

# Niccolo Machiavelli and the general interest politics

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## Abstract

*Machiavelli's political thought puts the state's interests before those of the individual seeking to end the unification of Italy. Currently understood as a policy without any scruples, Machiavelli's doctrine authorizes the use of any means including deception, violence and murder to achieve the political goal- the unification of Italy, giving up the moral and religious considerations in political activity. For the Florentine thinker the purposes of the prince (politician in general) are supporting the government with the acquisition of glory, honor and wealth for himself, but also for the state leaders and the people. Preserving freedom and glory in the name of the state is acquiring the primary role of the prince.*

**Keywords:** *Niccolo Machiavelli, machiavelism, interest policy, political realism.*

## Introduction

Machiavelli's thinking has at its base the background of the medieval political systems collapse and the transformation of feudal theocratic state in a pre-modern secular state. The divine origin of the state must be overcome in Machiavelli's opinion through political realism with an admiration trend for the violence model in political pagan systems, generating reform and historic renewal<sup>1</sup>. Machiavelli's political thought puts the state's interests before those of the individual seeking to end the unification of Italy. Currently understood as a policy without any scruples, Machiavelli's doctrine authorizes the use of any means including deception, violence and murder to achieve the political goal- the unification of Italy, giving up the moral and religious considerations in political

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<sup>1</sup> M. V. Antonescu, *Doctrina neomachiavellistică în contextul provocărilor globaliste*, Lumen Publishing House, Iași, 2005, p. 102.

activity<sup>2</sup>. For the Florentine thinker the purposes of the prince (politician in general) are supporting the government with the acquisition of glory, honor and wealth for himself, but also for the state leaders and the people. Preserving freedom and glory in the name of the state is acquiring the primary role of the prince.

In the philosopher's opinion, the world is mean and distorted. Political prudence prevents the prince to act under conventional Christian morality<sup>3</sup>. Machiavelli authorizes the use of religion as a political tool in fulfilling the purposes of the secular sovereignty. The Machiavellian State is released from the bonds of religion and thus the philosopher is the forerunner of the modern theories of the state, based on realism and political pragmatism.

### *Niccolo Machiavelli and the political realism*

It is interesting to see to what extent Machiavelli truly influenced the conceptual frameworks of realistic theory in International Relations. Researcher Ioana Petre<sup>4</sup> conducted a comprehensive analysis of the relationship between Machiavellianism and political realism starting from the analysis of contemporary political systems and realistic ideology in international relations summarized as follows:

- States are characterized by rationality, thus being the most important actors in the international arena;
- The international environment penalizes states that fail to protect their interests or those which incorrectly follow their objectives;
- Anarchy in international relations is the primary force that motivates the political actions of the states;
- States in anarchy have concerns particularly in the area of power and security being prone to conflict and they are often reluctant to cooperation;
- The international institutions affect only marginally the cooperation processes;
- There are no universal moral principles that can be applied in international relations<sup>5</sup>.

The principles set forth by the author are increasingly less valid in our view

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 151

<sup>3</sup> Iain McLean (coord.), *Dicționar de politică Oxford*, Univers Enciclopedic Publishing House, Bucharest, 2001, pp. 263-264.

<sup>4</sup> Ioana Petre, *Machiavelli and the Legitimization of Realism in International Relations*, Lumen Publishing House, Iași, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 17.

regarding the evolution of international relations, respectively the transition from bipolarism to unipolarism, the establishment of collective security strategies, the globalization of communications and the role of transnational economical actors becoming more active in the relocation of policy, the globalization of terrorism and the terrorist threat in line with a terrorist war. In essence, sovereign states are no longer major actors on the international arena, their place being taken over gradually by supranational unions such as the European Union. The political rationality of national interest is transferred to a transnational construct through a voluntary limitation of sovereignty in order to ensure a collective security.

*Neo-machiavellist ideology and the establishment of transnational political institutions*

International institutions are central actors in the reconfiguration of politics, but together with them, other important actors in international politics can be large organizations, whether with a licit character as is the case of NATO, OPEC, or even illicit as the international terrorist group ALCAIDA. Although the latter is not a subject of international law the U.S. has managed to raise a significant coalition of states involving them in the war against terror. Other significant actors in international relations are global financial institutions such as IMF, World Bank etc. institutions able to influence national and international policies of sovereign states.

Civil society through its transnational bodies is becoming an increasingly active subject in international relations especially in areas such as human rights, ecology etc. In our opinion, besides globalization, we are also witnessing a process of corporatisation of the social environment signifying a shift from a society model based on extended family and subsequently the mononuclear family model to corporate the responsibility model, where the social is analogically operating to corporate the environment. We are witnessing the transformation of the individual into personal brand, of the cohesive family into a functional one etc.

*Neo-machiavellism and trans-modernity*

The sociologist Daniela Cojocaru<sup>6</sup> draws attention to phenomena specific to postmodern and transmodern such as: “deprivatization of family life”, “peripheral centrality of the child”, “parenting resignation” etc. The above mentioned aspects illustrate the transformation of family life in a cvasi-corporatist one – the deprivatization of family life. All these changes both to individual level and

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<sup>6</sup> Daniela Cojocaru, *Copilăria și construcția parentalității*, Polirom Publishing House, Iași, 2008.

society as a whole do not bring a withdrawal from social and political realism centered on the concept of interest and especially its legitimate interest and its tracking. On the other hand, interest in the machiavelist sense is at the origin of the social and political actor. Post and transmodern transformations diminish the role of individualism with organic universalism of collective interest type. We speak now of a fractal holism in the sense of keeping the individual within the new frames which incorporate him together with his direct alterity and represent him in relations with second-order alterity. The national state is thus integrated keeping its structural individuality in a transnational system such as the European Union. It is mandated to represent all citizens of Europe, including those of the national state in question, in relations with international organizations and power structures. But national sovereignty is not canceled, as it accomplishes its own foreign policy and remains an international subject, but with the correlation of its own policies with the common ones.

In the new framework the political realism involves both the pursuing of legitimate interests and the correlation with significant alterity. The new realism maintains the idea of pursuing the interest, but within globalizing interdependence, social solidarism does not contrast the individualism no longer, thus outlining a new model of corporate and social solidarity and responsibility. Corporation can not be understood as an economic organization designed to pursue the interests of a particular employer, but an independent actor in the social and economic space. A corporation represents the interests of shareholders divided as opinions, points of view and weight. The organization develops its own culture but that generates a sense of belonging, no longer being representative of shareholders, but an independently social construct, controlled by them. In the same way the state is a social construct independent of its citizens, partly controlled by them and also binding besides the instruments they have.

#### *A criticism on the machiavellic vision*

The first certainty of Machiavelli sent to Prince - Laurentium Medicem to whom is dedicated the book - is that the role of the Prince is to govern. For this he must have an adequate education and counseling<sup>7</sup>. Sovereigns must know how to treat their subjects, allies and enemies. An important role in political life is the luck, the fate<sup>8</sup>. In his time as a legacy of Roman law there is absolutely no

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<sup>7</sup> Ioana Petre, *op. cit.*, p. 27.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 41.

separation between law, religion and morality<sup>9</sup>. Machiavelli's novelty lies in the theoretical distinction between ethics and other aspects of everyday life<sup>10</sup>. The role of policy to self-perpetuate and the transformation of virtue into trickery and force introduce in the vision the Florentine philosopher, as Parvulescu states, the understanding of politics through the dialectics of power and fear<sup>11</sup>.

Handling fear transforms power from leading to dominating. Parvulescu realized even the transforming of the medieval concept "reger" (royalty) / royal power / dominus / dominating power<sup>12</sup>. The distinction between political and moral means for the Florentine philosopher to apply a completely different set of values to the politician compared to the mere citizen<sup>13</sup>. The interest, the political purpose pursued prevails in the political human activity. This interest is not his personal interest as an individual but of the state he represents and embodies<sup>14</sup>. The political realism should not be considered evil in itself, but rather a separation of rational and effective governance from sentimentality moralist that may appear in some politicians' attitude. Professional politicians should act detaching themselves from their feelings, just listening to the voice of reason which dictates those policies that will be most beneficial for the state and for most citizens. Even if some people will suffer only temporarily only in this way it can reach to strengthen the state and society in general. In current theories, the exposed idea generates the concept of "collateral damage" that is regrettable but necessary in a conflict. It would be a mistake to criticize Machiavelli's theory standing in an "ethical" position because this mere position is rejected by the Florentine philosopher in his construction of an early pragmatism. We can judge the Machiavellian thinking on the consequences of social development itself acknowledging on one hand that underlies any modern policies, especially liberals, thus being a precursor of modernity, but also a precursor of totalitarianism, centered on the slogan "purpose justifies means".

*Totalitarianism and the new man. Social interest theory as a justification of social inequality*

Totalitarian experience has shown that in the name of creating a new man,

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<sup>9</sup> E. Molcuț, *Drept privat român*, Universul Juridic Publ. House, Bucharest, 2005, p. 29.

<sup>10</sup> I. Petre, *op. cit.*, p. 51.

<sup>11</sup> Constantin Pârvolescu, *Politici și instituții politice*, Trei Publishing House, Bucharest 2000, pp. 24-25.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 52.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 53.

that is a noble goal in itself, were destroyed numerous material, spiritual and human values that have been transformed into collateral damages because of ambitions, most of them being personal.

The philosopher and politician Gabriela Cretu makes in the book "I hate political realism" a critique of contemporary European and Romanian politics from the perspective of uncritically application of political realism where, the author says, appear dangerous subversions of the democratic spirit<sup>15</sup>. "The political realism says the author cited - is becoming more common in the world of politics: she is skillfully translating a phrase which for some sounds more meaningful in English «real politics». It is about the extremely conservative vision in which political, military or economic interest of the strongest replaces the principle of law: (...) Idealists still cling to the idea that the principles and values of international law must be defended (...). There are no sui generis events in the history. Everything is a result of past and changes the future. (...) I hate political realism and I have no satisfaction when I say: Have I not told you that this would happen? (...) In politics, between love and hate always lies great indifference"<sup>16</sup>.

### *Conclusions*

Transformation of power into domination and the leading strategy using fear originated in the royal power justify their existence nowadays by the general interest of political discourse. The interest, the political purpose prevails in political human activity. This interest, although should not even be his own personal interest but the states he represents, is shifted in practice by pursuing personal, party or group interests. Political realism should not be considered an evil in itself, but rather a separation between rational and effective governance and moralistic sentimentality that may appear in some politicians' behaviour. Professional politicians should act with detachment from their feelings just listening to the voice of reason which dictates those policies that will be most beneficial for the state and for most citizens. General interest politics legitimize abuse by social pressure and general welfare. Social interest prevails illegitimately from the individual one, generating a political philosophy of force law pursuing compromise in prejudice of particular interest of individuals.

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<sup>15</sup> G. Crețu, *Urâsc realismul politic*, Lumen Publishing House, Iași, 2009, p. 93.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 95-97.

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