

Editorial Introduction

Professor Massimo La Torre
Editor of the Journal

This first issue of a new series of East-West studies presents the proceedings of the international conference held at the University of Tallinn on 28 and 29 October 2021. The conference was titled *Still a Cold Monster? Rise and Decline of Modern State*, and it was sponsored by SOGOLAS, the School of Society, Governance and Law of the University of Tallinn. The topic discussed was the role of the state in an increasingly privatised, globalised and digitalised society. In the last thirty years, national societies have been undergone profound transformations. The first was the promise of a new global order, inaugurated by the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union. A new age of peace and global conversation was opened—or so it was universally believed. We thus observed a dramatisation of commitment to international law in internal affairs and the supranational dislocation of some of the traditional tools of national sovereignty. Markets were liberalised, and capital could flow freely across borders without being hindered by tariffs or borders. Within national societies, state intervention in the economy quite quickly withered away. We also observed the emergence of a third industrial revolution, one where computers and robots are replacing human beings, machines and motors. Rules seem to be replaced by algorithms. Digital platforms and the internet are irretrievably the space where people conduct their conversations and meetings. Now, these platforms are not publicly, but rather privately run, and managed and owned by tycoons, rapidly crowned as oligarchs. The state in this panorama seems to be losing its traditional grasp on societies and, with it, its proper function and special legitimacy.

Could one then say that we are facing the death of the state? This is the question we were confronted with in the Tallinn conference, a disquieting question that serves as the red thread of all the articles we are publishing in this special issue. The other question, related to this one, is the following. If we are losing the state, should we consider this loss as something determinable to our civil condition? In many doctrines and in several political theories, the state has been seen as a kind of “cold monster” (to use Nietzsche’s words). People were somehow repelled by the bureaucratic and abstract nature of state organisation, being also worried about its asserted monopoly of violence over society. Should we now repeat Nietzsche’s curse on the state? Once we are losing it, should we be happy about such an epochal loss? Are we not losing, together with the state, basic goods of social life, such as public care, social security, welfare, and last but not least, sovereignty—“government of the people, by the people, for the people,” in Abraham Lincoln’s words? Could we do without a state in the frantic and perilous arena of international relations? The final question is thus: Is the state still a cold monster? Or should we review our curse upon it, or our suspicion of it, and rehabilitate its role within society and in the international arena?

Now, this is the ground we have trodden at the Tallinn conference, and this is the theme this special issue addresses. The answers to our three questions remain unanswered. Nonetheless, in the conference, there was some basic consensus about what is a plausible thesis in the brave new world we are approaching in the twenty-first century. The state as the holder of the public sphere and as the protecting agency of public goods, as a space where not only private interests and whims, but rather shared care and a reasonable, civic conversation, have the upper hand: such a state still has a lot to say and to contribute to a civilised and free mode of human coexistence.