

## Are nationalism and cosmopolitanism compatible?

Written by Anastasia Voronkova

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# Are nationalism and cosmopolitanism compatible?

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The term cosmopolitanism comes from the Greek *kosmos*, 'world' and *polis*, 'city'. A cosmopolitan, thus, means a 'citizen of the world'. Like many other notions in political science, cosmopolitanism is an essentially contested concept in that it can mean different things to different people and at different times. It is also a multidimensional concept having several levels of meaning. The core idea behind cosmopolitanism is not new; it has its origins in the Greek philosophical tradition of Stoicism and Kantian philosophy of the Enlightenment. The Western cosmopolitan political tradition derives from Kantian understanding of a *polis* extended around the globe. However, the exact meaning attributed to it evolved over time reflecting the changing nature of political and economic structures, as well as of social and cultural interactions around the globe.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century it has taken on a new significance primarily as a result of various processes related to the inexorable influence of globalization. Globalization has been the key force triggering a resurgence of academic debate around and practical interest in cosmopolitanism in the modern era. Cosmopolitanism has reemerged as a way of understanding the implications of social, cultural and political transformations and contacts that transcend territorial boundaries. In this context, it has been invoked to refer to notions as diverse as global democratic institutions and transnational justice, 'postnational' forms of citizenship and belonging, together with individual values and cultural dispositions.

The essence of cosmopolitanism is the idea of moving beyond one's own specific political, communal, territorial, cultural attachments to give allegiance to the wider human community. Several processes taken together have contributed to the growing enthusiasm about cosmopolitanism as a new form of politics, ideal for the increasingly globalized world. Chief among them are the declining capacity of territorially bounded political units (nation-states) to provide a stable source of identification for their members, the nation-state's inability to give adequate solutions to collective political and economic problems, the compression of time and space, extensive mobility of populations, the proliferation of new forms of communication and the emergence of global threats, such as international terrorism or ecological disasters. Proponents hope that cosmopolitans will gradually establish institutions and values which are not embedded within national societies.

The extent to which cosmopolitanism (both as a political principle and a cultural commitment) is compatible with nationalism, that places a territorially based community and an emotional attachment to a collectivity underpinned by common symbolic resources at the heart of its ideological outlook has been the subject of an intense academic debate, having practical implications. It has been represented by some as a clear opposition while others have recognized the potential of humans to reconcile global citizenship, cultural openness and recognition of otherness with an allegiance to relatively closed and culturally homogenous collectivities.

This essay is concerned with the relationship between nationalism and cosmopolitanism in the age of globalization. It proceeds as follows. The first section defines the key concepts used, discusses the major ways of understanding cosmopolitanism in the context of various transformations triggered by globalization and distinguishes it from some other notions. It also looks at opposing positions adopted by different authors on the compatibility between the two – what could be termed the universalist versus the community-embedded perspectives. The second section establishes four points of tension between nationalism and cosmopolitanism. In this connection, it is argued that the opposition is based partly on one-sided conceptions of human nature. For the purposes of analysis we divide

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cosmopolitanism into politico-legal and cultural-moral strands. The third part assesses the arguments about the weakening of the nation-state and evaluates proposals for global cosmopolitan democracy articulated most notably by David Held. The final section looks at the cultural construction of a common cosmopolitan space within the framework of European integration and its compatibility with national identities.

When evaluating the connection between nationalism and cosmopolitanism we attempt to answer three interrelated but nevertheless separate questions:

- whether at a normative level the contradictions are sufficiently strong to justify the incompatibility claim;
- whether the actual experiences of cosmopolitanism suggest that cosmopolitan belonging substitutes and overrides existing national affiliations;
- whether the relationship is a valuable one, i. e. whether the synthesis of the two (if possible at all) can contribute to informing real political action by reconceptualizing the dominant ways in which collective problems, in particular, difference and diversity, are dealt with in an increasingly complex political, social and cultural environment.

The main thesis of this paper is that nationalism and cosmopolitanism should not be seen as irreconcilable alternatives and the victory of one over the other is not inevitable. It is perfectly possible to speak of a cosmopolitan nationalism, or ethnic cosmopolitanism. In fact, their combination and fruitful mediation can help minimize both the dangerous exclusivist potential of nationalism and the Eurocentric nature of universalism, which is also to some extent inherent to cosmopolitanism.

**Definitions.** Vertovec and Cohen [2002] have identified six major ways of understanding cosmopolitanism: as a socio-cultural condition, a worldview, a political project to build transnational institutions, a political project based on the recognition of multiple identities, a mode of orientation to the world and a set of specific capabilities allowing to adapt to other people and cultures. It is fair to say that what unites those visions is a 'fundamental devotion to the interests of humanity as a whole' [Robbins, 1998: 1]. In a similar vein, one of the most fervent supporters of cosmopolitanism, Martha Nussbaum defines it as the ability to 'recognise humanity wherever it occurs, and give its fundamental ingredients, reason and moral capacity, our first allegiance and respect' [Nussbaum, 2002: 7].

Three major tenets are commonly identified as forming the core of cosmopolitanism [Held, 2003: 169; Pogge, 1992: 48-49]:

- 1) individualism – the individual is the ultimate unit of concern and analysis;
- 2) universalism – every person, irrespective of class, gender, race or religion is equally worthy of respect and recognition by others;
- 3) generality – the whole humanity (and not just those sharing certain objective characteristics) is entitled to fair and impartial treatment.

In order to understand better the multidimensional nature of cosmopolitanism it is helpful to distinguish it from two concepts that are frequently confused with it – globalization, and multiculturalism. Put rather bluntly, globalization implies that 'events occurring on one part of the globe can affect, and be affected by events occurring in other, distant parts of the globe' [Thomas, 1999: 464]. It, thus, involves, increased social, political, economic and cultural interactions that crosscut territorial boundaries, the ambiguity of the boundary and the growing interconnectedness of the national and the global. Cosmopolitanism responds to the various state and society-level changes by developing transnational forms of politics, forms of life and loyalties.

Cosmopolitanism has been described as a 'middle-path between ethnocentric nationalism and particularist multiculturalism' [Vertovec and Cohen, 2002: 1]. On the one hand, it is different from multiculturalism in that it is not limited by the frontiers of individual nation-states. It advocates the recognition of cultural diversity and openness

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across the globe as a whole, whereas multiculturalism simply accepts difference within nation-states and promotes collective rather than individual identities. On the other hand, cosmopolitanism should be distinguished from nationalism. The most relevant to the present discussion points of disagreement between them concern cultural aspects.

Nationalism denies the general and celebrates the importance of the specific. Nationalists tend to provide ample justifications for why each nationalist movement is unique. For nationalists individuals are culturally and socially embedded beings, the needs of the nation take precedence over individual interests. Cosmopolitanism maintains, amongst other points, that identities are fluid and not geographically or culturally bounded. Most authors who have contributed to the debate have identified themselves as being either on the nationalist or on the cosmopolitan side. A clear statement of the extreme incompatibility position is the following. A cosmopolitan is someone who possesses

'...a way of being in the world, a way of constructing an identity for oneself that is **opposed to the idea of belonging to or devotion to or immersion to a particular culture**' [Waldron, 2000: 227, emphasis added].

Nussbaum (2002) argues that world citizenship rather than patriotism (a **sentiment** of loyalty and pride with respect to the community of which one is a part) or nationalism should be the basis for good society. Both patriotism and nationalism are for her based on an exclusivist conception of belonging and there is no room for them in cosmopolitan principles. Some commentators have recently started to conceptualise the relationship as a complementary one, where multiple forms of identification and overlapping identities become the norm. From this perspective, cosmopolitanism implies an ethical and methodological stance that allows people to distance from their national, religious, ethnic loyalties without rejecting them but to be able to reflect critically on other cultures and one's own position towards them [Turner, 2002; Beck, 2006].

However, affiliations to a specific place and culture form the necessary background and context, within which to engage in such a self- and other-reflexive exercise. It appears that this view is more realistic in that it stresses the idea that we should be attempting to derive new non-nation-state centric ways of dealing with cultural multiplicity and plurality. In order to understand why the issue of the potential compatibility of nationalism and cosmopolitanism has been the subject of a lively debate it is necessary to compare in greater detail their specificity. Four points of contrast will be focused upon, although the list is not exhaustive.

**Nationalism and cosmopolitanism contrasted.** Firstly, it should be reiterated that cosmopolitanism is based on individualism, that is it puts the morally autonomous individual at the center of its philosophical outlook. By contrast, nationalism places an emphasis on the collective dimension of human life. The sole unit of analysis for nationalism is the collectivity – the nation, the ethnic group. It is this sense of belonging to a community that can be considered common and unifying to nationalist thinking, despite the wide variety of sometimes contrasting trends existing within it. Cosmopolitanism extends membership beyond what it sees as the narrow confines of a particular nation to the world at large. It is arguable that this universality destroys the very basis of belonging – the cosmopolitan belongs everywhere but at the same time to nowhere in particular.

This is closely related to the second point – the deterritorialization of cosmopolitanism as opposed to the centrality of the territorial dimension in nationalism. Cosmopolitanism is frequently associated with increased mobility of ideas, people, cultures and cannot be tied up to any specific territory. It is based on the belief that the individual is capable of moving beyond territorial attachments. Refugees, diasporas and migrants are said to represent the 'spirit' of cosmopolitanism. Loyalties are seen as divorced from territory. Instead multiple forms of identity and belonging are encouraged and promoted. By contrast, the concept of a territorially based homeland remains key to nationalist ideology. Almost all nationalist struggles revolve around territory as the object of emotional attachment of the members of the nation.

The third aspect of difference concerns the 'hot' emotions of nationalism versus the 'coolness' of cosmopolitanism [Nash, 2003: 506]. Nationalism cannot be fully understood in rational categories alone, it invariably involves a strong emotional affection and loyalty. For Anderson the nation creates 'deep attachments of fraternity' [Anderson, 1991: 7]. Cosmopolitanism is directed towards self-reflection and criticism more than to emotions. The final contradiction

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relates to the inadequacy of the temporal dimension of cosmopolitanism. It has been extensively criticized for ignoring the temporal deepening of the human community [Cwerner, 2000: 335; Smith, 1995: 25]. It is true that cosmopolitanism tends to concentrate on the spatial expansion of loyalties, identities and rights. Unlike nationalism, it does not present a long historical narrative of the 'global society'. Nor does it extend the rights and responsibilities to future generations. A dialogue between past and present could contribute to a consideration of the ways in which the problems of the present might be partly generated by the inequalities of the past (for example, inequalities between nation-states).

All the abovementioned tensions certainly deserve attention as indicators of potential 'uncomfortable zones' in the relationship between the two outlooks. However, it is arguable that they do not automatically lead to an incompatibility between nationalist and cosmopolitan perspectives. It is suggested that those who maintain a clear-cut opposition between nationalism and cosmopolitanism rely upon a one-sided and simplistic account of human nature as based on either unqualified collectivism or pure and rootless individualism. As soon as we recognize that human nature can be constituted by both collectivist and individualist dimensions it becomes much more difficult to make categorical statements in this regard.

**Cosmopolitanism as a political project: politico-legal thesis.** So far we have been discussing the normative side of the debate. We now move to consider actual proposals of cosmopolitan democracy and their conceptualization of the role of the nation-state. As mentioned in the first section of this paper, the principle of cosmopolitan democracy as an alternative to existing structures of governance is articulated primarily by David Held. Underlying his work is the idea that the existing international system based on the Westphalian regime and state sovereignty is inadequate to deal with the challenges of globalization.

Complex interconnectedness arising from globalization requires a more nuanced and multidimensional system of governance where states constitute just one level. The inability of individual nation-states to provide answers to collective questions, the ambiguity of the boundaries between the national and the international, the global and the local means that nation-states are no longer the sole sovereign agents. The nation-state is unable to realize democracy in terms of three key tenets – individual autonomy, political legitimacy and democratic law. In addition, 'overlapping communities of fate' [Held, 2003b: 523; Guibernau, 2001: 431] are the reality of the modern era – that is the existence of a spatially bounded self-determining national collectivity free to decide on its own destiny is no longer sustainable. The community of fate can no longer be situated within the borders of a single nation-state.

What is required in this context is a new institutional framework that is conceptualized in opposition to traditional national forms of democracy [Held, 1995, 2003; 2003b] and includes local, national, regional and global institutions. This new democratic framework should be based on the principles of equal worth and dignity, active agency, political responsibility and accountability, consent, reflexive deliberation and collective decision-making through voting procedures, inclusiveness and subsidiarity, avoidance of serious harm and amelioration of urgent need [Held, 2003b: 515]. Held does not dismiss the role of the nation-state completely but does not see it as the primary locus of democracy. He admits that the nation-state can coexist with transnational civil society and transnational organizations, such as the UN.

Held is right in pointing out that it is not possible to confine politics to territorial borders. In addition, it is certainly vital to complement institutional principles with ethical considerations, such as equal worth and recognition of diversity. Proponents of a more socially-oriented cosmopolitanism criticize his version of cosmopolitan democracy on the basis that it is grounded in the same statist assumptions [Beck, 2002: 25]. According to this view, Held's conception implies territorially-based states and closed societies, which are simply becoming more interconnected as a result of globalization. One other possible objection could be a lack of attention to the internal plurality of the cosmopolitan community. It is not clear who will define the emergent cosmopolitan order. There is a danger of several powerful states deciding on the boundaries of the cosmopolitan order. What happens to those states which fail to live up to the cosmopolitan ideal? Held would respond by saying that cosmopolitanism is not about coercion and states should be free to join the cosmopolitan community at any stage. Yet the extent to which 'latecomers' will be free to intervene to negotiate the principles and the organization of the cosmopolitan order might remain limited.

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**Cosmopolitanism and identity: culturalist thesis.** As mentioned in the theoretical section of this paper, the growing enthusiasm about cosmopolitanism frequently described as a 'postnational' form of belonging stems largely from the desire to escape from the traditional nationalist understanding of culture that is often seen by critics as overly exclusivist and spatially bounded. Due to its capacity to transform state sovereignty and its integrating potential the EU is sometimes seen as the perfect example of cosmopolitanism in practice [Rifkin, 2004]. It appears that it is certainly right to view the EU as a cosmopolitan entity from an institutional viewpoint (as evidenced by the presence of common European institutions). However, the question of whether it is appropriate to speak of a 'cosmopolitan Europe' from a cultural perspective, (as could be suggested by the project of a pan-European federal state and the emphasis on common European cultural heritage) is debatable. For Gerard Delanty a cosmopolitan Europe is a 'more accurate designation of the emerging form of Europeanization as a mediated and emergent reality of the national and the global' [Delanty, 2005: 406].

At the same time describing Europe at the present stage of integration as cosmopolitan carries the danger of confusing cosmopolitanism with supranationalism that is a form of nationalism existing above and beyond the nation [Grande, 2006: 96]. The issue here is whether the cultural specificity of Europe as a distinct reality points to the existence of a form of cosmopolitan identity that transcends previous historical divisions and whether this cosmopolitan disposition is compatible with existing national affiliations.

The first point to note is the expansion of the symbolic dimension of a common cultural space – a common flag and other symbols. Secondly, new forms of commemoration have arisen based on forgiveness and aimed at overcoming the diverse and divisive experiences of the past [Giesen, 2003]. Thirdly, collective identities are at least partly conceptualized in European terms [Kohli, 2000: 125]. However, they complement and coexist with national loyalties. Sociological studies have shown that the sentiment of belonging is not a 'zero-sum game', that is individual and collective identity can be constituted by a multiplicity of combined socio-territorial attachments and an increase in attachment to the global (or, in this case the European community) does not necessarily presuppose a corresponding decrease in loyalty to local or national communities.

On the one hand, if cosmopolitanism is taken to mean the recognition of otherness and hybrid identities, a cosmopolitan Europe certainly exists, at least in the discourse prevalent in the context of integration. On the other hand, reducing cosmopolitanism to mere acceptance of plurality makes it an extension of multiculturalism. Cosmopolitanism should be not simply about the coexistence of multiple identities but also about the interaction of the national and the global that transforms both in a positive way. Even if we recognize that national identities are being transformed as a result of interaction with the global it is difficult to determine to what extent this is triggered by Europeanization more than by pressures from within nation-states. The controversial nature of 'cosmopolitan Europe' highlights a major problem with the concept of cosmopolitanism itself, which also has implications for its relationship with nationalism – its indeterminacy. While it is an attractive theoretical idea, it remains hard to pin down clear cases of cosmopolitanism in practice. The real practices of the cosmopolitan agent are difficult to discern.

Another widely recognized example of cosmopolitan belonging is one generated by transnational migration and diasporic movements [Ong, 1998]. Firstly, as Pheng Cheah (and also David Held) points out, various transnational organizations, such as Amnesty International, the Asian Pacific People's Environmental Network and others can be considered to be politically-oriented cosmopolitanisms, in that they attempt to generate a global consciousness about fundamental problems concerning humanity as a whole [Cheah, 1998: 36].

Secondly, transnational migrant communities could be termed cosmopolitan, because their existence within the borders of individual nation-states reminds us that collective identities can be linked to places outside these borders. Thus, the nation-state's cultural hegemony as the privileged agent of identity is challenged. Identities are not fixed and migrants forge links that crosscut state boundaries. For example, the social space of Turkish immigrants in Germany and throughout Europe is increasingly transnationalised [Çağlar, 2001: 607]. They get engaged in various organizations at the European level.

Efforts are being made to define collective identities in civic rather than exclusively ethnic terms, for example in relation to common urban spaces (such as Berlin), as opposed to one single ethnically based unit. This indicates a

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distinctive cosmopolitan stance in that citizenship is divorced from nationalist exclusivist prejudices. Similarly, Singapore is often viewed as a cosmopolitan city [Yeoh, 2004]. There has been a limited shift away from the discourse of the 'authenticity of the four founding races' (Chinese, Indians, Malays and Others) towards a greater acceptance of cultural diversity and a more inclusive attitude to non-citizens.

However, it remains unclear how concepts of cosmopolitan belonging and cultural heterogeneity can fully develop in public consciousness without a significant transformation of the nation-state's management of ethnic relations, which in the two examples given here is still largely based on an essentialist assumption that there should be a declared and unchanging ethnic identity. While it is accurate to talk about the objective process of the cosmopoliticization of reality in the sense of an increase in mobility, communication, ecological and other risks that link previously unrelated societies across the globe, this is not exactly the same as to say that subjective cosmopoliticization has taken place. A cosmopolitan attitude in the treatment of difference is only starting to materialize. It would involve not only a sense of distance from one's own culture to be able to critically evaluate it, as Turner (2002) suggests, but also the establishment of democratic principles guaranteeing respect for cultural and ethnic diversity. Here nation-states, as well as the international community, should be the key participants.

## Conclusion.

This essay has examined recent debates about cosmopolitanism as a form of political and cultural response to the various challenges arising as a result of globalization. We have discussed the possibility of combining allegiance to the wider human community with national affiliations. We will now make some concluding remarks on a way of thinking about cosmopolitanism to take into account the connection between the universal and the particular, the global and the local instead of representing it as a clear dichotomy. If the cosmopolitan ideal is to have any real meaning it should be based on an ethical commitment to the recognition of difference, diversity and otherness underpinned by an appropriate institutional-legal structure at a global level but not confined to it.

As we have tried to emphasize throughout the present paper, one of the key developments of the modern era has been the proliferation of overlapping layers of loyalties and identities. It is arguable that the underlying assumption of pure cosmopolitans is that the experiences of modernity, globalization and cosmopolitanism are not transportable and are alien to non-Western cultures. Here local cultures can be expected to gradually dissolve into the universalist and all-embracing framework of the cosmopolitan tradition. Yet the effect of globalization and the shrinking of physical distance is that actors in traditional societies now have the opportunity to interact with global forces (like, for example, international trade) but also often rework them in their own ways, which reflects their embeddedness within specific cultural schemes and value systems.

Uniting cosmopolitanism and nationalism helps to move beyond the otherwise Eurocentric and elitist nature of the cosmopolitan perspective. In addition, it might contribute to addressing one of the major challenges facing modern societies – the accommodation of ethnic and cultural diversity. It is neither possible nor necessary for the nation to 'escape' nationalism and none of the aforementioned outlooks should be prioritized over the other. Cosmopolitanism is not supranationalism that exists above and beyond the nation. As long as we remain mindful of this distinction, cosmopolitanism both as a political and cultural principle and an emerging reality certainly deserves to be accepted and taken into account in the creation of new avenues of political action.

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