

## **POLITICAL AND GEOGRAPHIC ASPECTS OF STATENESS (ANALYSIS OF MICROSTATES' EXPERIENCE)<sup>1</sup>**

**Mr. Igor Okunev**

Ph.D. Student

Department of Comparative Politics  
Moscow State Institute of International Relations  
76 Vernadsky Pr., Moscow, 119454, Russia

### **Abstract**

*In the modern world, sovereignty is not an attribute, but the cause of stateness, and key political and geographical ground of sovereignty is the polity location relatively the balancing of power between different actors of world politics. Space is not able to determine the sovereignty of the territory, but may limit the choice of paths and tools of stateness. These conclusions are based on experience of the microstates sovereignty analysis. The stateness in the microstates is not a stable condition but a developing process. It is not a background for political institutions formation but a reaction on the external political processes when a small state starts using all the internal political instrument to accommodate this challenge.*

**Key words:** microstate, sovereignty, stateness, political geography

### **Introduction**

Subjects of sovereignty and stateness have been significantly developed in the Russian political science recently. However, regardless of the fact that in the appropriate works the authors were paying much attention to territorial attributes, we believe that the politico-territorial comprehension of stateness hasn't been singled out yet as independent and understood in full. In this paper we continue elaborating our ideas in this direction, while trying to depict the theoretical frame of identifying the role of space in stateness and address some political & geographical issues thereof as well as to outline hypotheses that will allow us to have a better idea of these notions. At that, the starting point of this work mainly referred to the author's investigation in the peculiarity of geopolitical location and political systems of microstates that, in our opinion, will better understanding of stateness in general and the role of spatial aspects in its development.

In the above-mentioned works the Russian researchers suggested conceptualization of the "sovereignty" and "stateness" notions that result form the traditional (politico- geographical) understanding of stateness of a polity, which is being formed around the centre for making decisions obligatory in the entire territory of a state and extracting resources in this territory for self-reproduction. In addition, they underlined the difference between "statehood" being both the internal and external recognition of the existing state and regime, and "stateness" as a potential for becoming a territorial polity with an established centre. Also, they put forward a hypothesis that stateness is connected with production volume and scope of social benefits. The political geography has always focused on the sovereignty issues, because a state, being an object of study for this science, traditionally is understood via sovereignty. So, the standard understanding of sovereignty as a concept that ties the power and society by way of internal and external legitimization in the specific territory already involves a socio-geographic aspect. Numerous works are devoted to this matter, some of which have become canonical (Gottman, 1973; Sack, 1986).

We believe that in the modern political geography there exist two dominating approaches to sovereignty. According to the first one sovereignty is implemented by the state through designation and achievement of its interests mostly by its foreign policy, and in this case we suppose that sovereignty is a consistent feature of the state (Biersteker, Weber, 1996). As per the second approach, sovereignty is a result of political processes taking place in a particular territory, and thus we are speaking of dynamic (in terms of time & space coordinates) sovereignty (Agnew, 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> Paper for the 6<sup>th</sup> ECPR General Conference (Section: Small states in the global economy: Comparative perspectives, Panel: Small States and Their Capabilities), Reykjavik, 25-27.08.2011.

As we can see, the first approach implies that sovereignty is the state's attribute and indisputable feature, while in accordance with the second approach it is vice versa, i.e. the state itself becomes a subject of sovereignty.

The first approach, let us call it *attributive*, is based on the Westphalian system's interpretation of sovereignty meaning that the world consists of independent states, which control their territory completely. Though, most likely this has never been the case, but the advocates of this approach still believe that full sovereignty is a required organizing principle of a state and an obvious feature of political power. In that event, states are treated in a Social Darwinism way as autonomous individuals, whose behaviour reflects certain solid internal interests, and who are acting as objects of international relations that struggle for survival with each other, and this gives rise to tough dichotomies "inside – outside" and "friends – foes". If so, the level of their stateness (effective protection of these interests in this fight) may be quantified.

The second approach, let us call it *subjective*, implies that a state should be treated not like a source of power but a derivative from sovereignty and political processes conducted under the name of the state in a particular territory, when power and society are connected by internal and external legitimization and form single identity. With such an approach states become additional subjects of the international relations system, which they are being built in by the states' foreign policy. In this case, sovereignty ceases to be a universal (and, consequently, measurable) measure of stateness and turns into a specific construct embodied in various forms and by different tools depending on the historical and geographical context. If we stick to the second approach we can single out two main territorial reasons for establishing stateness – nation building and security threat. If we are guided by the principle of derivation of state from sovereignty, it means that the population of a state is the only source of its sovereignty. However, the theory of people's sovereignty gives birth to a contradiction: on the one hand, the population is a pre-political society still establishing future political institutions required for sovereignty; and on the other hand, it is already a territorial community within the boundaries of an already existing entity. How does a state obtain territoriality prior to political institutions? Probably, not only political communities have territoriality but natural cultural ones as well. The nation building process makes it possible to tie a geographically isolated cultural community with emerging political institutions that allows the population to become a source of legitimization of a future state (Yack, 2001). If nation building is an internal basis of creating stateness, then the external one should be security threats or, to be exact, a discourse on security threats, which creates an image of "aliens", while a state is being formed by opposing them. In addition to political borders the new entity needs identity limits that are established by creating outside threats. Moreover, security threats unite the population thus expediting internal legitimization (Campbell, 1998).

Rethinking of stateness also requires reconsideration of attitude towards territoriality. In the modern political science and international relations theory there dominates the territorial paradigm of world order, which suggests that the world is divided into spatially extended objects (states, first of all, and also empires, spheres of interest, etc.) (Agnew, 2005). Nevertheless, the numerous historical examples prove the fact that territoriality in this understanding is not a must for polities. Territoriality is just one of polity's development strategies that simply has prevailed in our era. At the same time it is known that modern territorial states were developing in Europe only in Modern Age after rejecting non-territorial dynastic systems with personalized sovereignty in favour of people's sovereignty. However, sovereignty may be achieved not only in extended in space objects. Internal and external legitimization of relations between power and society may be secured in non-territorial network entities as well. Obviously, such polities as, say, city-states, alliances or great maritime powers are not spatially extended objects, which means that stateness does not always implies inflexible limits of its territory.

All this indicates that in the modern world we need to distinguish between *territoriality* of a polity as a description of its length and limitation in space, which suggests fixed limits of utilization of sovereignty, and *spatiality* of a polity as a description of its extent (abundance) in space. In our world the resource of territoriality is very limited, since the same territory may not fall under different sovereignties, while the limits of spatiality are wide, because the network principal of a polity's organization allows a territory to distribute its sovereignty over several entities. This way, the network polities are limited in space only by goals they were created to hit. In such polities limitation of sovereignty is effectuated bottom-upwards on a voluntary basis and not top-downwards by way of directives as is the case in many territorial polities. In disputes relating to stateness they traditionally refer to big entities and presume with almost no evidence that smaller polities lack sovereignty in its full extent and consequently their study becomes senseless. But we believe that the very study of microstates and polities with problem stateness (self-appointed states, not-self-governing territories, enclaves and exclaves, autonomies,

territorial regimes, etc.), i.e. entities with minimum or incomplete set of sovereignty attributes is more relevant, for it allows studying the essence in its excesses. The above made the author focus on the microstates case when studying stateness. Firstly, let us look into specifics of internal and external legitimization of relations between power and society in microstates so that to make general conclusions on politico-geographical specificity of their stateness. Following Jozep Colomer, Mikhail Ilyin defines the category of microstates as polities with considerably weakened outside aspects of sovereignty and low stateness with population under one million. The last criterion allows to determine that in the modern world there are 41 UN member-microstates. Most of them are located on islands in Caribbean (9) and Southern Pacific regions (11), yet such can be found in all parts of the world excluding North America: 10 in Europe (Cyprus, Montenegro, Luxembourg, Malta, Iceland, Andorra, Lichtenstein, Monaco, San Marino, and Vatican), 4 in Asia (Bhutan, Brunei, the Maldives, and the Seychelles), 4 in Africa (Djibouti, the Comoros, Equatorial Guinea, and Cape Verde ), 3 in South America (Guyana, Surinam, and Belize). Twenty seven of the listed microstates are located on islands and only six of them were not colonies in the recent past. As to GDP per capita the microstates are scattered as far as from Luxemburg ranking first to the 153<sup>rd</sup> place taken by the Comoros (according to the IMF data for 2010), concentrating mainly in the middle of the list (from place 76 to place 135). Twenty eight microstates can be considered as democracies. All depended territories with the exception of Hong Gong and Puerto Rico can be referred to micro polities as well.

The internal processes of legitimization in microstates are mainly connected with the level of maturity of political institutions and democratic procedures. Those advocating the theory of influence of the size of state territory over the democracy level picked out several areas, in which such influence may occur, namely, citizen participation, security and order, unity and diversity, common interests, loyalty and control over leadership (Dahl, Taft, 1973). The microstates are likely to have the following benefits: homogeneity, lower proneness to conflicts, higher loyalty to the authorities and symmetric interrelations between the elite and citizens due to the shorter distance between power and society. In small communities it is easier for the citizens to develop common interests; however, it reduces their need in strong opposition. In such a way, the power is concentrated in hand of the sole dominating political organization. Often this leads to personification of power, and consequently, to reduction of authority of legislative power and the role of political parties. On the other hand, so long as the leaders of microstates have to interact directly they seek to minimize open confrontation or, in other words, the internal consensus is inherent to the elite of microstates to a greater extent in contrast to the big states' leaders.

In turn, proneness to consensus works for development of democracy as it reduces the threat of destabilizing frustrations in the political system. Besides, the small size of a state enhances participation, because each vote becomes more significant, but at the same time the homogeneity of society lowers competitiveness during elections. Maturity of direct democracy tools as a mechanism of legitimization of state authority is of special interest. Apparently, microstates create ideal conditions for establishing direct democracy exactly due to their size. Solidarity is their integral feature, which enhances the population's awareness of local political life. In addition, microstates are more competent in issues related to struggle with elite that seek benefits through law manipulation. At the same time it is worth mentioning that the short distance between power and society as well as similarity of views and values of population create additional obstacles for direct democracy in these states. (Anckar, 2004). It is obvious that there exist certain differences between microstates, e.g. those connected with their location (islands or mainland) or colonial history, but most likely they effect the level of the above attributes rather than their qualities.

Now we can draw a preliminary conclusion that for microstates their size is not an obstacle but an accelerator of sovereignty, because this gives additional opportunities for internal legitimization provided that these states do not blindly imitate the political system of their former parent states. External legitimization of microstates in the modern world mainly concerns their integration in the global economy. During the last three decades many microstates, in spite of their size, demonstrated significant economic and social security growth, which proves the fact that the size of territory doesn't hamper this growth despite numerous challenges that small countries are facing. On the one hand, globalization is quite a threat to singularity of many successful island states, on the other hand the failed attempt to accept globalization might mean that small countries will remain isolated from positive changes brought about by globalization and be thrown away to the world's economic and geographical periphery.

The following determinants of the microstates' socio-economic development (or their competitive advantages as per economic terminology) can be identified: openness, sector specialization, flexibility, sensitivity to changes in the world economy and strong involvement in regional integration processes (Read, 2004).

It is assumed that successful small states specialize in products and services that utilize the human capital to its full extent. For such states it is important to raise the level of education of population, since they can't rely on increase of economic capacities by involving workforce in large quantities in production processes due to low population size in these states. The necessity to improve their comparative advantages suggests that successful development of these small states is likely based on an economic model that requires focusing on one segment of economy. And again microstates enjoy strong public unity and political flexibility that stimulate their development. However, remoteness and isolation affect the economic growth because of high transportation and communication costs, while the very successful development, though it may sound paradoxically, increases economic vulnerability owing to strong dependence on trade and international cooperation. And of course, the current disbalance in international trade, which leads to dictatorship of the OECD countries, now hampers the economic development of microstates, which can oppose this only by higher level of diversification of export and regional cooperation.

So, the size of a state is a decisive criterion in the microstates development ensuring a higher level of their democracy but at the same time it can impede their development (Anckar, 2002). Simultaneously, it needs to be noted that microstates refute the thesis of interrelation between democracy and the level of well-being. Therefore, creation of stateness in minute polities is connected, as a rule, with two opposing factors: the colonial past and globalization. The balance between the microstates' orientation on democratic development according to the Western patterns and their desire to maintain uniqueness has become an indispensable condition for keeping their sovereignty. When characterizing the process of implementation of stateness in microstates in general we can come to a conclusion that for these states stateness is a response to dichotomies of their politico-territorial situation: existence of political institutions and culture imported by colonizers or more powerful neighbours and necessity to liberalize the political sphere, on the one hand, and a wide range of opportunities given by globalization and the necessity to create own identities, on the other hand.

In many Oceanic languages the notion of sovereignty is conveyed through the word *mana* or cognates (Petersen, 1998, p. 197). *Mana* means a sort of preternatural power. This interesting fact suggests an idea that for microstates the external aspects of legitimization (first of all it refers to recognition by the former parent state and the rest of the world) of their regimes are more ponderable than the internal ones. Furthermore, readdressing our subjective understanding of sovereignty, we may assume that for microstates the role of internal aspects of sovereignty is nothing but trifling. Sovereignty of micro polities is not the reason for political changes and often results from them. Being compelled to accelerated stateness microstates have to select from the scant arsenal of state properties and attributes those suitable for establishing legitimate power. Under such conditions the influence of fundamental spatial factors of development of these territories becomes determinative. Regardless of the different value of some factors for particular countries in the region we can draw a general conclusion that political development in microstates is conditioned by the influence of spatial factors arranged in the form of a certain hierarchical pyramid, in the bottom of which there are physical and geographical factors outlining territorial delimitations in the region. Following are ethno-geographical, economic & geographic and socio-geographical factors accordingly that describe main peculiarities of functioning of certain states being depicted herein. And finally, on the top there are politico-geographical factors, the influence of which is not that significant due to the absence of a long-lasting tradition, however, it is gradually increasing. This top layer reflects the differences developed by the lower levels.

These thoughts give us an opportunity to take a different view of microstates and their stateness. The thing is that speaking of minute polities we can disregard *territoriality* (in the meaning it was defined above, i.e. extension in space) and regional differences that allows us to treat a polity as a point in the system of international relations. Such simplification is required for better understanding of peculiarities of politico-geographical essence of stateness, and not microstates only; however, disregarding territoriality and regional differences in case of big and mid-size states becomes a problem. Perception of a polity as a point but not a stretched territory allows us to look at the system of international relations from another perspective, because at first glance it gives *spatial* properties of stateness, in other words, as it was mentioned above, it means the characteristics of network abundance of a polity. This makes it possible for us to raise a number of research issues.

Firstly, what is the low threshold of availability of attributes required for creating conditions for sovereignty, which, as was described above, was an object of stateness but not its attribute? Our hypothesis is that analysis of microstates' stateness attributes (their dissimilarity, weakness and conditionality) will show a zero threshold.

In other words, to let a point with some stateness prerequisites appear in space it is not required that it has some provisory attributes of sovereignty. Its location in space may be a basis of its stateness, first of all, relative to other polities.

Secondly, we should be interested in how politico-territorial position of a polity (as a point in space) effects its stateness. At that, we need to focus not on analysis of attributes of the object's position in space only, which are immanent to it ("vertical conditionality"), but on analysis of its relations with other objects in space (mainly with other polities), i.e. on analysis of spatial connections ("horizontal conditionality"). So, in our work we study the effect of geopolitical (static) characteristics on chronopolitical (dynamic) ones. Our hypothesis is that space cannot determinate sovereignty of a territory, however, it may reduce probability, a set of scenarios and tools for stateness development, and in some cases enhance probability of certain scenarios and tools versus the rest ones. In our opinion, the key role in formation of a sovereignty basis that precedes formation of a state is played by balancing (exactly as a process) of forces between actors of the international system. As the result of ongoing alteration of balance of forces between them, in a certain point of spatiotemporal continuum there appear conditions, under which the best option to maintain or stimulate this balance is to provide this point with sovereignty attributes.

The microstates history may substantiate the proposed hypotheses. For example, Andorra and Lichtenstein have never had sufficient historical, ethno-cultural or economic grounds for sovereignty. Such formations had appeared and successfully exist for a long time thanks to the fact that they became a condition for maintaining the balance of forces between France and Spain and between Germany and Austria-Hungary accordingly. For this outside reason there appeared conditions required for development of other conditions for stateness of these polities including those for external and internal legitimization of their regimes. It is interesting that after correlation of forces in Western Europe had changed Lichtenstein reoriented and now is taking advantage of contradictions between Switzerland and the EU. The way Luxembourg kept on losing and regaining independence following changes of the geopolitical role of Germany in 19<sup>th</sup> -20<sup>th</sup> centuries is just another proof of our thesis. Microstates of Oceania also exist by maintaining balance of interests of major players in the region – the USA, China, Japan and Australia.

And once again, the differences in politico-geographical location of a point in space vary the possibility of obtaining traits of stateness by this point, but don't determinate such development. Insular position of a state that is typical for microstates, or other similar types of territorial isolation (e.g. mountainous surroundings as is the case with Andorra or ethno-cultural heterogeneity of Luxembourg) just increase such a possibility and enlarge the set of scenarios according to which the signs of stateness may appear on this territory. Now we can make a conclusion that in the modern world sovereignty is not an attribute of stateness but a reason for it, and so long as the spatial properties prevail over territoriality the key politico-geographical basis for sovereignty is the position of a polity relative to the systems of balance of forces of other actors of the global politics. As per our hypothesis this conclusion is true for all territorial formations and not for microstates only.

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