

Basic problems of small countries

In the absorption of the over one million political and economic refugees created by these Eastern European small state ethnic and national conflicts, Germany and the Scandinavian countries have assumed a disproportionate share of the burden thus far, not boding well for Western European political and economic integration and threatening the European Community's unity on foreign policies, defense policies, immigration policies, employment policies, and overall economic development policies.

If the small, strong, wealthy, and democratic countries of Western Europe do not take the lead in defending and developing their poorer "cousin" small states in Eastern Europe, it is unlikely that the larger countries, including the U.S. and Russia, having less to gain and more to lose by political-military-economic involvement in resolving the current Balkan and incipient Baltics small states ethnic conflicts, will act soon or decisively enough to save the lives and freedoms of these much threatened new small states.

A recurring question in small state research is: How large or how small should or can a small state or country be? Anguilla in the Caribbean has about 7000 inhabitants. It is a beautiful small island, much smaller yet than Liechtenstein. Is that too small to be a country? (We think not, as long as it can survive politically and economically in its national independence, as it already has for over 20 years - longer than many larger states).

The survivable size of a state, we have already learned, is not an absolute but a relative quantity, related to the geopolitical regional context, natural barriers and political-economic inhibitors of neighboring potential aggressors and exploiters. Iceland, for example, with only about a quarter of a million inhabitants, is probably the world's oldest and one of the per-capita wealthiest democracies. Estonia, with five times Iceland's population, has had much more difficult security and survival problems in its 800-year history, because it is surrounded by several much stronger neighbors who prize its strategic location, rich natural and human resources, and are undeterred from over-running and occupying it by any formidable natural barriers. There are no Swiss alps or stormy North Atlantic oceans or powerful but benign nations surrounding it. Much larger Poland has not survived as independently for much the same reasons, independent of size of territory or population.

Another recurring question: How old can small states become? We don't know, because the world's oldest surviving states are all small. Who can tell how much longer they will thrive? Personally, I hope forever, or at least