Small States, Latent and Extant: Towards a General Perspective

Introduction

The study of small states is a long established tradition in political science and international relations. At the same time, many issues pertaining to “small states” are not recognised as such. Thus the field of small state studies has little visible coherence. A large part of what may be called the small-state literature deals with the basic foreign policy options of small states — neutrality or isolation vs. alliance (Ørvik 1953; Fox 1959; Rothstein 1968; Väyrynen and other contributions in Höll 1984). A second stream of the literature is the comparative literature on politics and policy formulation in small states (Katzenstein 1984; 1985; Alapuro 1985; also Jackson 1990). A third tradition is concerned with issues of recognition, self-determination, minorities, secession and irredentism, and with justifying small states’ existence and their rights vis-à-vis great powers (Chazan 1991; Heraclides 1991; Lehning 1998; Bartkus 1999). Each of these streams tends to be understood as a self-contained research area — or even several ones — and to have its own following and its own set of specialists. However, the larger patterns connecting small-state problems tend to be lost. Indeed, in the large, third category above, the concept of “small state” is hardly ever employed.

The point of this article is to argue the underlying commonality of these literatures and thereby to initiate a move towards a more coherent sub-discipline with more consistent theories of small states. In this introductory section, I shall do this by first placing small-state studies in its present context and presenting my general argument concerning an alternative life-cycle conception of small states. In the next section, I briefly examine the small state concept in its typical usage and basic reasoning. From there, I move on to a more detailed explication of how a life-cycle conception can consolidate and tie together disparate strands of existing theories. This leads to an empirical section surveying the process of small-state life cycles in a grand historical sweep since antiquity. The article closes with a final theoretical summary and a suggested overarching hypothesis to link the phases of the cycle.

So where then do small-state studies find themselves at the present juncture? Apparently, not entirely at the forefront of world affairs. As of today, many issues of the recent past seem obsolete or outdated. During extended periods of the 20th century, the security and existence
of small states was threatened, whether we consider the case of the European small state as it faced the challenges of bolshevisim and nazism, World War II and later the East-West conflict, or the case of the Third World small state as it battled or gained formal independence from imperialism and neo-colonialism. This condition of existential threat stimulated a broad range of research efforts, surveyed in Keohane (1969), Amstrup (1976) and Handel (1981). A broader range of small-state problems — conceptual as well as substantive — is covered in the rich collection by Höll (1984).

Yet, small states are still here and they are facing new challenges and sometimes old ones in new clothing. A large number of small states have appeared since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the mid-1990s, almost all the “new” small states in Europe have been actively seeking membership in the European Union (EU) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. Non-alignment vs. alliance policy are once more live choices. Nevertheless, instead of the confrontation that was the Cold War, co-operation dominates at the turn of this century. The new prominence of co-operation is not just found in Europe. Asian small states are among the most enthusiastic builders of regional co-operation in the Asia-Pacific region. Processes of integration are at work. The most encompassing of these are of course those of the internationalisation, or globalisation, of politics and economic affairs (Goldmann 2002).

By contrast, many small states in the Third World — above all in Africa — live on the edge of collapse or have experienced internal breakdowns (Jackson 1990). Here, the decline and fall of small states is being illustrated day by day in an increasing variety.

As already indicated, I find it fruitful to assume that there may be a common underlying problematique for all these small-state experiences. In concentrated form, they are visible in the dilemma of many states in the post-Soviet sphere when they have achieved better conditions than ever before to develop their own lifestyle and their own political existence, while simultaneously seeking integration with the rest of Europe and being increasingly pulled into the globalised system.

Recent state formation has occurred mainly through secession and/or irredentism. Secession (Lehning 1998; Bartkus 1999) is the name for the type of process that peacefully led Norway in 1905 out of the union with Sweden and in 1991 led Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania mainly peacefully out of the Soviet Union. The same kind of process led Slovenia and Macedonia similarly out of Yugoslavia. Secession is also the kind of process that led Croatia, Bosnia-Herzegovina and East Timor into mass bloodshed as they tried to extricate themselves from their bonds with (respectively) Yugoslavia and Indonesia. At the same time, this conceptualisation says nothing about why the units concerned were formerly parts of larger units. Imperialism is one part of this, irredentism (Chazan 1991) another. Irredentism has been observed in innumerable places, though no better illustration can be found than the recent case of the Albanians in Kosovo and Macedonia.

Secession and irredentism may be disintegrative of existing states, yet they are nevertheless state forming processes. Still, if one looks back a few centuries the building of empires that were typical European projects led many smaller units to disappear for a long time. Moreover, legitimacy tends to follow where power goes first. When empires grow, so does their acceptance among elites, obviously, but also among common men and women, and scholars. As empires decline,
legitimacy tends to shift to smaller units. The concept of self-determination was formed during such a phase in Anglo-European history.

Paradoxically, state-building and integration beyond the state are thus closely linked while also being mutually conflicting. State formation leads to the need for the political survival of the new unit. Political survival depends on economic endurance and collective identity. Economic endurance depends on external cooperation, inspiring a wish for integration. Identity is secured in a process of enhancing and accentuating one's own people's distinctiveness, to be cherished and defended against outer threat. In the worst case, this turns into a search for internal enemies focused on minority groups of all kinds. All of the above are research topics in their own right. The entire literature on nations and nationalism is relevant here (Kohn 1965; Smith 1971; Anderson 1983; Gellner 1983).

Small State: Concept, Terminology and Reasoning

What is a small state? The problems of definition are myriad (Väyrynen 1971; Baehr 1975). Essentially, a small state can be any state in a relationship of marked inferiority of power vis-à-vis another state. In much of the literature, a simple definition seems to be assumed: a small state is a unit with a relatively modest territory and population. While less than satisfactory, I shall work with this definition and the relational criterion of the inferiority of power.

As East (1973a; 1973b; 1978) emphasised, one usually assumes that small states have a very limited capacity for foreign policy action on their own. However, beyond the ambiguities of definition we immediately run into another problem in the concept of the “small state”, namely the state. One cannot easily get around the fact that any discourse about “small states” presupposes — one way or the other — “the state”. In the small-state literature, the state concept is almost uniformly taken for granted. More than that, the assumption of the state as an actor becomes reinforced by the way the subject is labelled. Hence, the state as an actor is placed in focus and the use of the state as a unit of analysis is not questioned. First of all, this prejudges the analysis of state formation — the state simply is there from the beginning. We need to assume instead that many potential state formations never come about and that the small state therefore in many theoretically significant cases is merely a latent phenomenon. In 1990 Jessop argued the improbability of a truly unified state and launched the concept of “state projects”, to sensitise us to the possibility of situations in which several state projects compete within the boundaries of an existing state (1990:9). A decade later, nothing seems more common.

Second, the small state must from now on increasingly be studied as a context — a relatively special type of context — for the transnational socio-political and socio-economic processes that evolve in European integration. I shall return to this in a moment.

The small-state concept thus takes as its point of departure the small state as a type of unit. The use of such a concept must logically rest on a claim that there is a theoretically significant difference between such units and other (i.e., larger) kinds of units — especially great powers — or by reference to other aspects beyond the small state itself. Rothstein (1968:1) described the purpose of his book as ‘[...] establishing one central proposition: that Small Powers are something more than or
different from Great Powers writ small.’ Without this kind of idea, the small-state concept has little meaning. My justification for using the concept is found in the claim — open to refutation — that small states tend to have characteristic life cycles, which are associated with (though not to be confused with) the life cycles of great powers.9

In this article, strength takes an external reference as its starting point. It is only with a context for the unit “small state” that it gains analytical effectiveness. It is primarily in the study of small states placed in the context of an interstate confrontation with great powers, or of small states as units in a context of a particular external problématique (e.g., globalisation) that the small-state concept can defend its utility. At the same time, we must not forget that the small state in itself is also a context — scene, arena, locus — of processes that unfold there, in the small state — and that it is thereby also an explanatory factor for other phenomena.10

In most small-state studies, however, the relative size of a society is a key explanatory element. What that is supposed to mean in analytical terms, however, is often unclear. The effects of smallness are seldom clearly identified. All told, therefore, one can say there are small-state studies but not that there is a “small-state theory”. Indeed, much of what has been written about small states has been descriptive and ethnocentric. This is partly also due to a sociological and populist factor. Academics from small countries write about their own countries because that is where they have an advantage in knowledge, possibly also because that is where the demand is. However, this is an Achilles heel for more systematic, generalising small-state studies since it leaves the field dominated by researchers more liable to take a particularist view.

**Small-state Theories**

**State Formation**

State formation and integration are crucial possible phases in the life cycle of a small state. However, these phases are also part of a great power’s life cycle. So, what is the difference? Schematically, the life cycle of a state can be said to embrace: (i) origin and conception; (2) emergence and state formation; (3) survival over time; and (4) disappearance through either a) a process of voluntary, gradual integration; b) voluntarily entering a union; c) being eradicated (annexed) as a result of war; or d) internal degradation and dissolution.

If we begin with the origin, this phenomenon may be schematically represented as one of three quite disparate types of processes: small states originate either by an ethnically-based dissociation from weakened empires or great powers; or as a gradual fusion and further growth of a city state with its hinterland (alternatively a complex of city states, with or without an ethnic factor); or they have arisen in relative geographical isolation (islands or peninsulas). The theories that will occupy us here cover mainly the first two categories, as the last (islands and peninsulas) tends to be of less interest given our focus on units whose status is liable to vary considerably over time.

Beyond this one may argue with some credibility that, historically speaking, once states have emerged they are all in a sociological sense born “small” and grow bigger gradually, step by step, from a small core area. This is a well-worn topic based on fascination with the emergence of great powers and empires, which leaves the rest — the medium-sized and small states — as somehow “normal”. Thus one has tended to beg a key question: why do we have some historical examples of political units that have grown large and
powerful, while others have stayed small, and yet others never have even been distinguished as state formations on their own? Why has this even happened in the same territory over extended historical periods? Why is there no member of the United Nations named Kurdistan? Why is Latvia not three micro-states consisting of its three constituent regions (which incidentally have a quite disparate history)? Why has Jordan been a state from the middle of the 20th century without having ever been a state before? Why was Finland through 1000 years of reasonably well-documented European history not a separate state before 1918?

In the case of formation by clustering, Cederman (1995) modelled a simulation of the initial process and tested it provisionally on the case of former Yugoslavia. His model is based on “primitive units”: ‘... small, culturally homogeneous communities, such as city states, tribes or pre-modern villages’ (1995:335). The model assumes there is an inclination to form larger communities provided neighbouring units share some essential trait. The model also builds in an assumption of a continuous power struggle between the centre and periphery, leading the centre to strike down growing community formations in the periphery according to a given rule combining power differentials and probability (see also Jessop 1990:9). Over a great number of runs Cederman can identify the frequency of failed and successful “nationality formations”.

Clustering as modelled by Cederman culminates in secession attempts. His work combines well with that of Bartkus (1999), in which the timing of a decision to secede is seen as dependent on four variables: the benefits of continued membership in the larger political entity, the costs of such membership, the costs of secession and the benefits of secession (“costs” and “benefits” are here not narrow economic terms but broadly political notions — Bartkus 1999:18, 24-6). Her special attention to processual factors, such as changing rates of change in the midst of a process, make this a perceptive and analytically rich source for further use.

Cederman and Bartkus fit into Gilpin’s larger perspective. Gilpin (1981) launched the theory of the repeated power cycles of great powers, that such states go through a sequence of phases where power rises and declines in large historical cycles. Even Eisenstadt (1963) made deep macro-sociological studies of historical empires and the significance of bureaucratic (i.e., organisational) factors in their lives going back to pre-antiquity and forward to the 19th century. Eisenstadt emphasised organisation and communication. The key dimension is centralisation. In cases where empires have failed to centralise, the reason has usually been inadequate resources to institute controls and reward compliance (1963:29). Centrifugal tendencies are also linked to tax collection and the delegation of authority. The centre’s dependence on tax collection by sub-units led to reformation of the empire where feudal and military lords were key actors (1963:35). The centre’s dependence was probably limited to the larger sub-units. The smaller ones were easier to control. Thus, there could develop a competition for the control of the smallest units between the centre and the larger sub-units. Eisenstadt (1963:134) returns to this when discussing the attempts of emperors to limit the power and influence of the upper (aristocratic) classes. Obviously, the subunits are latent small states.

In Gilpin (1981) we can find a first — implicit — explanation of the life cycles of small states, which we could call the power cycle hypothesis: certain small states appear as a consequence of great
power decline, and disappear again once the great power begins to recuperate. Alternatively, the decentralisation hypothesis, as we might call it, from the Eisenstadt angle: small states appear when empires decentralise and collapse, and disappear again when empires are rebuilt and centralised.

The author is tempted to go out on a limb at this point and suggest that small states are not formed by any unique type of process, different from that producing other kinds of states. Rather, these other determinants are probably such that enter the process only after the state has been initially formed — *i.e.*, they would be factors of non-growth in territorial terms. Here, Rokkan’s theory may be our best guide, even if it is skimpy in many of its details. Rokkan (1999:104) emphasises that we cannot ‘study territorial exits without analyzing strategies of boundary-building: the costs and the payoffs of the institution of barriers to transactions across local communities.’ He also stresses, throughout, the importance of the centre-periphery dimension and the political battles that take place between them, with outcomes determined partly by how dependent a given peripheral area is on the centre, and partly by the strength of the resistance in the peripheries to the centre’s removal of barriers between them (1999:116).

The role of barriers and boundary-building as the basis of the small state’s existence is well illustrated in the German case. The many German small states that marked Central Europe for centuries were an almost comical reflection of this phenomenon — though its impulses came from several sources, not least the manipulation of religious commitment for purposes of local power. Seen over time, Germany also strikingly illustrates the varying significance of the identity factor — focused on very small socio-political units if present at all before 1800, awakened at the “national” level and driven to the ultimate extreme in the 19th century and after (Rokkan 1999:146).

**Security**

Once the small state exists, what is the concept and idea of the small state supposed to illuminate or explain? In many lines of reasoning the weakness of the small state is naturally in focus, its presumed lack of effectiveness or competitiveness *qua* state with regard to the functions *vis-à-vis* the surrounding world which a state is normally expected to undertake for its citizens: security, or influence. Those who use the small-state concept often convey the message that the small state carries with it a security problem. The small state is usually a “net importer of security” — a unit which in an international context is expected to need more help than it can offer. The small state’s weakness or absence of clout also enters the picture in more general political discourse, where the small state is held to be an ineffective instrument for the advancement of its inhabitants’ external influence and interests, particularly relevant in connection with the EU.

To say that insufficient size makes for weakness in confrontations with great powers is hardly an interesting claim. However, the outcome of such confrontations has repeatedly been that the small state has survived. The weakness of a small state does not, consequently, inexorably lead to its demise. This observation could be somewhat more interesting. One of the theories of this is — to use one of Vital’s (1968) metaphors — that the small state’s survival has been more a matter of bending like a reed in the wind than to stand like a rock in a waterfall. This insight was also a starting point for the early critique of the sovereignty concept during the 1960s and the conceptualisa-
tion of sovereignty as a relative matter. What is significant about small states is therefore perhaps not so much that they are weak, or that they are strong in a very peculiar way (as some have argued), but that they are so “survivable”, so adaptable, as the Danish small-state literature of the 1970s and 1980s emphasised again and again (see the overview in Due-Nilsen and Petersen 1995). The stream of literature that has to do with security in the narrow sense can also be summed up as “the handling of power disparity”. The great literature on small states and neutrality bear witness to this, partly in the classical issues (Ørvik 1953; Riste 1965; Jakobson 1968; Frei 1969; Sundelius 1986), partly in the new issues that arose as European Community membership became a possibility back in the late 1980s (Luif 1988; Wahlbeck 1989).

Then there is a related problematic involving survival in which the small state becomes the context within which politico-economic processes take place. Katzenstein’s studies of European small states (Austria, Switzerland, the Scandinavian countries) are among the most central works. To Katzenstein the Western European small state’s most significant characteristic in the latter half of the 20th century was its successful adaptation to full openness vis-à-vis the world economy. It was the internal political and economic structure in such states — in particular their corporatism — which according to Katzenstein’s analysis had eased their adaptation to the international economy, characterised as a “success” due to their ability to retain essential traits. At the same time, Katzenstein highlighted the role of the state in the small state’s society and economic system. Here, on the one hand, the small state as a context or arena in itself stands in focus. On the other hand, Katzenstein draws our attention to the small state as an actor through its government, and to the latter’s actions — especially industrial policy — undertaken in the external politico-economic context of late 20th century Western Europe. These aspects cannot simply be separated from the small state’s existential security as if they belonged to a totally different category. If a small state does not have the strength to survive as a distinct industrial/economic setting in the 21st century, then its political existence is also threatened. This is part of the challenge of internationalisation/globalisation as well as of integration.

The Baltic states provide a good illustration of the entire cycle. For Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, it has been a reality throughout the 20th century that small states’ worries about self-determination, economic survival and physical safety were inescapably tied together in one over-arching question of security. For centuries, they lived a hidden existence as the “indigenous populations” of the Danish, German, Swedish and Russian empires along the south-eastern Baltic coast. Independence from Russia emerged gradually as a demand through the influence of national romanticism and the growing literacy of the population (Knudsen 1993; Lieven 1994; Kirby 1995). Independence was won in 1917-20 by a combination of their own struggle and Russian disintegration. It was lost in 1940 and again in 1944-45 by a classical game of great-power politics between state actors, and won once more in 1988-91 by a combination of national mobilisation and the accelerating decline of the Soviet Union. Independence and self-determination has once more been debated in the Baltic states from the 1990s onwards in connection with their applications for EU membership. Their entanglement in the world economy is proceeding rapidly, partly under EU governance and partly under
the rules of the World Trade Organization. The greater unity of the small state’s predicament can hardly be demonstrated more clearly than by the history of these three nations.

We can nevertheless see that the challenges to their existence faced by the Baltic states, while linked in their essence, required fundamentally different skills. To handle a conflict with a great power is a military-diplomatic task, something quite different from trying to master one’s own society’s interaction with the surrounding societies. The former case takes the unit (the small state) for granted. The latter does not — it has primarily to do with autonomy, in the literal sense of “self-control”, ability to steer oneself, the skill and will to make oneself distinct from the surrounding world as a unity with a distinct “identity” (Mercer 1995). This could well be called the “identity/integration problématique” (Anderson 1983). Identity threats are determined at least partly by who one at the outset defines oneself as being — which is usually a matter of finding out who one thinks one is not. For those who take the small state as given, identity is a question only about the small state’s relationship to its surroundings. For those of its inhabitants who belong to a minority, the question of the collective identity is also an even more intricate question of who “we” actually are, not least if the minority also exists in other countries nearby: should we who belong to the minority accept the majority’s assurances that “we are all one nation”? If we say no, what further conclusions should we (the minority) then draw? Again, the field of nationalism and identity studies is relevant.

Hence, the well-taken point that the security concept must refer to something more than just the state as such (Buzan 1991). The security and welfare of the society’s main constituent groups, or of the individual is not necessarily identical with the state’s security — much less the ruling elite’s security. This tension is more than amply illustrated in the case of Yugoslavia as it imploded. Holsti (1996) went as far as to identify this type of war as “the wars of the future”, demonstrating convincingly how (internal) war about the state has replaced war between states. In a long-term perspective he may have overstated his case. Conceivably, there may actually be alternating periods of mainly “internal war” and mainly “external war” in the international system.

**Legitimacy**

Poor leadership, intolerant neighbours and miserable living conditions are in abundant supply everywhere. The idealised Western response is voice, channelled into orderly political participation and coupled with some degree of loyalty, but exit strategies appear to be more popular, in individual cases as emigration, in other cases — collectively organised (and better funded) — taking the form of secession. Both of the latter have repercussions more disturbing to the world’s systems of governance than the former. Voice, however, may also be perverted into absolute demands for uniformity, leading to the uglier variety of exit in which community groups “exit” those of their neighbours they do not like. When governments fail to deliver what their populations need, legitimacy becomes an issue. And when no alternative government is expected to be able to come to power — far less succeed — the crisis is not merely one of government legitimacy but of the entire state project’s legitimacy as such. Alternative state formations may then be considered. Especially where unequal distributions of resources exist within a territory, the exit option may come to supersede the voice option. The case of Biafra is a classical example.
We should expect that questions of state legitimacy will be raised with intensity in increasing numbers of cases. Small states tend (but not always!) to be poorly endowed with resources and often find themselves dealing with countries to whom they are less important than the others are to them. Such are the essential elements of asymmetric relationships. If this is true (and I contend that it often is), small states tend more than others to be dependent on immaterial factors such as political legitimacy, political mobilisation and concentration, organisation, talent and good leadership.

The Central and Eastern European situation is marked by looming crises of legitimacy as the governments are negotiating the final terms of their accession to the EU. In many cases, Central and Eastern European governments’ abilities to keep their promises upon entry to the EU are doubted by large and important segments of their societies. Once their country enters the integration process for real, their government’s influence vis-à-vis other integration partners (other governments) will even more than before depend on their political weight and resources. Legitimacy at home accentuates the impact of these factors, increasing them when legitimacy is strong, decreasing them when it is weak.

**Consequences for Methodology and Design**

The perspective advocated here has certain consequences for the way we go about our analysis of small-state phenomena. Whether small states arise at all is the first question, and to answer it we need a unit of analysis that does not presuppose statehood. Large concentrations of population which are culturally or linguistically distinct from their surroundings may be a good choice. Such units may be studied comparatively across time and space to identify characteristic patterns of development. Some establish (or “turn into”) states, others do not. Some state formations continue to grow beyond the small-state level, others do not (Chase-Dunn et al. 2002). What processes govern here?

Both the state formation process and the separation of the small state variety from the rest are processes not usually considered part of small-state studies. That ought to change. We must ask under what conditions does the state formation remain latent? What happens to such units historically? In what conditions do state formations enter phases of growth or stagnation and what relationships exist between the aspect of scale (size) and the phases of growth or stagnation?

Beyond this, the established areas of small-state research must continue. Power disparity should be studied longitudinally as well as situationally. The small state as a unit of analysis should continue to be studied as an actor in interstate contexts to see if the small state distinguishes itself systematically from other states such as great powers. The small state should also in itself increasingly be analysed as a context, as an arena or sociopolitical milieu, for political processes on a hypothesis that this kind of context yields other outcomes from those processes than other kinds of contexts.

The differences and the connections between these perspectives of established small state research need to be more clearly recognised.

**Empirically: The Small State as a Historical Phenomenon**

Let us return again to the basics — but this time on the empirical side. States — centrally governed political collectives — have over very long periods of time had to deal with the problems
of power disparity and their own collective identity. Small states as we know them today have existed for maybe a few centuries. For this reason, it has been common in the study of international politics to write off earlier small-scale formations such as the city state as uninteresting. In the perspective taken here, the city state is a significant phenomenon, partly because of the long-term historical experience it represents, partly also due to its significance in the development of other state forms. During antiquity, the city state was common, and organised societies on a larger scale were less common (Mann 1988; Mackenney 1989; Tilly 1992). The city state also faced existential threats — physical as well as economic (Tilly 1992), partly from migrating groups, partly from raiding bands, partly from a few larger states. As larger-scale societies controlled by state administrations were formed and grew stronger (Mann 1986; 1988), city states were first confronted with the integration problématique. The strongest or wisest converted themselves into territorial states (Rome being the most successful example) or found themselves at least some form of autonomy within the state formation that swallowed them up (Mackenney 1989). The most recalcitrant were exterminated, at least as states. As Mackenney shows, Europe from antiquity until today has seen two waves of city states arise, flourish over centuries and then gradually die because of the emergence of larger state formations — the first from the early 1st millennium BC until the middle of the 1st millennium AD, the second from around 1000 AD until around 1700. In this picture, there is no obvious room for small states. In Tilly’s theory of state formation AD 990-1990, the linkage between city and state is central while the small-state phenomenon is relegated to the background. Burke (1986), on the other hand, underlined the connection between city states and small state survival and in that connection the significance of the choice between mercenaries and a self-generated defence.

Like the theory, empirical studies of states and state formation have paid scant attention to small states. In the celebrated studies during recent decades of “the state” as a political phenomenon, the presumably prototypical European state (France) appears as the organised manifestation of a narrow elite’s success in conquering a “national” territory (“their own”), from which they exercise their power over: (a) their own society; (b) the surrounding world, at the same time as the organised elite expresses its power; through (c) repeated symbolical representations of itself as a social macro-phenomenon. Small states, on the other hand, have mostly emerged in other ways. Often the population’s enthusiasm and commitment have been strongly contributing factors, and small-state formation has therefore more often occurred with society (at least considerable parts of it) rather than against it.

The uncertain existence of small states and their confrontations with the great powers in the Westphalian system (which was presumably to guarantee their survival) have been empirically analysed in a long series of case studies, most of them from the 20th century, above all of Finland, Czechoslovakia and Poland. Whether these trials of strength have always corresponded to the picture of David and Goliath is a different question. Both Sweden, Finland (after World War II) and Denmark may be mentioned as examples of a diplomacy of acquiescence — bordering on self-extinction — which may have been common to most small states in an exposed geopolitical situation (Fox 1959; Riste 1963; Mouritzen 1988).
Reassembly for Further Research

Initially I advanced the proposition that there is a small-state problematique that needs to be seen as hanging together in an overarching life cycle, where self-determination, secession, identity formation, survival and integration/submission are central components. We can now hopefully locate these components more clearly in relation to each other in an imaginary analytical space. The small state may be depicted as experiencing a successive motion through a process in several phases, in which the first is identity formation preceding the existence of a state, beginning with the loosening of ties to a larger unit, while the second phase consists of state formation as such. The third phase is the achievement of security: firstly (a) that of the state (i.e., of the elite), next hopefully (b) the security of the individual and in this connection — possibly — the security of minorities. The fourth phase as originally suggested would consist of the small state’s decline, fall and extinction, either due to its encapsulation in an integration process, or to its incorporation in another, stronger and more powerful state. At this point, however, I shall add an alternative fourth phase, namely the survival of the state in an integration process, where survival means it remains a distinct jurisdictional and economic unit.

Two possible significant elements in explaining the phases would be Gilpin’s power cycle hypothesis and what I have called Eisenstadt’s hypothesis of decentralisation. Both predict that small states may arise as a consequence of the decline of a strong state or empire.

Yet the same hypotheses do not distinguish between small states and other states. They simply predict the proliferation of states in certain phases, and their disappearance in others. We cannot actually therefore point to any specific theory of small-state formation. The closest we get is theories of secession. Here, both Cederman and Bartkus provide important theoretical contributions in somewhat different ways. Cederman (1995) models secession as a state-formation process emphasising a combined identity factor and a power factor. Bartkus (1999) presents a more detailed examination of the process in her theory of secession.

In the later phases of the small-state life cycle, two other mechanisms have been indicated: the processes of interstate integration and internationalisation. These are mostly disruptive and degenerative forces to the small state as a unit, although they may be more beneficial in the long term than another peak in the power cycle of Russia, China or (for that matter) the United States.

The small state of today is under pressure from several directions. Questions of security in the broadest sense are raised in an expanded and multidimensional manner, leaving little leeway for the small state’s organised management and control. While these pressures affect small states all over the world, the ultimate severity of their effects is perhaps best judged in Europe, where small states have achieved their greatest resilience and most robust standard of existence. Europe is also that part of the world where the attraction and threat of integration are currently at their peak. The experiences of small European states are quite varied, and their different histories tend to accentuate the variation. The apparently anomalous dissatisfaction of the Nordic states with what European integration has brought them so far may still have a simple mechanism behind it that could be formulated as a working hypothesis.
In the successive phases of the small-state cycle, the experiences from one stage may be hypothesised to be a stronger determinant of the attitudes to the succeeding one, the shorter the time that passes in between. Crudely summarising the experience of a population as being basically satisfied, or basically dissatisfied, with the phase that went before, we may compare among present-day smaller European states on one hand the group Belgium, the Netherlands and Finland — all of them largely dissatisfied with their previous condition and very satisfied with EU integration — with Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Among the latter, all three were relatively content with their classical period of independence (even if to a varying extent and in different ways), and all three are to some extent dissatisfied today with European integration and their own situation in it. If such ideas have empirical validity, we may expect the future of the EU to be strongly tied to the new Central and Eastern European members — including the Baltic states. The Scandinavian states may remain on the fringe of EU, with members Denmark and Sweden as reluctant as non-member Norway to pursue the visions of a union that erodes their sense of civic achievement over the long run. By the same logic, Finland may, fortified by its long experience in dealing quite successfully with Russia, gain a new position of leadership in an EU which will be increasingly marked by the entry of less successful Russia-hands and by the Union’s need to continue to handle that aspect with skill in the long-term.

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Notes:

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1 The concept of “polity” (“small polities”) (Ferguson and Mansbach 1996) may have offered an alternative and broader conceptualisation than that of “state”. This possibility is rejected here, however, due to my emphasis on the larger political connection between the potential and the actual small state. It is because of the importance assigned by other states to the status and formation of states that even the potentiality of forming a new unit of this kind is invested with political significance. The polity concept emphasises the underlying uniformity of collective political units. The present work instead stresses the transitions which small units of this type are likely to undergo, transitions between state status and non-state status, and the processes connected with these transitions.

2 Secession is evidently an uncontested concept in political science. Bartkus (1999:3): ‘Secession is the formal withdrawal from an established, internationally recognized state by a constituent unit to create a new sovereign state’. Lehning (1998) does not even provide a definition; he takes it for granted what the concept refers to, citing the examples of Yugoslavia and the Soviet Union during the 1990s as recent examples.

3 East Timor was forcibly annexed by Indonesia when it was still a Portuguese colony. The United Nations has long concerned itself with the issue of the status of East Timor and instituted the referendum which triggered the actual process of its secession from Indonesia.

4 The term irredentism originated with the claims of Italians for the inclusion in Italy of Italian-speak-
ing groups living outside Italy's borders after 1866. Today, a broader meaning applies: 'The term irredentism has, by extension, been applied to nationalist agitation in other countries, based on historical, ethnic, and geographical reasons, for the incorporation of territories under foreign rule' (Columbia Encyclopedia 2001). It may occur both among the minority groups “outside” a state dominated by a majority nation and among the majority “inside”.

5 The concepts are obviously formulated from a great power’s point of view, from above. In the view from below, both concepts may be referred to as “liberation”.

6 State here refers to what in state theory would be “state cum society”. To retain a long-range historical perspective, we reject the focus on the “modern state” of Jessop (1990), to whom only the post-18th century “modern state” is a “true state” evidencing state formation in which ‘... military and economic control ...’ are ‘... extended into the countryside or periphery ...’, requiring ‘... new forms of organization which went beyond household management or palace administration’ (1990:350; emphasis added). Moreover, this line of reasoning was rejected by Eisenstadt, whose typology of empires stresses the bureaucratic variety, distinguished precisely by the fact of its organising the control of its periphery (1963:29). A more useful definition of “state” for our purposes is that of Mann (1986:112) according to whom a state may be defined (paraphrasing Weber) as a differentiated set of institutions and personnel, implying centrality, in the sense that political relations radiate from a centre in order to cover a territorially delimited area, over which it exercises a monopoly of authoritatively binding rule-making, supported by a monopoly of the means of physical violence. The inclusion of a spatial dimension is important in connection with theorising about small states.

7 Yet he does not go into the spatial dimension. The unity or disunity of the state, for Jessop, has to do partly with his conceptualisation of the state ‘... as a set of institutions that cannot, qua structural ensemble, exercise power’ (1990:8). When he goes into state/society relations, Jessop also sees unity/disunity in terms of class, and not in terms of ethnicity, peripheries or territorial/spatial dimensions (see the discussion of ‘One Nation vs. Two Nations’ — Jessop 1990:211). The potential state-as-unit-forming division that concerns me here, the possible bisection of a state, therefore, does not fall within Jessop’s field of interest.

8 Size is a shortcut notion for the strength that can be mobilised in confrontations with other states, or with external challenges (cf. Handel 1981). Hence, we are not talking about the “inner strength” of the unit. The conceptual pair strong/weak states has two main varieties of meaning. One equals strength of the ability of public administration to accomplish tasks, typical examples being industrialised vs. developing countries. The other variety concerns the government’s strength vis-à-vis its own society, where a strong state plays an active role in most social contexts, whereas a weak state takes an unassuming role — the “night watchman’s state” (Katzenstein 1977; 1984; 1985; Krasner 1977). These two dimensions are united by Holsti (1996:82-122).

9 A class of exceptions is those cases where a small state during a short time develops into a great power or, conversely, when a great power suddenly collapses and becomes a small state. The Swedish example of a rapid rise from nowhere during 1520-1630 is well known, as is the German unification miracle 1848-70, but also Castile, the Netherlands, Japan and the United States have during their history gone through similar rapid processes of ascendance.

10 Cf. “the state as arena” in Skocpol (1979:23).

11 That Gilpin’s study from 1981 is much less known than Kennedy’s (1988) may have little to do with scholarship. Power cycles, of course, have been studied by many others (cf. the long cycles literature).

12 Bjøl (1968) studied a number of situations in which weakness paradoxically was turned to unsuspected strength for the small state. The unexpectedness of such situations has again become topical after 11 September 2001 with renewed interest in studies of asymmetrical conflict.

13 Katzenstein does not take the full step of arguing that the success was due to their smallness, because he also wants to teach the United States a few lessons. But the main drift of his conclusions appears to be in this direction (Katzenstein 1985:80, 191-211). The internal/external dimension is placed in focus by Elman (1993), who provides a strong theo-
retical and empirical argument for the significance of the small state’s domestic structures and political processes in explaining foreign security policy. Her empirical case is the United States before 1848. The thesis on domestic influences on small-state external policy-making is formulated and utilised in a case study of Norway by Knudsen (1990).

15 Today, it may seem commonplace to apply Hirschman’s exit-category to the processes of nation-building and state formation, yet it was seen as more of a rarity — even an oddity — when it was first introduced in 1970 and then primarily in the context of the European exodus to North America (Hirschman 1970). However, Rokkan eagerly grasped the idea back then and built it into his theory of nation-building in Europe (Flora et al. 1999:31, 83; Rokkan 1999).

16 These issues are well covered by Lehning and his colleagues (1998), who were primarily concerned with the elements of justice in secession.

17 As already indicated, according to Katzenstein (1984; 1985) the small state is misconstrued as an underdog. His analyses emphasise the positive outcomes often produced by European small states.

18 See in particular Burke (1986). Hall (1986) is a useful anthology on the emergence of states as well as on a series of questions of more specific interest such as city states, the state and the economy, the state in modern European society and, not least, its role in centrally-planned economies.

19 Such events in the wider Mediterranean region during the 4th-2nd centuries BC are described and analysed in great and vivid detail in Polybius’ contemporary Histories (1979), as well as (with a concentration on Greece) in Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian War (1972).

20 This ideal case is easily seen in studies like (e.g.) Rokkan’s theory as presented in Flora, Kuhne and Urwin (1999); see also Tilly (1975; 1985; 1992), Evans, Rueschemeyer and Skocpol (1985), Mann (1988). The exceptions to my generalisation on scant attention to small states are above all those that focus on secession and related questions; they are found (e.g.) in Buchanan (1978), Williams (1982), Jackson (1990), Chazan (1991), Heraclides (1991), Holsti (1996), Lehning (1998), Bartkus (1999). For a more imaginative analysis of the emergence of French identity through its national myths, see L’Ecotais (1990).

21 The account here is of necessity strongly simplified. Burke (1986) covers the connection city state/small state and the emergence of the city state. Rokkan’s theory is the one that contains the most specified explanations claiming validity for all European states — implicitly including small states. That concept, however, is not used by Rokkan (1999:135-208, esp. 191).

22 At the same time, Cederman is to some extent bound by his own assumptions, such as that about a continuous power struggle with the centre, which may not always be equally important as a determinant if one follows a power cycle model. But Cederman’s work here nicely complements the theory of Rokkan.
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Skocpol, Theda (1979) *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.


