

Politeja

No. 4(98), 2025, pp. 189-202

<https://doi.org/10.12797/Politeja.22.2025.98.10>

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THE MICROSTATE AS AN OBJECT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE RESEARCH

ABSTRACT

Research on microstates in political and administrative sciences and international relations is certainly not popular. Nonetheless, it is worth undertaking such research by focusing on the challenges of their participation in integration processes (especially in economic terms) or issues related to migration (including climate issues). When studying this group of states, appropriate research methods should be used, not always the same as for larger states. Undoubtedly, they are specific actors in international relations, characterised by a small territory, a small population, specific relations with their neighbours, and late participation in international organisations. At present, there are also no grounds to question their sovereignty. Taking into account two factors (size of territory and population), there are twelve microstates in the world.

Keywords: microstate, sovereignty of microstates, Liechtenstein, climate migrations

Research on microstates in the discipline of political science is still – in the author's opinion – challenging and relatively new, in the sense that it is a relatively marginal research object. For this reason alone, it is worth devoting some space to them, in order to bring their problems closer to a wider audience and to highlight the challenges faced by those who take a scientific interest in them. This is most often the case for political scientists, international relations researchers, historians, economists, sociologists, and less frequently for representatives of other scientific disciplines.

Microstates are undoubtedly specific actors in international politics. They are often seen through the prism of their small area and modest population. Consequently, they are regarded as less important states, a view clearly contradicted by international law. Despite such perceptions, they try – as far as possible – to play a noticeable role in interstate relations.

This article aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1) Can microstates actually be a relevant direction for political science research?
 - 2) What are the main challenges for research on them in political science and international relations?
 - 3) What problems concerning these states should be considered the most relevant in the future?
 - 4) Is there a need for an in-depth analysis of these political organisms in the future?
- In order to answer these questions, research methods typical of political science and administration were used, i.e.: the literature review method (including analysis of statistical data), the historical method, the method of system analysis, and the comparative method. The reflections focus primarily on European countries, although other areas are also addressed.

WHAT IS A MICROSTATE?

The definition of the research subject is important from the point of view of further analysis of the specific issue. This is because it allows us to be as precise as possible as to which group (and how many) of states we will apply this concept to. This is not easy, because – as in the case of many other entities and phenomena – there is no single definition adopted and used by all researchers of what a micro-state is. There is a multiplicity of terms used to describe the smallest state organisms in the world.

Frequently used, especially in English-language studies, are the terms *microstate*, *ministate* and *small state*.¹ They are, it seems, generally understandable, neutral and describe the object of study appropriately. The question of the neutrality of the term is important, as pejorative terms are in use, such as: *lilliput states*, *village states*, *relict states*

¹ P. Osóbka, *Systemy konstytucyjne Andory, Liechtensteinu, Monako i San Marino*, Warszawa 2008, pp. 5-6. This group of terms also includes the German *Mikrostaat* or *Kleinstaat* (small state), see: D. Ehrhardt, *Der Begriff des Mikrostaats im Völkerrecht und in der internationalen Ordnung*, Aalen 1970; B.M. Malunat, *Der Kleinstaat im Spannungsfeld von Dependenz und Autonomie. Eine Fallstudie über das Fürstentum Liechtenstein*, Frankfurt/M–New York–Paris 1987.

or *pocket states*.² The German term *Zwergstaat* and the Polish *państwo karłowate*³ (literally, 'dwarf state') are of a similar nature. In the author's opinion, the term 'microstate' is neutral and defines the research subject clearly enough, referring to a state that is noticeably smaller than the so-called 'small states'.

In order to define microstates, it is necessary to adopt appropriate criteria that allow them to be distinguished. The use of indicators relating, for example, to size or population makes it possible to objectivise them.⁴ The first criterion is population – in the case of this group of countries, it must be not too high, but this needs to be defined. For many years there has been a scholarly discussion on this topic, which has not produced concrete solutions – a result that is hardly surprising. Authors have proposed adopting boundaries that differ strongly from each other. In the opinion of H. Armstrong and his team⁵ as many as three million people were mentioned, which nevertheless seems an exaggerated figure.⁶ E. Plischke proposed a limit of 100,000 inhabitants.⁷ The latter proposal is sensible insofar as it significantly narrows the group of analysed states and the next entity that could belong to this category is relatively much larger.⁸ The same boundary is set by D. Ott⁹ and also C. Clague, S. Gleason and S. Knack.¹⁰

Nevertheless, the adoption of only one criterion is insufficient and forces one to find another rationale for distinguishing a specific group of states. A reasonable condition seems to be the size of the territory, which has relatively often been regarded as a criterion for characterising the smallest states in the world. M. Sobczyński points out

² K. Koźbiał, "Metodologiczne aspekty i wyzwania w badaniach nad europejskimi mikropaństwami," in D. Niedzwiedzki (ed.), *Kultura, tożsamość i integracja europejska*, Kraków 2014, p. 294. The term 'relict states' refers to the fact that these formations are relics of the feudal period, or ancient times in general, especially on the European continent.

³ See: B. Sikorska, *Sytuacja prawnomiędzynarodowa europejskich państw karłowatych: Liechtenstein, Monako, San Marino, Andora*, Warszawa 1971; A. Sroka, "Państwa karłowate a Unia Europejska – kazus Andory," in R. Żelichowski (ed.), *Pierwsza pięćdziesiątka. Małe państwa Europy Środkowo-Wschodniej w Unii Europejskiej*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 205-217.

⁴ P. Borkowski, "Małe państwa w świetle teorii integracji," in D. Popławski (ed.), *Małe państwa Europy. Specyfika systemu politycznego i aktywności międzynarodowej*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 35-51.

⁵ H. Armstrong, R.J. De Kervenoael, L. Xiao-Minh, R. Read, "A Comparison of the Economic Performance of Different Micro-states and Between Micro-state and Larger Countries," *World Development*, vol. 26, no. 4 (1998), pp. 639-656.

⁶ From this point of view, microstates in Europe would also include Iceland, Malta, Montenegro, Luxembourg, Estonia, Latvia, Slovenia, North Macedonia and even Lithuania. This would mean as many as 14 states on the continent, including Andorra, Liechtenstein, Monaco, San Marino and the Vatican City, which are classically counted as microstates.

⁷ E. Plischke, *Microstates in World Affairs. Policy Problems and Options*, Washington 1977. For other proposals see: K. Koźbiał, "Metodologiczne aspekty...", p. 295.

⁸ In the case of Europe, Andorra (with a population of over 85,000) is more than four times smaller in this respect than Iceland.

⁹ D. Ott, *Small is Democratic. An Examination of State Size and Democratic Development*, New York 2000.

¹⁰ C. Clague, S. Gleason, S. Knack, "Determinants of Lasting Democracy in Poor Countries. Culture, Development and Institutions," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, vol. 573, no. 1 (2001), pp. 16-41.

that the smallest states are countries (defined by him as mini-states) with an area of less than 2,000 km². He distinguishes within this group of states those with an area of more than 150 km² and those with an area of less than 2 km² (calling them micro-states). This should be regarded as an exaggeration, as this subgroup could currently include only the Vatican.¹¹ The limit set at just 2 km² is therefore too low.

The criterion of area size, limited to a maximum of 1,000 km², is adopted by M. Kubát and P. Sokol as a feature defining microstates. They even go a little further by assessing that there are small (up to 100 km², such as San Marino), medium (100-500 km², such as Liechtenstein) and large micro-states (500-1000 km², such as Dominica) and even large micro-states with a significant population of over 500,000 people (such as Singapore).¹²

The fact that there are no clear indicators related to the possibility of defining a group of micro-states is also acknowledged by other Czech authors. They point out, however, that for the analysis conducted in their research they have chosen countries on the basis of population size, territory size and the reference that they should be countries that are functioning democracies (which automatically excludes the Vatican as a subject of inquiry).¹³

In defining the object of research, it therefore seems most reasonable to define micro-states as territorially small (i.e. less than 1,000 km²), and with an insignificant population of less than 100,000. Applying both criteria simultaneously makes it possible to narrow down this group of states and to objectivise what we want to study.

Taking the criterion of territory size and population together, twelve microstates can currently be identified in the world, five of which are on the European continent. Their participation in the United Nations (the Holy See has observer status) indicates – without a shadow of a doubt – the fact of their international recognition. These states are listed in Table 1. Just above the limit of meeting the mentioned criterion is currently Antigua and Barbuda, a state with an area of 443 km² and a population of more than 102,000.

It is debatable whether the Cook Islands belong to this group, which, being a free territory associated with New Zealand, can establish diplomatic relations with states and international organisations. They currently have such relations with more than fifty countries. They have not been included in the mentioned group due to their non-membership in the United Nations. However, this may change in the future. On the other hand, it is difficult, in a meaningful sense, to speak of the independence of Niue.¹⁴

¹¹ M. Sobczyński, *Państwa i terytoria zależne. Ujęcie geograficzno-polityczne*, Toruń 2006, pp. 177-179. According to the latest data, Monaco's territory covers 2,02 km².

¹² M. Kubát, P. Sokol, "Velké systémy v malých zemích (komparativní analýza)," *Politologický Časopis*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2000), p. 199.

¹³ P. Jurek, D. Šanc, L. Cabada, P. Hlavaček et al., *Politika nejmenších evropských států*, Brno 2018, pp. 12-13.

¹⁴ On both territories see: Z. Dumieński, "Shared Citizenship and Sovereignty. The Case of the Cook Islands' and Niue's Relationship with New Zealand," in S. Ratuva (ed.), *The Palgrave Handbook of Ethnicity*, Singapore 2019, pp. 221-246.

Table 1. Micro-states in the world (2023)

Micro-state	Territory (km ²)	Population (in thousands)
ANDORA	468	85.4
DOMINICA	751	74.7
LIECHTENSTEIN	160.5	40.3
MARSHALL ISLANDS	181	82.0
MONACO	2.02	31.8
NAURU	21	9.9
PALAU	459	21.9
SAN MARINO	61	35.1
SEYCHELLES	455	98.2
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS	261	55.1
TUVALU	26	11.7
VATICAN	0.44	0.84

Source: own elaboration based on: *The World Factbook*, www.cia.gov

The Cook Islands have autonomy in internal affairs, but in external affairs and defence, the Wellington government has retained powers. This is not to control the actions of the islanders but to support them. This does not imply recognition of the Cook Islands by New Zealand as a sovereign state, as this would require changes to the New Zealand citizenship currently enjoyed by islanders. In this way, New Zealand has made clear its position in relation to the Cook Islands' possible membership in the UN: such a decision would mean that islanders would lose their New Zealand citizenship.¹⁵

CHARACTERISTICS OF MICROSTATES

Small size and small population are not the only characteristics of the group of states analysed. The smallest state organisms in the world exhibit other typical characteristics. These include, *inter alia*, geographical location, sovereignty, special ties with neighbours (especially in Europe), relatively late participation in developed international relations, understood through the prism of joining various international organisations

It is noticeable that the world's smallest states are mainly located in three regions: Europe, Oceania and the Caribbean. While European states of this type have a long,

¹⁵ B.H. Toszek, "Status prawnomiędzynarodowy. Stosunki międzynarodowe," in B.H. Toszek (ed.), *Wyspy Cooka. Wielowymiarowy obraz państwa i społeczeństwa*, Toruń 2021, s. 294-314.

even centuries-long tradition of existence, the others are the result of gradual decolonisation and gained their independence in the second half of the 20th century.¹⁶ For a long time, they were more of a curiosity and were not necessarily taken seriously when it came to their international activities. This changed with their accession to the United Nations. At that time, it was difficult to question their status of full independence. Seven micro-states joined the UN in the 1990s, before which only Seychelles, Dominica and St. Kitts and Nevis decided to do so. The last to join the organisation was Tuvalu in 2000. The timing of their entry into the UN is shown in Table 2.¹⁷

Table 2. Microstates as members of the UN

Micro-state	Accession to the UN
ANDORA	1993
DOMINICA	1978
LIECHTENSTEIN	1990
MARSHALL ISLANDS	1991
MONACO	1993
NAURU	1999
PALAU	1994
SAN MARINO	1992
SEYCHELLES	1976
ST. KITTS AND NEVIS	1983
TUVALU	2000

Source: own elaboration based on: <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/member-states#gotoD>

As mentioned, membership of the UN has emphasised the **sovereignty** of these states. The key question then is: are they in fact sovereign? In the author's view, this is difficult to dispute, especially today. This is not to say that this status has not been questioned before. The problem is mainly that it is a contractual and discretionary category. Despite many attempts in the international space, there is no definition of what a state is. There is nevertheless no doubt that it should be characterised by a territory, population and authority. As a fourth element, the ability to have relations with other

¹⁶ For example, Seychelles, formerly a British colony, became independent in 1976, and two years later Dominica – also formerly subordinate to the UK – became independent. In the same year 1978, Tuvalu became independent, also from the UK. In 1983, the island nation of St. Kitts and Nevis became independent, although the British monarch remained head of state. Nauru, on the other hand, formerly a UN trust territory under Australian, New Zealand and British administration, became independent in 1968. Palau, which was also a UN trust territory under US administration and only became independent in 1994 (as an associate state of the US), followed a similar pattern.

¹⁷ The Holy See has observer status at the UN, which also indicates its links with the organisation.

states is often mentioned.¹⁸ It is difficult to dispute that these smallest states have the elements mentioned, with proof of this being, for example, their membership in the UN. They are therefore states. If so, they are sovereign, because a state as such cannot be non-sovereign.¹⁹ State sovereignty, on the other hand, is defined as a situation in which state authority is independent of any other authority and the external activity of the state manifests itself in, among other things, membership of international organisations, recognition of other states and governments or the establishment of diplomatic and consular relations. At the same time, the UN Charter makes all states equal in legal terms.²⁰ The legal approach draws attention to the fact that small states are de jure those whose right to co-determination in international organisations is limited compared to most other states.²¹

Micro-states seek to accentuate their sovereignty in their basic laws. Monaco has already done so in Article 1 of its Constitution, where it affirms *sovereignty and independence within the framework of the general principles of international law and specific conventions with France*.²² The French Republic is the 'guardian' of Monaco ensuring the protection of its sovereignty and the defence of its territorial integrity. The 2002 treaty between the two states corresponds somewhat better than previous agreements to the principle of equality of states. In the case of this small state, it should be noted that in spheres such as politics, economy or security, the Principality's activities must be in line with French interests. It is therefore a limitation of sovereignty, but only a partial one.²³ Similarly, Andorra emphasises its independence – it also does so in Article 1 of its Constitution.²⁴ The discussion about the dependency of the Pyrenean principality ended in 1993 with the entry into force of its Basic Law. This kind of wording is not to be found in the Liechtenstein Constitution, but this is not an argument for claiming that the state is not sovereign. This is evidenced by the fact that the Principality became part of the European Economic Area (EEA) despite its links with Switzerland, which did not choose to do so.²⁵

The world's smallest state organisms are also characterised by a **particular kind of relationship with their neighbours**. This is undoubtedly most noticeable on the European continent. As a rule, their neighbours are much larger states that play an important

¹⁸ T. Kamiński, K. Myszona-Kostrzewa, *Prawo międzynarodowe publiczne w pytaniach i odpowiedziach*, ed. S. Sawicki, Warszawa 2009, p. 87.

¹⁹ C. Berezowski, *Prawo międzynarodowe publiczne*, part 1, Warszawa 1966, p. 128. According to not only this author, the state is either sovereign or not a state at all.

²⁰ T. Kamiński, K. Myszona-Kostrzewa, *Prawo międzynarodowe...*, pp. 87-88.

²¹ T. Fleiner, *Die Kleinstaaten in den Staatenverbindungen des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, Zürich 1966, p. 29.

²² *Konstytucja Księstwa Monako*, introd. by K. Wojtyczek, transl. by A. Wojtyczek-Bonnand, K. Wojtyczek, Warszawa 2012, p. 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-15, 21. The treaty was adopted as a result of a suggestion from the Council of Europe when Monaco sought membership at the end of the 20th century.

²⁴ *Konstytucja Księstwa Andory*, introd. by M. Zubik, transl. by M. Bobiński, Warszawa 2014, p. 83.

²⁵ K. Koźbial, *System polityczny Księstwa Liechtensteinu*, Kraków 2013, p. 55.

role in the international arena. It is no exaggeration to say that it is thanks to them that micro-states have survived, finding in them a protector and guardian as well as a guarantor of security. In the case of San Marino and the Vatican, it is Italy, although without going into detail – for this is not under consideration – the latter's relations with the Vatican were strained for a long period of time, especially with the birth of the modern Italian state in the second half of the 19th century and the abolition of the Papal States. In the case of Monaco, it is France, and in the case of Liechtenstein it is Switzerland. A unique status characterises Andorra, which has two patrons: France and Spain.

Relationships with neighbours are mainly for practical reasons, as the smallest states entered into such links for political and economic reasons, adopting the currency of the larger state,²⁶ and often their legal or postal systems, as creating their own was either unprofitable or pointless. San Marino, for example, concluded an agreement with the then Kingdom of Italy in 1862, entering into a customs union with it, but this was only a prelude to the conclusion of many other agreements at a later date: postal, monetary, educational, cultural or scientific.²⁷

Another example is the Principality of Liechtenstein, which, bordering two much larger neighbours, 'tested' cooperation first with Austria – a result of the ruling dynasty's ties with the Habsburgs – and then, after the end of the First World War, joined Switzerland by concluding a customs union and many other agreements. In this case, practice and the needs of everyday life were the deciding factors, as the inhabitants of the then poor duchy were looking for work in Helvetia and had been using Swiss currency for at least some years beforehand.²⁸ The authorities of the subalpine country therefore met social expectations by introducing the Swiss franc as the currency (at that time still without the consent of the government in Bern).

The situation is no different for non-European micro-states. Nauru, for example, maintains close relations with Australia, which is obliged (by mutual agreement) to defend the island. In addition to this, the Australian government has pledged financial assistance (in terms of budget preparation) and also supports Nauru when it comes to development aid.²⁹ The Marshall Islands, on the other hand, are a sovereign state associated with the United States. The latter is responsible for the security and social affairs of the islanders. The US supports the oceanic state with more than USD 80 million per year.³⁰

²⁶ None of the European micro-states currently have their own currency. Liechtenstein uses the Swiss franc, in the others the euro is in use. Nauru and Tuvalu use the Australian dollar, the Marshall Islands and Palau use the US dollar. Only Dominica and St Kitts and Nevis use the Eastern Caribbean dollar, which is used in several countries in the region. However, this currency is pegged to the US dollar, which in practice is accepted as the second currency used.

²⁷ S.T. Stępnicki, *San Marino w stosunkach międzynarodowych*, Warszawa 2010, pp. 36-46.

²⁸ K. Kozbiał, *System polityczny...*, pp. 35-36, 45-46.

²⁹ *Nauru Country Brief*, at <https://www.dfat.gov.au/geo/nauru/nauru-country-brief>, 26 June 2024.

³⁰ *U.S. Relations With Marshall Islands*, at <https://2021-2025.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-marshall-islands/>, 26 June 2024. This amount is earmarked for education, health or infrastructure, among other things.

In contrast, **late accession to international organisations** is also a feature of the group of states analysed. Accession to such associations has only occurred in recent decades; as mentioned in the case of the UN, a major breakthrough came in the 1990s. In addition to global organisations, these countries take part in regional or continental integration. An example is Liechtenstein's membership of the EEA, which is also mentioned later in the article. Nauru, Palau, Tuvalu and the Marshall Islands, on the other hand, are members of the Pacific Islands Forum and the Pacific Community, which respectively discuss the problems of the South Pacific countries and support the resolution of their economic and social problems. This late accession to international organisations was due to the initially sceptical attitude of the analysed states towards integration processes. Over time, it was undoubtedly difficult to remain outside the processes of ever closer cooperation between states; joining organisations was, in a way, forced upon them by increasing international cooperation. Another dimension of involvement is also the participation of small and island states in cooperation, which is worth mentioning at this point, but an analysis of the phenomenon exceeds the scope of this article.

KEY CHALLENGES AND ISSUES IN MICROSTATE RESEARCH

Research on the world's smallest state organisms has been conducted for many years in many countries and scientific centres. Leading the way in this respect are, understandably, scientists from these countries. In Liechtenstein, the main research centre is the Liechtenstein-Institut, based in Barenden, where research is conducted primarily, but not exclusively, on the Principality. This is interdisciplinary research, covering mainly history, law, political science and economics.³¹ At the University of Malta, on the other hand, the Small States and Islands Research Institute conducts inquiries into the diverse aspects of the functioning of these entities.³² The University of Iceland, similarly, conducts both research and studies on small states. These examples highlight that there is interest in research on these state organisms.³³ An interesting interdisciplinary study of the future of the Pacific area is being conducted by the University of the South Pacific based in Suva (Fiji).³⁴

Undoubtedly, scientific inquiry into the smallest state organisms encounters specific challenges and problems. Certainly, the first challenge is their functioning in the international community (or relations), especially in the economic field. Their customs or economic ties with larger neighbours (or, in the case of islands, with nearby states)

³¹ Lichtenstein-Institut, *Forschung und Lehre in und für Lichtenstein*, at <https://www.liechtenstein-institut.li/forschung>, 30 June 2024.

³² L-Università t'a Malta, at <https://www.um.edu.mt/issi/>, 30 June 2024.

³³ Small State Studies, at <https://english.hi.is/small-state-studies-small-states-international-system/micro-credential>, 30 June 2024.

³⁴ The University of South Pacific, at <https://www.usp.ac.fj/>, 24 April 2025.

are the result of reason and logical choice. It is difficult to imagine other solutions, especially in an integrating and globalised world. For countries operating in areas where integration has taken a much more far-reaching form (as in Europe), their further commitment to rapprochement and a 'borderless economy' is to be expected. An example is Liechtenstein, which in 2023 offered more than 42,500 jobs, of which more than 30,300 were occupied by foreigners (i.e. more than 71%).³⁵ This means that, for this country, only support for integration processes will be the basis for economic success, which was, after all, behind the decision to join the EEA in 1995. In other words, isolation is not a desirable development for these countries. This area of research is relevant to the existence and future of this group of states.

No less important is the issue of security related to the challenges humanity faces in the face of climate change. This aspect is particularly relevant for the states located in Oceania, which will be in the first risk group as a result of rising ocean and sea levels. The existence of these states, including the smallest ones, may in practice become dependent on the willingness of larger state entities to help and support them in the event of major crises. This applies both to extreme weather events and to long-standing, already visible processes.³⁶

In the most pessimistic scenario, there will be so-called 'climate migration', in which – as a result of climate change – the population of certain areas will be forced to leave previously occupied territories or even entire countries, such as Tuvalu, where the highest point above sea level is only 5 metres. New Zealand is a country that has pledged to help by taking in residents.³⁷ However, this does not rule out the phenomenon of deterritorialisation of such countries, which would be unprecedented. Tuvalu, Nauru and the Marshall Islands may be affected and climate refugees will become a significant problem.

Migration phenomena in general in the modern world can also become a challenge for micro-states. People migrating for various reasons reach the farthest corners of the globe. Migration flows are most often directed towards the northern hemisphere, which may have specific consequences, especially for Europe's smallest states. So far, foreigners have not been a problem for these states; they are a significant component of their societies. In Liechtenstein, for example, they accounted for more than 34% of the population in 2022,³⁸ in Monaco as much as 77.5%.³⁹ There is no doubt that the

³⁵ *Liechtenstein in Zahlen 2024*, Vaduz 2024, p. 22.

³⁶ V. Kumar, *Climate Change and the Existential Dilemma to Oceania's Microstates*, at <https://eastasiaforum.org/2011/05/04/climate-change-and-the-existential-dilemma-to-oceanias-microstates/>, 27 June 2024.

³⁷ B. Terminiński, "The Raising Levels of the Oceans as the Causative Agent of Forced Migration. Current Status and Forecast", *Revista Europea de Derecho de la Navegación Marítima y Aeronáutica*, no. 29 (2012), pp. 54-57.

³⁸ *Liechtenstein in Zahlen 2024*, p. 11.

³⁹ *Monaco in Figures 2024*, p. 46, at <https://www.monacostatistics.mc/Publications/Monaco-in-Figures-2024>, 28 June 2024. It should be remembered that Monaco is home to rich athletes or film people – for tax reasons.

labour market will require further workers, who will also find employment in the smallest countries in Europe.

Another challenge is the contact between the political and economic worlds. This is because it cannot be ignored that democratic decision-making processes take on special significance in small communities. The limited population means that those making political decisions are even directly known to the electorate. Some micro-states – such as Liechtenstein – have tried and tested direct democracy mechanisms in the form of referendums, which can become an element used when difficult decisions have to be taken. An important research question seems to be what role economic bodies play in political decision-making and whether this influence is reflected in their involvement in international relations. For the economy as such, of key significance is undoubtedly the integration processes already mentioned, in the face of which it is difficult to remain on the sidelines.

A different kind of challenge concerns how to study the world's smallest states. Should they be approached in the same way as classical participants in international relations? What research methods should be applied to them? Above all, interdisciplinary research is advisable, as only a broad approach makes it possible to capture all influencing factors. These must be methods appropriate to the situation and applicable to the state in question. Among them, one should certainly mention: the system method (important for learning about the functioning of political systems), the historical method (difficult to ignore due to the sometimes complicated processes going back a long way), the institutional-legal method (important when it comes to analysing decision-making processes), the decision-making method or the behavioural method. When trying to point out similarities between the countries analysed, the comparative method is essential. The extrapolation method, on the other hand, can be helpful when it comes to trying to predict the direction of development of micro-states.⁴⁰

In the author's view, the study of micro-states is still a challenge, both in terms of political science as well as administration and international relations.. At first glance, they are inconspicuous participants in the international community, but an in-depth study of them leads to the conclusion that much can be learned from them. It is reasonable to argue that in the case of, for example, the Pacific states, their experiences of the challenges of climate change are of interest.

CONCLUSION

Taking the criterion of territory size and population size set out in the text, there are 12 microstates in the world. Of these, 5 are on the European continent, which leads the way in terms of numbers and the historical functioning of this group of states. It is also of great interest to observe the micro-states in the Pacific, which are characterised by specific challenges. These are sovereign states, although from a practical point of view

⁴⁰ More on research methods see: K. Koźbiał, *Metodologiczne aspekty...*, pp. 298-301.

they are characterised by advanced links with their larger neighbours. However, this is an unforced decision of the smallest state organisms.

For a long time, representatives of political sciences, and not only they, have shown interest in the states under analysis. This has led to a relatively large number of studies on them and this trend is likely to continue in the years to come. The main research challenges related to the study of this group of states concern the analysis of their functioning in the international community, especially taking into account the economic aspects of their development. Scarce resources and a lack of raw material resources make these states dependent on external supplies on the one hand, but on the other hand – as the example of Liechtenstein shows – they are able to develop their capabilities to such an extent that they become a very attractive place in economic terms. The challenges of globalisation also make these countries engage in integration processes as much as possible. Finally, migration processes may also be an aspect to be taken seriously, as migrants also come to these countries and, due to their small populations, can have a noticeable impact on their social processes. This is all the more important to analyse, as in some micro-states outsiders are already an important component of society. Another aspect is the migration of people, especially from the Pacific countries, forced by climate change.

Undoubtedly, microstates will never become the most relevant subject of political science research. Nevertheless, it should be stressed that the analysis of the various manifestations of their international activity can contribute to conclusions that are useful from the point of view of much larger states. Their survival, developed, good-neighbourly relations with their neighbours, and involvement in integration processes (especially in Europe) are examples of positive coexistence in the modern world. This is of course dictated by the specific deficits of these smallest states, but these weaknesses have at the same time become their strengths.

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