

SMALL STATES' SECURITY THROUGH INTERNATIONAL INTEGRATIONS: A THEORETICAL APPROACH

Shefik SHEHU^{1*}, Gjeraqina LEKA¹

¹Department of Political Studies, Faculty of Law

*Corresponding author e-mail: shefik.shehu@unite.edu.mk

Abstract

The major shifts in international relations such as the end of Cold War and globalization rendered the traditional concepts of state security as obsolete. The need to expand on the notion of security pertained to the smaller states just as much as to the bigger ones. The small states, often underestimated by International Relations scholars, were growing in number and influence, as their role became more salient in the international realm. Nevertheless, many scholars agree that small states, as opposed to the bigger ones, are often more vulnerable to security issues. Furthermore, the latter are no longer only of military or territorial nature. Other issues, such as the economy, poverty, or identity, have grown into threats to the security of a state. Within such context, the question is: how do small states respond towards such security threats and how do they manage them? One of the strategies, which will be elaborated in greater depth in this article, is the selection of cooperation through international integration. This approach is oftentimes chosen as the most adequate way by small states to ensure their survival. The impact of international integrations, with a focus on the EU, as an expanding unique regional organization, will be analyzed for the effect it produces over the security of small and weak states, which may face external and internal threats. This scientific paper aims to provide a theoretical contribution on the securitization of small states through international integration. It will attempt to do so by presenting and juxtaposing the dominant IR theories, with an emphasis on institutionalism, as potential explanatory of the small states' foreign policy behavior in an effort to ensure security for themselves.

Keywords: Small states, security, EU, international integrations

"The strong do what they can, the weak suffer what they must" - Thucydides

1. Introduction

Small states have traditionally been considered as entities which play only a minimal role in the maintenance of the international order and security. Not only have they been underestimated for their influence on international security, but they have also been treated as states with a pragmatic and reactive behavior towards security issues. Oftentimes, small states have adjusted to the big states' interests, having survival as their main goal. According to Browning (2006, p.669), the security issues of small states are closely linked to their size. Having a small size, these states are generally considered as weak and limited in their capacity and influence. The size of small states used to be considered as a handicap not only towards state action but also towards their survival possibilities. The Cold War period, furthermore deepened the division between the states which provide security – superpowers, and the states which simply consume security – small states (Wivel et. al, 2005, p.4).

However, the geopolitical changes, which followed the end of the Cold War, were accompanied by substantial changes in the security concept of states. More significantly, the end of this era brought about the change of the traditional security concept, which used to be characterized by military threats and territorial invasions. With a changing world order, the

security threats to small states began to change as well. In other words, the small states began to feel relieved from the fear of military threats or territorial occupation by superpowers. Such transformation allowed the small states a greater space for their foreign policy maneuverability, without fearing that their actions would cause irritation in the great powers and consequently a risk for their existence. The rapid expansion of globalism, on the other hand, intensified the level of interdependence among states, allowing the smaller states to emerge on the international scene with a more prominent role.

Whereas the security challenges changed their form, they did not cease to exist. The Gulf War (1990-91) and the Yugoslavian wars (1990-99) highlighted the need for a more active conflict management by the states. Also, threats of other forms, such as the financial crisis, the market rivalries, global terrorism and warming, migration, etc., demanded a new response strategy, and in this regard, the traditional approach was not quite helpful. The aim of this article is to conceptualize and explain the small states' security challenges, by analyzing their strategies in facing and overcoming the latter. Such analysis will be carried out through the prism of the dominant IR theories, namely of the realist, liberal, and constructivist approach. By juxtaposing these theories, the aim is to find out whether there is any pattern which is characteristic for small states' security quest. In particular, the tendency is to find such patterns within a globalized world, which is characterized by interdependence and integration among states. Within such contest, we aim to analyze what options or choices are available out there for small states to maximize their security.

Although the world's map is made up of smaller more than of larger states, it is difficult to put them all into a single category and to find a common pattern of their securitization. For this reason, the focus of this article narrows down on the theoretical notion of small European states and their endeavors to achieve and maximize state security. By analyzing the evolution of the small states' security issues, a special attention will be paid to the relevance of multilateralism in ensuring security for these entities. The question which this article will try to answer is: Does international integration of a small state play a role on its security? The emphasis will be put on the European Union and its significance over the security of small states. But, in order to understand the role of international integrations on security, initially it is necessary to briefly explain the notion of small states and the evolution of this concept.

2. Defining small states

To answer the question of what small states represent, we should initially define the entity *state*. Dixon identifies four criteria which have been accepted as the column of the state's definition. In order for an entity to be regarded as a state, the latter should (a) have a defined territory, (b) have a permanent population, (c) have a government in control and (d) be willing to participate in international relations (2005, pp.105–108). The word *small* alludes to the size of the state. The latter, according to some authors (East 1975, Olafsson 1998, Crowards 2002), is related to quantitative criteria such as the population size, the territory or the geographic area, as well as the economic size. Most authors have offered composite concepts, by joining altogether the above determinants of a small state. As quantitative criteria, these relate to the physical aspects of a state, and are thus more measurable and visible.

Other authors (Mass, 2009), however, pose the dilemma of whether such definitions are sufficiently comprehensive of small states. The complexity of small states implies the need of an expanded definition, which also includes the concepts of *power* and *force*. According to Scheldrup (2014:5), this approach is considered as subjective, as it depends upon the perception of the small states' position within the international system, and is therefore not quite

measurable. Power, in fact, cannot be considered just as another determinant which adds to the quantitative factors mentioned above. In fact, power, changes the attention from the quantitative to the qualitative definition. In this respect, Keohane (1969, pp. 291-310) assesses that small states are defined by the lack of power to influence the international system, while Hande (1981) adds that small states differ from big ones by their inability to impose the will on other states or to resist the other states' will on them.

As the focus of this paper is small states' security, the subjective or qualitative definition of the notion small state appears as more explanatory than the objective one. The connection of a small state with its inability to impact the international arena or to protect itself from the influence of bigger states, equals a small state with a weak one. The latter, consequently leads to security concerns. Since a small state is defined as an entity which lacks power, this definition implies the lack of security from external threats. Sveics (1969) defines a small state precisely from a security perspective. He claims that a small state is one which is threatened by a greater military power. Viewing small states from the security aspect, many authors (Aron 1966, Raeymaeker 1974) argue that these states usually adopt a defence mode, while their primary objective becomes ensuring their survival. "A small power is a state on the defensive, a state that thirsts for security" (Raeymaeker 1974, p.18).

The above definition, however, leads to a paradox. According to it, a small state lacks power to influence the international relations, and is therefore vulnerable to the greater powers' impact, yet it 'thirsts for security'. How does a small and weak state achieve to fulfill its main preoccupation, i.e. to ensure its security, while being incapable of exercising power and influencing the international order? According to Rothstein (1961), "an important tool which small states can utilize to address their security shortcomings is to enter into an alliance" (taken from Maass 2005, p.73). Rothstein argues that small states, while being unable to enhance their security independently, choose a multi-lateralist option, the building of alliances, or international integrations. Multilateralism or alliances, are thus explained as one of the main characteristics of small states' foreign policy behavior (Hey 2003, Huldts 1990). Below, three main theoretical approaches will be analyzed for their stance towards small states' security endeavors. In the context of international integrations, the EU and its security policies will be analyzed for their role in the small states' security, and in conclusion this role will be compared to the theoretical predictions.

3. The IR theories on small states' security

The central idea of the classic realists, represented mainly by Morgenthau (1948), is based on the innate human desire for power and domination, which consequently represents the main cause for conflict and war. Hence, international relations, from the realist perspective, are explained through the behavior of individual states in quest for power. The neo-realists, among whom Waltz (1959), add to this perspective, by claiming that the international system is defined by the most powerful states, and therefore the balance of powers, where the biggest powers are the most significant players, is the most possible outcome within the IR system. Focusing on the great powers, it seems that realists are negligible to the role of small states. However, they do acknowledge some potential strategies for small states to navigate in order to enhance their security in a world system defined by great powers. Stephen Walt (1985), presents two options for small states action, balancing and bandwagoning. Balancing occurs when a small state joins a group of other states in order to balance against a greater power. Bandwagoning occurs when a small state joins a greater power, which may be threatening for the small state's security. Hence, realists view the options of small states as limited, and based either on alliances or competition (Kevlihan 2014, p.2). In general, realists and neorealists view

the role of small states through risk aversion. Such perception reduces the role a small state may have, including its endeavors to enhance security and realize interests.

By comparison, liberals seem as more optimistic, as they do not view *conflict* as the only determinant of international relations, and much less do they view it as inevitable. On the contrary, they argue that although there is a possibility for conflict, as a result of individual states' search for national interests, the latter may, at times, push the states even towards cooperation. Which one dominates, either conflict or cooperation, depends on the distribution of the states' preferences (Beach, 2012).

As opposed to realists and neorealists, who focus on power and force, liberals turn attention to the international community and its significance in international relations. Considering the states as rational actors, liberals consider that the former view positively the finding of mutual solutions to problems. Furthermore, the states' cooperation in the security field only helps the latter's enhancement and therefore helps the protection of common interests. The liberals' prediction is that individual states may enhance their security by joining constraining international institutions. The liberal theory focuses mainly on the promotion of inter-state cooperation with stressed support by the international institutions. This theory is based on the three criteria of Kant on the 'perpetual peace': interdependence, international institutions, and democracy (Beach 2012, p.17). Thus, liberals, besides the states' relevance, also underscore the significance of the international organization in ensuring and enhancing state security.

The constructivists think that realities are constructed through the actors' interaction, in a way which reflects their interests and identities (Beach 2012, p.19). Since constructivists believe that the social environments are created through inter-subjective interactions, they argue that the norms, identity, and ideas, play a key role in establishing international relations. Hence, constructivists oppose rationalists in their treatment of security as an objective concept. Constructivists posit that security cannot represent a static and concrete referential object; instead, security is dynamic and changeable. In the objective sense, constructivists define security as absence of threats towards established values. In the subjective sense, they define security as absence of fear that values would be threatened. But constructivism isn't as much interested in defining security under an objective light, as it is interested to construct the process of common understanding over what is meant by threats (Shehu 2015, pp.35-6).

Also, some constructivists are focused on the possibility of improving the security dilemma in different contexts, given that security, in their opinion, takes different meanings in different contexts. They analyze the possibility of creating security unions, which would consist of groups of actors, mainly states, to who, the resolution of problems through force, would be unimaginable. Along the same lines, constructivists perceive the European cooperation on security, as a symbol of the possibility to build security alternatives, through the development of institutionalism and common norms (Georgieva, 2010, pp.41-46)

4. Small states security through international integrations

Although formally, small states are treated as equals within international organizations, the reality is different. Small states are different from big ones in many aspects, and such difference has its impact on the security policies and fulfillment of foreign policy objectives. In fact, the lack of sufficient power for small states "to navigate the security landscape independently" (Inbar and Sheffer, 1997), is the main factor which causes small states to differ from great ones. Their freedom of action depends on the geographic and geopolitical setting, domestic conditions, economic development, membership of international organizations and even social cohesion. They, according to Vaicekauskaitė (2017), not only differ from the big states, but also among themselves. Their differences lay, among other things, on the orientation of their foreign policy and more concretely on their perception and endeavors to achieve security. The

author mentions several reasons why small states feel more vulnerable towards threats to their security. Some of them are “smaller economies and militaries, limited diplomatic resources, various economic or political dependencies, less means of dealing with more powerful states.”(p.9)

Small states also differ on their strategies to enhance security. Vaicekauskaitė (2017) distinguishes three categories of such strategies: balance against greater threats, hedging strategies, and neutrality. For the purposes of this paper, we will elaborate on the first category, exploring the possibilities of small states to enhance their security through international integration or alliances. More precisely, we will try to find out how the process of integration into international organizations such as the EU, helps the small states not only enhance their security, but also increase their space for foreign policy maneuverability, which in turn, would allow the small states enhance their influence within the international arena

Vaicekauskaitė identifies two strategies of small state's security objectives through international integration. The first strategy is to form alliances as responses to threats, and the second is the alliance shelter strategy. The primary strategy is often chosen by small states in order to ensure security and increase stability. Joining modern alliances, with highly institutionalized form and commitment to defend its members, is a guarantee for small states' protection against external adversities and even advancement of their international status beyond neutrality (2017, p.10).

However, small states' foreign policy preoccupation goes beyond traditional security matters. Their vulnerability is not evident only towards typical military or territorial threats. Small states are also under constant economic, political, and social challenges, which they cannot face efficiently in an independent way. Hence, they choose integration into international organizations which would assist smaller states not only in terms of hard security but also in terms of economic, social, political challenges. Such strategy, known as the alliance sheltering theory (Vaicekauskaitė, 2017, p.13), enables the alignment of small states with other larger ones, not only based on security interests, but also on other factors such as economic, social, cultural, etc. Integration of smaller states into such alliances or organizations, which would enable them to deal with their military- security threats, alongside other, non-typical threats, is a significant aspect which influences the decision of small states to choose a particular foreign policy approach.

5. EU as a source of small states' security

Membership of small states into the EU may be called a modern model of alliance sheltering. As the goal of this paper is to find out whether small state may enhance their security through international organizations, we must first analyze the concept of EU's security policy. The latter, in line with the constructivist thought, which affirms that in order to understand rightfully the current processes and events, it is necessary to know the circumstances and conditions which have triggered their emergence, hasn't appeared in the form it is today. The EU's security policy has evolved through several phases, while its development has mostly been a response to the circumstances and contexts, from the Cold War to this day. Its beginnings are characterized by oscillations and doubts among the member states on the creation of an independent defense mechanism, due to their fear of losing national sovereignty in the field of defense. Hence, for its most part, EU security has largely depended on the USA-led alliance, NATO. The changes caused by the end of the Cold War, the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the dissolution of the communist bloc, led to the appearance of new challenges for the EU. These events highlighted the need for the EU's security complex to adjust to the changing international setting. The sophistication and consolidation of the EU's security policies, have become overtime more complex and rather ambitious.

The role of EU's security is generally analyzed through the prism of its Common Foreign and Security Policy. Established with the treaty of Maastricht, the latter is said to "include all issues related to the Union's security, including the formation of a common defense policy" (Official Journal of the European Union, 1992). The EU's security and defense policy is in charge of covering both the civil and military aspects of crises management. This corporative identity gives uniqueness to the EU's security policy, while enabling the mobilization of all EU available resources, which are needed for giving the EU an international credibility as a global player. (Shehu 2015, p.93). The structures and institutions of EU's SDP are an integral part of the structures and procedures of decision making within the EU. As such, these structures and institutions are under the competences of the European Council and of the Council for General and Foreign Affairs. However, regardless of the developments and consolidation of the EU's security policies, the decision-making process is still characterized by qualified majority voting, demonstrating the perpetual tendency of the member states to keep security and defense issues under their national competence.

6. Small states' security prospects through EU

According to Mouritzen (1997, pp.101-6), the integration and security dilemma of small states has to do with their ability to maintain a delicate balance between the protection of their autonomy and the maximization of their influence in the international relations. Then, how able is the EU to fulfill the security objectives of small states by helping them maintain this delicate balance? How can it help smaller states increase their influence over the other states while not having to surrender their autonomy?

As explained above, small states security challenges were different from those of the big ones due to the former's lack of power to influence international developments as well as to their small margin of errors (Jervis 1978, pp.172-3). Therefore, small states favor membership in international institutions, which act as constrainers of the great powers' actions, help the peaceful resolution of conflicts, and offer space for influence to the smaller powers. As such, small states result as the greatest beneficiaries of the international integration processes.

The EU and the strengthening of its security and defense policies emerge as beneficial for smaller powers within the continent. This organization provides the small states with space for applying their influence on the regional greater powers, as well as institutional means to resolve security problems. EU's security policies, according to Wivel (1996) proved to be almost ideal for the small states, especially after the end of the Cold War. He supports his thesis through several arguments. According to him, the EU's security and defense project has eliminated the constant risk the small states were in, during the centuries' old clashes among the great powers of this continent. The EU, by institutionalizing the relationships of the great powers, began to substitute the Europe of several power centers with a Europe of a single power center, thus avoiding the instability created by the then dominant feature of European conflicts among great powers (Wæver, 1998, p. 54). EU's approach towards security is based on values such as the peaceful resolution of conflicts, prevention of the use of violence, promotion of human rights, protection of minorities, etc., which extends even to the prospective small states, as it has become a requirement for their full membership (Mouritzen et al., 1996). The concept of coalition-building, has given small states space to gain relevance within the international system, by participating in peace operations, which used to be reserved only for the big states before. Furthermore, the promotion of the soft power idea by the EU, which is based on the above-mentioned values, and not on the use of hard military, helps small states to avoid marginalization, but at the same time to preserve their own security identity. This is so, as the proclaimed values by EU's security policy are on the same line with the security orientation of the small states, such as: development of democracy, peace building, human rights, etc. The

fact that in the Maastricht Treaty, which established the Common Foreign and Security policy, the goals of EU's security were proclaimed only broadly and vaguely, yet were intended to encompass the whole region, allowed the EU to position itself as an actor with relevant security functions, while at the same time to remain a civil power without an effective influence over military issues. This identity, to some extent ambiguous, of EU's security policy, provides space for smaller states which wish to guard their neutrality, while at the same time promoting their security identity, like for example the peaceful resolution of conflicts or denuclearization. Regarding the small states which do not wish to remain neutral, EU's security policy provides them with the opportunity to adopt a more active security policy in line with their traditional security identity.

As long as the EU's security policy is characterized by a value-based soft power, small states have a greater chance in enhancing their own national securities, whose identity matches the logic of the former. However, the critics of EU's security policy estimate that the efforts of the EU to assert itself as a more efficient security actor, created incompatibility between small states security and the EU. This process occurred as a result of the crises at the end of the Cold War, such as the former Yugoslavian wars, or the offensive against Iraq, in which the EU demonstrated an almost insignificant involvement. Hence, several institutional changes made in the EU's foreign and security policy, in an effort to strengthen the EU in military affairs, brought about challenges to small states. It furthermore caused their marginalization and abandonment from major decision-making processes. Although formally equal, small states do not have the same weight as the big states in initiating or blocking action. The events which stroke Europe in the post-Cold War period, such as the wars in Bosnia, Kosovo, or Afghanistan, emphasized EU's weakness in being a civil power, at a time when hard military power was needed. Such events led the big members of the EU to meet among themselves before going to the council table, often making their decisions outside the EU institutions. In this context, small states complained of being abandoned from decision making and military action, which was being carried on informally and in ad-hoc fashion by the great powers of EU. (Wivel 2005, pp.400-407)

7. Conclusion

The above analysis portrays both the opportunities of small states to enhance their security through EU membership and the challenges they may face with the attempts of the EU to assert it more as a military global actor. However, the arguments clearly indicate that the EU, as it is in its current form and content, provides two significant security functions for the small states of its region. Firstly, it prevents the return to the former military competition among greater powers, dominating the continent in the past centuries, and secondly, it diminishes potentials for instability in its periphery. Hence, the stability order the EU creates, protects small states from their traditional security threats, which they wouldn't be able to handle efficiently and independently from this organism. Wivel (2005) argues that indeed within the union there is power asymmetry between the great and small powers, nonetheless, this is "less important in a stable and peaceful region such as Europe than in a region characterized by political instability and a high risk of war"(p.409). It furthermore, only reflects the inequality of military capacity between the bigger and smaller members of the EU.

On the other hand, many scholars argue that instead of trying to fight the inequality in decision making within the EU, by strengthening its security institutions, small states should try to expand their influence and maneuverability by focusing on security issues, other than military. Engaging in security issues such as global terrorism, illegal immigration, or pollution, would prove more beneficial for small states, as they require political competence over military

power, and small states may be good at providing such resource. In such case, small states may enhance their security by increasing their influence and at the same time maintaining their autonomy.

The arguments above support mostly the liberal stream of thought. Recall that liberals, as opposed to realists, saw security issues not only through the prism of conflict but also of cooperation. Emphasizing the role of international institutions and interdependence, they stressed the opportunities provided to small states to resolve security issues through common solutions and within institutions. However, the unique structure of the EU and its security policy in particular, is in line with the constructivist approach as well. This is true as the EU promotes itself as a value-based security organization, which doesn't define security only in terms of hard power, but also in terms of inter subjective interactions and meanings of threats. As such, security is perceived as a dynamic and changing concept, which takes different meanings in different contexts. Such approach leaves room for smaller states to select security issues which require 'smart' rather than 'hard' resources, in order to maximize their influence and minimize the risks of traditional small states' threats.

References

- [1]. Beach, Derek. *Analyzing Foreign Policy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012.
- [2]. Hey, Jeanne A. K. "Introducing Small State Foreign Policy." In *Small States in World Politics: Explaining Foreign Policy Behavior*, edited by Jeanne A. K. Hey, 1–11. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2003.
- [3]. Keohane, R. O. "Lilliputians' Dilemmas: Small States in International Politics." *International Organization* 23, no. 2 (1969): 291–310.
- [4]. Maass, Matthias. "The Elusive Definition of the Small State." *International Politics* 46, no. 1(2009): 65–83.
- [5]. Moravcsik, Andrew. "Taking Preferences Seriously: A Liberal Theory of International Politics" *International Organization* 51, no. 4 (1997): 513–53.
- [6]. Rosenau, James N. *The Domestic Sources of Foreign Policy*. New York: The Free Press, 1967.
- [7]. Rothstein, Robert. *Alliances and Small Powers*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1968.
- [8]. Shehu, Shafik. "Macedonia and Europe security strategy: Macedonia's role in EU's security" University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius University, 2015
- [9]. Thorhallsson, Baldur. "The Role of Small States in the European Union." In *Small States in International Relations*, edited by Christine Ingebritsen, Iver B. Neumann, Sieglind Gstohl, and Jessica Beyer, 3–36. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006.
- [10]. Waltz, Kenneth N. *Man the State and War: A Theoretical Analysis*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1959.
- [11]. Vaicekauskaitė, Živilė Marija. "Security Strategies of Small States in a Changing World" *Journal on Baltic security*, no.2 (2017): 7-15
- [12]. Wivel, Anders. "The Security Challenge of Small EU Member States: Interests, Identity and the Development of the EU as a Security Actor" *University of Copenhagen*, no.2 (2005): 393-412.
- [13]. Wivel, Anders. "From Small State to Smart State: Devising a Strategy for Influence in the European Union." In *Small States in Europe*, edited by Robert Steinmetz and Anders Wivel, 15–30. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing, 2010.