ERASMUS+ PROGRAM:
SMALL STATES IN EUROPE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

SMALL STATES IN THE EU: PASSIVE POLICY TAKERS OR INDUSTRIOUS AGENDA-SETTERS?

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A SEMINAR HOSTED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF MALTA IN COLLABORATION WITH THE CENTRE FOR SMALL STATE STUDIES AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ICELAND

Opening Remarks: Professor Roderick Pace
Director, Institute for European Studies, University of Malta and Jean Monnet Chair

It is with enormous satisfaction that I welcome you all to this seminar which is financed under the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union.

This project is entitled “SMALL STATES IN EUROPE: OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES” and is led by the Centre for Small Studies of the Institute for International Affairs at the University of Iceland.

The project’s name is identical to the title of a book co-edited by Robert Steinmetz and Anders Wivel published in 2010. Professor Wivel is here with us today.

The theme for today’s seminar is “SMALL STATES IN THE EU: PASSIVE POLICY TAKERS OR INDUSTRIOUS AGENDA-SETTERS?”

The University of Malta is one of the partners in this project and the Institute for European Studies of the University of Malta was appointed the local co-ordinator in March of this year. The other partners include the University of Copenhagen (Prof Anders Wivel); the University of St. Andrews (Ian Taylor); Vilnius University (Margarita Šešelgytė) and Tallinn University of Technology (Tiina Randma-Liiv).

It was very challenging to organize today’s seminar in such a short time, but we have done it and we are here today. I would like to thank all the members of staff at the Institute, Mr Stefan Bezzina, Mr Thomas-Anthony Muscat and Ms Daniela Callus for their organizational inputs and dissemination of the information for this seminar. My thanks also go to my colleagues the members of the academic staff for their support as well as to Mrs Pia...
Hansson, Director of the Centre for Small State Studies, Professor Baldur Thorhallsson Jean Monnet Chair at the University of Iceland and Mr Jón Gunnar Ólafsson.

This seminar has various characteristics but one of them rings out. It brings together research institutions with a very deep and long-standing commitment to the study of small states. The Centre for Small States studies of the University of Iceland has a significant track record. The University of Malta has also contributed to the study of small states particularly through the work of Prof Lino Briguglio and his Island and Small State Institute (ISSI) and the Professor Godfrey Baldacchino. Of course many others have made significant contributions, including all of the speakers present here and the institutions they represent.

Up to end of the Second World War small states hardly generated interest among scholars. They were treated like footnotes in world politics and international relations. Their right to exist as independent, sovereign units was even doubted. The post-war decolonization process led to the emergence of many small states on the world scene and this was bound to increase their salience in political studies.

Still, it is considered to be rather brave on the part of academics like ourselves to sideline more attractive areas of research such as the politics of the big powers to focus on much lesser known, less attractive subjects such as small states.

Indeed at times we do question whether all the time we employ on extending the horizons of knowledge of small states was or is really worthwhile. But when one considers that more than 80 small states and territories in the world have a population of less than 1 million or that 118 have a population of five million or less, we begin to understand the global significance of the focus of our attention.

In Europe, around 45 states have a population of around eleven million or less and in the EU this category of small states amounts to 20.

The study of small states has wrestled itself free from the cage of defining what a small state is. Not that it has solved the problem but by not overly focusing on it, it has been able to delve deeper and deeper into their international relations, security, alliance, internal politics, economics, parliaments and institutions, party systems, sociological traits and many more.

One of the key subjects that has gained currency in the past couple of decades has been small states and the EU.

Hence today we know more about small states then we are willing to admit. And this knowledge is benefitting our communities in many ways. For it is after all of the utmost importance that our studies and reflections ultimately contribute towards the common good.

It would be a black letter day indeed for the research community when we begin to forget this and treat writing and research for personal satisfaction or simply to entertain those who think and work like us.
This is the reason why today’s seminar has another scope namely to provide some food for thought that Malta might find useful as it prepares to take on the rotating presidency of the Council of the EU in 2017. Our Institute with its limited resources has already made its modest effort to sensitize students and academics to this event.

Small states in the EU have not only featured in our curriculum for many years, but this year we organized a series of lectures on Malta and the EU Presidency. The series was inaugurated by the Hon. Ian Borg MP - Parliamentary Secretary for EU funds and 2017 Presidency and was followed by a series of presentations by Dr Peter Agius, Director of the European Parliament Office in Malta. I wish to take the opportunity here to thank them once again for their contribution.

A couple of weeks ago, we hosted a small workshop at the Institute on party politics in European microstates. Dr Marcello Carammia, Senior Lecturer at the Institute for European Studies is taking the lead in this project which will hopefully lead to a publication in due course.

Shortly, Mrs Pia Hansson, Director, Centre for Small State Studies of the University of Iceland will take the podium to speak in more detail about the project. But before she does I need to quickly dispose of two important matters.

First of all I would like to thank all the speakers who accepted our invitation to speak at this seminar: my colleagues Professor Lino Briguglio and Prof Godfrey Baldacchino, Dr Mark Harwood Senior Lecturer at the Institute for European Studies, Dr Peter Agius, and Ambassador Victor Camilleri, Executive Director in the Ministry for European Affairs in Malta, with special responsibility for the preparations for Malta's presidency of the EU Council in 2017.

Thanks also to my friends Professor Baldur Thorhallsson, Dr Stelios Stavridis, Dr Charalombos Tsardinidhis who unfortunately will be arriving later today, Professor Anders Wivel, Dr Guido Lessing from Luxembourg and of course Dr. Külli Sarapuu, from the Ragnar Nurkse School of Innovation and Governance, Tallinn University of Technology. The name of Ragnar Nurkse evokes respect from those familiar with international economics for his great contribution to the foundation of classical development economics.

The second item that I wish to mention is that four of our students at the Institute will be travelling to Reykjavik this summer to participate in the Summer School which will be held there between Monday 22 June and Saturday July 4. The students are being supported by the project’s funding. They are Ms Nicole Tabone and Ms Cristina Cefai third year students and Ms Kimberly Zammit and Ms Charmaine Catania second year students. The call for applications was sent to various departments and centres at the University and in all we received 13 applications. The applicants were ranked according to their annual course work averages and participation in small state study-units. I wish them every success in their endeavours. The Institute for European Studies spares no effort to provide its students with the right opportunities.

Thank you and I wish you all a fruitful seminar.