

THE POSITION OF SMALL STATES IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND THE EXPANSION OF THE NORTH ATLANTIC TREATY (NATO)

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Abstract: After the end of the Cold War and the bipolar world in which the largest superpowers (the United States of America and the Soviet Union), along with other major players, played a major role in the world order, a new configuration of international relations was established. At the beginning of the 21st century, the existing political and economic system of the world, which was mainly driven by the United States and Europe, found itself in a gap that needed to be filled with new organizational forms of international cooperation and global governance. However, the reconfiguration of the international system left very little room for small states. In the recent doctrine of international relations, more and more attention is paid to the positioning of small states. However, the theoretical approaches differ regarding the criteria for defining what is called a “small state”. Economists and political scientists have devoted several studies to the analysis of small states. Some distinguish between microstates and small states, insisting on their classification, while others compare small states with weak, fragile states completely dependent on external dynamics, sometimes comparing them with innovative, agile states. The themes are quite demanding, which is why the author returned to the analysis of international relations three decades after European and Atlantic institutions began to open their doors to the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Most of the debate on this issue took place from 1995 to the early 2000s. For most of the so-called Eastern countries, integration into NATO and the EU was motivated by concern for protection against the former Soviet dominant power. These countries were ready to join the opposing alliance and seek

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close cooperation with the United States. That is why they are all candidates for NATO and the EU, which is perfectly illustrated by the words of the Lithuanian ambassador to France, Giedrius Cekuolis: "NATO and the EU are like dad and mom to us, and we cannot choose between the two". The connection between these two processes suggests that the Euro-Atlantic integration of the countries of the former communist camp was inevitable, although in theory and practice there are opposing viewpoints that believe that it was a drastic mistake by America and the EU.

Keywords: Small states, NATO, EU, geo-politics, Collective Security Treaty Organization.

"Big countries do what they want, small countries do what they have to"
(Thucydides)

INTRODUCTION

Since the second half of the 20th century, and especially after the end of the Cold War, academic interest in small countries has grown. As the history of the international community accelerates and restructures, so the fragmentation of states accelerates and restructures, especially after the implosion of the Yugoslav Federation and the Soviet Union. In this way, the number of small countries with less than 5 million inhabitants multiplied. Their number in the last decade has reached over 200 countries, of which as many as 40 countries are located in Europe. One of the most contentious issues is the question: which countries are considered small-states? Some theorists distinguish between microstates and small states, insisting on their classification (Gaidz, 2007). Others, on the other hand, compare small states with weak, fragile states, completely dependent on external dynamics, sometimes with innovative, agile states (Handel 1981, Guilbaud 2016, p.11). There are also theorists that believe that small states are those whose survival is no longer truly threatened (Kalibataite, 2016). It is clear from the above that there is no single view of what is meant by "small country", especially since there are no criteria that would clearly distinguish this group of countries from medium and large ones. The historical-political framework for the affirmation of small states was formed during the 19th and 20th centuries during the holding of major international conferences, such as the congresses of 1815 (Vienna) and 1919/120 (Versailles, Saint-Germain, Trianon, and Sèvres). After World War II, when the Cold War broke out, the NATO Alliance and the

European construction (Communities and the Council of Europe) were constituted in the West. At the same time, in the East, was created the counterpart of the Warsaw Pact Alliance and the European Community, the integration of COMECON. In these two military-political integrations, the small states strengthened their status, although the USSR and the US remained the main leaders. These alliances offered a new framework for the development of small states. During the bilateral constellation, their survival as states was no longer threatened, as the two antagonistic blocs took care of the security of their members and thus the security of small states. Aware of their weaknesses, small states sought to implement a policy of neutrality. They hoped that in this way, they would escape the monopoly of the great powers and their satellitization. With such enthusiasm, they created the Movement of Non-Aligned States, which hoped that with such an out-of-bloc policy they would see political stability and security (Ružin, 1985). However, numerous coups, military coups, and dictatorial regimes under pressure from the great powers have shown their weakness and instability regardless of the solidarity they manifested during the great summits of the Non-Aligned Movement or within the world organization. In the historiography of small countries, several types of neutrality have been affirmed: a) freely chosen neutrality (for example, the Netherlands, Sweden); b) neutrality arising from international agreements (e.g., Belgium, Luxembourg); and c) neutrality imposed by the force of political circumstances (e.g., Finland, Austria). Several papers devoted to the political and security issues of small countries make it possible to better identify contemporary trends in this field. It should be emphasized that the lack of consensus on defining the term "small state" continues to characterize this field of research. In defining the term "small state", there are quantitative and qualitative approaches. According to the first approach, the identification of the size of the states is done through the size of the area, the population, the economic resources, and the military capacities. However, there is no generally accepted limit to the precise quantitative demarcation of the term "small states". According to the qualitative approach, the size of a country can be determined by the perceptions or influence of the country on a regional or international level. A small country is one that is perceived as not being able to influence events in its environment or the wider international community. Despite such uncertainties, small countries' studies are evolving and gaining precision in terms of both methodological and empirical affirmations. In the 1970s, small and medium-sized states within the Non-Aligned Movement frequently

imposed themselves as relevant entities in the World Organization, as a voting bloc on numerous resolutions (Sauvent, 1982). In December 1961, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the period 1960-1970 as a decade of development (*United Nations Development Decade*). During this period, the resolution on "International trade, a basic instrument for economic development" was adopted, requesting the convening of an international trade conference (*International trade as the main instrument of economic development*).¹ In the eighties, with the strengthening of neoliberal institutionalism, the foundations were laid for an in-depth study of small states. Small countries in this era, relying on skillful diplomacy and acting within international organizations, could exert some influence internationally (Luša & Mijić-Vanjska, 2012, pp. 39-65). In the late eighties, after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the fall of communism and the end of the Cold War (1945-1991), whose winner was the Western Liberal Democracy (Francis Fukuyama-The End of History and the Last Man - 1992) a number of small and medium-sized states from the Middle and Eastern Europe gained their independence. This assessment stimulated the interest of science in the study of small countries, their foreign policies and importance in international relations, the effectiveness of tools used as a soft power policy, and the ambitions to join large alliances.

SECURITY THREATS - A COMMON CHALLENGE FOR LARGE AND SMALL COUNTRIES

The literature in the field of international relations, which has traditionally dealt with the study of the great powers in the 19th century, placed them at the center of scientific interest primarily because of their dominance. At these historic peace congresses, the great powers wrote history and shaped the international order. At the same time, the term "Great Power" has become institutionalized in the international vocabulary, a universal term that identifies with the term force. In many languages, such as French "puissance", English "power", or German "macht", the term force grows into a personification of the term state. The interest of science in the study of small states was marginal regardless of the fact that after the Great War (1914-1918) and the creation of the League of Nations, the conditions for strengthening small states improved. However, as the Second World

¹ The mentioned resolutions will result in the holding of the UN Conference on Trade and Development (CNUCED), from which the Group 77 will emerge.

War approached, hostilities between the great powers escalated, and with them, the realist theory of international relations gained importance. It was not until the onset of anti-colonial wars, the affirmation of non-aligned policies, and especially the “year of decolonization in 1960” that many small states gained independence. These processes are of great interest to science for analyzing the “role and place of small states” in international order. The affirmation of the young states is accompanied by several scientific monographs, among which stands out the collective work “Small States and International Security, Europe and Beyond” (Small States and International Security, Europe and Beyond), realized by Clive Archer, Alison J.K. Bales, and Anders Wevel (Kalibataite, 2017). This study analyzes the behaviors of small states in an environment where security challenges have increased.² The main ambition of the authors is to harmonize the analysis of the behavior of small countries and their room for maneuver in the face of modern security issues. The traditional security reading, which focused on military issues and the power of states, has been gradually overtaken. The authors seek to show that in analyzing the security of small states, it is necessary to take into account the interrelationships between foreign policy and the broader aspects of security. The link between foreign policy and national security is a reality and shows that small states generally act on the international stage to protect themselves from the geopolitical and geo-economic interests of large or medium-sized powers. Such a way of reasoning, in the style of Hans Morgenthau, is a categorical imperative of states acting from a position of politics of force (Morgenthau, 2005). The lack of control over the military or economic power of stronger neighboring states, in the Hobbesian sense of significance, affects the sensitivity and behavior of small states. It is enough to point to the example of “Finlandization” between Finland and the USSR to understand the significance of this phenomenon. It is therefore understandable that the foreign policy of small countries is aimed at ensuring national security. Above all, “small countries through foreign policy seek to secure the defense of their national interests internationally and domestically”. In the opinion of Raymond Aron, “the national interest is real and defined in relation to the security of the state as an eternal goal”. Although the concept of national

² Divided into three parts: a) theoretical and conceptual considerations, b) European case studies, and c) comparative research on non-European cases. This work aims to go beyond the Eurocentric monographs and proposes a comparative analysis of different security strategies of small countries around the world.

interest and security remains disputed by some theorists, these concepts, together with foreign policy, show that “international politics “is a game in which the main players are the big countries and the ultimate reward is security”. Aware of the destructive effects caused by major disruptions of the international system on their fate, small nations are increasingly inclined to adopt a foreign policy strategy that reflects security concerns. The stakes are high because it is about their survival and autonomy in the constellation of international actors that have the greatest importance and influence. In order to impose and be heard, small countries are very active in international security issues. In reality, however, the stakes of international security and diplomatic relations imply the growing dependence of small states on the dynamics and importance of external actors. That is why small countries are the weakest link in asymmetric relations. They are not able to change the nature and functioning of these relationships from the big to the small, powerless actors. This statement is affirmed by the American political scientist, Robert Keohane, who believes that “a small country is one that cannot have a greater impact on the international system” (Keohane, 1969). To understand the vulnerability and capacity for action when it comes to small country survival strategies, it is necessary to analyze the environment in which they evolve. For example, the first NATO alliances with the Baltic states and their “marching to the West” were entirely conditioned by relations between the United States and the Russian Federation. At the same time, the persistence of small countries towards NATO integration was in perfect coherence with another of their characteristics. It is the use of international organizations as an action platform but also as a platform for the international scene” (Kalibataite, 2017). In principle, the behavior of small countries was oriented by two essential motives. The first is the desire for greater neutrality or autonomy. The second is the search for various forms of influence in the region and beyond on the principle of solidarity and cooperation. After the end of the Cold War and the strong process of democratization in Europe, small countries affirm international activism through cooperation in the face of major security challenges. Due to quantitative or qualitative constraints, small countries in the field of military security seek to adapt survival strategies in the most rational and effective way. Experiences from the functioning of NATO and the EU in the post-Cold War period have shown that they tend to specialize in narrower domains such as cyber defense, IT technology, and research in various forms of intelligence. On the other hand, the general diversified military capacity is pushed to the background. These activities can be affected by small countries only within the framework of large political-military integrations

such as NATO-Alliance or the European Union. At the same time, apart from the military and territorial security dimensions, small countries are also interested in the economic, social, and environmental aspects. It is evident that in today's international community, security developments are leading to the widening of the margin of action of small states. They should no longer be seen as mere consumers of security whose survival depends solely on the will of the great powers. On the contrary, they affirm the idea that "the same state can sometimes be small and weak, sometimes small but also more powerful, depending on the situation, the environment, and the actors". Finally, small countries can see significant international affirmation thanks to mediation, as was the case with Norway in the Middle East conflict, when the historic agreement between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization was signed; Switzerland's role in numerous humanitarian and mediation operations (OSCE), the UN, and the Red Cross in Ukraine, Africa, and the Middle East (Allouche, 1994, pp. 213, etc.). Observed from a general point of view, the logic of the mediation of small states is explained by the place they occupy in the international system, where they hold modest international positions such as physical, human, and material capacities.

MULTILATERALISM AS A FOREIGN POLICY OPTION OF SMALL STATES

In the opinion of Newman and Stoll, "countries with similar sizes of territory, demographics, economic and military power, i.e., the power to conduct internationally are identical", which also shows the strategic orientation of all post-communist countries towards Euro-Atlantic integration (Neumann & Gstohl, 2004). Alliances and international organizations represent the most appropriate framework for their actions to maximize their interests in the international community. Analyzing these phenomena, Walt realistically assumes that alliances are formed for the sake of power balance, while third parties will be tied to those who perceive them as a threat (Stephen, 1990). It is well known that realists in the analysis of alliances are guided by the principles of power and interest as the reason for their creation. In the Cold War era, the creation of NATO, especially thanks to Article 5 of the Washington Treaty, according to which any attack on any member would be treated as an attack on the entire Alliance, acted as a magnet for post-communist Europe. In the post-cold period, NATO is adapting to the new international circumstances and, instead of the philosophy with which it treated the reception of the former

dictatorships (Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and Greece), has built a completely different strategy. This time, the criteria for democratization, the rule of law, the market economy, respect for the rights of minorities, peaceful settlement of disputes, and good neighborly relations were emphasized as essential conditions for membership in the Alliance (Ružin, 2010, p. 43). One of the most important questions posed by critics of the Alliance is: what are the benefits and financial obligations of the new NATO members? On the one hand, the possible scenario was that small states that had freed themselves from the shackles of the Warsaw Pact or found themselves in limbo after the break-up of the communist federations would have had to accept a “policy of neutrality,” “equidistance,” or “non-alignment.” Such a policy was rejected by the majority of political parties and elites because it was historically overcome and without major effects. The second scenario was the creation of regional security institutions, which was unacceptable because there was a reservation that this would create an alternative to NATO. Finally, the third scenario was NATO membership as a kind of security umbrella, although in the 1990s the former Warsaw Pact countries did not face security challenges. Considering the level of security, economic prosperity, and political consequences of the conflicts in the former Yugoslavia, small countries, through membership in Euro-Atlantic integration, had ambitions to: participate in the process of making global political decisions; impose themselves as exporters of security and peace, not as importers of crises; have economic benefits; increase the chances of joining the European Union; increase stability in the region; and finally, become members of a “selected established international club of leading Western world politicians”. In an interview, the Prime Minister of North Macedonia, Zoran Zaev, emphasized the benefits of NATO membership.³ At the same time, as a member state of the Alliance, which is the personification of the most powerful military-political force in the world, small countries are becoming more attractive to non-NATO countries because they are more influential and stronger in the region and beyond.

³ In a press release dated June 3, 2019, Zoran Zaev stated that Macedonia has benefited from NATO membership. He said that the benefits of membership are already visible since NATO means peace and stability and is the strongest guarantor of our security. Gross domestic product rose for 5.5 percent, unemployment fell for 7.5 percent, industry grew 8.8 percent, and wages rose for 6.1 percent. Foreign investments reached a new record in the country of 625 million euros, which is three times more than the average of the last eight years, and twice the best year so far.

In this way, small countries gain wider space for lobbying, consultation, and use of NATO, EU, OSCE, and UN mechanisms where there are special subgroups of Alliance members.

ENLARGEMENT OF THE ALLIANCE

Since the constitution of NATO in 1949, the number of 12 member states has reached 30 with full membership. Of these, two states that are signatories to the Washington Agreement and also founders of the Alliance belong to small states. These are Iceland, with 320,000 inhabitants, and Luxembourg, with 645,390 inhabitants. When Iceland signed the Treaty of Washington, the state did not have its own army. Iceland promotes coast guard police, national police forces, a defense air system, and a well-organized volunteer peacekeeping expedition force in its security forces. Iceland is present in all major NATO committees, contributes to the Alliance's military and civilian budgets, and participates in NATO-led operations. Iceland's biggest trump card at the time of its accession to the Alliance was its geopolitical position. Iceland is located in the middle of the Atlantic on the mid-ocean ridge between Europe and America. The geography of this island gives it great strategic importance for the Euro-Atlantic partnership. The small country of Luxembourg, also one of the founders of the NATO Alliance, with 645,000 inhabitants and an area of 2586.4 km², is geographically located in the heart of Western Europe between France, Germany, and Belgium, and has long sought to promote an international neutral and isolationist position. Prior to leaving neutrality, Luxembourg had not had a permanent army since 1867, when it was granted "permanently neutral and disarmed" status by the Treaty of London. During World War II, when the country was occupied for the second time in its history, the government in exile decided to create a military force so that Luxembourg could fight alongside the Allies and participate in its liberation. Shortly after the end of the Second World War, Luxembourg became one of the biggest proponents of European and Euro-Atlantic projects. As the smallest member state of the Alliance in terms of geography and demographics, Luxembourg has played a significant role in mediation between its large neighbors. Due to the lessons learned from the two world wars, Luxembourg became the greatest pro-American actor in Western Europe. A *New York Times* article on the eve of the Grand Duke's visit to Luxembourg on November 15, 1984, described the country as "the most openly pro-American European country" with "a reputation as Washington's best friend". Luxembourg's contribution to NATO has

been significant since the Cold War. The town of Capellen has been the seat of the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency (NAMSA) since 1967, when it changed its name to the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA). This institution provides logistical support to NATO forces and commands in Europe and North America; procurement and storage of equipment; engineering and technical support. At the same time, the NATO-AWAKS fleet (AWAKS) was registered in Luxembourg. The country's main airport has been used to deploy troops for NATO exercises, including Exercise Reforger, which was conducted once a year during the Cold War to test the Alliance's ability to rapidly deploy forces in West Germany in the event of a Warsaw Pact conflict. After the end of the Cold War, the integration into the Atlantic Alliance of the former Soviet bloc countries grew into a fundamental national interest in foreign policy. In the eyes of the post-communist elites, NATO membership has become a symbol of the "cessation of violent inclusion in the communist camp." NATO was seen as the guarantor of security for the preservation of territorial integrity, independence, and the free choice of liberal democracy. At the jubilee NATO Summit in Washington in 1999, Poland, as the largest and most important country in post-communist Europe, marked the first round of enlargement with the status of *primus inter pares*, i.e., first among equals, together with Hungary and the Czech Republic. Most Poles thought that Moscow would never agree to Poland's membership in NATO, so this act of membership in the Alliance was perceived as "the realization of the dream of the ancestors, the biggest historical day when Poland became part of the West again (...) (Blaha, 2003, pp. 18-26).

The Washington Summit, which marked the 50th anniversary of NATO's founding, also meant opening the door to the Alliance and other aspirants and promoting an "open door policy." In the opinion of Janos Martoni, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Hungary (1998-2002), the Hungarian government attached great importance to regional cooperation in order to reduce new security risks (Martonyi, 1999). In a 1997 referendum, about 65% of Hungarians voted in favor of joining the Alliance. Thoughts were similar in the Czech Republic, led by the dissident Vaclav Havel. The lessons learned from the admission of the first three post-communist regimes into NATO made it possible to facilitate the candidacy of the new aspirants who were invited to join the Alliance. In the membership action plan, the candidates were offered the opportunity to choose "a la carte, their own program of restructuring, eliminating or conserving the weapons of the former regime, reforming their battalions, reducing their capacities, and the like (...)". The foreign policy leadership has set two strategic goals: to become an EU

member, synonymous with democracy and prosperity, and to join a military alliance with the United States to protect Russia. In this first wave of enlargement, small countries were bypassed despite the ambitions of France, which was lobbying for Romania and small Slovenia. The ministers of the nine candidate countries at the meeting in Vilnius in 2000 took the initiative for NATO membership in the next round of enlargement. This option is known as the formal Vilnius Group. Among the smaller countries at this meeting were the three Baltic States, and Slovenia, Slovakia, Albania, and Macedonia, while the larger ones were Romania and Bulgaria. Croatia joined the Vilnius group in 2002, while Montenegro was still part of the Federation of Yugoslavia (Serbia and Montenegro). Each of these Vilnius Group members had a strong ambition to become a NATO member in the next round of enlargement. The hope was in the “regatta” option, according to which the states would gain membership in accordance with the logic of the regatta-peaceful water races and, depending on their achieved reforms, several years after the accession of the first three member states.

“BIG BANG” - ELARGEMENT OF THE ALLIANCE WITH SMALL COUNTRIES

The Alliance Membership Initiative was marked by strong rivalry among aspirants. Each country sought to present itself as better than the other competing candidates. Thus, the Baltic States sought to prove that they were much more democratic than their competitors, while the Balkan aspirants invoked their positive attitude during the Kosovo war. The Alliance has embraced such experiences as “lessons learned” that must not be repeated. For some American experts, such a competition resembled the selection of “Miss”, when each candidate looked jealously at her rival. After a while, the aspirants were taught by the Alliance and gradually began to realize that such an approach was wrong and counterproductive. This change was dictated by a series of unsuccessful reform efforts but also by a change in the conjuncture in international relations. The world was at peace; the Yugoslav crisis had been resolved, and there had been no major international stresses on the international stage until September 2001.

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, changed the context of NATO's second enlargement. The United States has felt the need to create a broader front of political and security support in the war on terror. In early 2002, President George W. Bush called for a more ambitious expansion of the Alliance. At the same time, the US administration has

profoundly improved its strategic relationship with Russia, which has been given the status of a “partner in the war on terror and proliferation”. On May 24, 2002, an agreement was signed between Russia and the United States to reduce their nuclear arsenals, so that topics such as the expansion of the Alliance, or the Missile Defense System, were pushed to the background. The Treaty establishing the NATO-Russia Council was signed in Rome on May 28, under which Moscow meets with the other 19 members of the Alliance (Fortmann&Hlatky, 2021). In this context, all conditions were met for the Alliance Summit in Prague in November 2002 to initiate the second cycle of NATO enlargement. At the Prague Summit, NATO’s open door policy experienced a big bang for the buck when it comes to Alliance enlargement. Seven new members were accepted for full membership, of which, apart from Romania and Bulgaria, other countries such as Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Slovenia, and partly Slovakia belong to small countries. The other two small countries, Albania and Macedonia, did not receive an invitation. Together with Croatia, they constituted the Adriatic Group, which was joined by Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia-Montenegro. At the Bucharest Summit in 2008, two smaller countries, Croatia (3.8 million inhabitants) and Albania (3.01 million inhabitants), were invited to join (OTAN, 2015, December 3 and 10). Finally, in 2020, after 20 years of waiting and fulfilling the Membership Action Plan, North Macedonia (2 million inhabitants) received an invitation for full membership. Thus, the radiography of the small member states of the Alliance resulting from the former communist federations, members of the Warsaw Pact, or non-aligned Yugoslavia increased to nine countries: Slovenia, Slovakia, Croatia, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, Albania, Montenegro, and North Macedonia. Bosnia and Herzegovina, which could not receive an invitation to NATO due to the Republic of Srpska, and Kosovo, which is not recognized by four Alliance members, both expressed strong interest in membership (EURACTIV, 2022, March). Due to its neutral position and the Alliance military operation (1999) against the then Yugoslavia, Serbia is not at all interested in joining the Alliance (EURACTIV, 2019, December).⁴

⁴ The National Assembly of Serbia adopted the New National Defense Strategy. Three days earlier, the Minister of Defense stressed that the purpose of this defense strategy is to reaffirm Serbia’s military neutrality and protect national interests.

SMALL POST-COMMUNIST STATES IN THE ALLIANCE

Philip Perchok's monograph on the Baltic states and the European system (1985-2004) proposes an analysis of the freedom and ability of small "powerless" states to act in international relations, with Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania becoming part of the European community (Perchoc, 2014). The first dilemma that arises is the question: what is the place of small states in the European and Euro-Atlantic security architecture? Drawing on the chronology of the search for security immediately after the first manifestations of the weakening of the Soviet Union in 1997, the third phase was regional consolidation with the prospect of integration into the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) (1997-2004) and the European Union. The other Balkan aspirant countries, except Bulgaria, had no problems of this nature. In the countries of the Western Balkans, including Croatia, it was more about the negative experiences from the wars in the former Yugoslavia and the fears of a possible intrusion of new security challenges. At the same time, NATO membership was perceived as a "big workshop" for democratization, the rule of law, and the fight against corruption, but also as a lobby for EU membership. All these steps reveal the importance of institutions, ideas, and the system (Ružin, 2010). In the realization of this small "geopolitical revolution", the Baltic States were not able to change the international situation in their favor. It was necessary for the great Teutonic changes in the USSR, the fall of communism and the implosion of the great federation to create an opportunity for the small Baltic States to return to Europe (Eisenhower, 2001). The analysis of the diplomacy of small states and more generally of their behavior on the regional and international stage cannot be interpreted with the one-sided reading "that small states were inactive and weak in themselves." It makes sense to analyze the broader context and significance of large states and their geopolitics that have influenced small states. Perchok's demonstration of the Baltic States' diplomacy in their "march to the West" is a great illustration that their accession is largely conditioned by relations between the United States, European countries, and Russia. Moreover, the persistence of the Baltic States to integrate into the EU and NATO is perfectly in line with another major feature of the behavior of small states. It is the use of international organizations as a platform for action and as a refuge on the international stage. In other words, the behavior of small states is generally driven by two main motives. The first is the pursuit of autonomy through neutral status. The second motive is the search for greater influence in the region

and beyond through cooperation with allies and partners. In the end, activism through international organizations and cooperation (NATO, EU) is the motive that led small countries in their desire to defend themselves against modern security challenges. Regardless of the positive statistical correlation between geographical or demographic size and democratic growth, there is currently no evidence to conclude that small countries are more democratic than large countries. On the one hand, it is known that giant countries such as China, India, the US, and Russia are not the most democratic countries in the world, but this title is owned by Scandinavian countries that belong to medium-sized countries. On the other hand, small states can acquire unfavorable characteristics in a democratic system if they are led by authoritarian or populist leaders, regardless of the implementation of party pluralism and liberalism. In this sense, small states, although they are “the weakest part of the asymmetric relationship of the international order” in the absolute sense, when they are part of alliances, they are not so weak. If a small territory or population were synonymous with weakness, the survival of small states on the international stage would be greatly compromised. Their longevity and survival are indicators that they have managed to sustain themselves, despite the frequent influences and controversies they have imposed as part of the international system. It should not be forgotten that one of the biggest peculiarities of small countries is their sensitivity to the dynamics and aggressiveness of external actors. The small countries that gained NATO membership after the end of the Cold War do not possess impressive military and political forces as well as individual military potential. However, all together united within the Alliance, they emerged as an important military-political entity, students participating in numerous peacekeeping missions, and important allies of the United States and European powers. Croatia spends 1.74% of the JDP and has 16,000 active-duty military personnel. The Croatian Army has been engaged in several peacekeeping missions such as ISAF, Afghanistan, Lebanon – FINUL, Syria, Israel, Kosovo, KFOR, Liberia, Cyprus, Western Sahara, India/Pakistan, and Somalia. Albania’s army numbers 14,295 troops and 5,000 reserve troops and accounts for 2% of GDP, or about \$210m. The Albanian Army has participated in several peacekeeping missions in the Balkans, in Afghanistan (ISAF), Iraq, EUFOR/Althea, KFOR in Kosovo, and Chad. The Army of North Macedonia, just like the previous small countries, first realized its peace activities within the Partnership for Peace Program. Macedonia has 10,000 troops and spends 2.5% of GDP, or about \$230 million. The peacekeeping missions of the

Republic of Macedonia participated or are still active in EUFOR Althea (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Afghanistan, Lebanon, KFOR (Kosovo), as well as in the war in Iraq. Slovenia spends 1.6% of GDP and has participated in NATO operations in the Balkans (KFOR/SFOR), but did not take part in the war with Iraq. The Montenegrin Army has 2,368 active and 2,800 personnel in reserve. It accounts for 2.68% of GDP, or about 61 million euros. Slovakia has about 26,000 military personnel and troops and spends 1.9% of GDP. Lithuania is involved in KFOR, ISAF, and Iraq. It has an army of 8,000 professional soldiers and another 2,000 in reserve. It allocates 2% of GDP for the army. Latvia participates in KFOR, ISAF, and Iraq. Latvia and Estonia also stand out with the fulfillment of budget commitments of 2% intended for the army, with a similar military structure as Lithuania but also with large allocations for cyber defense. Together, these countries have state-of-the-art armies, adapted for interoperable defenses and peacekeeping missions, with significant budgetary resources at the level of NATO mid-level members. That is why they are successful in military peacekeeping missions. Given the limited human and financial resources, small states can also develop their own normative power within alliances and international organizations. Such a state must have moral authority, political capital, and the ability to build norms. Normative power is defined as the normative, civilizational, and ethical power of the actors who exercise it to change normative beliefs and set normative standards through the process of diffusion of norms. If they are to persevere in this area, small countries must establish a model of consistent implementation by advocating and promoting policies that are in line with the values they advocate. It is estimated that if a small country seeks to be perceived as influential in international relations, it should always rely on normative power in any situation. Furthermore, in relying on normative power, small states should rely on achievable political goals rather than long-term and over-ambitious goals that may fade over time. In an effort to convey norms at a higher level, it is desirable for small states to form coalitions to promote regional and global interests.

CONCLUSIONS

Small alliance founders such as Iceland and Luxembourg find the motive for joining NATO for at least three reasons. First of all, it was about entering under the security umbrella during the Cold War, then the disappointment of the neutral status and its abandonment because no

country respected it during the great world conflicts, and thirdly, with the integration in the Alliance, the efforts for more successful integration of the West through the Euro-Atlantic community and the EU. Similar, but not completely identical, were the motives of the small Central and Eastern European countries to gain membership in the Alliance. The countries and peoples of Central and Eastern Europe have existed for centuries in an uncertain gray area ruled by force rather than the rule of law. Starting from the fourteenth century, empires changed, first with the rule of the Ottoman Empire, then Austria-Hungary, Germany, Russia, the Third Reich, and the Soviet Union. Some of them, like Macedonia, first gained independence and sovereignty (1991), others referred to medieval principalities or kingdoms (Croatia, Slovenia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina), all in search of their own identity, political and territorial integrity, and national sovereignty. The Cold War and the domination of the Soviet Union prevented a free democratic and multi-party system, and all attempts were suppressed by force (Hungary 1956, Czech Republic 1968). These were bad experiences for the peoples under the Bolshevik regime of Stalin or Brezhnev and their satellites. That is why the statement of Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus during the Vilnius conference in 2000 is understandable: "We hope that this bitter experience will never happen again". A similar message was sent to the Lithuanian Foreign Ministry by the creator of the Vilnius Group, Algirdas Saudargas. "Having too often experienced in our history the effects of political indifference on the fate of others, we are determined to defend the values of the Atlantic community". The final message came from NATO Secretary-General George Robertson: "If each country counts on its own merits, we believe that integration will be a success for all of us, for all countries, it will be a success for Europe and for NATO. The alliance must continue to expand (...) in order to remain faithful to our political commitment to the new democracies on the continent to participate in a safe and prosperous Euro-Atlantic community". The desire to become a member of NATO arose from the huge collective desire of the countries of the East, starting from the Baltic States to Bulgaria, Romania, Montenegro, Macedonia, and Albania, in order to establish links with their cultural, economic, and geopolitical heritage. At the same time, the processes of enlargement of the Alliance and the integration of these countries into the EU are not contradictory. The two processes are practically inseparable. For Central European countries, if the EU symbolizes a promised land of prosperity, NATO is protection and security. As Suzanne Nies puts it: "For most Eastern countries, former

members of the Warsaw Pact, NATO and EU integration were motivated by a concern for protection against the former Soviet dominant power". This desire was manifested in the constant insistence on joining an alliance opposed by the USSR and seeking close cooperation with the United States. Hence, it is understandable that all NATO candidates are also EU candidates. This was best illustrated by the words of the Lithuanian Ambassador to France, Giedrius Cekuolis, "NATO and the EU are to us like dad and mom (...), and we cannot choose between the two". From this vantage point, the necessary connection between the two processes can only lead to one conclusion: the integration of Central European countries into the EU and NATO was almost certainly unavoidable. Could Central European countries be prevented from entering the European Union? To ask the question is to answer it. And what applies to the EU applies equally to the Alliance. Enlargement, in any case, is a fact that is better accepted than complained about unnecessarily. One of the basic imperatives of aspirants was to show a sense of discipline and solidarity. On the one hand, they were burdened with the strategic goal of becoming a member of the Alliance and implementing the agreed reforms. On the other hand, Vladimir Putin's political rise, determined to restore Russia's former authority, has created a "race against time" over further NATO enlargement. Vladimir Putin has openly stated that the expansion of military alliances on Russia's borders will jeopardize his country's security interests. The leaders of the small states were in favor of joining the Alliance as soon as possible due to the risk of Russia's "no". The third imperative for membership in the Alliance is that membership increases the importance and role of the small state in the region (Masson, 2007). Some small countries, however, such as Macedonia (now North Macedonia), have been blackmailed, punished, and blocked by neighbors for irrational reasons such as the name issue (Greece), or history and non-recognition of national identity, language, and history (Bulgaria). Northern Macedonia was a victim of Greek and Bulgarian policy from a position of strength. In nine annual cycles (MAP), Athens blocked NATO membership of Macedonia. At the same time, Athens and Sofia blocked eleven-year cycles for starting the negotiations for Macedonia's membership in the EU. For its part, the country was an exemplary student, a disciplined executor of all relevant peace processes, such as the 2001 Ohrid Agreement, the Friendship and Good Neighbor Agreement with Bulgaria (2018) and the Prespa Agreement with Greece (2018). Named the "Oasis of Peace" during the Yugoslav inter-ethnic clashes, it sought to build good neighborly relations with all its neighbors. However,

its small geographical and demographic capacity as well as economic underdevelopment have prevented this small country from being able to function equally in the Western Balkans region. Today, as a member of the Alliance, part of the national long-term strategy is fulfilled, but EU membership remains. Like the other small countries in the Alliance, North Macedonia has a defensive security umbrella and a guarantee of its territorial integrity and sovereignty. After the collapse of the USSR and the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, NATO clearly expanded to Eastern Europe. Hungary, Poland and the Czech Republic were the first to join the Alliance in 1999, followed by Bulgaria, the three Baltic states (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania), Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia in 2004, and later Albania and Croatia in 2008/2009, and Montenegro in 2017. The last country to join NATO is North Macedonia in 2020. Military peacekeeping operations outside their borders were welcomed by both the former communist bloc countries and the Alliance as a political and military alliance. NATO has faced its *raison d'être* as its historic cause for existence has disappeared. With the end of the Cold War, opposition to any attempt by the Soviet Union to expand its influence into other European countries became disproportionate. Despite the criticism, Lord George Robertson, NATO Secretary-General, called for its survival, acknowledging that if "the challenges now are not as obvious as the threat posed by the Soviet Union during the Cold War, they are just as real". Such a statement was shown in these dramatic moments with the invasion of Russia in Ukraine. At the time of Robertson, NATO had other preoccupations. The Alliance has launched a battle against terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the dangers posed by disintegrating states. The accomplishment of NATO missions presupposed a solid degree of interoperability among the membership. But not all members played on equal terms as the gap between a re-armed America and a war-torn Europe widened after the end of the Cold War. This syndrome is interpreted by the headquarters in Brussels as an innate divergence from the very creation of the Alliance. As former NATO spokesman Yves Broder points out, "this is partly a result of the 'treaty doctrine', according to which European allies did not have to worry about interventions outside their borders". On the other hand, the Americans were the ones who had to "project" the defense in Europe "by installing military bases throughout the Western Hemisphere of Europe. As a consequence of such a strategy, for example, a country like Iceland did not have to take care of its defense for fifty years. There was the shadow of "Uncle Sam". The same was true of disarmed West Germany. Today, however, things have

changed. The notion of pure territorial defense from the Soviet threat became an outdated paradigm. European armies are called in for missions outside their territory. The war in Kosovo in 1999, the first military operation conducted under the NATO flag, is proof of that. NATO officials also insist that the Alliance “will continue to engage in the Balkans”. Another example is Afghanistan. In fact, the organization did not carry out offensive military operations there. But for the first time in its history, it invoked Article 5 of its statute, which provides for “collective solidarity” with one of its attacked members, the United States. With the war in Ukraine, the world has returned to the Cold War era on the brink of a world nuclear conflict that has significantly encouraged NATO and EU allies to strengthen their ranks. Many analysts believe that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or Putin’s “special operation” has saved NATO from its stroke, as French President Emmanuel Macron said three years ago. This war further strengthened NATO as two eternally neutral states, Sweden and Finland, decided to join the Alliance. There is no doubt that the great powers on both sides of the Atlantic are pleased that the small nations are members of the Alliance and are strengthening the front of states for the peaceful settlement of disputes.

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