

Agency, Security and Governance of Small States

A Global Perspective

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In terms of sheer numbers, the small to middle state is the prevalent type of global statehood today. Most of these “Small States and Territories” (SSTs) have emerged only recently and in the wake of the decolonisation process after the Second World War (Lake & O’Mahony, 2004). Still, macro-syntheses of history setting out to reveal long-term patterns of ‘smallness’ are very popular (see, e.g., Duursma, 1996; Klieger, 2014; Simpson, 2014). Such contributions usually offer a narrative of historical events or a teleologically biased review of the past. They tend to overlook the fact that in the past no future was certain. The destiny of a country for largeness or smallness was not manifest, and its contingency remained open-ended (Keating, 2015, p. 19).

One key question of the volume’s concept addresses the coexistence and co-dependence of vulnerability and opportunity related to small-state size; another addresses the ability of small states to adapt to shifting security paradigms. In my analysis, the one major adaptation to shifting security affairs concerns the emergence of small and even smallest nation-states that was based on a certain blueprint: European-type nation building. This, first of all defensive modernisation made not only Luxembourg ‘fit’ for participation in the very first wave of internationalisation in Europe: the nineteenth-century Concert of Europe. This development also made small states in ‘old’ Europe quite different from newly emergent small states. This may also serve as proof that any quest for small-state definitions across history and geography is bound to turn into a Sisyphean task.

The coexistence of vulnerable small states, particularly the German states of the former Holy Roman Empire, made shelter-seeking the only realistic option, albeit by means of a proto-typical ‘regionalism’ in the shape of an alliance. The German Confederation narrowed down the security dilemma of German small states by reinforcing policies aimed at protecting physical security and territorial integrity as a collective security agenda. Paradoxically, it was the mere existence of a number of small and even micro-states that ‘forced’ the hand of the Great Powers with regard to security guarantees.

Keeping this in mind, I propose in this chapter to adopt a *longue durée* approach to looking at Luxembourg ‘pre-state’, precisely because it allows me to explore contingencies and potentialities. I will present the security governance of the county (later duchy) during the Middle Ages and of the province of Luxembourg

as part of the Habsburg composite monarchy during the Early Modern Era before examining the Grand Duchy in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries—without positing any continuity between these entities. This long-term perspective will enable mixed patterns and sequences of security governance in Luxembourg to be discerned. They will be discussed in trans- and international contexts in the sense of activities between individuals and groups of different entities (state, nation, estates) on the one hand and relations between official representatives of such units on the other.

The theoretical framework used here is that of ‘extantism’, which I shall explain in the following section, before presenting the changes and continuities in Luxembourg’s security governance.

The rise and fall of small states—tides of numbers

On a statistical base, Matthias Maass (2017) was able, in accordance with findings of other research in European history and world politics, to identify two major ‘tides’: the first such wave began in 1648 (The Peace of Westphalia) and led to a rise in numbers of up to 427 small states (and 19 large ones) in Europe, followed by a ‘mass-extinction’ (Kaegi, 1942) 150 years later during the Age of Revolution, particularly after the French Revolution of 1789. Overshadowed by the Napoleonic Empire, the number had dropped to 77 in 1813, the lowest number to that date. In a second global tide, a stepwise upswing occurred after the two world wars: from 50 small states in 1945 to 106 in 1973 with numbers slowly rising to a provisional total of over 250 recognised by the United Nations, at present. While Maass is not comparing apples with oranges in the survey, he clearly uses pears—from the same plant family (pomaceous fruits) but of quite different shapes and tastes—for his transhistorical collation. What makes things intriguing for a historian is not so much the rise and fall of petty powers but the fact that even under very different sociopolitical conditions small, smaller, and even micro-political units were part of the system. Like their Political Science colleagues, historians of International Relations (IR) across all periods mostly prefer to investigate big players—in other words, the emergence, decline, or collapse of empires, nations, and great powers. The persistency or renaissance of small polities, even of those embedded in empires, was not given the same attention, except for the writing of their own national history and narratives. This is due to thinking in benchmarks (of bigness) and deviations: incompleteness of sovereignty or lack of power, found in smallness. Thus, and contrary to a (neo)realistic view such as that of Keohane (1969), who regards small states as ‘system-ineffectual’ because they adapt to circumstances whilst these circumstances do not depend on them, I argue that small units have always been an integral and system-shaping part of international relations: their ‘extantism’, their mere existence—to give a preliminary definition—was necessary and has been a precondition to bringing order into anarchy, because, to paraphrase Alexander Wendt (1992), anarchy is what states make of it independently of their size. Two historical contexts may help to illustrate my point: to neutralise causes of disagreement, states like Luxembourg were regarded as ‘system-irrelevant’. In

maintaining the political order as a balance of big-power politics in nineteenth-century Europe, the great powers agreed on collective security guarantees of non-intervention. However, pushing such neutralised countries out of the game granted smaller states room for manoeuvre; the ‘agency’ needed for their own course was set for full sovereignty. It was this system-stabilising strategy and concerted action that made small states system-relevant in the first place and elevated small states to the rank of players in their own right.

After the Second World War, and across all ideological divides of the Cold War, East and West agreed on the necessity of, and the right to, decolonisation. This proclaimed right for self-determination of new states, independently of their capabilities and as legal fiction, created ‘affordance’—the compulsion to take action. The subsequent competition of East and West for fellowship with even the tiniest state to cope with this new extantism was systemic. A global struggle for influence between the two superpowers over smaller and smallest states ranging from development aid to proxy war unfolded.

The concept of extantism denotes this affordance of political entities, irrespective of their size, as action possibilities. These depend not only on capabilities but also on goals, beliefs, and experience. Such opportunities for action present themselves not as a one-way and top-down but as a two-way-process as systemic drivers.

Extantism as a concept for Small-State Studies

While the discussion around the definition of ‘What is a small state?’ may be relevant when analysing a narrow period, in particular Late Modern times, it turns into an unmerry-go-round question if one adopts a deeper historical perspective: states are not ahistorical entities; their features change. Therefore, understanding smallness as a relative and relational category seems to best serve not only IR but also Small-State Studies (Baldacchino & Wivel, 2020; Wivel et al., 2014). However, there are limits to this approach. In classificatory relations of similarity and difference, things (in our case, states) cannot be known except through the relations of their properties. This constitutes a time-bound paradox: a relation, say ‘big to small’, is determined by the features of this very comparison, its *relata*, which are not absolute but fluid (MacBride, 2020). The only ‘absolute’ property is their existence *per se*. Extantism builds on the simple fact that *existence precedes essence*, the properties of a thing. In other words, the reality of states antedates the need to problematise features such as ‘too small’ or ‘large’. This discussion is context-dependent and has its own historiographic past in IR Studies and in the political debate. So far, definitions of small states in this field have been decisionistic: it was not the content of the definition that determined its validity but rather the fact that the definition was made by the proper authority or by using an academically accepted method. To all intents and purposes, these definitions operated as working hypotheses in a pragmatic and time-related field, which may turn out to be anachronistic for another period (Baldacchino & Wivel, 2020). To circumvent such self-referencing, I want to point to the pure existence of polities and their impact on

security governance in the first place: in a systemic feedback, the sequence of the loop is as essential as the components, as illustrated by Figure 4.1. In the second place, I call into question the anachronistic use of ‘state’ and ‘sovereignty’ in IR Studies.

In the past, size mattered, too, of course, but this and other state-related properties and capabilities (population, perception of sovereignty, state of military force or diplomatic activities, etc.) were as relative and context-sensitive as in current affairs. In the following line of argument, I further expand on extantism. In other words, what may appear to be a self-evident truth today, namely that all states are equal and endowed with certain unalienable rights, only emerged at a certain period in time. What this turning point was or whether there were repeated trends in favour of such extantism of small and smallest political units in the past, is one question to be answered. So, back to the roots of the neologism.

In view of the proliferation of small and micro-states in the age of decolonisation, Bernard Schaffer, a researcher in Development Studies who coined the term in question, concluded that “the formal status of independence tends to be maintained by the ideology of ‘extantism’—the support for already existing nation-states, while formal independence itself helps to improve a country’s score on the dependence/independence scale” (1975, p. 24). Schaffer’s perception was nurtured by the general political climate in support of smaller and even micro-states after the Second World War. Looking further back into history, we can discern tides, a

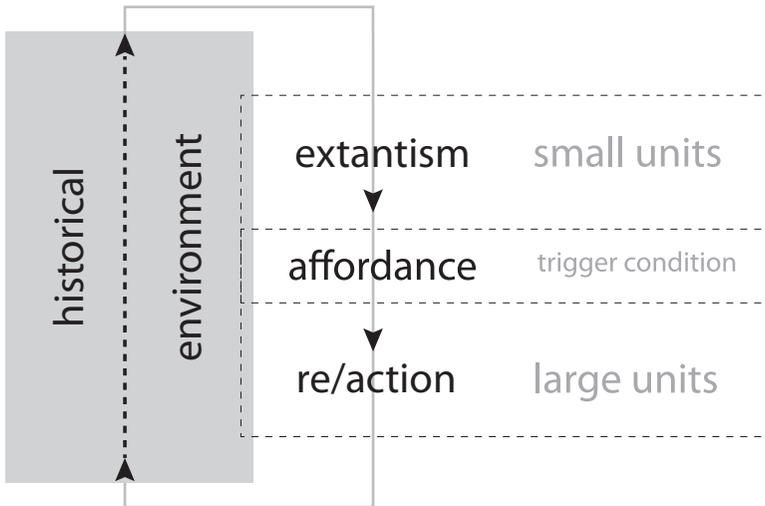


Figure 4.1 Agency and structure of extantism in international relations

Source: Created by Author.

Note: Extantism of small polities affords action by larger polities resulting in the co-creation of subsequent historical environments, which may favour or disfavour the persistency or change of small polities. ‘History’ is the contingent iteration process while the historical system structures the actors.

waxing and waning of such smaller and smallest political *units*. I prefer ‘units’ to ‘states’ to encompass quite different qualities of modern and absolutist states as well as political entities in composite ‘feudal’ or absolutist monarchies. In a fundamentalist reading of (neo)realism, polity (‘the state’) and politics are conflated into autonomous ‘like units’, that face similar tasks: “Anarchy entails relations of coordination among a system’s units, and that implies their sameness. [S]o long as anarchy endures, states remain like units” (Waltz, 1979, pp. 93–5).

To sum up extantism as concept: asking when and under what circumstances smallness persists in the first place can bridge different time periods better than ‘whatness’ (‘What is a small state?’, ‘What is its essence?’) as a supposed lowest common denominator.

Second, extantism is not prejudicing any quality in a system but points to the fact that ‘big’ and ‘small’ mutually define each other. This approach is non-essentialist and in opposition to the view that collective singulars (in this case, subjects of international law) have a set of attributes that are necessary to their identity or to be identified as such.

Third, political actors, that is, the question of who is entitled ‘to do security’, change. Their role and legitimacy derive from very different historical backgrounds: a Roman nobleman, an Early Modern absolutist monarch, and the government as collective organ of the executive branch of a nation-state democracy are functionally incommensurable; they are not neutral operators on neutral and transtemporal levers of power. That would be a functionalistic disillusion, because they shape function in the very way they fulfil it (and vice versa, actors are shaped by these man-made structures).

Fourth, and contrary to Schaffer, reasons for extantism go far beyond ‘ideology’, understood as a political belief system, because practical elements are as prominent as theoretical ones in IR. Extantism is not the coincidental coexistence of big and small, it is system-driven. (Or, is it even the driving force and prime-mover of the system?)

Last but not least, extantism in my understanding also goes beyond Bartmann’s positivistic use, “once a state, always a state”, because of the systemic interplay of affordance and agency (Bartmann, 2002, p. 366, compare Baldacchino & Wivel, 2020, p. 2). Extantism is a systemic approach where ‘small and big’ continuously regenerate and realise a network of relations that produce and define them. This historical environment is not absolute (‘ahistorical’) but a “specific spatio-temporal context” (Thorhallsson & Wivel, 2006, p. 654) for a certain length of time. Its contingency may change fundamentally at critical junctures. In this volume and in extension of the time horizon of this chapter, André Linden presents just such an end of an old and the beginning of a new ‘era’ of Luxembourg’s security in the 1940s.

In the following section, I will read Luxembourg’s history in retrospective—the only way we can investigate and try to understand the past. Doing so, I will discuss development from the point of view of extantism in “multistable perception”:¹ small states have to adapt but so do great powers; the same common political environment shapes small *and* great powers.

Why Luxembourg as case study?

Luxembourg merits a classification as an archetypal small state. Its territory has been continuously landlocked, in contrast to small-island polities. The geographical character of islands with natural borders accentuates not only their distinctiveness as communities but also their “insularity” (Baldacchino, 2010, p. 53). Deep-blue-sea borders in particular have made a political division in history, with a few exceptions (such as Haiti/Dominican Republic) rather unlikely. Luxembourg has never experienced such ‘islandness’ and border protection (or perception as a ‘natural unit’).

Arend Lijphart’s (1971) notion of an interpretive and theory-conforming case study is the rationale of the following account of Luxembourg’s continental persistency in two sections.

In this account, I make explicit use of established propositions of Small-State theory by applying them to history before the existence of the nation-state to show that smallness is neither ahistorical nor an ‘invention’ of modernity.

Section I: Luxembourg’s lands before the Grand Duchy

Siegfried (ca. 922–998), a descendant of Charlemagne and member of the House of Ardennes, acquired a small castle, the *Lucilinburhuc* which gave its name to the market town and later to the count(r)y. During the European Middle Ages and well into the Early Modern Era, the governance and security of the surrounding lands of that stronghold followed the logic of a proprietary principedom, better known as a ‘proprietary kingship’. Any political interaction of such a social system meant

that public and, *a fortiori*, foreign policy was conducted in the name not of *raison d’état* or the national interest, but of dynastic interests [and] social relations of international intercourse were largely identical with the “private” family affairs of monarchs.

(Teschke, 2009, p. 222)

That system entailed political marriages and, inevitably, wars of succession. Lordship diplomacy and empire-building worked as an enlargement of the heritable estates of a dynasty (‘Hausmachtspolitik’) via networking for alliances with either deep personal, albeit extra-familial, bonds (‘feudal’ allegiance and vassalic relations) or loose(r) coalitions (*amicitiae, pacta*). You could also buy or pawn lord or townships, including the rights over their inhabitants whilst performing reciprocal duties at the same time. Wars of feudal expansion were another means and were particularly prevalent at the periphery of the Christian world. Armed commercial interest of mercantile republics completes the picture.

However, it is no coincidence that the modern word *state* derives from ‘estate’ (landed and personal property). ‘State’ at these times meant, first of all, the quality of the *status* of the associated persons and their relationship in *The Estates* of a realm or lordship, that is, the assembly of the landlords and patrician families.

These non-permanent *parlements* were basically theatres for negotiations, the *parler/parlay* for the self-interest of their members, and not a legislative government body of popular representation. These inner circles of the powerful acted in a collective manner mainly to check the ambitions of *their overlords*, particularly in questions of taxation and warfare. In the checks and balances of the period, even the mightiest monarchs could find themselves ‘entrapped’ by the interests of their peers as an encircled king or queen with marginal room for manoeuvres. The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth (1569–1795) was such a tight aristocratic republic, just to give one prominent example.

Monarchs and princes were, politically speaking, not ‘heads of state’ but *primus inter pares*: co-rulers and co-proprietors in a polycentric political world with parcelled sovereignty. Some, like the Holy Roman Emperor, enjoyed the highest charisma while most people were filling the lower ranks on the successive order of prestige down to the commons and non-eligible poor. Great, small, or miniscule power was related to persons and their ability to mobilise resources (a fellowship) and not to a certain territorial government. Even in the face of the eliminatory competition for land, people, and taxes (‘feudal rent’), inter-dynastic compensation for equilibrium did not usually result in the eradication of small polities because the estates continued to work. They needed to. Thus, dynasties were ‘big’ or ‘small’—this size and their capabilities mattered and, as a general rule, it was dynasties and not their lands and estates that vanished (see, e.g., Nexon, 2009).

State formation in the later Early Modern Era advanced most in regions where the monarchs did not depend anymore on co-rulers for their main prerogative, that is, foreign policy, which in turn has to be equated with war as *ultima ratio*. Absolutist monarchs as giant landlords over their demesne had sufficient resources at their disposal. Even a legitimate master of tax and excise of the realm nevertheless needed consent, but some ‘royalties’ were already undisputed or made into a royal monopoly. The development of Luxembourg from the lands of a lordship to a territory is quite typical. Here is an ‘executive summary’ of that history.

Siegfried’s descendants soon called themselves Counts of Luxembourg. This branch of the House of Ardennes-Luxembourg died out without a male issue, and in 1136, the lands passed to a cousin of its last scion, who himself was head of another dynasty, namely Henry the Blind of the House of Namur. A political marriage secured the claim of Henry’s heiress Ermesinde. In 1308, Count Henry VII managed to achieve the ultimate elevation in prestige by first being elected King of the Romans and then being crowned in Rome as Holy Roman Emperor (the first of three provided by the House of Luxembourg). His son, John the Blind, gained the ultimate prize in 1310, when he accepted the offer of the Bohemian estates to wear the kingly crown of the richest principedom of the *Sacrum Imperium Romanum* in today’s Central Europe, after the royal line of the House of Přemyslid had ended there. The new royal dynasty moved their ‘headquarters’ to Prague, the centre of the Lands of the Bohemian Crown, making them absentee landlords in Luxembourg. No land bridge connected these very distinct parts of their realms: the smaller one as the ‘private’ economic power base, the other as the political one. In Bohemia, John’s son Emperor Charles IV elevated Luxembourg (and his

inheritable dynasty) to the status of a duchy in 1353. Itself a composite lordship consisting of four different counties, a marquisate and several townships, the unit became part of various composite monarchies on the next level. First as part of the Holy Roman Empire. After another succession crisis, the possessions of the Luxembourg dynasty were redistributed among their noble co-contenders. The Duchy was mortgaged to a female heiress of the extended royal household, Elisabeth of Görlitz, which created the next succession crisis. Philip the Good, Duke of Burgundy, did not respect the deal struck with Elisabeth in 1441. He broke the contract of co-rulership in a swift military coup, actually a raid, and expelled the Duchess. The Duchy became part of the Burgundian Netherlands, then—and without going into too many details—Luxembourg was inherited by the House of Habsburg and first ruled by the ‘Western branch’ of that mighty dynasty in Austria (1506–1556); then the Duchy fell to the Spanish branch (1556–1714); then, after the War of the Spanish Succession, the lands became part of the Austrian composite monarchy (1714–1794) again. All that time, Luxembourg had been administered from three capitals in overlapping ways: first, from Brussels (for the various historical ‘Low Lands’ or Low Countries); second, from the respective residences of the ruling dynasty in Nancy, Vienna, or Madrid and, finally, from the fortress-town of Luxembourg as site of the regional provincial estates—all power-brokers following their own security governance needs and having to deal with overlapping structures in that process (see, e.g., Margue, 2013; Pauly, 2014; webpage: history.uni.lu/research-luxdynast/).

Pre-state extantism—an interim summary

Raymond Aron’s widely used definition of an international system implies that the independent polities “maintain regular relations with each other [and] are all capable of being implicated in a generalised war” (1966, p. 94). Instead of a system of states, we are confronted with a system of dynasties and peer groups as an ‘international system’, bundling lands and rights to resources in their hands within layers of shared, sometimes even excluding, sovereignties. This personalised nature of politics implicated a *narrow* continuum between (in a literal sense) domestic and foreign, or private and public, affairs: peace (*pax instituta* or *Landfriede*) also meant putting an end to pursuing claims by resorting to the ‘private’ use of violence (feuding). Moreover, the extantism of myriads of lordships was supported, on the materialistic side, by the implicit strategy of balancing overlordships, that is persons and not states, realised as bandwagoning, balancing, free-riding, hedging, and shelter-seeking of personal ties on any level against centralised empire-building. This included collegial bodies like city magistrates with or without formal overlordship as well as ecclesiastical principalities. The constant availability of lordships, due to the rolling extinction of dynasties, particularly in cases of male succession, the reshuffle of composite lordships via marriage or incorporation by quasi-permanent and small-scale warfare stabilised the system in the core of the Christian Occident. The expansion on its periphery, from Ireland and the Peninsula to the Slavic East and into the Mediterranean,

later even as transcontinental enlargement, contributed its share, too, by siphoning off land and rent-hungry war enterprises overseas.

On the ideological side, we face an ‘international’ society of landlords and patricians as a system, which—and recalling Hedley Bull (2012)—existed because

a group, conscious of certain common interests and common values, form a society in the sense that they conceive themselves to be bound by a common set of rules in their relations with one another, and share in the working of common institutions. [A]n international society in this sense presupposes an international system, but an international system may exist that is not an international society.

(p. 13)

I would argue that in Bull’s sense, system and society were to be equated before the rise of the current, that is the modern nation-state.

I have given this account, based on Luxembourg’s history, some space for several reasons. First, ‘international relations’ pre-existed before the rise of the state in the proper sense, and there is no gigantic floating gap in historical IR between the so-called early states and modern states—between Uruk, Athens, or Rome and ‘Westphalia’ (1648). Neither rational actors nor rational policy platforms presuppose states. Family affairs guaranteed dense foreign-affairs communication beyond diplomatic missions, envoys, and ambassadors before the rise of a permanent legation system with embassies in many more countries than the nearest important neighbourhood. Today, the term “paradiplomacy” is used to refer to that form of outreach (Alvarez, 2020). After Westphalia, taken as a waypoint, central regimes (embodied by the prince) had succeeded in *widening* what I earlier in this chapter called the continuum of domestic and foreign (and of private and public) affairs by excluding intermediaries on local and regional levels. This division into two spheres of internal and external policy does not only mark the beginning of IR as we know it in Political Science but represents a probably underestimated driving force of modern state-building in general. Moreover, the persistency of ‘The Prince’ and his prerogative, even monopoly, in foreign and military affairs *after* the birth of the modern state during the very long nineteenth century of diplomacy and security governance (1750–1780 to 1918–1945) is still striking. Only the mediation seems to have changed: from estates to parliamentary checks and balances and from the ‘King’s two bodies’ (Ernst Kantorowicz) to the single state, personified by the prince now presiding over the mythical primordial nation. Regarding all these intermarriages, it may be that, taken with many grains of salt, the Great War was the last and ultimate inter-dynastic feud between royal families presiding over the European family of peoples and nations.

The second main point with regard to the emergence of the modern state is that we won’t find that one legendary button which triggered the development but, in keeping with the metaphor, we may imagine a switchboard called sovereignty. Authority as *domestic* and *international* sovereignty, the former understood as control by an authority within the polity, the latter as control of states’ borders and the recognition of the polity as sovereign independence by others and on a reciprocal

base, did not materialise simultaneously. On the contrary: while being sovereign in one aspect, historical examples, like Luxembourg, show that emerging states (big or small) could remain non-sovereign in other respects. Some of these features, besides traditional governance tasks in fields such as representation in foreign affairs; monopoly on the use of force; supreme military command; taxation, and so on, were even ‘waiting to be invented’ in the state-building process. On the one hand, the expansion of such government duties on new territory created the call for sovereignty by pulling ‘prototypes’ such as the monetary system into the exclusive orbit of the state. The right of coinage was an old princely prerogative before it became national monetary sovereignty within an international currency system. On the other hand, responsibilities such as nationwide welfare were established for the first time ever. In premodern times, social care beyond family obligations was a local duty of care by villages and municipalities or branches of transnational religious congregations on the spot only. In those cases, the modern central state authorities were most successful in circumventing and not eliminating or replacing their co-contenders. The new state grew and expanded so much in-between them, that the former co-rulers had to resign in view of the mounting field of responsibilities and the need for a bureaucratised apparatus for the management—and the money needed. At the end of this cut-throat competition, which might be called “jurisdictional accumulation” (Pal, 2021), the nobility took their apanage and tried to entrench their privileges, which ended only after the Great War.

Sovereignty or not sovereignty has never been out of the question

The question of big or small states arises for the first time for those lands where the process of flattening and disentanglement of sovereignty created territories. That process was accompanied by a new form of representation: the nation-state and parliamentarism. Authorities, understood as a centralised political organisation, could impose and enforce rules over a population within such an emergent territory in a selectively evolutionary or revolutionary manner. However, and in anticipation of future developments in our time, the question of small or big state can be settled only as a paradox: in the past, many sovereign modern states could achieve their state-modernity only by provisionally or permanently suspending, delegating, or simply ignoring key areas of their full sovereignty profile. Enduring non-sovereignty was often the case in matters of defence and security. In our days, we can observe a related, albeit devolutionary phenomenon of sovereign statehood. In the very midst of the decolonisation process of the 1960s, an analyst rightly predicted: “Regional economic and defensive alliances may imply a radical renunciation of national sovereignty to some super-national entity in the future” (Wood, 1967, p. 28). The creation of supra- or supernational entities could be one path. Another way to strengthen statehood and independence by not claiming full rule and authority was to

“surrender some of their sovereignty-derived regulatory powers, or more precisely choose to use them in a particular way”, in order to encourage non-local transitional actors to make use of their regulatory environment.

(Baldacchino, 2010, pp. 4–5)

The most recent publications in the field, which are regularly less theoretical and based on more real-world observations, indicate that microstates can actually use their sovereignty as a bargaining tool in international relations.

(Veenendaal, 2017, p. 22)

In short, life in the “antechamber” of the state system may look a good deal more attractive to these jurisdictions than the romantic advocates of sovereign self-determination had ever supposed.

(Baldacchino & Milne, 2009, p. 4)

What Baldacchino et al. have in mind are, in particular, small, or sub-national, island jurisdictions² or micro-states, which are de facto states (Bahcheli et al., 2004). This question of sovereignty raised or even created the problem of small and big states for the first time, because the environment for extantism had been changing its ‘body politic’ from the sovereign to the nation, understood as an institutionalised ancestral group with a state. This secular up- and downswing in sovereignty will be further described as ‘real-world observation’ along the history of Luxembourg.

Section II: from province to de facto state and formal independence—Luxembourg’s nineteenth-century experience

In 1795, the French Army invaded and annexed Luxembourg. The revolutionary Republic put an end to the absolutist kingdom in Paris and to various composite monarchies across Europe by expanding the republican, later imperial, borders of France by warfare. The Revolution radically accelerated the ongoing, more evolutionary, implementation of statehood as centralist state policies in France and abroad. The ‘lands’ of Luxembourg disappeared, and the duchy became, after some territorial adjustments, the ‘Département des Forêts’ (1795–1814), one of 130 at the zenith of the French Empire in 1811. These administrative sub-units were self-similar reproductions of the central state with bureaucratic layers in a top-down hierarchy from the centre to the province. Foreign and security politics continued to be conducted by the inner circle of the Republic, later on by Napoleon and his advisers in Paris, while the provinces had to deliver money and manpower provided by the central tax administration and the newly introduced general military draft system. These reforms also remained in place as modernisation was achieved after the fall of Bonaparte (1815) in the former annexed and occupied parts, for instance the Netherlands (and Luxembourg). Only the political context changed, with three burning questions for the congress delegations in Vienna to answer: (1) what to do now with all these resurgent monarchies in the shape of modernised ‘post-feudal’ small states in the middle of Europe? (2) how to handle these reformed societies after breaking up the Napoleonic Empire? (3) how to secure peace as a new security culture that would integrate the great, middle and little powers alike?

The post-Napoleonic IR was ‘securitisation’-driven and Luxembourg became part of a multi-layered military and security architecture, poised between reform, restoration, and (counter-)revolution (Graaf et al., 2019). Three angles of vision are important for Luxembourg’s extantism.

(1) *Luxembourg, the United Kingdom of the Netherlands (1815–1830/39), and the House of Orange-Nassau*

The Congress of Vienna reinvested various princely dynasties or compensated losses by redesigning former principalities on the map table. In doing so, the Congress diplomacy agreed on creating ‘united’ Netherlands as a northern cornerstone to curb France’s ambitions in this part of the continent and to compensate the Nassau dynasty for the cession of old family heritage for reasons of conference diplomacy. Luxembourg was elevated to the royal rank of a Grand Duchy to bolster the prestige of the new Grand Duke, William, Prince of Orange-Nassau, who was self-proclaimed and, in personal union, King of the Netherlands (1815–1840). The kingdom’s territory comprised today’s Benelux states. This possession was intended to enable the King-Grand Duke to muster a sufficiently strong army as a middle power. The Treaty of Vienna authorised him as sovereign to rule the Grand Duchy in accordance with his own plans: he rightfully integrated Luxembourg as eighteenth province of his reign under a common law, the *grondwet* (constitution), in a tripartite kingdom. William I continued the central state policy, albeit biased in favour of his ‘homeland’, the provinces of the former Dutch Republic now turned into heritable monarchy, which soured domestic affairs. An uprising in the Southern Provinces ended with the secession and the founding of a new middle state: the Kingdom of the Belgians. This Belgian Revolution of 1830–1839 resulted in the controlled break-up of the kingdom—and the beginning of the de facto state status of Luxembourg in 1830 (Kolnberger, 2022a).

(2) *Luxembourg and the German Confederation (1815–1866)*

On a strategic level, the partial restoration of Germany’s former patchwork of principalities, albeit in a less fragmental way than once assembled in the Holy Roman Empire until 1806, created a twofold challenge. First, the extantism of 37 monarchies and four free cities in Central Europe, guaranteed by the Congress, and second, the ‘awakening’ of a new force, instigated by the French Revolution: the German nation (and other nationalisms). A German Confederation (1815–1866/1867) was founded in the name of the sovereign princes and free cities of Germany. This ‘Deutscher Bund’ was the reaction to the multiple affordance of small states and designed as the centre piece of the new European security system with the purpose of “keeping the French out, an equilibrated Austria and Prussia in, and the German nation(alism) down”, to paraphrase Lord Ismay, NATO’s first Secretary-General concerning the purpose of the post-Second World War alliance. However, the Confederation was certainly more political. The twin task of the “Bund” was to provide external security based on a federal military constitution (“Bundeskriegsverfassung”) and internal security to counter revolt, protest, and revolutionary activities within the member states. The “Bund” was supposed to work as a mutual assistance pact with the duties *and* rights of the ‘steering committee’, the ‘Bundesversammlung’ (‘Federal Assembly’), which was the permanent ambassador conference of the members in Frankfurt, to intervene in support of peace and order in the form of executive orders. Internal and external security was regarded as a rather

short continuum. Beyond the borders of the Bund, other guardians of the peace order could also intervene to keep the balance of power, as in 1848, when Russian troops ended the Hungarian uprising for the Vienna government.

Only the territory of the Grand Duchy, with the Grand Duke as executive German prince, not the other 17 provinces, was a member of the German Confederation. At first only Luxembourg provided a quota of troops for the federal army and contributed to the federal war chest. The Grand Dukedom's important fortress, situated at a strategic gateway between France and Germany, became one of the Confederation-run and -financed the so-called *Bundesfestungen* (Federal fortress) with a Prussian garrison, which operated a military base and did not function as an occupation force. On the contrary, its mere presence prevented the Belgian secessionists, who had turned into irredentists, from entirely incorporating Luxembourg (Kolnberger, 2022b).

(3) Luxembourg from province to small neutral state (1815–1867)

Luxembourg was fully part of the United Kingdom of the Netherlands until 1830. In terms of international security and defence, the Grand Duchy was a special administrative zone, particularly around the federal fortress. In 1830, at the onset of the Belgian Revolution, one half of Luxembourg became a *de facto* state after the effective division into two parts: the French-speaking West, fully occupied by the Belgian secessionists, which constitutes the present Belgian “Province de Luxembourg”, and the German-speaking East, which is congruent with today's state borders of the Grand Duchy. This residual state was administrated as a kind of sub-national jurisdiction with kings of the House of Orange as Grand Dukes and heads of state until 1890.

In the 1840s, and due to the administrative split from the Netherlands, Luxembourg had to build up its own military capacities, independently of the Dutch army. Nevertheless, the Grand Duke (as German Prince) also had to contribute to the German Confederation as King of the Netherlands in order to uphold the previous quota for the federal-army contingent (in compensation for the part lost to Belgium). When the male line of the Orange-Nassau family ended, the head of the Nassau-Weilburg branch, expelled from his Duchy, which was annexed by the Prussians in 1866, took over the title of Grand Duke. This severed the last connection to the modern Netherlands. The German Confederation was disbanded on the same occasion, the ‘*Deutscher Bruderkrieg*’ (‘German fratricidal’ or Austro-Prussian War of 1866), which decided the rivalry between the two leading powers of the Bund. In 1867, the now unsheltered Luxembourg was declared permanently neutral in perpetuity by the still functioning Pentarchy—the Concert of Europe.

Luxembourg in the ‘balanced age of neutrals’ (1815–1914/1940)

The resurgence of small states after Napoleon's dynastic reformation and territorial consolidation politics was accompanied by the ‘invention’ of the small-state problem. A particular German and Central European discussion around the pejorative

notion of “Kleinstaaterei” (literally: ‘small stater’, rough meaning: ‘proliferation of small states’) to denote territorial fragmentation, including Luxembourg (see, e.g., Sieber, 1920; Langewiesche, 2008) unfolded. States became clearly delineated and their borderlines raised to the status of sanctity. The nation rather than the dynasty was the new glue for territories, joining even non-contiguous territories. The self-empowerment of nationalism awarded the nation the right to claim its ‘natural’ borders by expanding beyond former diplomatic compromises (and to assimilate enclaves of other nations in that process). This actually hostile environment for small states nevertheless created for Luxembourg a niche in which to endure. What margins of manoeuvre allowed Luxembourg to handle potential challenging events?

As part of the German Confederation’s military, Luxembourg’s quota of around 1,600 soldiers was assigned to the 9th army corps of the “Bundesheer” (the federal army), including 16 members—all but the Kingdom of Saxony were small and micro-states. The 8th and 10th “Armeekorps” were pooled with the other minor military forces producing a mixed corps, to be mobilised only in case of war. Nevertheless, Luxembourg, in the shape of the Grand Duke’s envoy, sat in Frankfurt as a diplomatic peer at the round table of the decisive “Engerer Rat” (‘Inner Council Curia’) together with the Great Powers: Austria, Prussia and, until 1837, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland due to the personal union of this crown with the Kingdom of Hannover. Though the voting rights were weighted according to the population of the members, Luxembourg had a vote and a ‘voice’ and could tip the balance in favour of one side of the Confederate Diet (“Bundestag”). In my understanding of the voluminous protocols of this permanent state conference, the Luxembourg–Grand Duke tandem generally ‘went with the flow’ and voted consensus-orientated, even initiating resolutions together with other smaller powers or in the slipstream of the two dominant members, Prussia and Austria. As ‘minor’ peer, Luxembourg was therefore kept in the loop of major issues in international relations, which had never been the case before: embedded in this security/securitisation environment, Luxembourg could punch above its weight—or duck away. Actually, Luxembourg (as a regular member state) should also have applied resolutions passed in Frankfurt concerning common domestic security affairs, such as press censorship or extradition treaties. The repeated failure to comply on these and other occasions was justified with the argument that the Council was juridically part of the Netherlands or by reference to their own constitution (in force in Luxembourg since 1842). During its period of membership, Luxembourg managed to opt out of decisions that impacted its ‘national security’ or domestic affairs several times, even after the administrative separation from The Netherlands in 1830, for example, during the Europe-wide 1848 crises. With regard to the Grand Duchys’ factual military contribution, Luxembourg was a profiteer of the Bund’s deterrence. In terms of financial aid and contribution of manpower, it may be considered a free rider: an opportunistic attitude in security affairs was possible because of the gap between the requirements on paper and their fulfilment in reality. To be sure, the Bund was a political confederacy, but it was not designed to work as a federal state with means of law enforcement and executive power of its own: like

the European Union today, the German Confederation depended on the goodwill of the individual member states, and this conference was always overshadowed by the logic of the security culture of the Great Powers.

In the typical mixed manner of doing security, Luxembourg became a victim of this very balancing of power politics and containment policy—and was ‘saved’ by it at the same time. The Great Powers considered the ending of the Belgian Revolution the greater good and the creation of an independent but permanent neutral kingdom more important for the stability of Europe than the territorial integrity of the Grand Duchy, on the one hand. On the other, emergent Belgium was prevented by the European Concert from annexing the whole of the Grand Duchy. During nine long years of limbo, between 1830 and the final acceptance of the separation by the King-Grand Duke in 1839, the Prussian garrison of the federal fortress (‘Bundesfestung Luxemburg’) was the military–diplomatic guardian of a truncated ‘rump’-Luxembourg and remained the force of deterrence until 1866, the year of the dissolution of the Confederation. In the same year, another conference in London ‘neutralised’ Luxembourg.³ Neutrality—understood as a permanent or non-permanent or occasional version; ‘credible’, that is armed to deterrence level or as a ‘neutralised’ version or as a guaranteed variety in the form of long-term voluntary neutrals—was the standard default option in conference politics, as Maartje Abbenhuis (2014) has shown:

Between 1815 and 1914, every country in Europe, and many others around the world, declared their neutrality repeatedly and as a matter of course when others went to war. . . . Neutrality was a tool of international power politics, utilised with alacrity by great and small powers alike.

(pp. 238, 17)

Neutrality has status-defined rules as parameters of reciprocally accepted behaviour for belligerents and non-belligerents in times of war. And war was the second default argument of the nineteenth century, complementary to neutrality: war was not the end of diplomacy but the most intensive and risky IR, which probably also made the ‘age of neutrals’ the one and only age of Clausewitzian warfare ever. This twin containment—short war clashes seeking the decisive battle of the adversaries on the one side and the official removal from the conflict by the interested third party as bystanders on the other—created the niche for Luxembourg’s survival. This containment, however, required a state territory as ‘container’: the aforementioned ‘sanctity’ of the border.

From boundary to border—a precondition for small-states security

In contrast to the multitude of islands which constitute the bulk of small and micro-states today, Luxembourg has no natural boundaries. Being a constantly landlocked polity in its history and situated not at the periphery of European concerns, but right in the middle of expanding spheres of interest, made another significant geopolitical difference. Unlike most micro-states Luxembourg has also never been a continental

enclave either. The same development that created the small-state problem in the first place became part of the solution: hard borders. The change from boundaries to borders began as a statehood practice during the late eighteenth century. It led to a first rush of border commissions in the course of the Congress of Vienna. From that time on, even ‘failing states’ could not, territorially speaking, fall apart that easily anymore due to the foreign side of the same border keeping the enclosed state ultimately ‘together’. This nineteenth-century ‘borderness’ provided the grounds for neutralising a state. It protected the *de facto* stateness of Luxembourg’s extantism quite well and supported the state-building process as a kind of ‘exclave’ from great power politics to be maintained. This is particularly important for the economic development of the Grand Duchy. As a delineated sub-national jurisdiction (of the Netherlands) on the one hand, Luxembourg was able to join the German Customs Union (“Zollverein”) in 1842 (ANLux, 2019). On the other hand, and as a full small state, the Grand Duchy had to delegate the customs management under the supervision of Prussia, which created a full economic union in terms of the free(r) movement of goods within common customs borders versus third countries. The Union’s customs dues were redistributed amongst its members in quotas, favouring smaller members. The Luxembourg share represented around a quarter of the annual government revenue of the Grand Duchy until the end of the Union in 1918. This income was reinvested in state-building, particularly bureaucracy, infrastructure, and education. Despite the ‘open market’, understood as an enlarged zone of economic protectionism (customs-wise) and shelter (security-wise), Luxembourg was able to prevent its main natural resource, low-grade iron ore, from being shipped off across the borders to feed the furnaces in Germany in accordance with the so-called ‘Verhüttungsklausel’ (‘smelting clause’, 1870–1874). That fully sovereign measure stipulated that at least one-third of the ore mined in Luxembourg had to be smelted and industrially processed within the Grand Duchy (Barthel & Krips, 2011). Consequently, foreign capital and expertise expanded the already-existing iron industry, transforming the agrarian into an industrialised state (with 80% export ratio).

This juggling with visible and invisible borders to the advantage of Luxembourg can be best exemplified by the country’s monetary policy. Luxembourg began issuing its own money (low-value coins) only in 1854 and at par with the French and Belgian Franc. The Grand Duchy followed Belgium, in a kind of economic bandwagoning, into the French-dominated Latin Monetary Union (1865–1927) to ‘balance’ German influence—thereby reaping exchange gains. In reality, Luxembourg had no currency of its own but used its sovereignty to fix the exchange rates between two competing currency areas to its advantage, thus saving itself at the same time from the risks of maintaining a full monetary system of its own (Kolnberger, 2023; Calmes, 1907).

Conclusion

It is not history that repeats itself but structures. In the case of small and smallest polities settings, that repetition favours or disfavors their proliferation. Luxembourg has experienced three distinctive phases of changing sociopolitical

environments in security affairs, defining its extantism as a small state. According to the proposed model (see Figure 4.1), the re/action of big and bigger actors in the first place to the existence of small and smaller units co-created historical environments of a certain duration. Long-term sociopolitical transformations such as the emergence of nation-states or critical junctures such as the two world wars reformed the environment. The affordance character of small and even smallest units in the system stabilised the extantism of these very unities. Luxembourg's course in relation to security affairs can be reviewed as follows.

In the European Middle Ages and the Early Modern Era, the extantism of competing dynastic lordships incorporated but did not assimilate others. The 'Good Old Order' had to be maintained or continued because there was no alternative at hand. In other words: as land and order, the political entity of Luxembourg was safe, but the House of Luxembourg as a dynasty was not safe from being replaced by another overlord as co-sovereign of the principedom. That perpetuum mobile of producing security *by* dynastic fellowships in face of constant threat *by* other dynastic fellowships changed fundamentally with the advent of the nation-state.

The nation-state can be understood as a "Ressourcengemeinschaft" ('resource community', Langewiesche, 2008, p. 36), where the 'common use of resources' is guided by a utopian national 'we' perspective towards others ('them'). It is no coincidence that Luxembourg twice disappeared from the political map: at the revolutionary onset of that period subsumed into different French departments for 20 years and again at the end and peak of the development into racist hyper-nationalism as part of the "Gau Moselland", de facto annexed by Nazi Germany (1940–1944/1945). Between these events, the bilingual Grand Duchy was neutralised during the long nineteenth century to become a buffer between French- and German-speaking (and 'historical' Belgian) claims. Security was realised as a guarantee of reciprocal denial in the Concert-conference security environment of that time. The interstice status gave Luxembourg more and more agency and the Grand Duchy rose from a Dutch sub-national jurisdiction to de facto state and 'full' state. Before reaching this status in 1867, Luxembourg was sheltered by being part of the German Confederation. In terms of security Luxembourg after the permanent neutralisation, turned into a constabulary small state.

Indeed, for Luxembourg, the age of neutrals was a very long nineteenth century ending in 1944 and only after the second German occupation during the two world wars (see André Linden's chapter) did Luxembourg become a different small state and a founding member of NATO. Luxembourg proved to be an accelerator of the 'European Integration' which is today's strongest source of security. So far, the deflated nationalism of the EU member states and their economic success (which can be redistributed) are safeguarding Luxembourg's co-extantism.

Notes

- 1 In cases of a metastable (also bistable) perception the observer experiences sequences of spontaneous subjective changes. The transition from one precept (an undefined term) to its alternative (the defined term) is a perceptual reversal, for example, given by

ambiguous or reversible figures like Rubin’s vase—do we see the ‘small’ state or the ‘big’ power, shaping IR along the same shared lines?

2 Subnational Island Jurisdiction (SNIJ):

They all share some measure of autonomous government, and are easily construed as independent states-in-waiting.

(Foreword)

Island jurisdictions wield many of the benefits associated with political sovereignty while they are delegating responsibilities to, and enjoying the security and reaping the material benefits of, remaining in association with, a larger, and typically richer, patron.

(McElroy & Pearce, 2009, p. 41)

3 Not including the Congress of Vienna and its preliminaries, all great powers attended 26 conferences between 1822 and 1909 (Abbenhuis, 2014, p. 42).

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