

powers able to effectively project their influence onto the region of a small state. One can distinguish between two basic models of long-term strategies pursued by small states:

1. An attempt at neutrality and an effort to stand aloof from neighbours and big powers
2. Attempts at co-operation ranging to integration in the sub-region and at nurturing strategic relations with a relevant big power.

In practice the evolution of international relations has demonstrated that amongst countries that sought to pursue independent policies only those have proved successful that had something truly exceptional available to them. That comparative advantage had to be significant so as to substantially offset other handicaps afflicting the small state, while the neighbours and big powers were expected to have a vested interest in maintaining the status quo. Switzerland may serve as a good example since, in addition to an exceptional banking regime, our host country has put in an enormous effort in building a total defence system, which is one of the reasons why it has been able to manage relations with bigger neighbours so successfully. However, the strategies that prevail in the modern world are geared to strengthen the relative weight of small countries by actively involving them in international co-operation and integration bonds at various levels.

Objectively speaking, most small countries initially did not have conditions in place that would be conducive to the successful implementation of an independent strategy bearing on foreign policy. Hence, they saw a way out in building up alliances either between themselves or within a big power's orbit of influence. The countries of central Europe also found themselves in this situation after the Soviet block collapsed and it was not obvious for a while in which direction these countries would evolve in the international context. A clear-cut pro-European enthusiasm on their part did not equate an automatically granted promise of a future within the European Communities or the North Atlantic alliance, quite the contrary. Initially, the «better organised part of Europe» perceived them more as a sanitary cordon against an unpredictable and agonising Soviet Union. The situation was further aggravated by the bloody fragmentation of the former Yugoslavia and the disintegration of the USSR where the emergence of many new states was accompanied by armed conflict. Even though the peaceful dissolution of Czechoslovakia was in stark contrast with the tragic developments in southeast Europe,