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## Introduction

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Democracies owe their existence to national loyalties—the loyalties that are supposedly shared by government and opposition, by all political parties, and by the electorate as a whole. Wherever the experience of nationality is weak or non-existent, democracy has failed to take root. For without national loyalty, opposition is a threat to government, and political disagreements create no common ground. Yet everywhere the idea of the nation is under attack—either despised as an atavistic form of social unity, or even condemned as a cause of war and conflict, to be broken down and replaced by more enlightened and more universal forms of jurisdiction.

But what, exactly, is supposed to replace the nation and the nation state? And how will the new form of political order enhance or conserve our democratic heritage? Few people seem prepared to give an answer, and the answers that are offered are quickly hidden in verbiage, typified by the EU's adoption of the ecclesiastical doctrine of 'subsidiarity', in order to remove powers from member states under the pretence of granting them.<sup>1</sup> Recent attempts to transcend the nation state into some kind of transnational political order have ended up either as totalitarian dictatorships like the former Soviet Union, or as unaccountable bureaucracies, like the European Union today. Although many of the nation states of the modern world are the surviving fragments of empires, few people wish to propose the restoration of imperial rule as the way forward for mankind. Why then and for what purpose should we renounce the form of sovereignty that is familiar to us, and on which so much of our political heritage depends?

We in Europe stand at a turning point in our history. Our parliaments and legal systems still have territorial sovereignty. They still correspond to historical patterns of settlement that have enabled the French, the Germans, the Spaniards, the British and the Italians to say 'we' and to know whom they mean by it. The opportunity remains to recuperate the legislative powers and the executive procedures that formed the nation states of Europe. At the same time, the process has been set in motion that would expropriate the remaining sovereignty of our parliaments and courts, that would annihilate the boundaries between our jurisdictions, that would dissolve the nationalities of Europe in a historically meaningless collectivity, united neither by language, nor by religion, nor by customs, nor by inherited sovereignty and law. We have to choose whether to go forward to that new condition, or back to the tried and familiar sovereignty of the territorial nation state.

At the same time our political élites speak and behave as though there were no such choice to be made—just as the communists did at the time of the Russian Revolution. They refer to an inevitable process, to irreversible changes, and while at times prepared to distinguish a 'fast' from a 'slow' track into the future, are clear in their minds that these two tracks lead to a single destination—the destination of transnational government, under a common system of law, in which national loyalty will be no more significant than support for a local football team.

In this pamphlet I set out the case for the nation state, recognising that what I have to say is neither comprehensive nor conclusive, and that many other kinds of sovereignty could be envisaged that would answer to the needs of modern societies. My case is not that the nation state is the only answer to the problems of modern government, but that it is the only answer that has proved itself. We may feel tempted to experiment with other forms of political order. But experiments on this scale are dangerous, since nobody knows how to predict or to reverse the results of them.

The French, Russian and Nazi revolutions were bold experiments; but in each case they led to the collapse of

legal order, to mass murder at home and to belligerence abroad. The wise policy is to accept the arrangements, however imperfect, that have evolved through custom and inheritance, to improve them by small adjustments, but not to jeopardise them by large-scale alterations the consequences of which nobody can really envisage. The case for this approach was unanswerably set before us by Burke in his *Reflections on the French Revolution*, and subsequent history has repeatedly confirmed his view of things. The lesson that we should draw, therefore, is that since the nation state has proved to be a stable foundation of democratic government and secular jurisdiction, we ought to improve it, to adjust it, even to dilute it, but not to throw it away.

The initiators of the European experiment—both the self-declared prophets and the behind-the-doors conspirators—shared a conviction that the nation state had caused the two world wars. A united states of Europe seemed to them to be the only recipe for lasting peace. This view is for two reasons entirely unpersuasive. First, it is purely negative: it rejects nation states for their belligerence, without giving any positive reason to believe that transnational states will be any better. Secondly, it identifies the normality of the nation state through its pathological versions. As Chesterton has argued about patriotism generally, to condemn patriotism because people go to war for patriotic reasons, is like condemning love because some loves lead to murder. The nation state should not be understood in terms of the French nation at the Revolution or the German nation in its twentieth-century frenzy. For those were nations gone mad, in which the springs of civil peace had been poisoned and the social organism colonised by anger, resentment and fear. All Europe was threatened by the German nation, but only because the German nation was threatened by itself, having caught the nationalist fever.

Nationalism is part of the pathology of national loyalty, not its normal condition—a point to which I return below. Who in Europe has felt comparably threatened by the Spanish, Italian, Norwegian, Czech or Polish forms of

national loyalty, and who would begrudge those people their right to a territory, a jurisdiction and a sovereignty of their own? The Poles, Czechs and Hungarians have elected to join the European Union: not in order to throw away national sovereignty, but under the impression that this is the best way to regain it. They are wrong, I believe. But they will be able to see this only later, when it is too late to change.

Left-liberal writers, in their reluctance to adopt the nation as a social aspiration or a political goal, sometimes distinguish nationalism from 'patriotism'—an ancient virtue extolled by the Romans and by those like Machiavelli who first made the intellectual case for modern secular jurisdiction.<sup>2</sup> Patriotism, they argue, is the loyalty of citizens, and the foundation of 'republican' government; nationalism is a shared hostility to the stranger, the intruder, the person who belongs 'outside'.

I feel some sympathy for that approach. Properly understood, however, the republican patriotism defended by Machiavelli, Montesquieu and Mill is a *form* of national loyalty: not a pathological form like nationalism, but a natural love of country, countrymen and the culture that unites them. Patriots are attached to the people and the territory that are *theirs by right*; and patriotism involves an attempt to transcribe that right into impartial government and a rule of law. This underlying territorial right is implied in the very word—the *patria* being the 'fatherland', the place where you and I belong.

Territorial loyalty, I suggest, is at the root of all forms of government where law and liberty reign supreme. Attempts to denounce the nation in the name of patriotism therefore contain no real argument against the kind of national sovereignty that I shall be advocating in this pamphlet.<sup>3</sup> I shall be defending what Mill called the 'principle of cohesion among members of the same community or state', and which he distinguished from nationalism (or 'nationality, in the vulgar sense of the term'), in the following luminous words:

We need scarcely say that we do not mean nationality, in the vulgar sense of the term; a senseless antipathy to foreigners; indifference to the general welfare of the human race, or an unjust preference

for the supposed interests of our own country; a cherishing of bad peculiarities because they are national, or a refusal to adopt what has been found good by other countries. We mean a principle of sympathy, not of hostility; of union, not of separation. We mean a feeling of common interest among those who live under the same government, and are contained within the same natural or historical boundaries. We mean, that one part of the community do not consider themselves as foreigners with regard to another part; that they set a value on their connexion—feel that they are one people, that their lot is cast together, that evil to any of their fellow-countrymen is evil to themselves, and do not desire selfishly to free themselves from their share of any common inconvenience by severing the connexion.<sup>4</sup>

The phrases that I would emphasise in that passage are these: ‘our own country’, ‘common interest’, ‘natural or historical boundaries’ and ‘[our] lot is cast together’. Those phrases resonate with the historical loyalty that I shall be defending in this pamphlet.

To put the matter briefly: the case against the nation state has not been properly made, and the case for the transnational alternative has not been made at all. I believe therefore that we are on the brink of decisions that could prove disastrous for Europe and for the world, and that we have only a few years in which to take stock of our inheritance and to reassume it. Now more than ever do those lines from Goethe’s *Faust* ring true for us:

*Was du ererbt von deinen Vätern hast,  
Erwirb es, um es zu besitzen.*

What you have inherited from your forefathers, earn it, that you might own it. We in the nation states of Europe need to earn again the sovereignty that previous generations so laboriously shaped from the inheritance of Christianity, imperial government and Roman law. Earning it, we will own it, and owning it, we will be at peace within our borders.