The resilience of the Nation State to globalization

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T HE STUDIES in the seminar that inspired the dossier "Nation/Nationalism" of this issue of Estudos Avançados are all dedicated to the analysis of European experiences, with the exception of the article about Israel. Even that article was written by a European, as were the others.

The lack of variation in the nationality of the authors is a limitation given the universal scope of the theme chosen – the nation and nationalism – without adjectives. There are no works from other perspectives, from Asia, Africa, North or South America.

To remedy this problem was one of the motives that led the journal, upon adopting the theme, to expand the approach. This is fully justified, given that, in terms of nation and or nationalism, Europe is an exception to the general rule because of its unique nature.

The Europeans invented the Nation-State and modern nationalism, together with the founders of American independence. In Europe, however, the creation became a monster in the 20th century, turning itself against the creators and provoking critical rejection unparalleled in other regions or continents. The European Union currently represents the only successful example (although still incomplete) – in an effort that has lasted more than half a century - to build a state structure that transcends the Nation-State. The trend is due precisely to the traumatic experience of the Europeans with the monstrous nationalism of the two world wars and to the desire to reverse this self-destructive process.

It is for this reason that it is advisable to broaden the focus of the analysis, to avoid a partial and incomplete approach. I will attempt to make a contribution in this direction, with two reservations. The first is that I will not detain myself on what professor Paulo Butti de Lima calls, in the "Foreword", national "feelings".

The second refers to the nomenclature, which is not always concerned, in the studies in the dossier, in precisely distinguishing the concept of nation as it relates to the "National State". Frequently, when nation is spoken of, the reference is more to Nation-State strictly speaking, as was clear in the "Foreword", which mentions the "national historic processes of affirmation in the modern and contemporary world". This affirmation is made through the organization of nations into National States, especially since the French Revolution.

In this line, the approach which I intend to use is that from international relations theory, which emphasizes the role of the Nation State as the principal

actor in the international system formed by similar units. The importance of this focus does not imply ignoring certain limitations, such as those raised by Giddens (1996, p.65-7).

The weakening of the National State by globalization has been widely declared in the literature. A good sample of this is found in Habermas (2001). Without denying the value of these arguments, I will seek to show that the National State has been capable of surprising resilience.

Therefore, to complement the narratives employed in the seminar, an empiric survey of the real experience of the Nation State in the past decades perhaps would be useful. The lens used for the examination will open on a much broader field than the European or Occidental plane, attempting to embrace a view as universal as possible of the trends in this issue, in a type of global political geography of the modern National State.

The "Balkanization" of the planet

At the time in which I write (February 2008), one of the new crises of the international agenda is Kosovo's proclamation of its right to form a State independent from Serbia, which in fact it already is. Two years earlier it was Montenegro's turn. In the brief span of just over 10 years, the Yugoslavian peninsula gave rise to seven States where there had been just the single Yugoslavian Federation. A bit earlier, the disintegration of the Soviet Union had produced 15 States from only one.

"Balkanization", after becoming known as a worldwide phenomenon, has thus returned to the Balkans of its origin. Some specialists in international relations sought this old expression to describe the true proliferation of States, which began in the 20th century and has continued until today. A century earlier, there had been a notable contraction in the number of sovereign units for two reasons: on one hand, the unifications of Germany and Italy; and on the other, the expansion of European imperialism in Africa and Asia, eliminating countless previously autonomous entities. The exception to the reduction of States had been the independence of Latin America, in particular the fragmentation of Spanish America.

Going back a bit farther, the Europe of the 17th and 18th centuries had nearly 500 units corresponding to the genre that preceded the National State, and which had a territorial nature, as consecrated by the Peace of Westphalia (1648). After the French Revolution and Napoleonic wars, approximately 30 European states were left in the Congress of Vienna, of which few were genuine National States such as France or England. Some had the nature of multinational States linked by common dynastic ties.

These increasingly anachronous empires – The Turkish-Ottoman, the Czarist, the Austro-Hungarian – would disappear with the First World War, giving birth to numerous States in Central, Eastern, Balkan Europe and in the Middle East that were relatively more homogeneous from the point of view of

their national constitutions. Since then, the trend towards the proliferation of States, through the great wave of decolonization in Asia, the Caribbean and Africa, has not ceased to rise. In Africa alone, the number of independent States rose from just two or three (Egypt, the South African Union and Ethiopia before the Italian occupation) to more than 50.

It would be risky to affirm that this proliferation is in the process of stabilizing or turning back. Russia's difficulties with Chechnya and the Caucasus in general (despite the fragmentation of the USSR, the Russian Federation still encompasses peoples of nearly 100 different languages and has elements of the multicultural empires of the past), the separatist movements in Georgia and Azerbaijan and the Basque problem indicate that the desire to create new States is still attractive.

The persistence of the form of the National State

It is also important to note how the multiplication of the Nation-State is a trend that tends to last, once established. Even the failed states, characterized by a true "regression of the State" agonize but do not disappear. The most extreme imaginable situation of State failure, that of Somalia, which has been without a central government for more than a decade and is divided by feudal lords, maintains the appearance, if not the reality, of a National State.

The preference for the more or less homogenous State form, in terms of national constitution, invariably condemned to failure all the attempts to join various small and weak entities and organize them in federations, in order to better prepare them for independence. The West Indies Federation in the Antilles, the Malaysian Federation of Singapore and Malaysia and the various attempts made by English and French colonizers in West, Central and East Africa were all fleeting.

In the same way, the jurisdiction of the great British Empire in India became fragmented first into India, Burma and Pakistan, and then the latter gave origin to Bangladesh after a brief and bloody war. In the 1990's, Eritrea separated from Ethiopia, to which it had been tied by the inheritance of the colonial conquest.

The rare examples of fusion – Germany and Vietnam – have occurred only when the people of a single ethnicity and language had been divided for political-ideological reasons linked to the Cold War.

A rarer example is that of Tanzania, which was born from the union of Tanganyika, of mixed British-German colonization, with Zanzibar. But the truth is that everything is exceptional in Tanzania, beginning with the privilege of having as its founding father the noble figure of Julius Nyerere, who insisted on being called "Mwalimu", the title given to an elementary school teacher. In addition to having formed one of the few African countries that did not fall into the scourge of tribalism, Nyerere was the only leader who took the initiative to limit his own mandate, removing himself from power while still in full glory.

Julius Kambarage Nyerere (1922-1999).

Whenever there is domination of one nation by another, the difficulty of returning to the past unity is nearly insurmountable. The union of Sweden and Norway dissolved in 1905. Sweden is now part of the European Union, but Norway did not return to indirectly join Sweden, even with the buffering shield of the European Union. It is suggestive that Norway is, along with Switzerland, the only European country whose population has no interest in adhering to Brussels.

Switzerland's attitude is related to its pioneering role in the construction of a multicultural, multi-linguistic State, at first under the form of a confederation, as its name indicates, and then, evolving into a federation. Many Europeans dream that the European Union will evolve similarly to the Helvetic Confederation, if on a larger scale. It is understandable that, the very success of their own union, makes the Swiss hesitate to submit their model, based on a patriotism born from the quality of their institutions, to the tension resulting from adhesion to a European system that was not able to free itself from the blemish of having a "Democratic deficit".

The variety and plasticity of the National State

The proliferation of States has now produced close to 200 state units of greater or lesser autonomy, of which 192 are part of the United Nations (UN), making it the first international organization of nearly planetary scope. Only important political factors impede this scope from becoming total, by

impeding the entrance of States such as Taiwan, which have all the other needed requirements.

To indicate how the creation of the National States accelerated, it is useful to remember that of the two hundred centers capable of relatively autonomous decisions, no fewer than 150 originated in the 20th century. In order to qualify the number of States by their true population size, it is worth noting that three quarters of the world population is concentrated in only 25 States, each one with a population of 50 million inhabitants or more.

This qualification points to another factor, that of the fantastic diversity of sizes, resources, power and characteristics of the National States. At one extreme is found those denominated by George Kennan (1993, p.143-6) as "monster countries". There are two conditions necessary to qualify as a monster: a continental territory combined with a huge population, of some two hundred million people.

It is not enough to have a large territory and a small population - as do Australia or Canada - or a sizeable population and a small territory - such as Japan. The example of Japan, a country with a large population, but one that is extraordinarily homogenous, highlights another factor important to Kennan: heterogeneity. This would result from the combination of many peoples within an immense space in which they are spread out. Heterogeneity is taken in a literal sense: "composed of elements or parts of a different nature".

The criteria point to the following members of the select club: the United States, China, India the former USSR and Brazil. All are heterogeneous, either because of the evident ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity (such as in India and Russia and China to a lesser degree) or because of the sharp regional contrasts.

The term select is not used as a value judgment. For Kennan, size is seen more as a defect than a quality. Returning to Rousseau and to the traditional Swiss argument that democracy only functions within small communities where everyone knows each other, he questions the effect of size on the quality of democracy. Note the pessimism of this observation: there is a real question as to whether "bigness" in a body politic is not an evil in itself, quite aside from the policies pursued in its name" (ibid, p.143).

In opposition to the monsters are found the micro-States, the miniature countries that survive by issuing postage stamps, by renting their name on the internet (an advantage that arose with globalization) or from the facilities that they offer as tax havens. Between the two poles stretches an extensive intermediary range of States of a nearly countless variety of sizes – miniscule, small and medium. There is also a notable variety of geographic situations – small islands, landlocked enclaves – Medieval principates, city-States and formerly great powers reduced to average countries.

The only thing that such diverse entities have in common is the option for the modality of the National State born at the end of the 18th century.

The variety of situations served by the National State says much in favor of the plasticity and usefulness of this type of organization. The National State adapted both to the needs of mastodons, such as China and Russia, as well as to the insignificant islands of the Pacific, such as Vanuatu and Tuvalu. Even the Catholic Church never let go of the guarantee of relative autonomy that the State of the Vatican confers to it. The virtual unanimity of choice for this kind of organization recommends caution in prophecies that the National State is suffering a terminal crisis and will be widely discarded for something better.

The challenges of the National State in the 21st century

To recognize the enviable historic success of the invention of the National State does not mean ignoring that it is subject to tensions and challenges that, at least in Europe, can eventually lead to its substitution by a post-national configuration. It is risky to generalize about these tensions, because only some of them are, in fact, unprecedented, and related to the advance of globalization. Even these, although they are felt throughout the world, do not affect all States with equal intensity.

Other tensions, such as those created by the global actions - to a certain point out of the control of the States, of non-State actors such as non-governmental organizations, religions, parties, political movements, terrorists and international organized crime networks - are not exactly new, although they have multiplied and taken on a scope unknown in the past.

There are other important factors found in specific circumstances of space and time. In relation to European unification, these include motives such as the desire to avoid the repetition of world wars, to make a common front against Soviet pressure during the Cold War, to create a critical mass capable of maintaining for Europe a status comparable to that of the United States, or of the rising Asian giants etc.

It is important not to lose sight of the fact that while in the European context, reasons of this type may lead to a possible overcoming of the Nation State, in other continents differences of historic time did not allow them to even reach the coveted minimum level of a functional Nation State yet. Thus, the thesis of the decline of the Nation State does not have the same attractiveness for those who are still trying to integrate the indigenous Bolivian population in a national state structure, overcome tribal divisions by means of national governments in Africa, or obtain recognition as a state for Palestine.

The recent literature tends to give greater importance to the challenges that rise from globalization for certain traditional functions of the Nation State. The power of state government is eroded not so much by means of the unprecedented intensification of cross-border economic and commercial transactions, which remain under government supervision. The phenomenon occurs, above all, from the transborder contacts or transactions that take place above or below borders, as if borders had become irrelevant.

This is what is taking place with the stunning explosion of communications and contact over the Internet and by electronic wave lengths, leading to the uniformization of cultural and political standards. Or by means of electronic commerce, for example in the buying and selling of non-tangible goods, ordered and downloaded by computer, paid for in tax havens that completely escape the vigilance of national authorities. This is not to mention the explosive increase, with no ties to the real economy, of financial and currency operations over the Internet.

To these modalities of transactions are added the multiform activity of transnational companies operating in dozens of countries, capable of moving in search of lower operating costs, doted with resources greater than those of most national economies. The sum of these factors will lead, throughout the world, to the exacerbation of ruthless competition, with dangers for the conquests of and guarantees provided by the Welfare State.

Habermas (2001, p.84) is one of the authors who calls attention to the fact that "since the late 1970's [...] this form of institutionalization, based on the national state, is found under increasing pressure from globalization". According to Habermas, the expression "globalization" evokes "in counterpoint to the territorial bond of the national state, the image of rivers overflowing that undermine border controls and which can lead to the destruction of the national structure" (ibid, p.85-6).

He systematically reviews how globalization affects: "a) legal security and the effectiveness of the administrative state; b) the sovereignty of the territorial state; c)collective identity; and d) the democratic legitimacy of the national state " (ibidem, p.87-102).

Globalized competition makes it increasingly impossible to defend the European social and democratic state exclusively in the realm of the Nation State. Given this difficulty, Habermas' response favors the construction of a Europe with a post-national configuration, founded on a "constitutional patriotism" to a Charter approved on the basis of broad legitimacy.

He approvingly cites Carl Offe: "A strengthening of European institutions in terms of their capacity to govern cannot be considered without the strong increase of their democratic base of legitimacy" (apud Habermas, 2001, p.125). While in the "Introduction", he refines this argument by declaring:

> I see a normatively satisfactory alternative [...] only in the federalist improvement of a European Union capable of acting in terms of social and economic policy, which could then turn its eye to the future of a (global) cosmopolitan order, which is sensitive to differences and socially balanced. (ibid, p.2)

This is not the place to discuss the obstacles that have been found, in practice, both to the approval of a European constitution by a broad legitimizing base, as well as to the determination and effectiveness of the European Union to avoid the dismantling of the social state. Nevertheless, Habermas' position is that

which best synthesizes the ideal of a post-national configuration as the sole hope for deterring the impetus of dehumanizing globalization.

The vicissitudes of globalization

A word of caution is in order. Warnings about the dangers of globalization were in vogue at a time in which it appeared as a devastating wave that would wash away everything. In the 1990's, particularly in the first half of the decade, this was the predominant impression. The impacts of the fall of the Berlin Wall, the end of real socialism and the disintegration of the Soviet Union were still fresh. The general convergence towards a market economy and representative democracy inspired premature announcements such as that of the "end of History".

The highest tide was in the mid 1990's when the World Trade Organization (WTO) was founded in 1994, a bit before the beginning of the monetary and financial crises in Mexico-Argentina (1994-1995), Asia (1997) and Russia and Brazil (1998). Since then, various factors have contributed to alter that perception: the contagiousness of the crises, the breaking of the "electronic- dot.com bubble" (2000-2001), the antiglobalization movement and the impasse in the three important negotiations that would complete the legal-institutional framework of a globalized economy.

These three processes sought to complete the circle of planetary economic unification in three fundamental economic sectors: finance (through the full opening of the capital account of the balance of payments by the IMF); investments (through the frustrated Multilateral Investment Accord negotiations in the OECD); and commerce (through the abolition of all the remaining restrictions to commerce by the WTO).

Of these three, the first two were removed from the agenda (except for that of investments in bilateral and regional accords) and the latter was taken up again by the WTO, under the diluted form of the Doha Round.

The most serious blow, however, came from an unexpected direction, from the periphery of the system - Afghanistan. The terrorist attack of Sept. 11, 2001 introduced a new phase in international relations, bringing back obsessive concerns with security. The immediate consequence was the affirmation of the State over the market, the dominance of the political and military realms over the economic and the logic of reinforcement and not abolition of border controls.

A revealing symptom of the change is that, in contrast with former President Clinton, President George W. Bush practically banned the word globalization from his discourse. This change in discourse is natural, because a government of a sharply nationalist and unilateral bent such as his has weak affinity with the internationalism of globalization. The current problems – interminable wars in Iraq and Afghanistan and the economic crisis of disturbing proportions at the heart of the economic center of the

globalized world – impede the return of conditions propitious to a new peak of globalization.

Ambiguities of globalization

Globalization was at one time understood as the Anglo-Saxon variety disseminated by the Clinton and Blair governments, which were the principal sources of pressure to liberalize norms and regimes in global negotiations or within the European Union.

Today, a variation of globalization with a Chinese, Indian, Asian, Arab or Brazilian accent is affirmed with increasing clarity. The first impact of this transformation in the developed countries appears in their appetite for commercial opening, which is weakened by the dominant fears in world commerce. Simply speaking these include: fear of Chinese industry, fear of the off-shore services of India and fear of Brazilian agriculture.

In addition to competitive products, the emerging countries also export investments, whether directly by the action of their internationalized companies or by the sovereign funds made possible by the accumulation of reserves. Reactions to this have been expressed in sensitive sectors, such as investors from Dubai who were forced to give up attempts to purchase controlling interests in a U.S. port company and a Chinese State oil company that had to step back from the purchase of a U.S. refinery.

More recently, concern is beginning to be shown for support provided by sovereign funds from China, Singapore and Arab countries to American investment banks weakened by losses in the mortgage market, through the purchase of part of the capital of these firms. Incipient, the concern could grow if the operations are repeated or come to involve a transfer of control.

It is possible that, as in Great Britain some time ago, the reaction is nothing more than an initial shock, and there will be no greater developments in the future. But only time will tell how the new trend will affect the pressure for the liberalization of norms.

In any case, the current changes serve to qualify the categorical terms with which it was affirmed that the dismantling of state controls was an irresistible demand linked to the nature of globalization. It is now seen that, at least in part, this apparent determinism is nothing more than an ideological pretense for the action of governments of powerful Nation States such as the United States and England.

This said, it cannot be denied that the reduction of controls is partially the result of the profound economic or technological forces that are more or less independent of the will of governments. This is the case of the propulsive trends of globalization: the internationalization of the production process, its fragmentation by locations geographically distant from one another due to economies of scale, the transnationalization of companies that operate the process and create the distribution networks and advances in electronics, telecommunications and transport that made it possible.

These forces continue active and operating. What has changed was the political, ideological context of security within which they move. In sum, it is not an exaggeration to maintain that globalization did not suffer a setback, but lost for now what the Americans call momentum, that is, the impetus and the accelerated rhythm exhibited 12 or 15 years ago.

Other ambiguities

To understand the situation faced by the National State, it is appropriate to consider two observations: 1. Not everything that weakens the power of the National State should be ascribed to the effect of globalization, other forces are in action in the domain of politics and security; 2. The effects of these forces are ambivalent and do not necessarily weaken the capacities and possibilities of the Nation-State.

In other words, as Giddens (1996, p.67) said: "the loss of autonomy on the part of some States or groups of States has often gone along with an increase in that of others, as a result of alliances, wars or political and economic changes of various sorts".

The most important of these changes has been the gradual emergence, since World War II, of a collective security system incarnated in the most universal of all the international organizations of history, the United Nations. Notwithstanding its notorious deficiencies – for example, the Iraqi invasion, without Security Council support, it cannot be denied that the countries without military power are better protected than at any time in the past against aggressions, invasions or annexations. The universal system is considerably reinforced by regional alliances, as is the case of the best known of them, the National Atlantic Organization (NATO).

The combination of new opportunities created by globalization with the added sense of security explains the reappearance on the world scene of City States such as Singapore and Hong Kong, the latter even after it had been returned to China without losing some of its previous characteristics. Certain petroleum States of the Gulf, such as the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, are not very far from this standard: without agriculture and with scanty or desert territory, they increasingly specialize in the creation of sophisticated and efficient advanced centers for providing services or communication nodes, a model of which Singapore and Dubai are well-known examples.

It would be difficult to imagine in our days a repetition of the brazenness with which Napoleon suppressed The Most Serene Republic of Venice, or with which he or the French revolutionary forces eliminated other venerable relics like the Republic of Genoa and Geneva. And, nevertheless, what defends the unarmed units against powerful predators if not the UN system, international law and the self-contention of the powerful?

In the ancient European territorial regime, in which the great powers used to enlarge themselves by means of conquering territory, very rich entities such as Luxembourg (with four hundred thousand inhabitants) or Norway (with four

million inhabitants) would only escape annexation if the avarice of the strong would balance each other and mutually cancel themselves.

The phrase "Territory is power", is attributed to the Baron of Rio Branco. Territory is still perhaps one of the bases of power. It is no longer evident, however, that some of the consequences associated to power and to size, especially the maximization of well-being, of the "happiness" of citizens, sought by the revolutionaries of American independence, or by Saint-Just, derive or depend on territory or on strength. This confirms Kennan`s skepticism towards the monster-countries.

All the classificatory indexes of human development , per capita income, longevity, absence of corruption and criminality, place in the first 10 positions small countries such as Finland, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Switzerland, Luxemburg, New Zealand, Singapore and Iceland. They rank much higher not only than the gigantic United States, but even than the intermediary sized Germany, United Kingdom and France.

Could it be said that globalization is more of a threat than an opportunity for Singapore or Dubai? Or that Norway and Luxembourg, invaded by Hitler, and Finland, attacked by Stalin, were more secure in the relatively recent past, let's say in 1939 or 1940?

What these examples demonstrate is that the security of citizens, their prosperity or well-being, once much better guaranteed by the power of the State, can now be maintained by smaller structures, which are in thesis weaker, as long as international conditions are present that complement and reinforce them, such as those dominant since the end of World War II.

Consider the secession of the Slovacks of Checkoslavakia, in order to adhere separately to the European Union. In the 1920's or 1930's, secession would have been seen as an unacceptable source of weakening and resisted by force. This time, it took place peacefully, given that the security of each of the two peoples depends on NATO and, therefore, in the final instance, on the United States, given also that prosperity was no longer that of the variety promised by the restricted domestic market, but would come through adhesion to the much more seductive European market.

The separation of Slovenia, and later of Montenegro, obeyed the same logic: the certainty that without the weight of the Serbs it would be easier for these two old members of the former Yugoslavia to be admitted to the European Union and NATO. In each of these cases, a bi or multinational State was exchanged for incomparably more attractive structures such as the European Union – in terms of economic potential and political prestige - and NATO for security needs.

Conclusions

Two organizational complexes, which originated from European history and with few parallels in earlier periods or cultural distinct situations, had special meaning in the development of modernity: the Nation State and systematic

capitalist production. After this affirmation, Giddens (1996, p.174) observed: "If , in close conjunction with one another, they have since swept across the world, this is above all because of the power they have generated".

The observation highlights power, the central reality of the international system. Central does not mean to say exclusive. Like any other type of social organization, the international system is characterized by situations of collaboration and conflict, perceptions of coincidence or of conflict of the interests of the actors.

By allowing an incomparable concentration of power, through the strengthening of administrative and fiscal capacity, territorial control and other elements, the Nation State became the modality of organization most apt to promote cooperation and arbitrate conflicts.

From this point of view, Giddens is mistaken to place the Nation State and capitalist production on equal planes, given that the second depends much more on the first, than vice-versa. This is being clearly seen in the currently expanding American economic crisis. Markets and companies, supposedly self-regulating, are imploring to be rescued by central banks and the fiscal action of States.

Under conditions of normality, Habermas' statements about "impotence due to globalization" appear plausible, or his reference to the decreased capacity of control (of the State) in macroeconomic terms. At times such as the present, they do not sound very convincing.

It could be that the further negative development of the crisis make the medicine of the State ineffective and require a long and painful cure. If this occurs, it would be from the specific gravity of the macro-imbalances that have been accumulating for some time in the U.S. economy and not because of some debility of the State caused by globalization.

The ideological argument that the economic sphere is autonomous from other realms was a belief that spread over the last two or three decades and, at times, it appeared that the economic order even had dominance over the political sphere. It was not perceived that trends such as financial liberalization and the opening of markets to international operators were less the consequence of the nature of things (in this case, of globalization) than of policies tenaciously followed by the U.S. Treasury. In other words, they were political options, positions of financial markets that coincided with the interests of the most influential power in international negotiations; one more proof, in the final analysis, of the power of the Nation State.

This is so true that, a contrario sensu, the two most spectacular success stories of economic growth, China and India, constitute examples of development led by strong Nation States highly resistant to financial liberalization or the impositions of transnational companies. It was not by chance that it was these two economies that suffered less from the Asian crises of 1997.

The reality of our times is, thus, a world still formed by National States and characterized by power as its central dimension. In a system defined in this

way, the concept that Robert Gilpin (1987) denominated "hegemonic stability" remains valid, in such a way that the description that I sketched of the system, more than 12 years ago, appears to me as still appropriate.

In that text, I said that the difficulty of fitting the current configuration of forces into one of the theoretical prototypes of the past was caused by the form by which equilibrium was established. In the traditional conception, equilibrium is derived from the component countries themselves and their specific weight. The number of principal actors – one two or multiple – is what would determine if the distribution would be uni-, bi- or multipolar. It was supposed that each one of the principal actors was among the most influential actors in each one of the scenarios where power is affirmed: military, economic-financial, political, technological etc.

Today, a variety of actors compose the various domains and they are by no means the same in all the different areas. There are those which stand out in the economic and technological plane, Japan for example, but may not do so on the strategic-military plane. The final balance is produced, therefore, by means of a more complex interplay in which the actors are counterbalanced by competition through different mediums (heightened financial dependence, in certain cases counterbalancing a superiority in strategic arms).

And I concluded: " In this game, the unmatched advantage of the United States is that it is the only actor and the largest of them all that plays a decisive role, on all the boards of power : military strategic, political, economic-financial, technological" (Ricupero, 1995, p.118-9), without forgetting the plane of culture and communications, where symbols, images, ideas are created.

This predominance does not establish an absolute unipolarity, which in ancient times was called universal monarchy - like that of the Roman Empire, which did not recognize equals, only vassals or enemies. At the time when Gilpin was speaking of "hegemonic stability", the United States was seen as a successor of Victorian Great Britain, the power that actively promoted the establishment of a liberal political and economic order, as in the Roosevelt era, by recreating the foundations of international order in the post war period.

What now draws our attention is that Washington has lost the ability to supply the moral and cultural leadership to build this always difficult multilateral consensus. This incapacity is due to the unilateralism of its action (the invasion of Iraq is one example) and the loss of legitimacy in terms of values because of atrocities such as those practiced at Guantanamo Bay and torture, direct or through third parties.

It maintains, however, very extensive power to obstruct the nearly unanimous consensus of the others in many areas. The obstruction extends from its position against the Maritime Bottom regime to the new generations of human, social, economic and cultural rights. It applies from undermining the International Criminal Court and to the opposition against the Treaty banning Anti-Personnel Mines, culminating in the rejection of the Kyoto Protocol and the reluctance to negotiate a new international climate change regime. It is suggestive

that, in all these issues, the U.S. justifies its rejection on grounds of national and sovereign interest. The paradox of the situation is that the country that originally invented globalization and remains its principal beneficiary is also that which most affirms its own nationalism.

Many of these unilateral decisions stem from the growing drift of U.S. society towards conservative or right-wing positions, which have little influence on the predominant sentiment even in the rest of the Western world. This contrast can be perceived not only in the reduction of the international agenda to issues such as terrorism, the non-proliferation of arms and the Middle East, but also in the insistence on keeping the death penalty, extreme attitudes towards family and sexual morals, the role of religion in society, etc.

As long as this panorama is not changed through social evolution and or elections, chances are remote of an improvement in global governance by means of reform of the U.N. institutions, the IMF, World Bank and others, in the direction of greater democratization.

The country with the greatest chance of reaching superpower status in the foreseeable future, China, has given nearly exclusive priority to its objectives of commercial-economic ascension and national strategic interests (Taiwan, Tibet). In issues of vital importance for the planet such as global warming, it behaves with the same sacro egoísmo as the United States.

In this context of traditional nationalisms, the European Union appears to present a unique shape because of its post-national structure and the relatively more enlightened quality of its international leadership (in climate change for instance). Its structure is different from that of the old confederations, which began by delegating defense and diplomacy to a central power, exactly the sectors still most controlled by the National States in the European Union. The European integration has started in the most specifically domestic sectors: agricultural policy, the common market, competitive rules, the European Court, common currency and the Parliament.

Instead of copying models of the past, the Europeans were able to create something new in terms of a post-national organization, as they did when they invented the National State. European integration goes to the depths of the issues and is based on values. A candidate for membership has to undergo a long process in which it must recreate itself by adapting its laws and institutions to the consolidated patrimony, adopting the minimum European Standards of human rights, ecology and democratic rights.

As a complement, the convergence of the new and poorer members toward the average income in the community is assisted by large financial transfers that have been capable of operating miracles such as those seen in Spain and Ireland. The contrast with the free trade agreements signed by Washington is notable. These are restricted to the supposed potential of trade to bring about the convergence of income levels.

The difference stems from the nature of the process itself, which in the European case, sees the candidates as inheritors of the same history and civilization and as future co-citizens with equal rights. This type of financial assistance, rejected by the Americans in their accords, is a mechanism of intra-regional solidarity, until now a symbol of cohesion exclusive to Nation States. It is this which allows the European Union to transfer to the post-national level this attribute of the National State, as the "highest social league known until today able to make acceptable the sacrifice of redistribution" (Offe apud Habermas, 2001, p.129).

The learning of solidarity by citizens, expanded in the European dimension, is in keeping with Europe's historical experience. According to Habermas, this experience, even as a consequence of the lessons learned from the frequent conflicts and disasters of the past, contributed to overcoming the particular and narrow perspectives, the gradual control of traditional animosities, tolerance and the institutionalization of disputes.

Its net result marked the "normative self-understanding of European modernity with an egalitarian universalism, which could facilitate [...] the transition [...] to a post-national democracy" (Habermas, 2001, p.130-1).

The skeptical reader would see this as a magnificent "creative myth". As long as some qualifications are raised – including the extremely negative European reaction to Islamic and African immigrants, and to those from outside the community in general – it would not be an exaggeration to say that the myth has a sufficient tie to reality to make the European model more attractive than others. The European Union's more enlightened position in many international questions, beginning with global warming, justifies affirming that this position helps build "a socially balanced cosmopolitan order that is sensitive to differences".

Perhaps it is fitting, in conclusion, to evoke an image that can serve as a symbol of the differences. In early 2008, TV showed how a concrete wall was being raised in the American West to separate these lands (once Mexican) from Mexico - despite the fact that Mexico is a partner of the United States in a free trade agreement for nearly 15 years. At the same time, beyond the Atlantic, border posts that separated Western Europe from its recent members ranging from the Elba to the Russian border were in the process of being removed. This opening, or better said, abolition of borders was the final coup to definitively dismantle the barrier that Churchill one day compared to an Iron Curtain that fell, inexorably, from Sttetin to Trieste, from the Baltic to the Adriatic.

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ABSTRACT - Notwithstanding recent studies about the alleged weakening of some basic functions of nation-states on account of globalization, national states have been showing remarkable resiliency, that is, flexibility and adaptability to change. Starting from the perspective of international relations, the article undertakes a review of contemporary world political geography, pointing out some of the reasons that explain the creation, during the 20th century, of 150 out of a total number of 200 existing national states. It analyzes the ambivalent nature of some of the forces for change, not always towards national state weakening, and devotes special attention to the European Union, the only example of a still unfinished construction of a post-national configuration.

KEYWORDS - Nation, Nationalism, National State, International System, Globalization, Post-national Configuration.

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