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**FOR A THEORY OF MINOR POWERS**

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the English-version refinement of the theoretical part of my book *Balanță și hegemonie. România în politica mondială, 1913-1989* (Balance and Hegemony. Romania in World Politics, 1913-1989), (Bucharest: Tritonic, 2005).

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**Abstract**

This paper attempts to construct a realist theory of minor powers. First, it criticizes contemporary approaches on international politics constructed entirely on the idea that only great powers matter for world politics. Secondly, it surveys the definitions provided so far for major and minor powers and finds them inadequate. It then attempts to define minor powers in relation with their international subsystem and develops a theory of their behaviour in connection with the polarization of international subsystems.

Realism firmly states that war is inherent to the structure of a system composed of sovereign states (Waltz 2001). As long as the international community consists of sovereign states, war between them remains a possibility and therefore the main object of study of international relations (Howard 1983: 6). Even the modern recovery of some classical figures of political science serves the same purpose. *The Peloponnesian War* of Thucydides is considered today the first major work in the field also because we can discover in it paragraphs that can justify the contemporary theories on the balance of power, on subsystem hegemony and on the change of international politics. *The Prince* of Machiavelli is so frequently quoted today as another founding work of the discipline because it represents a Renaissance textbook that links for the first time military-political alliances (immutable realities in the policy of organized human beings) with the modern concept of nation. *Leviathan* by Thomas Hobbes is often mentioned as the main classical contribution to the forming of a skeptical philosophy of international relations also because the main realist works use a definition of the anarchic state of the international system or with a definition of a possible society of states very close to those used by the English philosopher.

What is really amazing for a careful reader in international relations is the schizophrenia between the main international characters of Thucydides and Machiavelli and the following construction of realist theories on the structure of the international system and the behavior of states within it. Indeed, the two authors formulated some proto-systems of reflection on interstate politics by considering the presumed behavior of some minor powers. The hegemonic war between Athens and Sparta for the control of Greece was perceived by most scholars as an interstate conflict fought within a closed interstate system (namely the system of the states situated on the present territory of the southern Balkans). In my view indeed the relative power of either Athens or Sparta could not be measured with that of the small city-state of Corcyra, which formed the *casus belli*. But again considering relative power, none of the two meant too much when compared to the real hegemonic power of the interstate system of that period, the Persian Empire. Far from being a closed system, Thucydides' s Greece represents only a subsystem of interstate relations in the periphery of the interstate system of the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. In this subsystem, two minor powers, observing the rules of the balance of power, compete for the control of the region counting on the noninvolvement of the great power that dominates the entire area. In the same way, the main characters of Machiavelli were a group of minor powers. If some argue that in the first half of the 15<sup>th</sup> century these states formed a

closed system of international relations, this was no longer true for the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. They were but a group of players with insignificant power in the struggle for the domination of the rich peninsula, competition that drew the attention, since 1494-95, of the major powers of the European interstate system, namely France, the newly formed Spanish kingdom and the old pretender to hegemony in Italy, the Roman-German emperor (Ady 1971).

The interest of this survey in the contemporary reading of antique or renaissance works seems justified enough. Contemporary realists currently use a lot of concepts introduced in political science by ancient thinkers. Some of the concepts that currently form the core of the realist way of thinking on international relations, like anarchy, balance of power, hegemony, political and military alliances, international society are to be found in similar contexts in the work of the classics of international relations. But this is the point where, generally speaking, the importance that the main perspective in the research of world politics understood to place on these founding works ceases. The state-level of analysis, also borrowed from Herodot, Thukydides or Machiavelli, is altered because of the claim largely made especially by neorealists that contemporary international relations theories and concepts are useful for analyzing and predicting the behavior of only the main actors of international relations, the great powers. Although the classics started their analysis and formulated the key concepts of the field by considering some minor powers, contemporary schools of thought let this to go unnoticed. This radical indifference to the role and significance of the minor powers should not surprise us. International relations theory, as we know it, was elaborated in its main components during the Cold War (and the realist trend, despite the early works of E. H. Carr, makes no exception). It is easy to argue that for understanding the fundamental processes and the general power struggle of that period one should rely only on the analysis based exclusive on the superpowers of the 1945-1991 period. But it is harder to argue that this way of thinking is valid for all types of polarization of the international system.

In the following pages I will try to discuss the necessity of the existence of a theoretical enterprise in international relations based on the idea that minor powers are a special type of actor, essential both for the understanding of some characteristics of the international system and for any prediction related to interstate politics. This enterprise comes from a deep dissatisfaction connected to the way in which contemporary scholars understood to treat the minor powers, both as subjects of a theoretical discourse, and as actors of international politics.

20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century realists showed, in the best case, some sort of condescendence towards the role of the minor powers in the dynamics of power in the international system. Which is really puzzling is the persistence of a lot of realists in a belief that traces its roots not only to the works of the German historian Treitschke, but to the entire tradition of social Darwinism of the 19<sup>th</sup> century that claimed that minor powers are destined to a short and tragic road through world politics (Handel 1981: 6). What makes this conception amazingly untrue is just the evolution of the international system in the last century and a half, towards greater fragmentation of the system of states and towards a continuous multiplication of the number of minor powers. For instance, let`s compare the state of the European system of states in June 1914 to that of the same system in 2004. Of the six great powers of 1914 (Imperial Russia, the German Empire, Austria-Hungary, the British Empire, France and Italy) one was wiped form the political map and all the other five suffered considerable territorial losses (including the colonial empires) and losses in relative power. Hardly two of them (Russia and Great Britain) can be considered today world powers (Mearsheimer 2003). If we turn to the minor powers that existed on Europe`s map at that time, we will find not only that none of them permanently disappeared in this period (the only possible exception is Montenegro, but its tendencies towards independence are evident now), but also that a lot of them occupy a greater territory than they used to in the belle époque years. Moreover, the end of each of the three great confrontations for power in 20<sup>th</sup> century Europe multiplied the number of minor powers (Hansen 2002). Even more, a lot of authors seem to be inconsistent with reality when they deny the role of minor powers in major international crises. Both “hot” hegemonic wars of the last century started as wars between a major and a minor power, in both cases the major power desperately trying to avoid the escalation of the conflict.

To begin, I will investigate the main definitions that contemporary realists formulated for both the major and the minor powers.

Realism firmly states that war is inherent to the structure of a system composed of sovereign states (Waltz 2001). As long as the international community consists of sovereign states, war between them remains a possibility and therefore the main object of study of international relations (Howard 1983: 6). Even the modern recovery of some classical figures of political science serves the same purpose. *The Peloponnesian War* of Thukydides is considered today the first major work in the field also because we can discover in it paragraphs that can justify the contemporary theories on the balance of power, on subsystem hegemony and on the change of international politics. *The Prince* of



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### **The classification of powers in realism**

Contemporary realists were often content to analyze only the great power politics as a fact that could generate a comprehensive theory of international relations. One of the essential works in contemporary theory is based on the fact that the understanding of international phenomena starts only from the distribution of military and economic capabilities among the essential players of the system, because we cannot formulate generalizing propositions starting from the policies of such international actors like Costa Rica or Malaysia (Waltz 1979: 72). Who are these key players? How are they classified in realist approaches on international relations? How can we manage so many different definitions and understandings, each of them with its own claim to validity? Even one of the best realist textbooks classifies the main international actors in major powers, world powers, ruling powers, maritime, continental or regional powers (Wight 1998). The problem of the classification of powers seems to me fundamental for the construction of an integrative realist enterprise. Only adequately understanding the nature of international actors can we formulate consistent theories of world politics because, as I showed earlier, distorted perceptions on the real status of some actors led to theoretical constructions with at least dubious origins.

The major problem with the classification of international actors is connected to the criteria used to formulate their definitions. In the following lines I will analyze some of the most important definitions concerning the nature of major powers.

### The major powers

The criteria usually mentioned in the definition of great powers are connected to **material and managerial capabilities, the area of the interests of one power, the capacity to fight a major armed conflict and the relative diplomatic significance**. The definitions usually used take into consideration either one of these criteria, either a combination of them. I will show in the beginning the fact that none of these criteria cannot be used in itself for the formulation of a definition of major powers, and afterwards I will analyze the combination of these criteria to reach a wider solution.

One of the methodological problems related to my study should be discussed here. Which will be the testing ground of theory? Is it enough to discuss only the consistency and the coherence of international relations theory? In my view the answer to the purely analytic approach is a flat no. The only testing ground worth thinking of is the laboratory of social sciences, the history of human political organizations, in the case of international relations – the military and diplomatic history of international actors. History is more than a road companion to the study of international relations, as some of the reformed realists claimed after the Cold War (Elman and Elman 1997). In the same time, military and diplomatic history cannot be the only way of approaching international relations, because of its idiographic character and the caution that historians show towards any form of theory leads to a lack of significance of this kind of research for the contemporary problems of world politics (Schroeder 1994). I think that the two approaches should be seen as being complementary. On the one side, history is the testing ground of the theories formulated in political science. If those theories are proven wrong by this test, it is hard to argue that their value is more than that of an intellectual exercise. If they are proven true, we will have to search other methods to falsify them, for them to remain theories in the scientific sense of the term (Burke 1999). On the other side, political history in itself does not have too much to say about the realm of international relations. It cannot replace a social science approach because it won't consider the problems of the present or the future, and its purpose is not oriented towards discovering the type of regularities that lead to strong general statements about the problems of world politics. Moreover, its general hate of large explanatory theories makes harder an efficient collaboration between the two research perspectives. While the historians are still interested in establishing the veracity of some type of documents concerning facts in the past, political scientists are interested in creating theoretical models valid for

the present and eventually for the future. Thus, the theoretical need of a good knowledge of the historical discourse comes from the realm of political science (Levy 1997). On this ground will be tested, in the following lines, the main realist criteria and theories.

The easiest to criticize but also the most important criteria used is that regarding **the analysis of the depth of one state` s material and managerial capabilities** in order to understand its place on the world` s scene. The first legal definition of the great powers appeared in the March 1814 Treaty of Chaumont signed by England, Austria, Prussia and Russia in the moment of the collapse of the empire of Napoleon (Rothstein 1968: 11-12). The major powers were to comprise only the states that could send against France and maintain on the battlefield armies larger than 60000 men. The criteria of the size of the armed forces and the capacity to mobilize, transport and maintain them in the theatre of operations forms the basis of the calculus of foreign policy throughout the quiet 19<sup>th</sup> century if not also throughout the 1930` s. But even in those times this criteria seems to be inadequate when related to that time` s conception of relative power. For the 1814-1840 time span the number of bayonets could be relevant for understanding the power of one state. This happens because the armament, the organization, the training of the armed forces and the tactical and operational concepts used by the European powers reached a maximum degree of cohesion, due to the largely adopted Napoleonic – style organizational structure preached by authors like Clausewitz and Jomini (Taylor 1969: xix-xxxvi). A great power from southeastern Europe, the Ottoman Empire will not be very important from this point of view, but there are serious reasons, analyzed later, to consider Turkey an essential actor in that period. After 1840, the irrelevance of that criterion is apparent. Technological discoveries like the machine-gun, the steam engine, the telegraph, the rail or the first ironclads or the refinement of older military structures by the rationalization and standardization through a modern general staff radically transformed the traditional calculus of power. Those who stuck by the old conceptions on power, like Russia in 1853-55, Austria in 1866, France in 1870, again Russia in 1904-05 or England and Germany in the naval arms race from the first decade of the past century had to bear the burden of those calculus mistakes. Their defeat makes us think of the way in which stubborn feudal chivalry armies, dependent on the armor plates, of the men that owed military allegiance to the baron and the rock fortifications collapsed under the strikes of the permanent armies of the modern French or English kingdoms (Parker, 1990; Bean 1974: 205-206).

Even the refinement of this criterion by the realists of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century is not satisfactory for a complete understanding of what a major power might mean. Hans Morgenthau proposed in *Politics Among Nations* a calculus of the elements of national power based on nine elements that form the power of a state: its geography, demography, primary agricultural and industrial resources, the number and quality of the armed forces, industrial capacity, the quality of government, the quality of diplomacy, the national character and the national morale (Morgenthau 1985: 127-169). We can consider a major power a state that scores well in most of the above elements. Morgenthau's analysis is inconsistent even within his own theoretical framework. The critics that can be formulated might not even be directed against the last three elements of national power, recognized as subjective even by the author. For example, all material criteria apply extremely well for the 19<sup>th</sup> century United States. Even more, in 1898, the date that marks the moment after that most analysts consider them a great power the U.S. were already the main economic power of the world. During the Civil War they already were able to mobilize, field and equip the largest land forces in the world (with the possible exception of Russia). But before passing the test of conflict with another major international player, no power can be considered great. In the same way, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the material criteria of Morgenthau are not enough to say that a state that does possess them in a significant proportion, like Brazil, is a major power as long as its foreign policy attitudes show the contrary.

The theoretical offspring of Morgenthau never ventured too far from his analysis. For decades after *Politics Among Nations* realists claimed that the differences in international power and influence – the exact attributes that make one state a great power – are a function of differences in the anatomy of statehood, defined by population, territory, government, economy and unifying culture (Sprout 1962: 79-86). Even though he noticed the weakness of this criterion, Kenneth Waltz classifies powers considering the size of their population and territory, the grasp on resources, economic capability, military power, political stability and the competence of the leadership (Waltz 1979: 131).

It is easy to repeat for those realists the arguments I used in Morgenthau's case. But it is also easy to find new examples of states that qualify as major powers having pretty low scores on a number of significant elements of power. For instance, Frederic the Second's Prussia was unquestionably one of the major players of central and eastern Europe, even if the size of its territory, its population, its resources were no advantage and the course of its borders still designed

by a medieval logic were a disadvantage (Teschke 2002). In its case, the combination between a highly trained army, an excellent military leadership and a diplomacy skilled enough to get from overseas the money necessary for sustaining protracted conflicts made a capacity to win wars with other major players and made the other liabilities insignificant. In the same time, a very good score on the scale of material capacities would be obtained up to the last decades of the 18<sup>th</sup> century by Poland, which lost its great power status more than a century earlier, when it was proven incapable to defend itself against other international actors. The case of Poland which ends up by being partitioned without a major defeat in a war by one state (Prussia) which is weaker from the point of view of material capabilities and two others (Austria and Russia) marginally superior should be a decisive argument. In the same way, the fall of Spain from the ranks of major powers sometimes to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century is difficult to assess if we would define the great powers as only states with strong material and managerial capabilities. Any calculus will show the huge material, financial and human potential of post-1700 Spain, combined with hard elements of military powers such as a strong high seas fleet, a tough infantry and a network of overseas bases that controlled most of the Western Indies. The above lines showed that a definition of the great powers based solely on a good score in the scale of material and managerial capabilities is not complete. Such a definition would include states that are actually minor powers and would exclude states that are definitely great powers.

The second set of definitions used by some realists is related to **the area of the interests** of one power. A state with interests at the level of the international system is a great power, or world power in Martin Wight's terms (1998: 58). Yet in a nuclear world, in a world where the economies of most states depend on the free flow of goods, services and workforce, practically any state has interests at the global level. Nevertheless, not all states claim to be major powers and are neither recognized as such. Those who consider this criterion strengthen it by adding the capacity to see one's interests protected at the scale of the international system. The scholars who use such a definition understand the international system as a coherent pattern of relations based on economic exchange built on production and commerce regulations formulated by significant international actors (Wallerstein 1993; Modelski 1978). The international system was created, these scholars say, by Portuguese, Dutch, Spanish, British and French businessman that unified the world's main areas of production and commerce in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries. They were benefiting on state policies aimed on enriching the state by commerce with overseas regions and who understood two help their



businessmen by financing large battle-fleets. Using that, either private, state or corporate entrepreneurs built a complex system of political and economic exchange relations that never stopped growing, eventually becoming global in the last century. The elements of power in this interpretation of world politics are the mastery of the lines of communication and the establishment of exchange rules. One can argue against this argument in the following manner: if indeed the states that have those elements of power are systemic powers, the term of major powers is larger than that. For instance, technological or human capabilities and the force to survive on the international scene do not apply in Portugal's case, who disappears from the world's scene when, according to Modelski, it was supposed to be at the peak of its power (Wijn 1970; Vilar 1952). When we consider the history of central Europe, we see other great powers struggling for very different reasons and objectives. Of the hegemonic powers, Portugal and the Low Countries are insignificant for shaping European politics even in the two centuries of their glory. England always needed allies in all its endeavors to act on the continent, either for the beached provided (like Portugal under Napoleon) or for augmenting its naval power with some land power. It is therefore no wonder that at the end of a period when some authors argue that Britain was a superpower (Clayton 1986), in 1940, England founds impossible to act on the continent after the defeat of France in May-June 1940.

In order to maintain its pre-eminence in European affairs, the United States had to rely, for over sixty years, on the logistical and political support of a few continental pillars, which were also able to harbor and augment American military forces (Powell 2004: 22-34); (Layne 2003: 17-29). For the duration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, a completely different type of actors, assuming great power status and governing the faith of millions threatens peace on the European continent. Thus interests considered at the world system level, even coupled by a capacity to project them at this scale, are totally insufficient to describe the whole class of major powers, at least from a historic-comprehensive point of view.

By using **the capacity to cope with a major conflict** as the defining criteria of major power analysts seldom understand the access to that particular status as a result of a defeat of another great power. The classic examples are the victory of Prussia over Austria in the succession war to the Habsburg throne (1740-1747), which offered Silesia to Prussia and also a position of military parity with France and Austria in Central Europe; the U. S. victory over Spain in 1898, which permitted the take-over of Cuba and the Philippines, also decisively reinforcing the Monroe Doctrine; and, finally, the Japanese victory over Russia in the 1904-1905 war (obtained almost unbelievably both on sea –

at Tsushima – and on land ) (Vial 1910: 497-551), that destroyed Russian ambitions in the area for the next decades, forcing Great Britain and the U.S. to recognize the emergence of another strategic competitor in the Pacific area. The three examples above are indisputable evidence of the fact that due to a successful conflict carried against a former or established great power, also considered in terms of enlarging the influence area after the conflict, a former minor power can aspire to a great power status. But, on the other hand, during the last few centuries there are significant examples of minor powers defeating great powers and obtaining important territorial gains on their account. Though, this had no significant impact on their status at the international level. In 1920 Pilsudski's Poland, making use of the French logistical support and also of the advice given by a French military mission, administered a complete defeat to the Red Army's forces at the Warsaw gates. A general Russian retreat in complete disorder followed the battle and as a result Poland annexed large Russian territory in the Ukraine and Byelorussia (Manning 1939: 14-25). Though, in spite of claims made by the newly proclaimed Polish republic, the main European actors never acknowledged Poland as benefiting of a great power status. In 1973, after a war that lasted for more than 8 years, North Vietnamese forces obtain the retreat of the U.S. military in the South and manage to occupy all the formerly U.S.-held territory after another two years. At the end of the 70s Vietnam starts a hegemonic war in Cambodia, defeating another great power, China (Stoessinger 2001: 82-109). Though, just as it happened after the French defeat in 1954, Vietnam did not become nor did it wish to become a great power.

Then there is the very interesting case of Austria, a major power, which loses wars against significant adversaries for an entire century (1815-1914), although maintaining its great power status in an indisputable manner (even from an economic point of view) (Taylor 2000). Between 1870 and 1945 France loses two major wars and wins another by a close call, with massive British and U.S. support. It ends up occupied three times – twice by German forces and once by United Nations forces. Even so, although in 1940 France gives up its world power status, a combination of human and material resources, international prestige, a well employed diplomatic and political management and the preservation of French interests in key areas of the African continent and the Middle East assured it a great power status until today (Doise, Vaisse 1987).

Without doubt, an even more interesting case is that of states like India, China or Japan. In spite the fact that neither one of them waged a successful war against a major power within the last 55 years (with the Chinese exception in 1950-53, war ended in a stalemate), their combination of

material, human, economic and military power, also combined with the vastity of their interests and a reputable diplomacy (the example of India and of its involvement within the non-alignment movement must be recalled here), are enough reasons for them to be considered great powers at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Hence one can see that not even the criterion referring to the capacity of coping with a major military conflict can be *per se* taken into consideration while attempting a general classification of the great powers.

**The relative diplomatic significance** is clearly a criterion that cannot constitute by itself a definition of a great power. Seen as a quantifier for the sheer number of diplomatic legacies, their type and size, of their participation within international conferences and organizations, of their economic contributions within the latter, this criterion was not used independently even by the authors paying a special attention to it (Singer & Small 1966: 236-282) (it is usually combined with one of the criteria mentioned above, so a separate discussion has no place here).

I have shown above the fact that neither criterion taken separately has the capacity to accurately describe the totality of the states viewed as major powers since the formation of the international system. For each and every one of those criteria I have identified states that did not comply to them but nevertheless were considered major powers, and states that behaved accordingly but that they were far from becoming anything else than minor powers. Combining these criteria may lead towards a rather powerful definition of the great powers, which could be able to elude many of the theoretical traps discussed above. The next step will be to follow the most reliable definition of this type, formulated by Jack S. Levy in *War in the Great Power System, 1495-1975* (1983). I shall try to analyze, using the list of great powers offered by him, the relevance of his definition for my particular research. Levy brings up a complex definition of the great power concept, which can be resumed as follows: a great power is a state that plays a major role in international politics from the security issues point of view. Great powers can be distinguished from other states as a result of their military power, their interests, their behavior in general and their interactions with the other great powers, the perceptions these powers have on them (idem: 16). The most important element of a great power is that it is autonomous from the military point of view, possessing a high level of military capabilities as against other states. They are quasi-invulnerable to the military threats posed by minor powers and they only have to fear the other great powers. Essentially, their capacity is both defensive and very efficient in terms of long distance power projection. Secondly, their objectives and interests are different than those of other states, by that meaning that they consider their interests

rather as being global or continental than local or regional. Another distinguishing factor in regard to the great powers consists on their behavior towards international phenomena, their dominant tendency being to behave more aggressively than other powers, participating in a significantly more important fashion in the internationally based alliances and conflicts. Also, great powers are differentiated from other types of states by the other's images and perceptions on them. The great powers are fully recognized as such and treated with the needed respect (due to protocol) in case of negotiations or international alliances. There is also another set of formal criteria, able to differentiate between major powers and the other members of the international system: the acknowledgement as a great power by an international congress, a conference, an organization or a treaty, or as the result of the offering of some privileges as is, for example, the statute of permanent membership or a veto right within an international organization (*idem*: 16-18). Levy's definition is, indeed, a very powerful one, and apparently solves various problems of theories that are using either one criterion or a simple combination of criteria in order to identify major powers. The real issues appear when analyzing the table of great powers formed by the use of these criteria.

The three following examples will illustrate more the list's weaknesses than those of Levy's criteria. Spain during the Bourbon era cannot make it to the list, its presence here ending at the same time as the war of 1808 waged against Napoleon Bonaparte. On the other hand, the global importance criterion along with that of the resistance to a major conflict were not applicable to Spain for some decades already. Though, from a point of view centered on a set of influences and interests within a particular international subsystem (Latin America), Spain's position as a great power will be preserved for the decades to come. Another amazing aspect for the chosen period is Poland's absence. An undisputed major power during the entire 16<sup>th</sup> century, Poland's decline starts to slowly manifest itself only after the first half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century (Jablonowski 1970: 585-601). More important is the absence of the Ottoman Empire after 1699. The following two centuries after 1699 the Turks are the masters of the southern and eastern part of the European continent, their empire extending from Morocco to the Euphrates and the Tigris rivers. They are also waging a long series of wars against major and minor powers alike, from which they emerge more or less shaken. But a three centuries old prejudice continues to infiltrate even the most respectable proof of erudition in contemporary political science. The Ottoman Empire's place as a major power in the global international relations system cannot be contested until its exclusion from the European continent an

until the drastic limitations of its African possessions, during the 1912-13s wars (Blainey 1988: 177-185).

Levy's theory, discussed and amended above, still remains one of the most promising integrative attempts in relation to the criteria identifying major powers within the international system. Just like the latter theories, it doesn't pass a careful analytical historical test, based both on the missing powers on the list and on those minor power who have gained an unjustified place there.

As a result of the analysis above one can observe that the theoretical discussions concerning the elaboration of a general definition of major powers are unsatisfying in regard to the main purpose of my study. Next, I have to analyze the way in which minor powers were defined until now and the way in which their actions understood on the international scene. If this theoretical discussion will prove satisfactory, then it also may spread some light on the issue concerning the definition of great powers, viewed as those similar objects (states) not included within the conceptual sphere comprising minor powers.

### The minor powers

Many of the minor power theorists see them as a weak species of the major powers, hence their chosen denomination used in order to classify them. One of the terms very often employed is that of “small states”, which generates a whole series of problems when used. For example, if we are using one of these taxonomies, these states will be defined only as having a population situated under the 5 millions level (Hart 2001). Other authors tried to construct theories regarding small state’s behavior in the international area. Thus, Amry Vandenbosch (1964) speaks about “small states”, unable to pass the decisive test of power in order to qualify as major powers. The tendency to exclude minor power from the modern international political structure comes, as showed above, from the Vienna Congress period, where the significant winners (Austria, Prussia, Russia and Great Britain) inaugurated an inter-pares system of regulating European issues. Not until the two Hague Conferences in 1899 and 1907, following a strong American pressure, that equal presence for the small states will be admitted (idem: 293-296). The great powers are prisoners within their own natural drive to maintain the balance of power system as a mean to ensure their security, often being involved in war that was menacing the balance and, as a result they are forced to renounce at their own welfare and civic liberties in favor of military preparations. By opposition to this, small states are consumers, not providers of security and therefore they can benefit in terms of prosperity only if they are properly managing their resources (idem: 301-303). Adding to that the increased significance of collective security institutions formed after the Second World War (especially the United Nations), the political power of small states is growing, in spite of the deepened military gap that separates them from the great powers (idem: 308-309). There are few very serious issues affecting Vandenbosch’s argument. First, his opinion that the Vienna Congress must be seen as the starting point to the small state’s exclusion from the regulating process of European affairs is inadequate. As showed above, this exclusion can be found in a previous act, the Chaumont Treaty of March 1814. Then, the classic description of the European Concert system on which Vandenbosch is basing his theory may not be actually valid. The Vienna system tried indeed to become a hindering tool for the revolutionary or revisionist powers, through the use of collective bond between the great powers. Also, it tried to solve any important issue on the European continent through the use of negotiations between the great powers (Hinsley 1987/1963). At the same time, the congress may be considered as the first eloquent example of two superpowers ruling the international system – a maritime one (Great Britain) and a continental one (Russia) (Schroeder 1992: 683-706). But the

political practice that followed is actually divergent to the interpretations above. Indeed, as foreseen by Kalevi Holsti, a very insightful researcher of the theoretical relation between the formulation of the peace principles and the effective functioning of the system, the latter tends to further itself from the norms and to create the basis of a future general confrontation (Holsti 2000). Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century – founded from a diplomatic perspective by the Vienna Congress – the great powers tried either to solve emerging crisis through confrontation or direct negotiations, either to involve small or insignificant states in the decision making processes or in coalitions having an influential effect on the international system. The cases of the French-Piemontese alliance in 1859 or of the Prussian-Piemontese one in 1866 are good examples. On the other hand, the Vienna system made a huge error by excluding the Ottoman Empire, a major power, from its ranks. Thus, the instability area in the South and in the East of the continent was perpetuated and amplified, harboring the disease that will eventually put an end to the concert (Kissinger 1998).

Another sensible part in the Vandenbosch's argument relates to the way in which small states understand to manage their resources and to build their welfare and civic liberties policies. Indeed, major powers, caught in the “guns versus butter” dilemma, can experience troubles in ensuring civic liberties and the welfare state development, focused on equal opportunities and the pursuit of wellbeing. Still, there is no convincing argument able to prove that the security dilemma is less constraining for the minor powers than it is for any other state. The dilemma as formulated by John Herz, refers to the understanding of international relations in the terms of a Hobbesian analysis: individuals (states in this case), existing without any authority within an anarchical environment, with diverging, conflicting interests caused by the scarcity of resources, trying to gain security in order to protect against possible aggressions. By doing that they start accumulating power, fact that in turns is perceived by others as a potential aggression, driving them accumulate more power as well. The result is a situation that makes conflicts much more probable than the previous state of affairs (Herz 1950: 157-158). In the description of the security dilemma there is no clue to consider minor powers as being excluded from the definition. As long as they exist in an anarchical environment, the minor power's calculus of resources and interests will take the same shape as it does in the case of the great powers. Both are targeted equally by the same type of security threats and, as long as they are considered to be “units of the same type” (Waltz 1979: 93-97), they shall engage in the same kind of politics as the major powers do. Vandenbosch's argument can, though, be valid when there is a strict system of alliances in involving a major ally and a group of minor



allies. In this case, if the interest for which the alliance was formed is one of equal importance for all the allies, then the tendency to overload the major ally in terms of costs will appear. Thus the smaller states will become “free riders” in that particular alliance, being able to redirect their resources towards other economical sectors, especially towards the social ones. (Olson & Zeckhauser 1966: 266-279)

Even before Vandebosch, international relations theorists had identified the necessity to study the minor powers as a separate class of international actors. Thus, an early approach of this kind belongs to Anette Baker Fox (Baker Fox 1959). In her opinion, the ultimate test of a state’s power position consists in its capacity to assure the fulfillment of its demands at an interstate level or its resistance when facing demands coming from others. Of course, when minor powers are considered, the latter situation becomes the most relevant. The most active and intense side of their relations with the major powers is when crises of great proportions emerge between the great powers. During these crises both sides can use economical, ideological, diplomatic or even military methods in order to affirm their own interests. The best tool for fulfilling their requests for the minor powers still resides in diplomacy, thus being able to buy with goods and services the great power’s favor regarding their demands, they can win new friends or influence political leaders through psychological means, they can negotiate for an exchange of advantages and can increase their power by creating a network of suited alliances. Diplomacy will remain the main tool for the minor powers as long as they will continue to consider themselves as virtuous and peace-loving countries and will see in the major powers an evil, cynical and manipulative political force (idem: 2-4). Starting from these theoretical grounds, Baker Fox studies the policy of the neutral countries in Europe during the Second World War (especially Turkey, Spain and Sweden) but also that of some countries involved in the conflict (Finland and Norway), being perfectly aware of the fact that their policies were facilitated by their geographical position, somewhat eccentric in rapport with the main military theatres of operations.

The limits of the research made by Baker Fox became evident when one will try to extrapolate this analysis in order to extract a general theory regarding minor powers. She does not use an explicit definition and the elements described as being fundamental for examining the politics of a minor power (diplomatic persuasion, ideological influence, the use of subsidies or the payment of modern forms of tribute) can as well be considered as parts of the main characteristics of the foreign policy of a great power. As to the fact that minor powers see themselves as virtuous and peace-loving

countries as against all others seen as rapacious and driven by hidden agendas, this is a very hard to sustain from an historical point of view, apart from the fact that this can also be considered as being a vision shared also by the great powers. The best argument in this direction consists in the U.S. position, which is based on the strong belief in their own virtues, and in the pettiness and aggressiveness of all other states.

One of the earliest efforts to systematize realist thought concerning minor powers belongs to David Vital (Vital 1967). For him too, the fundamental test in order to establish a state's place in the international system consists in its current military power also considered as potentially modifiable either by historical circumstances, either by contemporary political situations. The defense system of a minor power can be best seen when that state is not allied with or protected by a major power (idem: 5-7). What is remarkable in Vital's case is the fact that, starting from the classic realist position according to which the military strength does not cover all the aspects of international relations but where there is the capacity and the intention to use it, it will exclude any other aspect of interstate relations, he is not basing his analysis exclusively on those states that are able to use it at a systemic scale. The contemporary world is, according to his slightly Marxist approach, a class society in which the main characteristics of the international relations are applicable to both minor and major powers (Vital 1971: 1-2). Though, the nucleus of his analysis is well fixed on the military capabilities of minor powers. What is seen for a great power as a very effective instrument for affirming its own position of power within the international system may be, in regard to the minor powers, a significant weakness. In any situation except for the open military conflict the modern defense system constitutes a source of weakness, an accentuation of the minor state's general vulnerability to external pressure and an aggravation of the structural economical problems derived from the absolute limitations of the small state. As an example, let's take the calculus of the balance of military power. Due to the economical limitations inherent to the minor power status, its military potential is less significant than the military power acquired until the beginning of a military conflict (Vital 1967: 61-68). Actually, Vital is interested in the study of the effective power disparities present between minor and major powers. On one hand he underlines the military gap already existing due to classic attributes, related to the dimensions and size of the population and, on the other hand, he tries to link that particular issue with the latest changes in modern technology and with the chronic inability of minor powers to assimilate new types of armaments. If that is possible, they are not able to produce these armaments in sufficiently large quantities due to their incapacity to

sustain scale-type economies. The influence of the minor powers on the system can be achieved only when the competition between the major powers is increased and the small states become either prizes in this contest, either essential pawns in the global game of power.

Some aspects mentioned in the Anette Baker Fox discussion can also be used in Vital's case. He is not formulating a definition regarding minor powers, just limiting himself to the analysis of their actions and of their importance within the international system starting from the study of the classic elements of power that differentiates them from the great powers. If his analysis proves itself to be very effective for the period taken in consideration (that of the industrialized economies of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century), it might not be as successful when applied to a different historical background. For example, the economic incapacity and the scarcity of human and material resources, a marginal position and diplomacy to match it did not prevent the Swiss cantons from successfully intervening in the Northern Italy, the center of the European competition for power at the beginning of the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Spooner 1958). Still, these critics may be considered as having a secondary relevance. Vital's analysis remains a very useful methodological tool in the study of minor powers considered within the frame of the industrial age realities and employing a traditional conception in regard to international relations – as a space of military, political and economical conflicts between equivalent entities and also as a territory of alliance strategies between them.

A solid attempt to build a minor power axed theoretical system belongs to Robert Rothstein. He offers a definition: a minor power is a state that acknowledges its inability to gain security by using its own capacities and that it has to rely mainly on the support offered by other states, institutions, processes or events. In the same time the minor power's belief that in its incapacity to rely on its own means has also to be acknowledged by the other states involved in international politics (Rothstein 1968: 29). It is very interesting to illustrate Rothstein's whole argumentation, because it will build the theoretical frame of the discussions evolving around this type of states. Thus, it becomes obvious the fact that his definition is based on a particular interpretation and application of the security dilemma. Small states can be the beneficiary of a "negative" security based on their own weaknesses. Due to the lack of an industrial base and often developing only a rudimentary governmental frame, they do not have the capacity to build a proper power structure of their own (idem: 19). Meanwhile, their special statute is also a result of a self-perception. Any state assuming a minor power status implicitly accepts the fact that it cannot change it by its own actions. Thus it is, for any immediate purpose, "permanently" inferior. Any solution to their security dilemma will

arrive from the exterior, their essential goal – survival – being achievable only with external help (idem: 23-24).

It is obvious the fact that Rothstein identifies minor powers as a separate class, different both by their actions and by their interior and foreign affairs typology from the other international actors. The weak position of minor powers is illustrated also by the fact that they have a very little maneuvering space in international politics. This type of situation is extremely well exemplified by the specific estimations made by many minor powers when they consider the international situation to be threatening: there is very little time to change anterior organizational and equipment deficiencies, there is a pressure towards obtaining a particularly built military instrument and also one produced by the eminency of the danger, often leading towards a surprise attack in order to take the initiative from the enemy (idem: 3-5). The politics of minor powers are caught in a special set of constraints that are rarely present in the major power case. Thus, there are few chances for a small revisionist state to be able to change a stable international order, based on a balance of power or on a strong hegemony. It will be able to achieve that only as a client of a much bigger revisionist actor (idem: 6). At the same time, using a set of neutralist politics will be completely inaccessible for a minor power, as long as that state is not strategically irrelevant and politically unchallenging. If those two conditions are not met and due to the fact that there are few wise or viable strategies to wear out the most powerful actor, in case of a crisis the most dangerous politics are neutrality or any form of non-alignment, because since it can lead to the occupation and, eventually, to the permanent disappearance of the state (idem: 32-37).

Rothstein's essential contribution to the whole minor power discussion consists on the accent put on the issue of assuring security to this type of states – as they are a special kind of international actors – and on the rapport of alliance existing between them and the major powers within the system. With all the new and valuable contributions brought into the research, a more careful analysis will show that neither this approach is able to build a general theoretical frame for the study of minor powers. First, there are many historical examples showing minor powers not following the security dilemma percepts and accepted (the case for initiations appears even more often, but that is accepted by Rothstein) to enter conflicts with more powerful opponents despite their own weakness and of lack of any allies. Only throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century three such cases are identifiable, each related to particular types of world order structures. Thus, there is the case of Finland in the Second World War – choosing to fight a defensive war having no allies and possessing a quantitatively

precarious human and industrial basis against the immensely powerful Soviet Union (Luttwak 1980-81: 61-79); (Watts 1998: 85-86). Then, during the Cold War, there is the complex case of the Afghan resistance against the same Soviet Union, previous to the American support (and its role still offers large room for debate). And, at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in a sensibly unsuccessful attempt – compared with those mentioned above – there is the Iraqi resistance against an overwhelmingly powerful coalition in military, economic and media terms. All these relevant examples came from a period when it would be expected that economic and development disparities should make even more probable a policy of alignment from the minor powers.

One of the most powerful cases that invalidates Rothstein's argument referring to the incapacity of minor powers to conduct revisionist policies in the absence of a major ally comes from his own example, that of the first Balkan war. There, a group of minor powers fought against a decadent major power pursuing not only unlimited revisionist goals, but they did that in the absence or even against the great powers of the day. Though, Rothstein must be appreciated for introducing a systematic conception on regard to the nature of the power of the minor powers and also for constructing strong and convincing arguments for the study of their alliances by using realist reflection concerning the security dilemma issues.

In a review centered on the works of both David Vital and Robert Rothstein, Robert Keohane is submitting an assumed "psychologizing" definition, in order to better understand the existing rapport between different categories of powers: "a great power is a state whose leaders consider to be able to exert by themselves a major impact and perhaps a decisive one on the international system; a secondary power is a state whose leaders consider that they can exert by themselves a form of impact, though never a decisive one, on the system; a middle power is a state whose leaders consider that they can efficiently act on their own, but the systemic impact could be reached only by joining a small group (of states) or through an international institution; a minor power is a state whose leaders consider that they would never be able (either alone or grouped) to exert a significant impact on the system (Keohane 1969: 296).

It will be fair to say that Keohane's contribution to the study of minor powers is marginal. The only seemingly innovative aspect is the introduction of the self-perception of the power status as a criterion for classifying different types of powers. But his entire definition is vitiated by the introduction of intermediary categories of powers which only uselessly complicate the discussion.

One shall not forget the fact brought up at the beginning of this section of my article that these theories represent the byproduct of the intellectual environment of the Cold War period and the way in which concepts begin to take shape is accordingly with the bipolar logic (seen by many as immutable at the time). Off course, there are some attempts that can be traced back to the inter-war period, some coming even from within the League of Nations, to legitimate to the term of “middle powers”. But for any purpose of a realist analysis the introduction of an intermediary category between major and minor powers is useless. The so-called middle powers differ only insignificantly from the minor powers in terms of military and economic capacities. Their superior strategic importance turns them to become relevant for the great powers and their sphere of interests and that of their capacity to defend them exists only inside their own subsystem of international relations. In addition to that, the capacity to cope with a military conflict against a major power turns out to be not at all different than that of the rest of the minor powers.

The issue concerning the bipolar structure of the international system is somewhat more complicated. In deed, in the bipolar system, if we were to rigidly follow the classic realist conception, it can be concluded that the only true major powers are the two superpowers. But a more careful analysis reveals the fact that we are much more preoccupied with only one of the characteristics of the Cold War – the strategic competition, the acquisition and development of vectors capable to deliver a nuclear charge to a specific target, and of the strategies based o that. It is true that the supremacy of the two superpowers was incontestable in this area (and that may be also due to the fact that there was no other significant pole able to challenge that supremacy). But it will be completely exaggerated to consider that a conception based only on the nuclear sphere should bear the capacity to decide in regard to the status of one power or another in the international system. The nuclear sphere consists only in these states having an atomic devastating capacity and also possessing – even in a limited way – the second strike capacity. It does not say anything about a state’s military economic and conventional capabilities, about the sphere of their interests or about their diplomatic importance. Also, it does not refer to their capacity to wage a major conventional conflict or about their ability of projecting force over great distance. In regard of these aspects, throughout the entire bipolar period there were states able to figure into a special class of powers and states that were, from this point of view, relatively insignificant. Between the major powers of the bipolar period, the superpowers were much more than *primus inter pares*, carrying negotiations in

inaccessible areas to the other great powers and exerting undisputed hegemonies over large surfaces of the globe.

Michael Handel offered another systemic conception on minor powers and their role in international politics (Handel 1981). His declared methodological assumptions are considering an analysis that is based on Kenneth Waltz's third image of international relations – the systemic one – and on the rationality of decision-making processes – the first bureaucratic model in Graham Allison's view (Waltz 2001); (Allison 1971). Although Handel falls in his turn into the trap of identifying five types of powers (superpowers, great powers, middle powers, small states and mini-states), he is offering an integrated conception of the “weak state's” role based on the old realist presumption according to which the state's behavior within the international system is determined by the relations and differences of power between the actors. What is essential for any type of power – either minor or major – is the effective population or, better said, the military participation rate, defined as that segment of the population that can bear arms and can be educated in order to be able to defend the state by using modern equipment (Handel 1981: 10-13). One of the major characteristics of the weak states is their inability to ensure their own existence, especially against a great power or even against another weak state backed by a major power (idem: 20). It is interesting to note that there is no correlation between size, relative power and aggression, minor powers being as inclined as the major ones to get involved in military conflicts, not just accepting them but also starting them. In absolute terms a state's power can be best measured not by comparison to that of all other states but in relation to its neighbors and also by the degree in which there is accordance between the power at its disposal and its goals and national ambitions. In the case of minor powers, disadvantages like their incapacity to create deep defenses – which means that the first battle might also be the decisive one –, can be balanced by some advantages, as a much more efficient diplomacy in relation to that of the great powers – due to the fact that that the array of issues specific to the minor powers is significantly smaller and is permanently linked to their own survival. This situation can convert itself into a rationalization of the diplomacy, in a very good knowledge of international issues and into the ability to maneuver for their own benefit the other power's bureaucracies which are less familiar with the characteristic of a particular crisis. Yet another advantage in the nuclear age – in which one can assume that the incidence of interstate war will be reduced – is due to the fact that a state's real or potential power which can, during crisis, to reflect military power, will be during peaceful times measured economically. This turns out to be a decisive issue, knowing that a number



of minor powers can be industrially and commercially well-developed states (idem: 42-52). The main concern for the minor powers is to maintain and to enhance their military in a manner that will allow them to wage at least some types of interstate conflicts. If we were to consider a state's military power as being effective when it passes the battlefield test and thus proving the effectiveness of its armed forces (even if it is only a image projection in order to discourage the adversary), then the case of minor powers rises some particular issues. First, it is compulsory that they'll maintain – even in limited numbers – armed forces because otherwise they could be perceived as generating power gaps within the international system, practically inviting the great powers to proceed at a “stabilizing occupation” (idem: 90). Secondly, even if minor power might have a high military participation rate, sometimes surpassing that of a major power, their mobilized armies cannot be much augmented, fact that leads towards a weak war potential. In addition, the war potential issue is aggravated by the fact that minor powers are usually unable to produce the most sophisticated types of armament (and, if they do, it is never in sufficient quantities). This shows that minor powers will face a great danger when they will be engaged in a prolonged military conflict against a more powerful foe (idem: 79-81). Thus, a predictable conclusion emerges, shared by most minor power theorists: the survival of this type of actor within the international system is deeply linked to its ability to call on other states and to extract from them particular resources needed for its own defense (idem: 171).

Handel can be criticized on one hand for his mistakes when classifying, for the ambiguity of some of his concepts and also for his excessive focus on the aspects related to the state's military power. As I tried to show above, the introduction of supplementary categories of states between major and minor powers is not at all beneficial for an attempt to build a coherent theoretical body within the realist view on international relations. Thus, Handel's argument on middle powers – seen as small populated but well developed states having efficient economies or as very populated but economically undeveloped states – it is not theoretically viable. Small states with small populations but well developed commercially and industrially might in times become great powers, as there were, during their hegemonic cycles Portugal and Holland (Modelski & Morgan 1985: 391-417) or they can be simply minor powers, quartered within a particular type of international subsystem that allows them to pursuit this path. States with large populations but with weak economies can be major powers – the example of the imperial Russia is well known – or can simply be minor powers (as Bangladesh is today). Secondly, Handel does not explain what does he mean by weak states –

which include, in his opinion, both small states and mini-states, as well as some of the middle powers. In addition to that, the excessive attention paid to the brute forms of the military potential to the prejudice of the alliance strategies and of the historical analysis of the status quo and revisionist strategies is deeply detrimental to his theory. Essentially, although he adds significant aspects to the realist debate, his contribution does not offer a clarification of the concepts and a proper theoretical set.

Starting from the issue of assuring minor power's security, Olav F. Knudsen formulated an "external" conception on minor powers, basically seen through their relations with other states and particularly with major international actors (Knudsen 1996). For Knudsen the issue of minor powers is circumscribed to the general realist logic. That is mainly due to the fact that their political leaders are approaching international politics in the same manner as their great power counterparts do, having the same vision on what constitutes the national interest. The main issues affecting minor powers are related to the existing disparities of power and to their historical experience as a small state, fact that often meant being forcefully engulfed by a more powerful neighbor (idem: 3-5). Thus, the essential problem of such an international actor is survival, complicated by the fact that its singular actions have no significant and lasting impact on security and, as a result, on its own survival. Small state's security is determined by external factors, as the processes that are structuring the international system or as the sectorial politics of the more powerful states. Basically, the great power's politics determine the faith of the small states (idem: 8). When researching a minor power's security, affirms Knudsen, one must consider the following determinant variables: the strategic significance of its geographical position from a major power's point of view; the degree of tension given at one time between the great powers; the particular phase of the power cycle in which the nearest major actor is; the policy towards that minor power of other great rival powers; the existence of multilateral security frames of cooperation enabling a stabilization of power disparity (idem: 9). Excepting the last point of his argument – where Knudsen strangely passes from a balance of power type of analysis to a collective security based one, the other points can be considered a *sumum bonum* of the entire classical realist thought relating to the minor powers issue. At the same time, in this particular case, one can notice the schizophrenia present between the argument according to which from the minor power decision's point of view they cannot be differentiated from the major ones but for the general purpose of the research, these decisions are completely insignificant. Such

an approach is actually questioning any type of research concerning the minor powers as a separate class of international actors, having their own influence and impact on the system.

Unfortunately for the great powers, Treitschke's predictions were far from being accurate. One of the most powerful tendencies of the international system in the past two centuries was one of fragmentation, of multiplication of the international actor's number, usually due to the emergency of new minor powers. Far from disappearing and far from being just simple pawns on a huge chess table where only major powers play, minor powers multiplied and their foreign policies, seldom revisionist and aggressive, frequently lacking any allies within the ranks of the major powers, turned out to be at the very origin of many international crisis or events essential for the general configuration of power equilibrium.

One of the most surprising aspects of the neo-realist inspired attempts their inability to really discuss at a system or a subsystem level the issue of minor powers. Works like Handel's or Knudsen's fail when passing from the systemic to the second level of analysis of international relations, proving an annoying lack of consistency. Things became even more surprising when noticing that Raimo Vayrynen had tried a neo-realist approach before Knudsen's article. The most important suggestion made by Vayrynen concerning the organization of the existence of the minor powers is that the balance of power is able to endorse small states security, just like a hegemony of a great powers can or the minor's lack of appeal to the imperial ambitions (Vayrynen 1983: 87-88). A conception like Knudsen's has the merit of showing only half of the glass, the modality in which great powers understand security and the minor powers politics. Actually, Knudsen later employed a definition of small states based on their inferiority in power relative to the major powers. A small state would be a unit with a relative modest territory and population (Knudsen 2002: 184), definition that I already criticized. The answers to how their political leaders act, to what is the minor power position in the international system and thus to what are their military and security policies are not to be found here.

The analysis of realist theories formulated until now on the nature of minor powers and on the type of their foreign policy showed that this attempts are either incomplete, either in complete opposition to all that we know about the behavior of this states in the international politics realm. Neither the analysis of major powers is capable to bring more light to the subject.

### Minor powers and the international system

The emerging issue at this time is to formulate a systemic-realist conception on minor powers. Structural realism, either offensive or defensive, tells us that the international system firstly defines by its structure. The system's structure consists on the type of the units (international actors), the units ordering principle and the distribution of capacities in the system (essential to which are the military and economic capacities, the latter being easily convertible into military resources).

For my research, problems became really important and truly relevant when the issue of the unit's ordering principle is being discussed. Two of these principles were analyzed by the Ancient, the Renaissance and of the 20<sup>th</sup> century realists. First, states can exist in an anarchical environment, where there is no superior authority (state authority or other) to regulate political relations, the order within the system. The second principle sees states existing within a hierarchical environment, where such a regulating authority is present and it is effective. In the anarchical environment, due to the absence of any superior authority, the state's own actions are those that form the basic interactions between units on the international scene. Being limited, the natural, human, economic or military resources will force the states to enter in conflict to redistribute them, either in order to preserve their own existence, either driven by the power will, by *the animus dominandi*. No international actor can avoid conflicts, because it will be put in an inferior state and will have to fight anyway, for its own survival. The existence of the weak and unable to adapt to this area of permanent conflict can be easily described in the terms in which the classics presented life in the natural state: ugly, brutal and short. The fact that, in spite of the fact that the ordering principle is the anarchic one, we are not permanently engaged into a gigantic interstate conflict is due to the equilibrium and alliances. Because states cannot afford not to take part in a conflict and because any victory obtained against another actor weakens their own position of power (for the victor always augments its forces by adding those of the defeated), a third party has the tendency to ally with the weakest actor in a conflict, in order to prevent lack of balance of power to appear in the system. In some cases the discouraging effect of these alliances prevents conflict initiation. In other cases when the political leader's rational calculus shows that the benefits resulted from the initiation of a conflict are bigger than the costs involved, then the war will start. The state of equilibrium appears either when there are too few rational reasons to alter it – because the balancing coalitions will turn it unprofitable for the initiating party -, either when as a result of a conflict already fought and won leads to the

installation of a hegemony too costly and dangerous, for the time being, for another power to challenge. This general logic – called by some “the logic of anarchy” – is obeyed by all international actors, big and small, because it is a behavior induced by the system and by the wish to survive.

In the case of a hierarchical system it is supposed that there is a central, sovereign authority that controls all the actors within the system. This kind of system functions very much like the internal mechanism of a state. There is a set of rules and norms - institutions, in Douglass North's terms (1990) - regulating the actor's existence. A superior authority that has both executive and legislative attributions issues these norms. The other actors do not accept these norms as a result of bilateral treaties (over which they would be sovereign, having the right to denounce them at anytime) but due to the superior power exerted by the central authority (usually called empire). Conflicts amongst actors – especially those regarding the distribution of resources – are not allowed to degenerate in open warfare but they are mediated and regulated by the empire, which decides the proper way to distribute them. Hence, in a hierarchical organization system there is no international conflicts, only internal ones. The universal empire represents the ending of all international wars.

The structural-realist analysis did not take into consideration any differentiation between types of powers up to now. The system's restraints (the distribution of capacities and the ordering principle) apply in the same manner to all international actors, regardless of their type. If one is not interested in state's foreign policy, than here is the point where any understanding of the functioning of the international system ends. But exactly these presuppositions that have made balancing to be considered as a system induced tendency determined me not to stop my elaboration of a theoretical attempt. If the balancing tendency is indeed induced by the system and thus theoretically compulsory for all actors, it is not effective against a powerful actor unless it is used by another great power. The balance's scale of the general power equilibrium fundamentally contains the powerful states, the small ones rarely being able to influence it by their own actions. But the world politics are never reduced to the main form of taken by the equilibrium of power. In various regions, subsystems of the international relations, different arrangements of peace are based on local hegemonies or on power equilibrium. The realist theory developed by starting only from taking in consideration the entire world scene, but this realm is nothing more than the sum of the state dyads and of the subsystems of political, economic and military relations created all over the planet by geography, migrations, economic exchange, ideological or religious contamination and military conflicts. And if the classical and the structural realism needs only the general power equilibrium in order to understand

and explain political processes of the international system, then for understanding state's foreign policies and the factors influencing their actions we must descend to the dyadic or the subsystem level.

**The main characteristic of the minor powers, profoundly differentiating them from the major powers, is that they do not live at a world or regional-continental scale. The interests, the power to defend them, the majority of their political, economical and ideological exchanges, the quasi-totality of their military conflicts take place exclusively at a dyadic level, with their own neighbors or at their own subsystem of international relations level. The international relations subsystems represent a coherent network of political, economical and ideological liaisons which appear especially within compact climatic or geographical areas, well delimited by natural barriers (particularly seas and oceans).** Subsystems appear as a result of the formation of patterns, specific ways, according to which are conducted for decades or centuries the political, economical and military exchanges between its political entities. In fact, current processes and ordinary international politics are taking place within these sections of the international system. International crisis and problems emerge in direct relation with them. The relations between political organisms have the tendency to be continuously conditioned by proximity, because these relations are built on the competition over the existing human, material, managerial or symbolic resources on their territories. The cheapest and thus the more rational way to acquire the needed resources is to exploit one's own territory and also the neighboring ones. Subsystems are born on one hand out of violent conflicts resulted from the fierce competition for resources, wars that create the fundamentals for a specific set of rules and power statuses in that particular region. On the other hand, they may appear as a result of the institutionalization of (even at an informal level) of the cooperation between the political entities existing in a given area. Subsystems represent a sum of actions and interests depending of a coherent geographical frame.

It will be a mistake to believe that these international realities appear as a result of any international actor's actions. The capacity to impose international norms and rules through winning decisive conflicts in order to gain control of a particular territory or the capacity to sustain a powerful commerce in that area are not amongst the small state's abilities. A subsystem is created usually as a result of the molding actions of one or a group of great powers. Either by the use of military force not followed by annexation, either by threatening with the use of force in order to impose its own set of political and economical rules, a great power transforms the unstable political

relations amongst the minor powers within a geographical area into a coherent system. Any type of a coherent sum of relations needs an organization of power around one or more centers of power, structured by their capacities and interests. To an organizing action as it is the one described above, in time is added the counterbalancing actions of the other great powers within the system, which can consider this as an illicit expansion of another great power. This intervention of the other major powers in that particular subsystem (especially of those powers neighboring the area) results in a reorganization of the systemic order.

Thus, the way in which relations in such a section of the international politics can be structured mainly refers to the subsystem's polarization, mining the number of major powers involved in maintaining the rules in the area. Thus, there are three general types of system organization. **The first type is the one in which such a construct does not involve major powers with significant interests.** This model depends on the balance of power between the minor powers within the system, is highly vulnerable to the external interventions of great powers and can survive exclusively as long as any major power will not consider the states forming that sum of relations as having a strategic importance in relation with its plans.

**The second type implies a single great power charged with establishing and maintaining the set of rules governing the political and economical life of the minor powers in the area.** In this case we encounter a reality seldom studied, but usually misunderstood when extended at a world scale, that of the subsystem hegemony. In wartime or during periods of peace, this model of ordering the relations within a system essentially means that minor power's foreign and military policies are filtrated (or even are controlled by) by the local hegemonic power. There is not a single type of hegemonic dominance. Sometimes, when looking at clear cases of subsystems well defined geographically, the hegemonic power may even not be present with significant military forces in the area. The powerful and also inexpensive domination of the sole great power is due to both its isolation from the other great powers and to its undisputed supremacy in the area. In other cases, especially when that subsystem has a strategic importance for the hegemonic power because of its proximity to other great powers, then the hegemon's massive military, economical and political presence is required on the minor's territory. And, if the hegemonic power is also a revolutionary state, carrier of a theory referring to the state's rightful organization, then its domination could extent onto other domains of the minor's activity. The revolutionary hegemonic power may try to shape its



satellites in its own form, affecting their inner social and political structures, their fundamental laws or their economic organization.

**The third type of subsystem organization involves the presence of a balance of power in the area, sustained by a group of great powers that are either competing with each other or are cooperating temporarily within that particular geographic area.** The minor powers, although do not have the freedom conferred by the first type of organization, are influencing in an important manner both the ordinary local politics and the general power equilibrium within that subsystem. Their alliance strategies are extremely relevant for the entire regional dynamics, because a certain kind of alignment can alter – sometimes in a radical fashion – the whole subsystem equilibrium. The way in which an effective, visionary and intelligent diplomacy of a minor power acts in order to shape the foreign policy of one or a group of major powers can radically alter if not even change the subsystemic order. Within this model of organizing interstate relations, the minor powers live in three separate spheres of power equilibrium. Within the first one, they are affirming and defending their position and interests in relation with the other minor powers. In the second one, they are effectively and significantly part of the local balance of power, from which they can obtain (if they are skilful enough) important resources in order to reshape relations within the first sphere. In the third one, that of the global balance of power, the minor powers exist only through the major groups that they are aligned with and they cannot exert – by themselves or not even in a group of minor powers – a significant impact on the system. One must not imagine that subsystem order based on a balance of power can only take one shape. Essentially, she depends on the relations between the major powers within the system, on their degree of engagement in relation to the region, on the type, extent and accent of their interests in relation to the minors in that geographical space. Also, it is extremely important to know their relation with the general order existing in the international system – if they are revisionist or status quo powers or if they are classical or revolutionary powers.

What is the relation between minor powers and these types of ordering the subsystems to which they can belong? Less important states are limited by a number of factors in their attempt to constitute and consistently follow certain international politics. First we have their own capacities – especially the economic and military ones – that are keeping them prisoner within the subsystem relations. Even if this type of state can be able to trade at a global scale and sometimes to project military force at a considerable distance from its homeland, this becomes possible only due to the fact that the powers dominating those terrestrial, naval and aerial commercial routes are allowing its

passage. Its own wealth, no matter how important, stands at the mercy of those forming and imposing within the entire system the rules of political and economical exchange. The minor power status can be surpassed only by following a centralized policy aimed at transforming the state into a war machine that will protect (and also will be fed by) a more and more strong economy. More than that, this only can become possible if the power gaps between major powers are widening, fact that can only mean one thing: this endeavor depends strictly on the existence of some windows of opportunity that can close at anytime. Until then, most minor powers will be prisoners of their own capacities and geography. They will exist within balanced subsystems (due to the fact that the first model of systemic polarization is rarely seen and it proves to be also highly unstable), in which they would have to shape their politics in relation to the existence of a great power having its own particular sets of interests in the region. They could also exist in subsystems dominated by a hegemonic power, where they will have to face a domination from which it will be almost impossible to escape by themselves.

Though, the minor power is not an essentially different international actor compared with a major one. The only difference comes from its position. Being like-units, it will have the same approach and understanding of the international realities as great powers do. The same security dilemma, even if in its case the alliance strategies will weigh much more than the arming strategies will trouble its existence. It will be a state substantially preoccupied with maintaining and strengthening its own security, even if by that it understands either the state's preservation, its borders or of its institutions, or it will chose instead the safety of the life and properties of its citizens. The politics that will forever be out of reach for any minor power are those based on the absolute maximization of power and on the pursuit of absolute revisionist interests(1).

(1) Some readers might notice the resemblance between the theory sketched above and the one proposed by Buzan and Weaver (2003). This resemblance is superficial, but some things need to be cleared right now. First of all, Buzan and Weaver build a theory of regional security complexes (RSC) based on realist **and** constructivist approaches. I tried to build an **exclusively realist** perspective concerning minor powers. Secondly, the RSC` s are "imagined" (constructed) territorial units, transitory in time. International subsystems are, in my view, historical and geographical realities with a significantly longer life-span than the RSC` s. Thirdly, the RSC` s can be studied as such because they are defined as specific security areas, impenetrable to foreign influences. The

subsystems allow interpenetration and they are much larger (they are not defined solely in security terms, but as relative continual and integrated regions of political, economic, military and religious exchanges. Moreover, any resemblance disappears in matters related to classification, as Buzan and Weaver use relative unclear distinctions between global powers, regional, minor and superpowers which I do not find necessary or justified. There are some resemblances regarding predictions related to balanced or unipolar subsystems and in the historical methodology employed. However, contrary to what I argue, Buzan and Weaver argue against the participation of minor powers in the general balance of power in a multipolar RSC, which is another significant difference.

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