

The Concept of The Nation-State in Machiavelli's Doctrine

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Abstract: The article examines the concept of the nation-state in Niccolò Machiavelli's doctrine through the analysis of his political philosophy, historical context and understanding of state power. Although the modern term "nation-state" did not exist in Machiavelli's time in its contemporary meaning, his political ideas contained several important foundations for the later development of this concept. Machiavelli lived in a period of political fragmentation, foreign invasions and internal instability in Italy. Therefore, the problem of political unity, strong state authority, national army, civic virtue and liberation from external domination became central to his political thought. The article shows that Machiavelli's doctrine was directed against the weakness of divided Italian states and against dependence on mercenary forces. His political ideal was connected with the creation of a strong, independent and consolidated state capable of protecting its people, territory and political order. The study reveals that Machiavelli's concept of the state was based on realism, historical experience, civic patriotism and the priority of public interest over private ambitions. The article concludes that Machiavelli may be regarded as one of the early thinkers who prepared the intellectual ground for the modern theory of the nation-state, especially through his ideas of sovereignty, territorial unity, national defense and political independence.

Keywords: Machiavelli, nation-state, political doctrine, sovereignty, Italy, national unity, state power, civic virtue, political realism, national army.

Introduction: The problem of the nation-state occupies an important place in the history of political thought because it is connected with the development of sovereignty, territorial unity, national identity and centralized political authority. In modern political science, the nation-state is usually understood as a political form in which state power is connected with a relatively unified national community, common territory, legal order and political sovereignty. However, this concept did not emerge at once. It was formed gradually through historical processes connected with the decline of feudal fragmentation, the strengthening of monarchies, the development of centralized administration and the rise of national consciousness. In this historical movement, the political doctrine of Niccolò Machiavelli has special significance.

Machiavelli lived in Renaissance Italy, where there was no unified Italian state. The Italian peninsula was

divided into many competing political units, including Florence, Venice, Milan, Naples and the Papal States. These states often fought against each other and relied on foreign alliances or mercenary armies. As a result, Italy became vulnerable to the intervention of powerful foreign monarchies such as France and Spain. This political situation deeply influenced Machiavelli's thought. His works were not created in isolation from reality; they were a direct response to the weakness, disunity and dependence of Italy.

The relevance of the topic is determined by the fact that Machiavelli's political views remain important for understanding the origins of modern statehood. Although he did not use the term "nation-state" in the modern sense, many elements of his doctrine anticipated later ideas of national political unity. In *The Prince*, Machiavelli called for the liberation of Italy from foreign domination and emphasized the need for a strong ruler capable of uniting the country. In

Discourses on Livy, he developed a republican understanding of civic freedom, laws and public participation. These two dimensions of his thought show that Machiavelli was concerned not only with power as such, but with the creation of a stable political community capable of self-defense and independent development.

The purpose of this article is to analyze the concept of the nation-state in Machiavelli's doctrine and to identify the main philosophical and political foundations of this concept. The article aims to show that Machiavelli's understanding of the state included the ideas of territorial consolidation, political sovereignty, national army, civic patriotism and the priority of common interest. These ideas allow us to interpret Machiavelli as one of the early theorists of modern statehood, even though his doctrine belongs to the pre-modern period.

The article is based on the historical-philosophical and comparative analysis of Machiavelli's political works. The main sources are *The Prince*, *Discourses on Livy* and *The Art of War*, in which Machiavelli expressed his views on state power, military organization, political unity, civic virtue and the causes of the rise and fall of states. These texts are analyzed in connection with the historical conditions of Renaissance Italy, since Machiavelli's doctrine cannot be properly understood without considering the political fragmentation and foreign dependence of the Italian peninsula.

The historical method makes it possible to reveal the connection between Machiavelli's political ideas and the crisis of Italian statehood in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. The comparative method is used to distinguish Machiavelli's views from medieval political concepts based on dynastic, feudal and religious principles. The interpretative method allows us to explain the meaning of such concepts as *virtù*, *fortuna*, civic freedom, national army, political necessity and sovereignty. The article also uses elements of political theory in order to connect Machiavelli's doctrine with the later development of the nation-state concept.

Machiavelli's understanding of the nation-state begins with his criticism of political fragmentation. For him, the weakness of Italy was not accidental. It resulted from the absence of a unified political will, stable institutions and independent military power. The Italian city-states were culturally rich and economically developed, but politically divided. They were unable to create a common system of defense and often placed their own local interests above the general interest of Italy. Machiavelli saw in this situation the main reason for the humiliation of Italy before foreign powers.

In this sense, Machiavelli's political doctrine may be interpreted as an early call for national consolidation. He believed that a state could survive only if it possessed internal unity and the ability to act independently. Political independence was impossible without a strong center of power. This did not mean that Machiavelli supported arbitrary tyranny as an ideal political order. Rather, he understood that in moments of crisis the creation of a unified state may require decisive leadership. The ruler must be capable of overcoming disorder, suppressing destructive conflicts and directing political energy toward the preservation of the state.

The last chapter of *The Prince* is especially important for understanding Machiavelli's national idea. There he calls for the liberation of Italy from foreign domination and expresses hope that a strong political leader could unite the country. This appeal demonstrates that Machiavelli's doctrine was not simply a technical guide for acquiring power. It contained a patriotic dimension. Machiavelli wanted to see Italy free, strong and respected. His political realism was therefore connected with a higher historical task: the creation of conditions for national independence.

One of the most important elements of Machiavelli's concept of the nation-state is the idea of sovereignty. In modern terms, sovereignty means supreme authority within a territory and independence from external powers. Machiavelli did not formulate this concept in the legal language of later political theory, but the substance of sovereignty is clearly present in his works. A state must not depend on foreign armies, external rulers or unstable alliances. It must rely on its own laws, institutions and military forces. Dependence on others destroys political freedom and makes the state vulnerable.

Machiavelli's criticism of mercenary armies is directly connected with this idea. In his view, mercenaries were dangerous because they fought not for the homeland, but for money. They lacked loyalty, discipline and civic motivation. A state that relies on mercenary troops cannot be secure because its defense depends on people who have no deep connection with its political community. For Machiavelli, a national army composed of citizens was the foundation of political independence. Such an army connected military strength with civic responsibility and created a bond between the state and its people.

This idea is one of Machiavelli's most important contributions to the later concept of the nation-state. A nation-state requires not only a territory and government, but also citizens who identify themselves with the political community and are ready to defend

it. Machiavelli's emphasis on citizen soldiers shows that he understood the connection between political identity and military duty. The defense of the state should not be outsourced to foreign or hired forces. It should be the responsibility of those who belong to the state and whose freedom depends on its survival.

Machiavelli's doctrine also contains a strong idea of territorial unity. In fragmented Italy, political borders were unstable, and many rulers were more concerned with dynastic ambitions than with the creation of a durable territorial state. Machiavelli understood that a strong political order requires control over territory, population and institutions. The state must be able to enforce laws, collect resources and defend its borders. Without territorial consolidation, political authority remains weak and easily challenged.

At the same time, Machiavelli did not reduce the state to territory alone. For him, the strength of the state depended on the quality of political leadership, laws and civic spirit. The state is not merely an administrative mechanism; it is a living political organism that can rise, decline or collapse. Its vitality depends on the ability of rulers and citizens to maintain public order, prevent corruption and adapt to changing circumstances. This view makes Machiavelli's doctrine broader than a simple theory of centralized power.

The concept of *virtù* plays a central role in Machiavelli's understanding of state formation. *Virtù* means political energy, courage, prudence, flexibility and the ability to act effectively in difficult circumstances. A ruler with *virtù* is capable of founding or reforming a state, resisting fortune and directing events according to political necessity. In the context of the nation-state, *virtù* becomes the quality necessary for overcoming fragmentation and creating unity. It is not passive moral goodness, but active political capacity.

The concept of *fortuna* is equally important. Machiavelli understood that political life is influenced by chance, historical circumstances and unpredictable events. However, he believed that fortune can be resisted by preparation and strong action. A divided and weak country becomes the victim of fortune, while a strong and organized state can control its destiny to a greater extent. Thus, the formation of a nation-state in Machiavelli's doctrine is also a struggle against historical randomness and political vulnerability.

Machiavelli's approach to morality is another important aspect of his doctrine. In medieval political thought, the legitimacy of power was often connected with religious and moral ideals. Machiavelli shifted attention from moral intention to political effect. For him, the main question was whether political action preserved the state and protected the community from

destruction. This does not mean that he rejected morality entirely. It means that he placed the survival and independence of the state at the center of political judgment.

In relation to the nation-state, this position has a clear meaning. The state must protect the collective existence of the people. If political leaders are unable to defend the state because they are guided only by abstract moral principles, they may cause greater harm. Machiavelli's realism reflects the belief that political responsibility is different from private morality. A ruler must sometimes make difficult decisions because the fate of the whole political community depends on them.

The republican aspect of Machiavelli's doctrine also contributes to the idea of the nation-state. In *Discourses on Livy*, Machiavelli praises the Roman Republic for its civic virtue, laws and capacity for expansion. Rome became powerful because its citizens participated in public life and defended the republic. Machiavelli believed that free institutions and civic participation could strengthen the state. This means that his ideal of political unity was not limited to monarchy or princely rule. He also saw the possibility of a strong state in republican institutions.

This is important because the nation-state is not only a centralized authority but also a form of collective political life. Machiavelli understood that a durable state requires citizens who feel responsibility for the common good. Laws alone are not enough if citizens are passive or corrupt. Civic virtue gives the state internal strength. It creates loyalty, discipline and readiness to sacrifice private interests for public benefit. Therefore, Machiavelli's doctrine combines state power with civic responsibility.

His understanding of conflict also deserves attention. Machiavelli did not believe that political unity means the complete absence of conflict. On the contrary, he argued that conflict between social groups can strengthen a republic if it is regulated by laws and institutions. In Rome, the struggle between the people and the nobles produced laws that protected liberty. This idea shows that Machiavelli's concept of unity was not mechanical uniformity. A strong state can contain internal differences if they are organized within a stable political framework.

This insight is relevant to the concept of the nation-state because national unity does not necessarily mean social homogeneity. A political community may include different groups, interests and tensions. The task of the state is not to eliminate all differences, but to create institutions that transform conflict into political development rather than civil destruction.

Machiavelli's thought therefore offers a dynamic understanding of political unity.

Machiavelli's national idea was also connected with patriotism. His patriotism was not sentimental, but political. Love for the homeland meant readiness to serve, defend and strengthen the state. He believed that citizens must place the public interest above private comfort. This kind of patriotism is closely linked with the development of national consciousness. Although Machiavelli did not formulate nationalism in the modern sense, he expressed the idea that a people must become conscious of its political destiny and must not accept foreign domination.

The concept of the nation-state in Machiavelli's doctrine is therefore formed through several interconnected elements: unity, sovereignty, territory, national army, civic virtue, political leadership and liberation from foreign control. These elements show that Machiavelli was moving beyond the medieval world of feudal loyalties and dynastic fragmentation. He pointed toward a modern understanding of the state as an independent political community with its own interests and historical mission.

However, it is necessary to avoid anachronism. Machiavelli was not a nationalist in the nineteenth-century sense. He did not develop a theory of national culture, language or ethnicity as the foundation of the state. His concern was primarily political. He wanted Italy to become strong and independent, but his argument was based on statecraft, military power and civic order rather than on romantic national identity. Therefore, it is more accurate to say that Machiavelli prepared the political foundations of the nation-state rather than created a complete modern theory of nationalism.

The modern importance of Machiavelli's doctrine lies in the fact that many of his ideas remain relevant. States still face problems of sovereignty, security, national unity, civic responsibility and dependence on external forces. His criticism of political weakness and his insistence on independent defense continue to have significance in contemporary political theory. At the same time, his doctrine reminds us that a state without civic virtue and public responsibility may become strong externally but weak internally.

Machiavelli's concept of the nation-state is also important because it shows the connection between realism and patriotism. Political realism is often associated with cynicism, but in Machiavelli's case realism serves the purpose of national liberation and state preservation. He wanted political actors to understand reality in order to transform it. His doctrine teaches that noble goals cannot be achieved without

practical wisdom, strength and institutional organization.

Thus, the concept of the nation-state in Machiavelli's doctrine is not expressed as a ready-made theoretical model, but it is present as a political tendency and historical project. Machiavelli's thought emerged from the crisis of divided Italy and was directed toward the creation of a strong, independent and self-defending political community. In this sense, his doctrine became one of the important intellectual steps toward modern statehood.

The analysis of Machiavelli's doctrine shows that the concept of the nation-state occupies an important, though implicit, place in his political thought. Machiavelli did not use the modern terminology of nation-state theory, but his works contain the main political elements that later became central to this concept. He emphasized the need for territorial unity, sovereign power, national army, civic virtue, political leadership and liberation from foreign dependence.

Machiavelli's doctrine was shaped by the historical crisis of Renaissance Italy. The fragmentation of the Italian peninsula and the intervention of foreign powers convinced him that political weakness leads to national humiliation. Therefore, he saw the creation of a strong and independent state as a historical necessity. His political realism was directed not only toward the acquisition of power, but toward the preservation and strengthening of the political community.

One of Machiavelli's most important contributions was his insistence that the state must rely on its own citizens and its own forces. His criticism of mercenary armies and his support for citizen soldiers reveal a deep understanding of the connection between state independence and civic responsibility. This idea anticipated one of the fundamental principles of modern statehood: the defense of the state must be connected with the political identity and loyalty of its people.

At the same time, Machiavelli's concept of the nation-state cannot be reduced to authoritarian centralization. His republican ideas show that he also valued laws, civic participation and institutional balance. For him, the strength of the state depended not only on the ruler, but also on citizens, institutions and public virtue. Therefore, his doctrine combines strong authority with civic foundations.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Machiavelli may be regarded as one of the early founders of modern political realism and one of the thinkers who prepared the intellectual

foundations of the nation-state. His ideas remain relevant because they show that political independence requires unity, strength, responsibility and the ability to act in accordance with historical necessity. The concept of the nation-state in Machiavelli's doctrine is therefore a significant stage in the development of modern political thought.

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