

to its neighbours. It is also necessary to emphasise the distinction between a small state and a weak state and to realise that there is no direct correlation between these categories. A small state may be strong, successful and, in some areas, fairly influential. Singapore is a good case in point. Typical of small states is a larger degree of economic openness since their limited internal space does not enable them as much as even contemplate voluntary isolationism or autarchy. The openness of the economy and the impact of foreign trade on a country's prosperity, however, imply yet another development factor that is not subject to the direct control of a state. In terms of origins, most of currently existing small states in Europe came about as a result of disintegration of larger units that took place in the past century. On a global scale, the decolonisation process proved to be the driving force of a much more widespread fragmentation and emergence of new states. Given the considerable dependence of small states on the external environment, it is only natural that they are so keen on seeing relations between states regulated by a system of international law and care so much about the advancement of international organisations. They view supranational institutions as a natural defence against the uncontrolled influence of larger neighbours and of big powers as well as an instrument of pursuing their own reasonable interests. Notwithstanding certain justified reservations concerning the effectiveness of the United Nations, nowadays the prevailing view is that in a way multilateral political institutions epitomise democracy and the rule of law in the international system. And, as we all know only too well, although democracy is far from being perfect, humanity is yet to devise something better.

Despite all the diversity represented by small states, there are certain political elements that predetermine their choice of political strategies. I will probably not be far from the truth if I say that while for big states the choice of a proper strategy for international policy is important, for small countries this choice is more a matter of survival. To small states an error in determining the right strategy – whether imposed by external factors or poor judgement in assessing the internal capacity – may prove fatal. History is replete with such examples. At present, the behaviour of small states in the system of international relations is determined by political geography, historic interactions and their current economic or military force. A major parameter is the influence of the international environment in the form of immediate neighbours and big