

# The State of Whom?

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**C**AN A LAW BE BOTH ridiculous and dangerous? It certainly can. Witness the ongoing initiative of our government to enact a law that would define the State of Israel as “*The Nation-State of the Jewish People*”.

Ridiculous 1—because what and who is the “Jewish people”? The Jews of the world are a mixed lot. Their only official definition in Israel is religious. In Israel, you are a Jew if your mother was a Jewess. This is a purely religious definition. In Jewish religion, your father does not count for this purpose (it is said, only half in jest, that you cannot ever be sure who your father is). If a non-Jew wants to join the Jewish people in Israel, he or she has to convert to Judaism in a religious ceremony. Under Israeli law, one ceases to be a Jew if one adopts another religion. All these are purely religious definitions. Nothing national about it.

Ridiculous 2—The Jews around the world belong to other nations. They are not being asked by the promoters of this law whether they want to belong to a people represented by the State of Israel. They are automatically adopted by a foreign state. In a way, this is another form of attempted annexation.

It is dangerous for several reasons. First of all, because it excludes the citizens of Israel who are not Jews—a million and a half Muslim and Christian Arabs and about 400 thousand immigrants from the former Soviet Union who were allowed in because they are somehow related to Jews. Recently, when the army Chief of Staff laid little flags (instead of flowers) on the graves of fallen soldiers, he skipped the grave of one such non-Jewish soldier who gave his life for Israel.

Even more dangerous are the possibilities this law opens for the future. It is only a further short step from there to a law that would confer automatic citizenship on all Jews in the world, thus tripling the number of Jewish citizens of Greater Israel and creating a huge Jewish majority in an apartheid state between the sea and the river. The Jews in question will not be asked.

From there, another short step would be to deprive all non-Jews in Israel of their citizenship.

The (Jewish) sky is the limit.

BUT ON this occasion I would like to dwell on another

aspect of the proposed law: the term “Nation-State”.

The nation-state is an invention of recent centuries. We tend to believe that it is the natural form of political structure and that it has always been so. That is quite wrong. Even in Western culture, it was preceded by several other models, such as feudal states, dynastic states and so on.

New social forms are created when new economic, technological and ideological developments demand them. A form that was possible when the average European never travelled more than a few kilometers from his place of birth became impossible when roads and railways dramatically changed the movement of people and goods. New technologies created immense industrial capabilities.

For societies to compete, they had to create structures that were big enough to sustain a large domestic market and to maintain a military force strong enough to defend it (and, if possible, to grab territories from their neighbors). A new ideology, called nationalism, cemented the new states. Smaller peoples were subdued and incorporated in the new big national societies. Presto: the Nation-State.

This process needed a century or two to become general. Zionism was one of the last European national movements. As in other aspects—such as colonialism and imperialism—it was a late-comer. When Israel was founded, the European nation-states were already on the verge of becoming obsolete.

WORLD WAR II hastened the demise of the nation-state for all practical purposes. Huge economic units like the USA and the Soviet Union made countries like Spain and Italy, and even like Germany and France, much too small to compete. The European Common Market came into being. Large economic federations supplanted most of the old nation-states.

New technologies hastened the process. Change became more and more rapid. While the new regional structures were being formed, they too were already becoming obsolete. Globalization is an irreversible process. No nation or combination of nations can solve the apocalyptic problems of mankind.

Climate change is a world problem that urgently needs world-wide cooperation. So is the danger created by nuclear weapons that will soon be acquired by violent non-state groups. A photo taken in Timbuktu is immediately

seen in Kamchatka. A hacker in Australia can silence entire industries in America. Bloody dictators can be brought before world justice in The Hague. An American youngster can revolutionize the lives of people in Zimbabwe. Deadly pandemics can travel within hours from Ethiopia to Sweden.

For all practical purposes, the world is now one. But human consciousness is far, far slower than technology. While the nation-state has become anachronistic, nationalism is still alive and killing.

HOW TO bridge the gap? The European Union is an instructive example.

At the end of World War II, thinking people realized that World War III could mean the end of Europe, if not the end of the world. Europe had to be united, but nationalism was rampant. In the end, the compromise model proposed by Charles de Gaulle was adopted: the nation-states would remain, but some real power would be transferred to a kind of confederation.

This made sense. The common market was born and steadily enlarged, a common currency was adopted. And now an economic earthquake threatens to bring the whole edifice down.

Why? Not because of the surplus of concentration, but because of the lack of it.

I am not an economist. Indeed, no renowned professor ever taught me the science of economics (or anything else). I just try to apply common sense to this problem as to all others.

Common sense told me right from the beginning that a common currency could not exist without common economic governance. It cannot possibly function when every little "nation-state" within the currency-zone has its own state budget and economic policy.

The founding fathers of the United States were faced with this problem and decided upon a federation and not a confederation—in other words, a strong central government. Thanks to that wise decision, when Nebraska has a problem, Illinois can spring in. The economy of all 50 states is practically run by Washington DC. The common currency does not just mean the same greenbacks, but the same powerful central bank.

Now Europe is faced with the same choice. It will either break apart – an unthinkable disaster—or abandon the Gaullist recipe. The diverse nation-states, from Malta to Sweden, must give up a huge chunk of their independence and sovereignty and transfer it to the hated bureaucrats in Brussels. One budget for all.

If this happens—a big "if" – what will remain of the nation state? There will be national soccer teams, with all the nationalist and racist hullabaloo. France may still in-

vade Mali, with the consent of its main European partners. Greeks can still be proud of their ancient past. Belgium will still be plagued by its bi-national troubles. But the nation-state will be more or less an empty shell.

I predict, as I did before, that by the end of this century (when some of us will not be around anymore) there will be some kind of world governance in place. It will probably be called by some other name, but the major problems facing humankind will be managed by strong and effectual international bodies. There will be new problems (there always are): how to maintain democracy in such a global structure, how to sustain human values, how to channel aggressive emotion, now released in wars, into harmless activities.

In this brave new world, what about the nation-state? I believe that it will still be there as a cultural and nostalgic phenomenon, with certain local functions, like today's municipalities. Probably there will be even more nation-states. When the states are stripped of most of their functions, they may well split into their component parts. Bretons and Corsicans, who were forced by nationalism to join the larger unit called France, may want to live in states of their own within a unified world.

LEAVING THE realm of wild speculation and returning to our own little world: what about this "Nation-State of the Jewish People"?

As long as the world consists of nation-states, we shall have our own. And by the same logic, the Palestinian people will have one, too.

Our state cannot be a nation-state of a non-existent nation. Israel must and will be the nation-state of the Israeli nation, belonging to all Israeli citizens living in Israel, Arabs and other non-Jews included. And to nobody else.

Israeli Jews who feel a strong attachment to the Jews around the world, and Jews around the world who feel a strong attachment to Israel, can certainly maintain and even strengthen their attachment. Similarly, Arab citizens can maintain their attachment to the Palestinian nation and the Arab world at large. And the non-Jewish Russians to their Russian heritage. By all means. But that does not concern the state as such.

When peace comes to this tortured part of the world, the states of Israel and Palestine may join a regional organization extending from Iran to Morocco, on the lines of the EU. They will join the ranks of the march of humanity towards a functioning modern world-wide structure to save the planet, prevent wars between states or communities and further the well-being of human beings (yes, and animals, too) everywhere.

Utopia? Certainly. But that's how today's reality would have looked to Napoleon.