

## RAZGLEDI

## POLITICAL GEOGRAPHY OF SOUTHERN EUROPE

AVTOR

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ABSTRACT

**Political geography of Southern Europe**

Southern Europe carries a particular value content, therefore it is problematic to accurately define it. There are ten different states in this area (Andorra, both Cypruses, Greece, Malta, Italy, Portugal, San Marino, Spain, and Vatican). They form four characteristic groups. These are relict states, de-colonized states, formulating national states, decaying imperial centres. In this paper, I have given you a view on Southern Europe political geographic issues.

KEYWORDS

relict states, de-colonised states, formulating national states, decaying imperial centres

IZVLEČEK

**Politična geografija Južne Evrope**

Južno Evropo določajo različne vsebine, zato jo je težko enoznačno opredeliti. Ob razpadu bipolarega sveta se je oblikovalo več nasprotnih teorij o njeni prihodnosti. Tu leži deset različnih držav (Andora, oba Cipra, Grčija, Italija, Malta, Portugalska, San Marino, Španija in Vatikan), ki smo jih razdelili v štiri skupine: reliktnne države, dekolonizirane države, nacionalne države in nekdanje imperialne države.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

Južna Evropa, reliktnne države, dekolonizirane države, nacionalne države, nekdanje imperialne države

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## 1 Space-forming factors and problems of nomenclature

The subject of this study, the topographically based spatial unit Southern Europe carries a particular value content, therefore it is problematic to accurately define it. Different variations for the division of Europe categorize different groups of countries and territories under this label.

There is not a single state – maybe Italy is an exception – which has not ever been left out from the category »Southern Europe« by any of the dividing principles. Extremely problematic are the cases of the two Mediterranean island states, primarily that of Cyprus which country is not grouped even with Europe by most of the geographic studies (Cyprus is most commonly referred to as belonging to the Middle East.). This calls the attention to the big dilemma in geography whether the Mediterranean Sea is a divider or separator or formulator of space.

The ancient Greeks called the area around the Mediterranean Sea an »inner sea« as if distinguishing it from the Atlantic Ocean. Its basin called by them »Oikumene« was considered identical with the known and inhabited world. From the 5<sup>th</sup> century on it was also referred to as the »inter-terranean sea« (Mediterranean Sea), but until the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the name »mediterranean« was used as adjective, attribute. This was the time when it became a proper name (»the Mediterranean«), to differentiate it from »inter-terranean seas« of other continents, at the same time emphasizing Europe's world hegemony.

The major nomenclatural characteristics appearing in the geographical literature of various nations depict distinctive national or imperial perception types. According to different national perceptions the regions of the Mediterranean Sea constitute a whole under the name »Mediterranean«, especially in the Italian and French approaches, while they are seldom referred to as such in the Anglo-Saxon literature or it is recognized differently (meaning South Portugal, South Spain and South Italy, i. e. Mediterranean cultural areas. Its major parts, which are spatial categories frequently intersecting each other (Eastern and Western Mediterranean; European Mediterranean; counter-Mediterranean; Latin, Greek and Arabic Mediterranean; Maghreb and Mashrik; Middle East and Moyen Orient ...) represent different values and different interests. Even the individual categories themselves have different spatial and value contents. For example, several theories exist in various items of Anglo-Saxon literature for the territorial category »Middle East«. Minimally, it is interpreted as reaching from Turkey to Yemen, from Israel to Iran, while its maximal perception includes territories from Morocco to the Indian Kashmir, from East Trakhia to Somalia.

Which are, then, those space-forming factors that stand in the background of the mentioned nomenclatural characteristics? In what way do they have their effects: strengthening or weakening each other, making borders, structuring space?

The large southern peninsulas and islands of Europe occupy a specific role among other territories of the continent. Within a spatial category partially extending over our continent, namely the Mediterranean, they have been parts of a civilizational core area in which the fundamental civilizational achievements of European culture (Greek philosophy and arts, Roman law and state organization, Christianity) were born. However, this core area was not limited to European territories, instead it included North-African and West-Asian regions as well. Its focal territories were Palestine, Egypt, the Balkan and the Apennine peninsula. In the center of Mackinder's »World Island« where three continents and three civilizations met, the relationship between various European, North-African and West-Asian national communities was economically, culturally and politically always lively, though varying in intensity. Different state formations and empires appearing time after time usually expanded their supremacy in the Mediterranean to include territories of more than one continent, and were able to spread their special cultural features. The different space-forming factors were not in alignment with continental borders, making the spatial structure of the region entangled. They created religious and ethnic anomalies that were basis for both co-operation and political conflicts.

The most striking and really important space-forming factor is religion. Fernand Braudel, one of the most distinguished specialists of the Mediterranean, understands the essence of the region around

the Mediterranean Sea as the place where three major religions and three major civilizations co-exist.

»... *The Mediterranean ... is three cultural communities, three huge and vigorous civilisations, three monsters always ready to display their teeth, three personalities with indeterminate fate, which have been present in their places for centuries and centuries if not for ever. These three civilisations are the West, the Islamic world and the orthodox culture...*« (Braudel 1998).

If the fourth one, that of the Jewish, is also considered (which is a much concentrated, smaller community, yet playing a key role in some of today's political geographic issues), the picture will be complete.

Southern Europe, thus, is made up of the Latin people through whom the western Christianity connects to the region, and the eastern Christianity the linkage system of which introduces the Russian Empire to the region. The Jewish connect their Diaspora, especially the large and influential American Jewish communities, to the Mediterranean.

The ethnic picture is much more confusing. In Southern Europe mostly Indo-European peoples live, with the being an important exception. On the southern coast, however, various Arabic dialects are being spoken. The main exceptions are the »Ivrit« and Berber languages. Absolutely different is the Turkish population, which does not fill the space homogeneously. A few other minor languages are spoken in Asia Minor, such as Kurdish and Armenian.

North and South differ in their political systems, too. In Europe parliamentarist democracies exist, while in the south various authoritarian system types have evolved. The major exception is the state of Israel in the South.

Geographers and historians advocating the principles of the uniformity of the Mediterranean have derived their arguments from climatic similarities. These are the basis of the once similar but nowadays diverging agriculture in the Mediterranean, producing for example grapes, citrus fruits or olives. The latter gave the region the name »olive belt«.

In addition to agriculture other fields of economy where similarities occur, are referred to among arguments trying to prove the uniformity of the region. Such are, for example, the high degree of dependence on trade, the scarcity of natural resources, the manufactural or small industrial features of the industry. Once the entire basin was characterized with these features, but now there are significant exceptions. During its long history, its commercial transit function was always outstandingly important; this feature is undoubtedly specific for the region.

Another common factor is the similar appearance and role of human settlements. This feature originates from the similarity of climate and the mutual exchange of constructional knowledge during times when traditional building materials were in use. Industrialization, however, has launched a new type of homogenization specific not only for this region.

Also, it was raised that a separate Mediterranean race existed, but this assumption seems very weakly founded.

It appears that besides significant distinctive features there is a high degree of interdependence in the region. The Mediterranean Sea, due to its size, is an interconnector rather than a separator. There are many indications that Southern Europe's relationship system is very powerful towards the south coast of the Mediterranean. Societies, economies and states of the region are similar mostly in their problems. They have to stand similar or identical challenges which fact can create a commonness of interests whether the countries need to handle poverty, migration or their common security.

Despite the ever-increasing interdependence throughout the world, the most important space-forming factor as seen from the viewpoint of political geography, has remained to be state sovereignty. In Southern Europe 10 such geographic formations exist (1997) but it is not very likely that it remains so. Even today the state corpuses of countries are held more or less in balance by the sophisticated variation of centrifugal and centripetal forces. In some states the proportion of centrifugal forces grows markedly; nevertheless, there are indications of possible new state establishment, too, in the foreseeable future.

## 2 Political geographic problems on the state level

In our age organizational structures above state level gain space, primarily at the expense of national states. The state level, despite being unquestionably forced to the background, continues to exist as one framework of civil existence and one important organizational form of political spaces. Thus, it appears reasonable to look over the inner political spatial structure of countries in the region. In Table 1, the 11 studied countries are grouped based on the way they were formed. Since their genesis had great influence on their inner spatial structure, they are looked at in such separation.

Table 1: South European states and their genesis types (Pap 1997).

relict states	de-colonised states	formulating national states	decaying imperial centres
Andorra	Cyprus	Greece	Portugal
San Marino	Cyprus Turkish Republic	Italy	Spain
Vatican	Malta		

The first group contains micro- and relict countries with medieval origin. Up to this point in the present study these three states have not been dealt with, in order to avoid seeing distorted ratios. Therefore, in the followings, the conditions of their formation are briefly touched upon.

The first reliable written relic from the Andorra Suzerainty (a French-Spanish joint suzerainty) dates back to 837 A. D. The local legend believes that the country was established with the help of Charles the Great. The unique form of state originates from 1278. The majority of the inhabitants are Catalan, while the rest are French or Spanish speaking. Only a small proportion of the people living there are Andorran citizens, for there are many immigrants because of the favourable economic conditions. It is traditionally considered as a buffer zone state. It could only survive as a result of its neutrality and cleverly balancing politics. The French President and the Bishop of the Spanish Seo de Urguel together as heads-of-state, have the power through their representatives.

Traditionally it is believed that the *San Marino Republic* was founded in 301 A. D. They consider themselves the oldest republic in the world. Their first Constitution dates back to 1263. Many emigrants (e. g. Garibaldi) took refuge there during the Risorgimento. The country did not wish to join the Italian monarchy; a treaty of protection (1862) secured its segregation. It was occupied by the Germans in 1944

Table 2: Some characteristic data of South European states (Pap 1997).

Country	Area (km <sup>2</sup> )	Population (1000)	GDP per capita (USD, 1996)	Biggest nationality and its proportion	Official language	Expenses on defense (1996)
Andorra	468	73	16,200	Catalan 60%	Catalan	no data
Cyprus	5,896	575	13,000	Greek 96%	Greek	5.6%
Cyprus	3,355	171	3,900	Turkish 98%	Turkish	no data
Greece	131,940	10,539	9,500	Greek 98%	Greek	4.6%
Malta	320	376	12,000	Maltese	Maltan, English	1.0%
Italy	301,230	57,460	18,700	Italian ~90%	Italian	1.9%
Portugal	92,080	9,865	11,000	Portuguese 98%	Portuguese	2.4%
San Marino	60	25	15,800	Italian	Italian	1.0%
Spain	504,750	39,181	14,300	Spanish 74%	Spanish	1.4%
Vatican	0.44	4.5	no data	no data	Latin	no data

for only a short time. It is inhabited by Italians and »San Marino people«. Their language is a dialect of Italian spoken in Emilia-Romagna.

The Vatican is a theocratic monarchy; remains of the medieval papal state, existing in its today form as a result of the 1929 Lateran treaty embedded in the 1948 Constitution. The enormous prestige of the Catholic Church, Vatican's diplomacy, and its financial, cultural, educational and scientific institutions ensure the tiny monarchy, hidden in the inner city of Rome, such great significance, which is in contrast with the size of the state. During the fights for the union of Italy a federal state type lead by the Pope was raised as an alternative which, as many thought, could be a more adequate state organization for Italian territories that had long developed in separate state formations.

The second group contains the late British colonies in the region. Malta appears almost insignificant if its size and population are seen, but it is strategically valuable. Available natural resources such as inhabitable space, arable land, drinking and irrigating water, and minerals, are sparse. Despite the barrenness of the islands and the need for considerable food import, the country has the highest population density value in Europe (1130/km<sup>2</sup>). The problematic accessibility of water is a very serious issue. Out of the natural resources it is the pleasant climate and the warm sea that the country can rely on. Tourism plays a fundamental role in the economy.

Malta's inhabitants are very mixed, owing to the multiple takeovers of power and the resulting oppression. The influences of Arabs, Normans, Catalans, French, Italians, Greeks and the British are all perceptible. Their religion is Roman Catholic, but they speak Maltese language, which is of Arabic origin with neo-Latin influence. The state's territory extends over a total of five islands out of which three are inhabited. Their African and Italian bonds are stronger, while the links to the British are weaker. Seventy-five percents of their foreign trade are with the European Union. Italy, alone, has a 30% share from Malta's export.

The center for economic, cultural and political life is on the main island Malta, more precisely on the capital Valletta. The state of Malta, taking advantage of its central position and multilateral relation system, exhibits a diplomatic activity the significance of which is far greater than what follows from the size of the state. The country's neutrality declared in the constitution is one obstacle to its European integration. A considerable proportion of the population is against joining the EU and the NATO. This attitude is pronounced in the concept of »Mediterranean Switzerland«. The essence of the concept is the aim of playing an important regional role through developing a powerful financial and service industrial sector and by relying on the excellent relations with the Maghreb and North Africa.

On *Cyprus* the organizations of two states are present today, maybe only temporarily. Natural resources are more abundant here than in the other island state, but the structure of the economy is similar. Here, too, tourism plays an important role. Besides, the Greek Cypriot financial service sector is of regional importance. There is considerable difference between the developmental levels of the two halves of the island: GDP in the Turkish north is 3.900 USD per capita, while in the Greek south it is 13.000 USD (1996).

Its population, also similarly to that of Malta, is mixed. As a consequence of multiple changes of power, immigrants arrived in the island from various areas, but, as opposed to the case of Malta, they have not melted together ethnically and language-wise. The majority of the population is Greek Orthodox Christian speaking Greek but characterized with a particular Cypriot identity. People of the Turkish minority (18%) are Muslims. In the north where the majority of the Turkish have lived, a Turkish-Cypriot state was formed after the *coup d'état* organized by the Greek in 1974 and the Turkish invasion following it. The war evoked a vast exodus with the Turks fleeing to the north, Greek Cypriotes to the south. By today the two states have turned ethnically »pure«. The intention to permanently stay in the place is reflected in the north by the »Turkization« of settlements with Greek names.

The two states are separated by a special border, a demarcation line. This is the so-called »Attila-line«, »green line« or UN buffer zone. Its width varies from a couple of meters to a few kilometers, and is controlled by UN troops. A peculiar political geographic phenomenon is a Turkish enclave embedded in the Greek Cypriot territory.

As early as in the 1960s–1970s, the cantonization of the then uniform country was raised (another concept of »Mediterranean Switzerland«. After the breakaway, several solution versions were developed. The Turks in minority, with the aim of securing equal rights for themselves, have come up with federal and con-federal ideas, which would mean high degree of sovereignty and keeping Turkish military forces on the island. This idea is not accepted by the Greek Cypriotes who suggest such a version of federal system, which gives the most important authorities to the central government.

The most powerful state of the region is *Italy* which country, through its northern territories, belongs to the European central regions. The state territorially consists of two large islands with the traditions of separation (Sicily and Sardinia), and the mainland part that has evolved throughout the centuries in different forms of state organization. Its most valuable territory is the productive land in the plain of the river Po. Its territory possesses excellent positional energy, owing to its exits on two seas, its cols in the north leading to Western and Central Europe, and passage routes connecting it to Eastern-Central and Eastern Europe. This plain is the core area of the Italian state, the place from where the union of the country started out, and where the economic centre of the country, in the Milan–Torino–Genoa triangle, exists today. The central and north-eastern part of the country went through a forced closing up in the 1980s. The southern territories and the islands (the so-called *Mezzogiorno*), except from a few local success stories, have not been able to reduce their backwardness, despite powerful support from the state and European Union.

The country's borders are marked by seacoasts and high mountain ridges. Borders on the north-east and the northwest are the ones that showed instability during the past 140 years. Intended as the completion of the *Risorgimento*, an attempt was made to integrate Italians living beyond the borders into Italy by means of war. On maps of state border permanence, a lasting political border within the body of the state can be pointed out, used to be the northern border of the Naples Monarchy for centuries. Unfortunately, it had posteriority, due to its coincidence with the northern boundary of the South Developmental Fund, which has been liquidated by now.

The capital is Rome, the city almost 2800 years of age. Primarily it is an important religious, cultural and administrative centre. The surrounding province Lazio is a core area of ancient origin. With the uniform Italy taking shape – resulting from the large number of national symbols and from space-rational considerations –, the function of the capital was translocated from Torino to Florence (1861), than from Florence to Rome (1870).

In addition to differences in the economic development of the north and the south, the Italian population is characterized with a cultural and language-based north-south dividedness. Regional identities also play an important role. Nationalities of significant numbers are found primarily in the north, along the state border. A French population (*Valdostans*) is present in Val d'Aosta, Germans live in Trentino-Alto-Adige. Smaller territories are occupied by Catalans (on Sardinia), Albanians and Greeks (South-Italy), Slovenians and Ladins (in Friuli-Venezia Giulia). Separatist intentions also find grounds on the islands.

The public administrative division of the country (French model) was, at first, subordinated to centralizational efforts, in an attempt to balance for centrifugal tendencies continuing to exist after the union. When Christian democratic movements were born and the theory of subsidiarity was worked out, regional peculiarities came to be considered in the spatial structuring of public administration. The constitution produced in 1948 includes decrees about the creation of regions (*regione*), but at that time so-called autonomous regions were founded in only five such places that were in peripheric, nationality-inhabited territories most seriously threatened by separatist intentions: Sicily, Sardinia, Val d'Aosta, Trentino-Alto-Adige, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia. The rest of the regions were created only in the beginning of the 1970s, following the neutral-left-wing governing during the 1960s. The regions were given more and more competences during the course of time. Regional autonomist, secessionist political powers gained importance. The most important among these is the Northern League with the aim of the northern territories seceding from the country under the name Padania.

There are strong centrifugal as well as centripetal forces inside the state corpus. The main centrifugal ones are: peoples of the peninsula have lived within the same state for a historically short period; during the era of the Risorgimento the state's territory was united only, while the nation was not; differences in language and culture are significant; the core area has a polarized location; the Rome center and the core area possess different levels of quality which induces political fights; economic developmental differences between the North and the South are very striking. Main centripetal powers are: natural borders that are clear and settled, only in few cases are they questioned; the country-wide interconnecting effect of the infrastructure networks and the micro-texture of the economy (an important economic interest); the state idea being strongly present in the majority of the Italians; the cohesive effects of Italian middle-power ambitions and the European integrational process. The resultant of the above forces points towards a federal type of transformation.

In the case of *Greece* the state's territorial structuring is similar. It is striking how strong the centripetal forces holding the country together are. Its population, mostly as an outcome of ethnic purges and population exchanges, is almost homogenous: the percentage of the Greeks is 96% and that of the Greek Catholics is 97%. Its capital, Athens, concentrates an extremely large proportion of national symbols. The city has outstanding demographic significance: approximately 40% of the country's population lives in the Athens agglomeration. Pyreus, being the largest port of the country, is an adequate contributor to the functions of the capital, since a considerable proportion of the country is made up of islands. The system of public administration is extremely centralized which further strengthens the position of the capital. De-centralization and the establishment of regions have been started in recent years, induced primarily by foreign, European unionist influence.

Among the centrifugal forces it is territorial-developmental differences, and the political culture split along political ideologies and overloaded with civil war traditions, that can be considered as cardinal.

State borders have kept changing during the past 170 years, with the territory of the country growing. Even at present, there are borders and territories over which the country is in debate with its neighbours. Originating from territorial issues, the situation is tense mainly with Turkey and Macedonia (FYR). The historic experience of the country produces a feeling of being threatened. Greece spends more than twice as much on defense as the NATO average.

As it has been mentioned already, its situation is unique mainly from the strategic point of view. The country's overland connection to the NATO and the EU, especially its energy supply, is problematic.

In the fourth group includes states with grandiose past, having have lost their imperial structures only in recent historic times. *Spain* is a country situated where Europe meets Africa, the Atlantic Ocean meets the Mediterranean Sea. Its territory can be considered as the crossroads of peoples. Despite several occasions of oppression, its population has preserved their consciousness of Iberian origin and prominence.

The Iberian peninsula is isolated from the rest of Europe by the Pyrenees. However, Gibraltar in the south connects the country to Africa rather than separates it. The African effect has left notable traces on the history of the country, as well as on almost every field of its life today.

The basic *dilemma* of the peninsula is the *simultaneous uniformity and dividedness*. Primarily as a result of geographic features, there are great differences between the arid, poor and isolating inner territories (Meseta, mountain region), and the rich, productive, open coastal areas divided by ports. Attempts for union usually came from inner, Castilian territories, while peoples in coastal areas tried to establish sovereign states during their histories. The Portuguese did succeed in doing this, while similar intentions of the Basques and Catalans could not achieve permanent success.

Political efforts to somehow balance centripetal and centrifugal forces existing within the Spanish state have relied both on centralization and de-centralization during the course of centuries. The constitution of 1978, as a sign of admitting that the united Spanish state with Castilian dominance could not be created, gave extensive autonomy (17 *comunidades autónomas*) within the framework of the state, to peoples living in Spain. It was a way of trying to close off any opportunities for separatist organizations, with remarkable success.

The situation of Madrid, the capital of the country in the geometric center of Spain informs us about space-rational considerations as well as unionist intentions. The development of the city into a financial, commercial and industrial center, and the radial structure of the country's railway network have all strengthened the position of the capital.

The outside borders of the country belong to the most permanent ones in Europe, either we look at the Spanish-Portuguese or the Spanish-French borders.

Territorial debates do exist currently: with Morocco and the United Kingdom. Less than 29.000 people, mostly Spanish speaking, live on the 6.5 km<sup>2</sup>s of the British colony Gibraltar. Owing to the inhabitants' specific and common historic experience, they have a strong consciousness of identity, and regard Gibraltar not as Spanish but as their own. Debates with Morocco go on for the possession of the towns Ceuta and Melilla on the African coast, and three islands (Islas Chafarinas, Penon de Alhucemas, Penon de Vélez de la Gomera), all of which are claimed by Morocco.

The group of the Canary Islands off the coast of Africa, about 1.000 kilometres from Cádiz, also belongs to Spain. Because of its isolation and particular history, strong communal consciousness has evolved in the inhabitants. Efforts to win autonomy were made in the 1960s by the Spanish-speaking islanders originating mainly from Andalusia, who consider themselves to be descendants of the gaucho natives and, thus, regard the Spanish as colonizers.

*Portugal*, a country that can also be categorized as Mediterranean *sensu lato*, is one with peripheral situation (»Europe's sill«). Its territory is compact; only two groups of islands being two autonomous regions (the Madeiras and the Azori Islands) cause some problems in the administration.

The mainland part of the country has a special spatial structure: population density, economic activity and the number of settlements grow towards the coastal areas. It is definitely a marine state: its inner, mainland connections to Spain have improved only recently, as processes of integration advanced. Administratively its continental territories are divided into 18 districts (*distritos*). Macau, the only remaining piece of Portugal's colonial empire has a peculiar situation. According to the agreement with China, it will return under Chinese supremacy on 20<sup>th</sup> December 1999.

The population in scattered settlements and in villages is outstandingly dense in the northern territories falling into the oceanic climate zone. This is the country's core area, from where the liberation war against the Arabs was started. As the resources of the region (excellent conditions for agriculture) started to become devaluated, emigration commenced, at first to the colonies, mainly to Brazil, recently to France and Luxemburg. The population becomes less dense towards the south, with the economy becoming more and more of Mediterranean nature (big peasant-towns, latifundia).

The country's borders are uniquely lasting, having been unchanged since the medieval times. Their relation with Spain is traditionally characterized with competition. During the course of history the fear of being annexed to Spain has turned up time after time. The country was dominated by the Spanish between 1580 and 1640 in the form of a Personal Union. It became divided under a Spanish-French deal in 1807. As a result of the European integrational processes, Portuguese economy, which formerly used to be only very weakly connected to the Spanish economy, is rapidly being brought under Spanish influence.

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#### 4 **Povzetek: Politična geografija Južne Evrope**

(prevedel Drago Perko)

Južna Evropa je zibelka evropske civilizacije. Njen izraziti kulturni vpliv se je širil po celem svetu zlasti do 16. stoletja, njegna strateška lega ob pomembnih svetovnih morskih poteh pa se je ohranila do danes.

Ob razpadu bipolarnega sveta se je oblikovalo več teorij o prihodnosti sveta, nekatere med njimi se ukvarjajo tudi s prihodnostjo južnoevropskega območja. Ena od njih, Huntingtonova »Vojna civilizacij«, vidi Sredozemsko morje kot mejno reko med sovražnima muslimansko in krščansko kulturo na različnih bregovih. V nasprotju z njo koncept »Evropa-Sredozemlje« predvideva sodelovanje, povezovanje in celo združevanje tega območja.

Južnoevropske države smo razdelili v štiri skupine: reliktno države (Andora, San Marino in Vatikan), dekolonizirane države (Malta in Ciper), nacionalne države (Italija in Grčija) in nekdanje imperialne države (Španija in Portugalska).

