

Analyzing North Macedonia's Size and Power in the Context of its Foreign Policy Conduct

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to explore the smallness and weakness of the Republic of North Macedonia by observing its foreign policy behavior since its independence to the present day. Instead of focusing on criteria that rely on internal determining factors, the aim of this paper is to investigate the size and power of a state by observing its external behavior. To fulfill this purpose, the article employs a case study methodology. Specifically, it uses the case of the Republic of North Macedonia to observe and evaluate its smallness and weakness based on the demonstrated foreign policy behavior of this state, especially in its efforts to deal with external challenges. The contextualized analysis is expected to contribute to an enhanced understanding of how the main patterns of a state's foreign policy behavior may dictate its size and power and consequently its place and role within the international system.

Keywords: small and weak states; foreign policy behavioral patterns; Republic of North Macedonia; external challenges; observational research methodology; international system

Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to evaluate the size and impact of a state while observing its foreign policy behavior. The shift of the international system towards multipolarity has created greater flexibility for small states to navigate, most evidently in the foreign policy field (Browning, 2006). However, small states, as a single category, are quite diverse among themselves, making it particularly challenging to establish a single, overarching model that would explain their foreign policy behavior. As such, small states are considerably unique in their specific foreign policy actions. Before dwelling into the motives or factors which determine the small states' performance within the international system, this paper tries to explore an analytical framework of small states, by reviewing the predominant criteria established by small states' literature, which may explain the size and power of small states, but not by looking

into the internal distinguishable factors, but rather into the external behavior through their foreign policy choices.

For the purposes of studying a state's foreign policy behavior and analyzing how it relates to the size and power of it, this article uses a case study as the most adequate methodology to systematically study the ongoing behavior of a particular entity, such as a state, within its natural context (Mason 2002). The observation is conducted within the context of North Macedonia, for the whole course of its existence as an independent state, with the aim to study complex and real life situations through an in-depth observation (Atkinson and Hammersley 1994). This case is used with the purpose of investigating whether there is any relationship between a state's size and power and the way it behaves in its external relations, as a theoretical assumption raised in this paper. Using such method, however, limits the comparability of findings to other cases and thereof must be complemented with other methodologies in case there are future research attempts to reach more generalizable findings (Denzin and Lincoln, eds. 1994).

The Concept of Small States

Despite the scholarly efforts to conduct research on small states, there isn't a consensus on a single, comprehensive definition. Different studiers conceptualize small states differently, which, according to Maass (2008) derives from the different criteria each uses to determine what a small state constitutes. Some rely on concrete or measurable criteria, while others analyze the political dimension or use qualitative criteria. The lack of a single, common definition on small states may be impairing on the one hand, yet it offers space for more flexible interpretation of this concept, which, in turn, reflects the complex reality in which small states operate within the international state system. This paper will explore various concepts related to small states to ultimately arrive at and formulate a synthesized definition, which will be referenced later in the text.

Many authors recognize the lack of consensus over a single, universally accepted definition of small states. Henrikson (2001, 56) states that there isn't any known academic and international definition of a small state. Ingebritsen et al. (2006, 5) argue that small states are often defined by what they are not. Moreover, the lack of a sustainable and durable definition of small states, as Rothstein (1968, 23) suggests, may be caused by challenges related to the definition of concepts such as weakness or power, which are closely related to the concept of small states. Consequently, defining a small states is more of a subjective than an accurate endeavor. The acceptance of this perspective, as Maass (2008) explains, produces a double effect: it may limit comparative studies of small states, but it may also allow for a wider and more comprehensive understanding of the concept (Leka 2020).

The study of small states relies on three approaches. The first approach uses rigorous criteria based on quantifiable data, resulting in precise definitions on the state's size and differentiating the small from medium and large states. The second approach studies small states as a political phenomenon, placing them within the international system, and offering more contextual definitions. The third approach integrates elements from both perspectives. Before examining thoroughly each of these approaches, which attempt to determine the essence of a small states, we will firstly try to establish a comprehensive understanding of the *state* concept itself.

Within the existing corpus of international relations literature, there are well known criteria which are utilized for defining a state. These criteria generally encompass a sovereign territory, a permanent population, a functional government and institutions, and maintenance of international ties as well as active participation internationally (Dixon 2005, 105–108). Additionally, the concept of the ideal state is usually characterized by four key attributes: defined territory, monopoly over legitimate use of force, authority over the population which recognizes the state as the highest form of organization as well as exchange of duties and benefits such as taxes, military service, social and material welfare (Finer 1975, Lindblom 1977, Hettne 1993, etc.). Although in the English language literature, the state is also referred to by other terms, such as *country*, *nation*, *nation – state*, or even *power* (Ingebritsen et al. 2006), this paper will use the term *state* as the integral term of the Westphalian international state system.

Once the definition and characterizing features of a state are established, the following question which arises is which factors help determine the size of a state. In other words, which criteria may be used in order to differentiate a small state from medium or big states? As explained above, a group of criteria, known as quantifiable criteria, are based on visible features or measurable aspect. They account for the territory of the state, size of population, its economic power, military capacity, etc. in order to assess a state's not only size but power as well. Among these criteria, the population size is the most widely used one. Some scholars, such as Karl Deutsch, point to the use of the economic indicators, such as the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), while others rely on the size of a state's territory as the most objective criteria for classification (Thorhallsson 2006, Maass 2009). The truth is that these two criteria have found little recent support within the academic and research circles. As Thorhallsson (2006) argues, if the GDP of a state is considered as a defining criterion for the former's size, then Poland would rightfully be considered a smaller state than Luxembourg, although the demographic data of the two indicate quite the opposite. Similarly, relying solely on the geographical extent of territory proves inadequate for categorizing a state as small unless it is supplemented by complementary criteria. To achieve greater accuracy, numerous scholars, as noted in Maass (2009), employ population size in conjunction

with other quantifiable criteria such as geographical area, as well as a country's gross domestic product or overall wealth, to distinguish between small and big states.

In the pursuit of understanding small states within the current international system, scholars often observe less visible factors, such as power, strength, and even the way a state is perceived in the international arena. This approach becomes indispensable due to the limitations of the quantifiable criteria, which mainly focus on the visible aspects of a state, and which furthermore fall short in providing comprehensive meaning of the complex nature of small states. Thorhallsson (2006, 13) argues that these criteria may have been more adequate in defining small states in the "old international systems where military capacity was the key to the survival of states; manpower for military purposes was highly important; the size of the economy was a basis for building up the militia, and states attached importance to concrete territorial gains". Therefore, scholars aiming to explore the dynamics of small states within the emerging global order, particularly in the context of the "new Europe," investigate less overt elements. These encompass considerations such as the nuances of power, resilience, and the way a state perceives itself in the international arena. The objective is to gain a contemporary, all-encompassing, and tangible understanding of what constitutes a small state.

The usage of the so-called qualitative criteria is perceived as an essentially subjective method for delineating the concept of small states (Scheldrup 2014, 5). Such subjectivism derives from the fact that the smallness of a state is determined based on its position within the international system or by comparison to other, bigger states. During the Cold War period, renowned scholars such as Keohane (1969) and Vital (1971) characterized small states as lacking in capacity to exert meaningful influence over the international system. According to their perspectives, small states produced much less impact in comparison to other, bigger states, rendering them ineffective in shaping the global state of affairs. This theory is thought to have found its roots in the historic Congress of Vienna, which placed big powers at the apex of the international system hierarchy. On the other hand, states deemed peripheral in the treaty drafting processes, were labeled as small states (Ingebritsen et al. 2006, 4).

The transformation of the global order following the conclusion of the Cold War ushered in new interpretations of small states and their potential impact on the international stage. According to Neumann and Gstöhl (2004), the conventional definition of small states, which stresses its limited capacity to shape international relations, is time-bound and fails to take into account the developments and changes in the international arena. In this newly configured landscape, marked by regional integrations, globalization, advancements in communication and technology, the role of small states within the international system underwent a revision. In the post Cold War era, Thorhallsson (2006) supposes that the impact of the social

constructivism, with its emphasis on the international norms, beliefs, ideals and international identity, empowered small states to maneuver more efficiently within the international system. By supporting international norms, small states widened their influence and the possibility to interfere at the global level. The Nordic states, for instance, are renowned for successfully promoting human right agendas within the international institutions. Moreover, small states' interactions with major powers evolved beyond mere bargaining processes, encompassing argumentation, framing, and the creation of identities and policies tailored to their advantage. In doing so, small states contributed substantially in forming a collective identity which includes the big states as well. Risse-Kappen (1995, as cited in Thorhallsson 2006) points to NATO, as an example, in which, its small member states, united by the common values and norms, achieved to influence even the security policies of the United States. By harnessing soft power to compensate for their lack of hard power, small states achieved influence in various domains, including technology and ecology, within the international system (Browning 2006).

A method used for defining small states includes the evaluation of their behavior in foreign policy, searching for distinctive patterns which differentiate them as a unique category of states. Advocates of this approach argue that small states demonstrate specific behavior within the international arena. An illustration of such demeanor is the small state's focus on local and regional policies instead of involvement into global affairs. Additionally small states typically advocate for international law and support international organizations, and furthermore demonstrate evident preference for multilateralism and alliances, as a means to strengthen their influence and as a strategy to guarantee their security against external threats. Maass (2009, 78-79) however, presents some criticism towards this approach. First of all, he doesn't consider that there is a causal relationship between the status of a small state and its unique foreign policy behavior. Instead, he posits that the two variables may stand independently of each other, and in some cases, some small states may even serve as the dependent variable to the foreign policy behavior, the independent variable. Furthermore, he stresses that the distinctive foreign policy behavior of small states may not be exclusive to this group, since bigger states may also adopt similar approaches driven by ethical and normative considerations. Despite these limitations, however, the qualitative approach of defining small states offers the advantage of being grounded in empirical data collection, yielding concrete and context-based results.

Proposing an alternative approach in defining small states, scholars such as Hey (2003) promote the self-perceived analysis. This method is based on the way a state perceives itself in relation to its position within the international hierarchy. Nonetheless, this method brings various challenges. Firstly, it raises the question of which perceptions should be deemed relevant and how to reconcile conflicting viewpoints, if they

arise? Secondly, a state's self-perception of its size carries a subjective bias, risking distorting the accuracy of its evaluation. Thirdly, leaving the task of defining a state's size on the hands of politicians or diplomats, may bring about politically motivated or prejudiced conclusions. In spite of these concerns, Hey (2003, 3-4) assesses that this approach remains valuable, particularly due to its alignment with foreign policy considerations. By exerting insights about a small state's foreign policy behavior based on its self-perception, this method offers a unique viewpoint. But, as with many other methods, it is advisable that this approach is complemented by other, more objective criteria, such as the population size or economic indicators, in order to achieve a more comprehensive definition of a small state. In this direction, Henrikson claims that small states, besides their quantitative dimensions, should also act and feel small (2001, 62-63).

Comparing small and weak states

In the quest to define small states, scholars often use terms like power and strength interchangeably. Whereas strength may be seen as a measurable quantity with a physical dimension, its application in the international relations realm has led to an overlap with the concept of power, which turns more into a qualitative criterion. When power is used as a determining feature of a small state, it drives scholars to equate smallness with weakness. In a world defined by power dynamics, small states are not considered only as physically small, but also lacking in capacity to affirm their will in international affairs, or to resist other, bigger state's influence on them. The overlap of the small and weak concepts in the small states' context is evident in different definitions, mainly rooted in the realist school of thought, but also beyond it. For instance, Keohane (1969, 291-310) characterizes small states as incapable of exerting significant impact on the international system. Along the same lines, Fox (1959, 2-3) defines small states as entities which lack the capacity to apply power in the international system or resist the big states application of power.

The inclusion of the power concept in defining small states introduces a security dimension. Small states, lacking in capacity to exert power in their international relations, find that their security is exposed to external threats. Whereas the nexus between power and small states used to be a characteristic of the realist school of thought, particularly during the first decades of the bipolar world order, Neumann dhe Gstöhl (2004, 12) argue that "external security concerns regained prominence" in the post-Cold War era. This resurgence is reflected by the increasing number of small states which seek membership in unions like the EU and NATO. Consequently, some scholars define small states as ones which face security threats by bigger and more powerful states and are unable to secure their own security independently, by relying solely on their capabilities (see Rothstein 1968, Ingebritsen et al. 2006, Bailes et al. 2016, Steinsson dhe Thorhallsson 2017, etc.). They argue that alliances serve as a valuable instrument for small states to not

only defend and improve their security, but to also strengthen their impact over international affairs.

Equating the smallness of a state with weakness, introduced a foreign policy dimension into the discussion. The supporters of this perspective, argue that small states, unable to produce relevant influence on the international system or to defend their security independently, suggest that their foreign policy behavior is oriented mainly towards survival (Maass 2009). Instead of engaging extensively into global affairs, small states have the tendency to focus primarily on their own defense. Raeymaeker (1974, 18) illustrates this stance by suggesting that "the foreign policy of small states aims at resisting pressure from great powers, safeguarding territorial integrity and independence, and preserving national values and ideals. A small power is inherently defensive, seeking security". Many other authors support the idea that small states, by subordinating to dominant big states or international organizations, in a way render themselves as small (see Weber, 2000, Cooley, 2005; Donnelly, 2006, Lake 2009; Engelbrekt dhe Matlary 2018, Reiss and Wattenberg 2019, Wibben 2020, FehI 2020). They contend that that the benefits that small states derive from aligning with these, more powerful entities, outweigh the cost in terms of their sovereignty. However, the alternative theories, such as the liberal or constructivist (referenced in Stainsson and Thorhallsson, 2017), suggest that small states are not weak by nature. According to these perspectives, the ability of a state to influence the international system is not based solely on raw power. Compensating for the lack of conventional hard power, small states use soft power to exert influence (for example the Nordic states within the EU). Unable to compete in terms of hard power, small states achieve their objectives through non-coercive means and the strategic use of soft power. Many small states have advanced significant agendas on the global stage, including environmental, human rights, and conflict resolution issues, by leveraging soft power. Furthermore, in our increasingly interdependent world, small states have greater opportunities to engage with the foreign policy establishments of larger powers. By appealing to international norms and laws that emphasize cooperation, small states can exert more influence than they might in a strictly realist framework.

As the wide range of criteria, presented above, for delineating a small state, show, there is no singular approach to define this category. The absence of a consensus in defining small states and the fluidity of characteristics, which also evolve and broaden over time, mirror the complex reality in which small states exist. This complexity arises from their distinctiveness and diversity within the international state system. Consequently, scholars may opt to utilize a specific set of criteria or combine multiple criteria from the aforementioned list when examining one or several small states, contingent upon their applicability to the particular state under scrutiny. As previously discussed, the concepts of smallness and weakness in states are closely linked to specific foreign

policy behaviors. Therefore, to achieve the objective of this paper, we will formulate a working definition of a small and weak state based on specific foreign policy traits:

A small state is a state that recognizes its own “smallness” and demonstrates this recognition through its actions and perceptions in the realm of international relations. Due to its inability to ensure its own survival independently, a small state fundamentally depends on the assistance of other (international) entities. In doing so, it subjects itself to limitations or guidance in its political activities, both domestically and internationally.

To establish a relationship between a state’s size and its foreign policy conduct, it becomes imperative to examine the factors that shape a small state’s foreign policy. The existing body of literature offers insights into the intricate interplay of both external and internal determinants influencing the foreign policy behavior of small states, spanning various levels of analysis. This exploration of these determinants, coupled with the working definition of small and weak states provided earlier, will be employed to assess their applicability within the context of North Macedonia.

Determinants of small state foreign policy behavior

The previous discussion puts forth many factors which impact the foreign policy behavior of small states, navigating across multiple analysis levels. The system level perspective underlines the international environment and the need for security as key factors which determine a small state’s foreign policy behavior. At the state level, other impactful elements include the social dynamics, institutional structure, political ideologies, ethnic preferences, and others. When examining the individual level, ideas and preferences of the political elite or leader surface as factors which impact foreign policy. By accounting for the interplay of factors at multiple analytical levels when scrutinizing a small state’s foreign policy conduct, a comprehensive understanding is facilitated, yielding more dependable insights into the state’s size and power. Across the spectrum of analytical levels, a scholarly consensus has emerged regarding the preeminent determinants of small state foreign policy (Hey 2003, 5):

- Small states, constrained by the international system, encounter limited foreign policy opportunities in comparison to big states.
- The small states’ foreign policy endeavors are curtailed, partially due to limited significant resources they possess.
- Small states usually establish short term goals in their immediate geographic surrounding. By contrast large states follow long term objectives on a global scale.
- Ethical considerations play a significant role in small state’s behavior, as the latter tend to support international law and principle. Small states rely on international

organizations and multilateral institutions to navigate more effectively in the international arena.

- Small states require protection, partnership, and resources from superpowers.
- Small states prioritize cooperation and conflict avoidance, especially when dealing with major powers. This tendency often positions them as effective intermediaries. Small states also have the tendency to choose positions of neutrality whenever possible.
- Security represents a paramount concern to a small state's foreign policy. To safeguard both physical and political survival, small states may choose to join alliances or remain neutral (as cited in Leka 2020).

The case of North Macedonia, in the section below, will be used to observe whether these non-exhaustive criteria find empirical applicability. The purpose of using the case of North Macedonia is to find out whether a state may be defined as small and weak based on certain patterns that it demonstrates in its foreign policy behavior. Such behavior, may furthermore inform North Macedonia's position within the international system, the choices it makes, and the role it plays within the system.

Assessing North Macedonia status, as a small and weak state

In order to determine whether North Macedonia's profile fits into the category of small and weak states, and whether these terms may be used interchangeably in this case, the concepts of size and power are initially analyzed separately and then intertwined. The analysis partly relies on the definition of a small state provided in the literature review section, in order to evaluate whether North Macedonia's smallness and weakness can be defined by observing its foreign policy behavior throughout the course of its independent statehood.

Commencing with the concept of *smallness*, a relatively straightforward approach to evaluate the smallness of North Macedonia includes the application of measurable criteria, which are grounded in physical measurability. When assessed in terms of metrics such as territory (25,713 km²), population (2,022,547), and GDP per capita (\$8,146), North Macedonia unequivocally falls in the profile of a small state (World Bank 2023). Nonetheless, it is imperative to bear in mind that the goal of this paper goes beyond these measurable criteria, aiming to investigate a potential relationship between the patterns of a state's foreign policy behavior and its size and power. This aim drives our attention to the second set of criteria, specifically to the qualitative ones. While we acknowledge the physical reality of North Macedonia as a small state, it prompts the following question: does a state's smallness equal its weakness? As explained in the literature review section, this criterion depends on the substantial question: can a state influence the international system? In other words,

does a particular state have the capacity or power to impose its preferences upon other states, while simultaneously resist external efforts to impose a stance which goes against the internal will? This criterion entails an international dimension of a state's size and power.

If we analyze the Republic of North Macedonia's case under this criterion, its early period of existence as an independent state is characterized by a foreign policy approach that is heavily influenced by the international system. Furthermore, in the first decades of North Macedonia's independence, a predominantly realist position on small states seems to have entirely influenced the state's foreign policy behavior, and this behavior, reciprocally, may have positioned North Macedonia as a typical 'small' state within the international system. The then President of the Republic, Gligorov, followed a foreign policy strategy characterized by balance of power, prioritizing security in the state's international relations and reliance on international alliances, in order to guarantee the state's security and defense of its national interests. His system level approach in foreign policy may have been influenced by contextual factors, including the neighboring conflicts caused by the dissolution of Yugoslavia and the external bilateral issues which significantly challenged the state's vital identity elements. Gligorov paid much less attention to internal factors which shape foreign policy, and viewed EU and NATO integration as a strategic necessity to defend the country's security rather than as an way of domestic identification with the western/European values and norms. The latter perspective would gain attention and relevance only during the later foreign policy discourse (Konseska 2014). The security oriented approach of foreign policy, as explained in the theoretical section of this paper, corresponds with the conventional characteristics of small states and their behavior within the international system.

Regarding this qualitative criterion, we may argue that North Macedonia's feeling of smallness becomes evident when we assess its difficult history of international relations since its independence. Particularly, North Macedonia's membership in the United Nations in 1993 holds a significant relevance in the international relations realm. The accession of this country into the UN occurred under its provisional name 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' instead of its constitutional name 'Republic of Macedonia' (Janev 2019). This exceptional situation took place during a turbulent period for North Macedonia. The country was facing unresolved border issues with Serbia, language disputes with Bulgaria, complex relations with Albania because of the discriminatory treatment of ethnic Albanians within North Macedonia, and a range of disputes with Greece pertaining to allegations on identity appropriations. Consequently, North Macedonia found itself in a precarious position and therefore unable to resist UN's decision, heavily influenced by Greek pressures. This decision, however, was in direct opposition to the internal will and aspirations of the country.

The undertaken alterations as a result of an interim agreement of 1995 with Greece, including the specific amendments in the Constitution of the then Republic of Macedonia, represent another case of external influence eventually accepted by the latter. Under Greek's pressure, North Macedonia was coerced to undertake a series of changes, including the revision of a few constitutional articles, which according to Greece, implied territorial claims (Perry 2000). The newly introduced amendments specified that North Macedonia would not assert any territorial claims on its neighbors and would not interfere in the sovereign rights of the other countries (Pop-Angelov 2010, 17). In 1995, North Macedonia also modified its official flag, substituting the Star of Vergina, a 16-rayed sun from the ancient Macedonian kingdom era (Shkarik 2009).

The most prominent example of externally imposed decisions, which derive from the challenging relations between North Macedonia and Greece, was the modification of the country's constitutional name from 'Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia' into 'the Republic of North Macedonia'. Some studies, as shown in Janev (2009), argue that this change reflects not only an externally imposed will onto another sovereign entity, but also a violation of the International Law. The latter upholds the principle that the choice of names is an inherent right of states, falling within their domestic jurisdiction.

The reached agreements of 1999 and 2017 with Bulgaria, represent a more complex scenario and cannot be categorized quite as one-sided impositions, since the Macedonian side has also demonstrated willingness to address the open issues with Bulgaria. However, the origin and nature of the dispute may still be considered as a type externally imposed pressure, considering that "this problem arises from Bulgaria's refusal to acknowledge the distinct existence of the Macedonian language" (Stojanovski et al. 2014). Furthermore, the friendship agreement of 2017 between the two countries does not necessarily mark the resolution of the historical or language disagreements. Instead, it could provide an avenue for Bulgaria to place additional new demands to North Macedonia. Bulgaria has already capitalized on this opportunity by placing a veto on North Macedonia's advancement towards EU integration. The veto, exercised at the Council Summit of Permanent representatives of EU (COREPER) in 2020, may be interpreted as a means of pressuring North Macedonia to succumb to external demands related to internal policy and constitutional changes in Bulgaria's favor. Consequently, North Macedonia's acceptance of these demands, as evidenced by a joint protocol signed between the two countries in June 2022, in which North Macedonia commits to amending its constitution to include the Bulgarian minority¹

1 Although the government has accepted the change of Constitution, this proposal is fiercely refused by the opposition of the country, namely VMRO, whose votes are necessary to make the two-thirds majority needed to pass the change. The failure to comply with these external demands may block further EU integration, plunging the country into deeper isolation and crisis (Brey, 2023).

(North Macedonia Signs Protocol With Bulgaria, Looks To Take Next Step To EU 2022), aligns with the notion of North Macedonia being a small and weak state in accordance with the definition outlined above.

North Macedonia's foreign policy behavior illustrates its limited ability to counter external pressures or circumstances, underscoring the narrow margin for maneuvering that small states face in their foreign policy decisions. A case in point is North Macedonia's diplomatic relations with the Republic of China (Taiwan), which elicited a stern response from the Chinese government and led to the derecognition of ROC. This had significant costs for North Macedonia's national interests (Tubilewicz 2004).

This qualitative aspect related to a state's small size also signifies its weakness in exerting influence or even resisting external influence within the international system, which is largely shaped by global powers. Before delving into the concept of a 'weak' state, let's explore another qualitative aspect of the 'small' state concept.

According to the theories of the above cited scholars (Huldt 1977 as cited in Rogers 2007, Evans and Newnham 1998, Hey 2003, Browning 2006, Steinsson and Thorhallsson 2017, etc.), small states tend to have narrowly defined priorities in their foreign policy, characterized by limited participation in the global arena and a substantial dependence on the international structures. In North Macedonia's case, the foreign policy key priorities have focused on the Euro-Atlantic integration, with a secondary focus on fostering bilateral and multilateral cooperation and commitment to the regional stability and prosperity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of North Macedonia).

The decision to adopt a double integrative agenda as the main foreign policy objective of the state may have derived from the existing circumstances of insecurity, internal and external, since the country's independence. This agenda later converted into an essential element of the state's identity and a feature for the diverse communities residing within its borders. The Euro-Atlantic integration priority represents a foreign policy orientation which enjoys an inter-party and inter-ethnic consensus. According to Koneska (2014), the main political parties have not deviated extensively from the common foreign policy objective, reflecting a sustainable stance since 1991. However, there have been periods when this orientation has shown signs of divergence. This divergence was characterized by a government's efforts not only to broaden the foreign policy focus towards a multi-vector approach but also to step back from the Euro-Atlantic agenda (Bieber, 2018). During the leadership of VMRO-DPMNE (2006-2016), the government initiated official visits and outreach efforts worldwide to attract foreign investments to the country and embarked on collaborations with Russia in the energy sector (Vankovska 2017).

Besides the economic justifications about this change of orientation in the country's foreign policy, the latter's conduct may also be attributed to the

deteriorating relationship with Greece and subsequent obstacles imposed by the latter in North Macedonia's integration path. Faced with diplomatic failures in resolving the disputes with its southern neighbor, the VMRO-DPMNE led government (2006-2016) pursued an adventurous foreign policy approach, characterized by endeavors to explore alternative alliances and partnerships, beyond EU and NATO. Furthermore, the Macedonian officials, in an undeclared manner, demonstrated an 'unofficial' retreat from the EU agenda, suggesting that compromising with Greece over the naming dispute, was too high of a 'national' price, and therefore unjustifiable (Pendarovski 2012, Koneska 2014, as cited in Leka 2020).

This situation led to the exploration of foreign policy alternatives. These efforts included the initiative of renewing the Non-Aligned Movement, closer cooperation with Turkey, discussions for a new security framework within the Euro-Asian security architecture and the involvement into the Euro-Asian Economic Community (Pendarovski 2012). Nevertheless, such experiments in foreign policy and deviation from the strategic objectives of the countries, seem to confirm Jervis's (1978) argument on the limited maneuvering space small states have in their foreign policy. According to Jervis, external circumstances compel small states to be highly sensitive to external constraints and to exercise caution in dealing with them, given their minimal 'margin of error,' which is often 'irreparable.'

Moving away from the traditional western allies, brought about severe consequences, resulting not only in the perpetuation of the EU and NATO isolation, but also in the internal and regional destabilization of the country. The relations with Greece deteriorated further, as official Athens continuously accused its northern neighbor for appropriating the Greek historical and cultural heritage (Karadzoski and Adamczyk 2014, Fidanovski 2018). The international and regional insecurity was exacerbated by internal tensions, mainly between the two biggest ethnic groups, the Macedonians and Albanians. These two communities began to adopt increasingly divergent stances in relation to how the state should approach the issue with Greece, often reflecting inter-ethnic mistrust, intolerance, and frustration. As Pendarovski (2012, 85) states, "in the post-Bucharest period (at which Greece vetoed North Macedonia's entry into NATO), the strategic goal that previously had served to enhance internal cohesion, [now] provided ground for inter-ethnic division...Until recently, it was beyond belief that the main division line should be the timetable for Euro-Atlantic integrations".

Given the considerable international, regional, and domestic consequences it produces, the deviation from the foreign policy objectives proved unsustainable in the long run. The change of government, in 2017, signaled a return to the conventional foreign policy trajectory. This return was characterized by intensified initiatives to ameliorate relations with the neighbors and the revival of the double integrative agenda.

These developments signify both the limited capacities of a small state to pursue a multi-vectoral foreign policy, and the significant risk associated with it, and its adherence to a more focused foreign policy approach.

Another qualitative criterion of a small state is their reliance on international law and organizations, and this has manifested in various forms in the case of North Macedonia. The continues efforts of the country to join renown organization such as the Council of Europe, UN, NATO, EU, etc. imply its commitment to international organizations and international legal structures. Furthermore, North Macedonia has relied on the internal law, as indicated by the case it raised against Greece before the International Court of Justice, referring to the violation of the interim agreement of 1995. As a small state, the former Republic of Macedonia opted for the judgment of the International Court of Justice, the most significant international legal body, to address the issue of Greece's obstruction of the country's Euro-Atlantic integration. However, despite the ICJ's decision in favor of North Macedonia, Greece's stance remained unchanged, rendering the institution's ruling ineffectual in unblocking the state's international integration agenda (Georgievski, 2013). These developments further affirm the state's status as a small entity within the international system. Despite its reliance on international institutions, it still lacks the capacity to exert substantial influence on the global stage, as noted by Sutton (1987, 20).

Another method used to determine the size and power of a state is based on the self-perception in its international relations or on the way it is perceived by others. This subjective stance represents a challenge on its own when attempting to evaluate the self-perception of North Macedonia. If we, hypothetically, suppose that North Macedonia sees itself as a small actor on the international scene, this may help explain its foreign policy behavior in relation to states like Greece and Bulgaria, manifested by the signing of bilateral agreements and accepting constitutional changes. The self-identification of North Macedonia as a small state is also reflected in its limited priorities in foreign policy, focused mainly on NATO and EU integration. However, as discussed above, it is difficult to assume that North Macedonia's foreign policy behavior has been consistent. If we analyze some foreign policy actions, especially during the last VMRO-DPMNE reign, a different self-perception of North Macedonia size and power comes to surface. During this period, the country's foreign policy scope expanded, embracing a more multi-dimensional approach, albeit initially driven by economic consideration (Vankovska 2017). Additionally, the objective of Euro-Atlantic integration was increasingly challenged, as it was conditioned by name change (Koneska 2014). Such behavior attempted to demonstrate that North Macedonia should not limit its foreign policy options, especially if the established objectives were perceived as damaging to its national interest.

Nevertheless, as explained earlier, such foreign policy approach resulted costly for North Macedonia. It led to tensions in its relationship with neighbors, due to provocative and nationalistic foreign policy decisions, driving the country to self-isolation and exacerbating inter-ethnic relations tied to the consensual foreign policy objectives. Such undesired outcomes suggest that self-perception may not only result as delusional, but also adventurous and risky to the state's wellbeing and its position within the international arena. Therefore, self-perception, being subjective and ambiguous in nature, may not serve as a reliable criterion for gauging the size and power of a state, unless is complemented by other criteria (Leka 2020).

Given that none of the above criteria are able to determine holistically a small and weak state, scholars usually employ a combination of criteria in order to reach a more accurate definition. In North Macedonia's case, if we presuppose that it qualifies as a small state in terms of population, territory, and economy, has limited foreign policy opportunities and maneuverability, respects international law and international organizations, and undertakes externally imposed changes from entities like the EU, Greece, and Bulgaria due to its self-acknowledged smallness, we might consequently reach the conclusion that it is indeed a small state.

This behavior fits the working definition revealed in the literature review section of this paper, which along general lines stipulates that a small state recognizes itself as a small entity and expresses this awareness by acting as such within the international system. Such a state is in search of survival by mainly relying on international aid, either from other states, organizations, or alliances, which in turn, curtail its political maneuverability, both at the domestic and international level. However, as the above analysis above shows, such a state does not always and perfectly fit these criteria. Therefore, we may argue that the concept of a state's size is inherently flexible and subject to change, with North Macedonia serving as an illustration of this adaptability.

When exploring the concept of a weak state, it is essential to underline the intimate relationship between a small and weak state. Such nexus derives from the overlap of criteria used to define both concepts. As a result, shared notions like power and strength have driven scholars (ex. see Fox 1959, Keohane 1969, Browning 2006, Steinsson and Thorhallsson 2017, etc.) to merge the concepts of small and weak state. Similar to the concept of small states, the idea of a weak state also includes a foreign policy dimension.

As suggested by Raeymaeker (1974, as cited in Maass 2009), a small and weak state pursues a foreign policy which is oriented towards resisting big powers' pressure, safeguarding its territorial integrity and independence, and defending its security. Although these criteria are not exhaustive, the first one, namely resistance against great powers is more characteristic than to the weak states. This criterion converges with the qualitative

criterion of small states, which, as North Macedonia's case points out, is manifested as inability to resist externally imposed decisions.

But what can we infer from North Macedonia's efforts to preserve its territorial integrity, independence, and security? We can argue that North Macedonia's foreign policy trajectory, since its independence onwards, including the amendments adopted along the way, has been oriented towards its survival. In its early years of independence, the newly established republic sought to adopt the so-called foreign policy approach of 'equidistance'. It can be argued that such approach served the purpose of safeguarding its independence during a time when most of its neighbors were involved in conflicts, which could easily spillover in North Macedonia (Marolov 2014). The advocates of this cautious foreign policy approach believed that it was the statesmen duty to preserve an equilibrium of distance towards the country's neighbors if they wished to safeguard inter-ethnic relations as an internal factor of stability and to advance towards Euro-Atlantic integrations as an external factor of stability. Balancing out these dimensions would represent a challenge should North Macedonia have decided to demonstrate preferences or closeness towards a particular neighbor (Marolov 2014).

North Macedonia's transition from an equidistance foreign policy approach to a regional cooperation one, mainly occurred under international pressure. Despite the shift, this recent orientation shared a common purpose with the earlier equidistance approach: defending territorial integrity, independence, and security, particularly when the old approach was no longer effective in achieving these goals. The country's resolve to pursue EU and NATO membership may be seen as a proactive step to achieve its continuous existence.

Whereas Koneska (2014) divides the foreign policy objective of North Macedonia into two branches: one oriented towards the defense of sovereignty and national security, and the other towards EU and NATO integration (as well as other relevant international organizations), Vankovska (2017, 6) argues that these two branches cannot be seen as isolated from one another. She suggests that "belonging to NATO and the EU is seen as the ultimate way to achieve and secure the country's sovereignty and state security". Moreover, the acceptance of external pressures for the sake of joining international organizations serves as another indicator of the state's vulnerability. Thus, membership into organizations such as the EU and NATO is considered more vital for the state's security and survival than resisting to external pressures.

Conclusion

Observing the case of North Macedonia, we were able to analyze and evaluate the assumed relationship between a state's foreign policy behavior and its smallness and weakness. As the arguments above indicate, North Macedonia seems to fit the

definition of a small and weak state by demonstrating certain behavior in its foreign policy, typical of a small state. Despite fulfilling internal hard criteria of being a small and weak state, the focus of this paper was to determine whether the smallness and weakness of North Macedonia can be determined based on external behavior. Such an objective drove the analysis of North Macedonia's main foreign policy objectives, ties, challenges, and risks, and related its behavior towards external ties and challenges with its size and power based on hard and soft criteria.

In conclusion, the case of North Macedonia demonstrates the vulnerability of a small state within the international system. As argued above, this vulnerability is evident in the state's inability to resist external pressures and influence from the international community, which is often related to tensions with its neighboring countries. As a result, North Macedonia has adopted a more cautious and attentive foreign policy, often following the instructions and recommendations of international institutions to which it adheres. Attempts to demonstrate a hardline policy stance have resulted in negative consequences, including aggravating inter-neighborly and inter-ethnic relations, and stalling its integration into Euro-Atlantic structures.

The flexibility shown in North Macedonia's foreign policy behavior further confirms its smallness and weakness. The state often makes compromises and concessions, indicating its powerlessness and inability to maintain a hardline policy stance. Multilateralism, manifested in North Macedonia's adherence to international organizations such as the EU and NATO for its external and internal security, is another indicator of the state's smallness and weakness.

This paper focuses on a single state and analyzes the relationship between its foreign policy behavior, size, and power. Given the diversity of small states and their foreign policy behavior, it is challenging to draw comparisons with other small states or generalize the findings of this study. A comparative study of several small states, conducted using a combination of methodologies, would be a useful approach to gain a more accurate understanding of small states' foreign policy behavior with wider applicability.

This paper aims to contribute to the literature on small states by analyzing the relationship between foreign policy behavior and a state's smallness and weakness. Contrary to the realist belief, small states, regardless of their size or power, can contribute to and affect international relations. As discussed earlier, small states can impact the international agenda through various means such as their resources, political systems, and so on. Additionally, there are more small states than large ones on the world map. Therefore, studying the behavior of small states' foreign policies helps us better understand the dynamics of international politics. By comparing the foreign policy behavior of small states to that of large states, we can gain a

better understanding of the latter. We hope that this paper will contribute to the understanding of the interconnectedness of size, power, and foreign policy behavior and serve as a basis for future research on the impact of small states on global issues such as politics, economics, and security.

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