

Small States in the System of International Relations

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour to address you at St. Gallen University at the invitation of my Austrian friend and a committed European, Dr Busek. Taking part in an academic event is always a welcome opportunity for an active politician to pause, sort out ideas and gain a new impetus for everyday work. Today we are going to focus, in accordance with the topic of this symposium, on some practical aspects of the policies pursued by small states at present and their implications for European integration.

In the system of international relations the policies pursued by small states constitute an exciting challenge. On the one hand, world politics are undoubtedly dominated by big states or, as it would be more appropriate to say nowadays, by a single super power. On the other hand, most problems that the international community is facing are directly associated with small and medium states. Such states frequently become sources of conflict, either directly or as objects of big states' foreign policy. If we take into consideration that small countries represent a majority of the international community of sovereign states comprising the United Nations, it becomes evident that attention should be given both to the theoretical assumptions and practical policies of small states that are working hard to make their voices heard. The experience gained after the end of a bipolar world demonstrates that even big powers are forced to heed the interests of small states in forging international coalitions that might facilitate their particular solution for a given problem.

Let us dwell for a moment on the definition of a small state. In addition to the traditional absolute criteria such as territory, population, the ability to independently defend oneself or the economic clout, also important are the relative size of a state in the region or in comparison