State

The word State come from the Latin stare, to stand, and is linked to notions of stability and permanence (see "status") or more clearly, in this usage, to the word stato used by Machiavelli to refer to the City-States of Italy. In French the word "état" appears in the modern era, but at the time referred more to the situation of a person in society, and beyond that to his or her political condition (for instance the *tiers-état*, the three-estate system under the *Ancien Régime* until it was abolished by the french Revolution).

A State is a construction that is at once institutional and political, established on a societal and territorial basis, and entails three dimensions:
• A set of institutions characterised by a monopoly over the promulgation of the law and the use of public force
• A sovereign whole, whose territory and boundaries are recognised by international institutions
• A mode of organisation and intervention in the functioning of the geographical space over which it has authority.

As the law-maker, the State promulgates and in theory guarantees the application of the law, in cases where the configuration can be described as a rule of law. The State is the only legal entity to possess full competence, and that which results from it: official political power. Defined in this manner, the modern State (Machiavelli) is a sovereign, central power which in the name of superior interest removes political action from moral and religious considerations. Its power is exerted over a territory where it is in charge of public "law and order", for a population to whom it guarantees cohesion, and whom it is to defend from outside forces, according to a contractual system as defined by Thomas Hobbes in his Leviathan (1651). Justifying its existence by the guarantee of social order, the emergence of the State system is seen as the transition from a state of nature, characterised by a state of war of all against all, to the civilian state in which each individual is free and obeys the law applying to all.

On the strength of this contractual freedom, the organisational and territorial prerogatives of a State materialise around the notion of sovereignty. This notion, first defined in relation to the State by Jean Bodin (1529-1596), sovereignty enables the State to exert its authority over the interior and towards the exterior. This notion of sovereignty takes the form of a certain number of exclusivities of State functions and/or of their symbols (the currency, the armed forces, the flag, the national anthem, taxation etc.). It can be noted that the importance attached to these State functions varies considerably from one State to another. Some are very particular about any relinquishment of sovereignty (for instance regarding currency) but nevertheless tolerate at their gates the presence of tax havens that defy taxation sovereignty.

Drawing away from this theoretical framework, the reality of the functioning of a certain number of States has earned them the epithet of "weak" (an notion that emerged in the 1960s in the work of G. Myrdal to draw attention to the situation of the recently decolonised countries), or of "failed states" (Helman, 1993), or "collapsed states" (Zartmann 1995) when the State system does not ensure its primary functions (security, justice, education etc.). It is well known that in these cases the vacuum is filled by other entities – private militias, self-defence groups, organised crime etc.).

Relationships between States and terrestrial space

Boundaries are markers of the sovereignty of States in space. The importance attached to the durability of their delineations often leads State authorities to seek to link them to natural landmarks (Vauban, P. Buache). It is nevertheless known for a long time (L. Febvre) that these are in fact merely elements of justification, and that claiming a territorial ensemble on the basis of contiguity and enclosure (D. Nordman) has had a role in both the securing of the State and in on-going conflict in inter-State relationships (M. Foucher).

This importance attached to spatial implantation led F. Ratzel to develop a theory of the "organic State", considering that the life of States and nations is a kind to that of living beings. The power of States, seen as organisms rooted in the soil, is correlated with their surface areas, so that the spatial growth of States goes hand in hand with their development, thus justifying territorial conquest and the hierarchy of powers. The delineation of vast colonial areas or geographical spheres of influence among European powers were applications of this view of the world. The link between the territorial implantation of the State and its geographical role was approached differently by J. Gottmann, according to a dialectic between the partitioning of the world and circulation. The quest for stability to organise spaces politically combines with the principle of circulation, which affects not only the internal organisation of States but also their relationships with the exterior. While contemporary "globalisation" tends to valorise vast, densely populated States known as continental states, surface area a contrario is no longer a completely discriminating element. A certain number of

entities described as micro-states (the Vatican, 32 hectares, Monaco, 1.2 sq.km., Singapore, 616 sq.km.) exemplify the absence of correlation between surface area and outreach. Conversely, the vast Antarctic territory houses no State.

The State in the system of international relationships

Since the Treaty of Westphalia (1648) it has been considered that international relationships are organised around a system of sovereign States, based since 1945 on equality of rights between States, despite the fact that this system is based on, and acts according to, an established hierarchy of powers. This legal equality among States appears to materialise in the United Nations, grouping 193 members in 2014, from only 51 when it was founded in 1945. The question of the international recognition of States by other countries is central to the existence of a State. The appearance of new States results either from colonised or dominated countries reaching independence, or by way of a process of splitting up or secession. Several territories have recently declared their independence and called for the status of States (Northern Cyprus, Abkhazia, or Somaliland) but without the international community recognising their independence. The irrevocable act of recognition is still a central element in international relationships (for instance the problem of the non-recognition of Taiwan by the People's Republic of China, or of Israel by certain Arab countries, or the recognition of Kosovo by only three quarters of the EU Member States). The growing number of independent entities leads several authors (P. Boniface, S. Rosière) to refer to a "proliferation of states", where the increasing numbers could be an element of international stability.

An apparent ebbing of the weight of States

The contemporary feature of the international system is the multiplication of new players that compete with States. Legal entities derived from States, such as inter-governmental organisations (such as the EU) issue pronouncements, resolutions or norms that can oblige the member States (for example the rulings of the EU). Although, as in the United Nations Charter, it is the States that officially remain in charge, certain international institutions (such as the International Criminal Court) call the rights of States into question.

Breaking with "realist" conceptions of geopolitics (Waltz, 1979), in the 1980s J. Rosenau (1979) proposed abandoning a merely state-centred understanding of the world, and the integration of non-state players. In the international system, this "trans-nationalist" approach was an attempt to take account of the proliferation and the growing influence of these new players (NGOs, media, transnational firms, criminal networks, etc.) where in certain cases financial means could be greater than the budgets of numerous States. In fact these new players cohabit, and in general interact with States in the course of international events. Thus it is possible (N. Brenner, R. Cox) to see an adaptation, either intentional or constrained, of States to globalisation, thus producing an "internationalisation of the State" by orienting them towards new priorities imposed by "world competition", for instance the creation of situations favouring trans-national investments. In the area of inter-State relationships, there has been a re-sizing of the State itself, with new levels of regulation taking the form of supranational ensembles (the EU, ASEAN, G7 etc.). For the G7 or the G20, the authority of individual States does indeed appear to merge to some extent into a world-wide governance, unless we can consider that the staging of these conferences serves only to remove the said States from pressure from the other players. Indeed, beyond the emergence of new powers, the international system continues to function in oligarchic mode (see for instance the UN Security Council).

see also: Nation state in Geography

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