

## **DIVERGING PATTERNS OF EURASIAN GEOPOLITICS: SOVEREIGNTY, IDENTITY, AND CONNECTIVITY IN A FRAGMENTED ORDER**

### *Editorial Foreword*

The comforting illusion of a linear and converging world order, which defined the immediate post-Cold War era, has effectively dissolved. We have entered a volatile interregnum characterized not merely by multipolar disorder, but by diverging paradigms of post-modernity or, perhaps, neo-medievalism. The term multipolarity has become so ubiquitous that it risks losing its analytical edge due to a profound fragmentation of the very mechanisms that once governed international life. In this new kinetic reality, the traditional binary of East versus West is increasingly insufficient to explain the complex behaviors of states. Instead, we are witnessing the rise of a quantum ecosystem, where middle and small powers are no longer content to act as passive recipients of great power politics. They have become active architects of their own survival.

This issue of the *YSU Journal of International Affairs* is dedicated to mapping this uncharted terrain. The contributions gathered here, spanning the Balkans, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, and the broader Eurasian rimland, suggest that the modern state is currently fighting a war on three distinct fronts: the normative, the ontological, and the geoeconomic. The articles in this volume collectively argue that sovereignty is no longer a static legal status guaranteed by the UN Charter. Rather, it is a continuous and high-stakes performance enacted through the modernization of national identity, the careful calibration of active hedging strategies, and the physical pouring of concrete to reroute global trade arteries.

We begin our inquiry by interrogating the fraying edges of the European project and the evident crisis of normative integration. For decades, the normative power of the European Union, its ability to shape the world through attraction rather than coercion, was the gravitational force of the Eurasian periphery. However, as Adrian Brisku and Klodiana Beshku demonstrate in their comparative study “A Tale of Two States,” this gravitational pull is neither uniform nor inevitable. By juxtaposing the trajectory of Albania against that of Georgia, Brisku and Beshku offer a sophisticated critique of the *Brussels Effect*. They argue that the success of

Europeanization is not dependent solely on the technocratic conditionality of the EU, but relies heavily on the alignment of domestic elite interests. In Albania, the normative framework of the EU anchored a successful, albeit difficult, transition because local elites viewed compliance as a mechanism for their own legitimacy. In contrast, the Georgian case reveals the fragility of this influence when confronted with a domestic elite that views European oversight as an existential threat to its power retention. This dynamic is further complicated by the looming coercive shadow of the Russian Federation, which offers an alternative model of governance. This article serves as a crucial corrective to the literature on European integration, suggesting that without deep local buy-in, normative power evaporates, leaving states drifting in a geopolitical grey zone where neither Western promises nor Eastern threats are fully decisive.

If the external anchor of Western integration is loosening, states are forced to look inward to secure their foundations. The subsequent two articles form a powerful dialectic on how national identity is constructed and utilized in the post-Soviet space. Violetta Manukyan provides the optimistic thesis in “Reconstruction and Modernization of National Identity as Catalysts for Stateness.” Moving beyond the primordialist view of nationalism as ancient folklore, Manukyan treats identity as a functional infrastructure of the modern state. She posits that in the post-Soviet vacuum, the state is often an empty shell unless filled by a modernized and cohesive national narrative. Her analysis suggests that stateness, or the institutional capacity to govern, coordinate, and command loyalty, is downstream from identity. When identity is successfully modernized and linked to civic values, it strengthens the immune system of the state against external subversion and internal decay. It transforms the population from passive subjects into active citizens who are invested in the survival of the political unit.

However, the construction of identity has a darker and more volatile mirror image, which Anzhela Mnatsakanyan dissects in her harrowing analysis, “Manufacturing the Enemy.” Focusing on the case of post-Soviet Azerbaijan, Mnatsakanyan explores the phenomenon of negative nationalism. She argues that the regime in Baku has consolidated its authority not through the positive civic modernization described by Manukyan but through the institutionalization of Armenophobia. This is not merely a study of prejudice. It is an analysis of authoritarian statecraft. Mnatsakanyan demonstrates how the regime utilizes ontological insecurity, the fear of the dissolution of the self, to manufacture an existential external enemy. By embedding hatred into the educational and media apparatus, the state generates a rallying effect that compensates for democratic deficits. This creates a dangerous paradox for the region, where the domestic stability of the regime has become dependent on the perpetual maintenance of external conflict. The result is a security

dilemma where peace becomes politically costly for the ruling elite, locking the South Caucasus into a cycle of violence that traditional diplomacy struggles to break. Whether the security dilemma in the South Caucasus could be transformed into a security community, as in the case of Europe, is still a matter of diplomatic pursuit of peace.

As states stabilize or manipulate their internal identities, they must simultaneously navigate a hostile external environment. The issue moves geographically eastward to Central Asia, where the passive strategy of balancing is being replaced by something far more dynamic. Fatima Kukeyeva offers a groundbreaking assessment of this shift in “From Balancing to Active Hedging.” For decades, Kazakhstan was the exemplar of multi-vector diplomacy as it passively balanced Russian, Chinese, and Western interests. Kukeyeva argues that the 2022 invasion of Ukraine shattered this equilibrium and forced Astana to adopt active hedging. This is a strategy of calculated risk management. It involves diversifying security portfolios and deepening engagement with middle players, such as Turkey and the Gulf states, to offset the unpredictability of the Great Powers. The analysis provided by Kukeyeva is vital for understanding the agency of the Global South. She shows that Kazakhstan is not merely trying to hide from the storm of great power competition but is actively building new shelters to effectively decouple its economic survival from its traditional security guarantor. The shift from balancing to hedging represents a maturation of statecraft where the goal is no longer just neutrality but strategic diversification.

Strategic autonomy, however, requires more than diplomatic agility. It requires physical exit routes. In the 21st century, the map of the world is being redrawn not by borders but by supply chains. The subsequent articles turn to the hardware of this new world order: transport corridors and connectivity. Seyedhasan Mirfakhraei zooms in on the critical bilateral axis in the South Caucasus in “Goeconomics, Connectivity, and Strategic Partnership: Iran and Armenia in Eurasia’s New Order.” Mirfakhraei posits that for both Tehran and Yerevan, connectivity is not a commercial luxury but a geopolitical imperative. For a sanctioned Iran and a blockaded Armenia, their shared border is a vital lifeline. Mirfakhraei analyzes their cooperation not just as trade but as resistance to isolation. He argues that the North-South connectivity between these two ancient nations acts as a stabilizer in a region increasingly dominated by East-West energy corridors. This proves that infrastructure projects are arguably the most effective form of security policy available to small states. By physically linking their economies, these nations create a mutual dependency that serves as a buffer against regional instability.

Expanding the lens to the continental level, Sandeep Tripathi and Urvashi Singh investigate the macro-strategic shifts in “International North-South



Transport Corridor: A Renewed Horizon of Trade Connectivity.” The INSTC has long been a theoretical project, but Tripathi and Singh argue that the geopolitical rupture between Russia and the West has catalyzed it into reality. Their analysis details how New Delhi and Moscow are operationalizing this corridor to bypass the chokeholds of the traditional and Western-dominated maritime routes. The authors present the INSTC as a material manifestation of multipolarity. It is a concrete attempt to rewire the global economy. This is not just about moving goods faster; it is about creating a trade architecture that is immune to the sanctions and leverage of the Euro-Atlantic powers. The authors suggest that the successful operationalization of this corridor would represent a significant blow to the ability of Western powers to use trade choke points as levers of political coercion.

The issue concludes by looking toward the future of hegemony and returning to the timeless nature of diplomatic practice. In his Discussion Article, José Miguel Alonso Trabanco offers a provocative theoretical intervention titled “Bitcoin as a Potential Hegemonic Watershed.” Moving the debate from physical trade routes to the digital ether, Trabanco challenges the bedrock of the current international economic order: the US dollar. He asks whether a stateless and decentralized currency could act as the catalyst for the next great hegemonic transition in the Global Political Economy. The argument presented by Trabanco is distinct from typical financial analysis because he treats Bitcoin as a geopolitical variable. He challenges the reader to consider whether the revisionist powers of the future will not be states seeking territory, but digital protocols seeking to decapitate the financial power of the existing hegemon. It is a bold and forward-looking piece that forces us to question the very nature of power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. If money becomes decoupled from the state, the traditional levers of international relations may become obsolete.

Finally, we ground these high-level theories in the practical realities of the negotiation table. Ruben Melkonyan provides a lucid review of *The Power of Negotiation* by Seyyed Abbas Araghchi. Reviewing this work by the Iranian veteran diplomat and current Minister of Foreign Affairs, Melkonyan illuminates the distinct nuances of the Eastern school of diplomacy. In an era increasingly dominated by algorithmic trading, drone warfare, and digital sovereignty, the review reminds us that international relations remain a deeply human endeavor. The ability to read a counterpart, to manage silence, and to navigate the bazaar of high politics remains the ultimate safeguard against conflict. Melkonyan emphasizes that despite the technological acceleration of our age, the patience and cultural intuition required for successful negotiation cannot be automated.

The *YSU Journal of International Affairs* is glad to present this collection. These articles, individually and collectively, refuse to accept the current global

fragmentation as a tragedy. Instead, they analyze it as a complex puzzle that requires new theories, new strategies, and new connections to solve. We invite you to engage with this scholarship, which charts the path from the crisis of the old order to the uncertain yet dynamic possibilities of the new.

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