

2016/1/2: Reason of state

Reason of state – remarks on a concept of political dynamism

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Reference to „reason of state“ is incentive of political action. Reference to “action for reason of reason of state” is beyond religious-ethical justifications for political decisions and actions, thus justifying absolute political autonomy and responsibility. At the same time, it manifests a new possibility for political exoneration when political success is desired. As far as objectives and strategy of political action are concerned, a “reason of state” may be in some way determined for every state and every political order, but it may also serve the political actor as a reason and justification for acting beyond the legally acceptable – at least in its borderline area – and for applying, if necessary, political power outside the given conventions, thus at the same time kicking off new politics or directions and causing inspirations. Even today, the objection that one acts „ for reason of reason of state“ also allows to deal with sometimes existential challenges and political problems in a targeted and efficient way, and occasionally even in a pragmatismal, flexible and very dynamic way, in reference to higher-level interests, thus to the well-being of the whole. The term “reason of state” has thus become a fixed star toward which political actors orient themselves with reference to the inevitable necessity of political decisions and political action. The complex challenges the state is confronted, on the one hand because of globalisation, on the other hand due to break-up of states and the resulting weak governments, could ventilate the term again and give it new relevance concerning the interpretation of its right to exist and protection of its vital interests in the area of tension between political dynamism and static. In reference to the Federal Republic of Germany, the radius of German reason of state has enlarged in accordance with the action range of German society and its government. In the beginning, it was directed towards the objective to gain national freedom of action; today, however, it is confronted with the – apparently imparted by the EU – claim to co-design international order. Depending from political constellations and power relations he can influence where appropriate, the political actor is free to decide by acting according to mere considerations of usefulness and interest. According to Machiavelli, political directives derived from context-independent and all-time valid ethical standards are ineffectual and sometimes prove dangerous for those who follow them. Machiavelli’s objective always was preservation, stabilisation and, if possible, enlargement of the polity. Hans von Hentig – who Herfried Münkler refers to – once stated that Machiavelli’s counsels actually never crossed the borders to what modern sovereignty is awarded for its preservation. So the term „reason of state“ is one of political dynamism and a result of functional politics. It is in the nature of politics that it cannot do without this term – be it quoted or not – as a realistic political instrument of political dynamism. The state changes permanently, and the constitutional state, because it is a constitutional state, always has to be a power state as well. Thus, it is worth regarding the term “reason of state” also from the point of view of political theory, and attending it in the context of its real appearance.

