why, in the age of globalisation, Italy, as a nation, runs the risk of evaporating. How will Italy meet the need to start political globalisation immediately after economic globalisation? What will its contribution be like? On which identity will Italy build her role? There is but one choice: to adjust herself, both at the political and cultural level to Europe. While in Italy demagoguery and justicialism were dismantling the party system, in Europe the great ideologies of social-democracy and liberal populism were growing, just like the traditionalist Right and the Left of social classes. The strength of Europe lies in its great political identities, in its heritage of experiences and capacities, and also of values, memories and, why not, of myths and symbols.

The only way to free our policy-making from the old paradigms of sovereignty and the Nation-State and to enable it to take up the challenges of globalisation is by building our political identities again, in the wake of the European experience. Otherwise, we will witness the death of politics and the decline of the nation.