In this Issue

Modern strategic rivalry among countries of the world is associated with a number of factors: territorial disputes and competition for global dominance through regional leadership in various spheres. In addition, many countries perceive as a threat the mutual strengthening of their presence in regions that they consider to be their zones of influence. One of the significant trends of our time is the process of macro-regionalization and consolidation of regions into larger macro-regions based on the strengthening of trade, economic and logistical interconnectedness, interdependence of security issues, and the activation of humanitarian contacts. At the same time, there is an increase in the importance of military-political issues in the context of increased great-power competition and the intensification of international conflicts.

In the last decade, political and economic processes in the Middle East, South Caucasus, Central Asia, South Asia, Asia-Pacific and other regions have become increasingly competitively interconnected. This is manifested in both the strengthening of economic interaction and in the growth of military and political risks and threats. The interweaving and, in some cases, even the clash of strategic interests of great, regional, as well as medium and small countries in the emerging macro-regions, gives their study a special analytical and research value.

In the articles of this volume, the authors define the features of the emerging macro-region and the type of relations between states in the cooperation-rivalry format, which presupposes the participation in structuring the world order of a larger number of participants, represented not only by great powers, but also by regional and middle powers, and also takes into account the nature of the relations between them.

In '*Risks and Opportunities for Central Asian Countries in the Context of New Geopolitics*', Fatima Kukeyeva analyzes, first of all, the ever-increasing importance that Central Asia plays in modern international relations. She draws attention to the fact that Central Asia is a point of intersection of interests of the largest global actors Russia, the USA, China, the EU, and, at the same time, a field of contact, interpenetration and clash of values of the largest world civilizations: Christianity, Confucianism and Islam. According to the author, Central Asia is not only a key region, the establishment of control over which allows managing the global transit of hydrocarbons and other types of strategic raw materials for the largest developing economies, primarily China, and, as a result, influencing their economic growth, aggregate power and expansion directions. In this sense, Central Asia is a crossroads of civilizations, control over which, as was believed for centuries, allows domination over the world. The region retains this exceptional geopolitical significance especially in the conditions of wars, confrontation and global confrontation. In studying the risks and opportunities for the Central Asian countries, the author draws attention to the fact that the resolution of specific regional problems is the basis for uniting various ethnocultural and regional-territorial units, consolidating their special interests on the ground. The subregional specificity of the Central Asian geospace has increasingly become apparent as a consequence of this process. Each state in the region quite naturally claims self-sufficiency and an independent role in political and economic processes, which is manifested in the claim to conduct independent domestic and

international policies. Such independence conflicts with the national interests of regional security. The developments in the context of overcoming such contradictions and determining ways to combine regional security interests with the national interests of each state emphasize the relevance and novelty of this article.

In '*The Transformational Engagement of Central Asia with the European Union: opportunities and prospects*', Kuralay Baizakova analyzes the effectiveness of the model of regional security that has developed in Central Asia in the context of European integration and a globalizing world, ensuring social and political stability in the region, as well as the impact of rapprochement with the EU on the formation of national interests of the Central Asian countries in terms of their security. The solution to this goal can allow us to come closer to developing solutions aimed at optimizing and adjusting the model of cooperation between the EU and Central Asia. All this determined the formulation of the following main tasks: to consider the place of integration projects within the framework of national interests in the modern political process and their conceptual foundations in the context of the current situation in the region. Having analyzed the issues of interaction between Central Asia and the EU in regional security and their impact on the formulation of national interests of the states of the region, the author determines the nature of the changes that have occurred in the Central Asian geopolitical space, thereby revealing their impact on ensuring the national interests of countries in matters of comprehensive security. The author proceeds from the fact that unresolved tensions in relations between Central Asian states regarding borders, resources and security, combined with deep political and social divisions within the states themselves and geopolitical competition, all this confirms the opinion that Central Asia is a striking example of interregionalism.

In her article '*Between Patronage and Donorship: Global Gateway and its Vis-a-vie in Eurasia*', Oxana Karnaukhova analyzes the main directions of the EU Global Gateway, arguing for the EU's desire to consolidate its role in the international arena: in global trade, in the area of development assistance, in promoting regional integration, democracy, and security. According to the author, the EU consistently demonstrates interest in implementing interregional policy, thereby confirming the ramified system of interregional relations. Using various cases, the author argues that the EU does not always successfully implement its interregional strategy, and each of the existing and emerging areas has its own characteristics. In addition to the EU, other regional associations strive to build interregional relations, thus forming an extensive network of regional partners, among which the EU is the most active. Against this background of the EU-Russia confrontation, the main task for the EU is to develop a system of measures aimed at maintaining leadership positions in the conditions of the transformation of the world order. At the same time, the EU's activity through the Global Gateway strategy as the ability to influence international relations and ensure the implementation of its interests regardless of other players is not an immanent characteristic of the EU, which distinguishes it from the great powers and further complicates the task of maintaining its position.

In the article '*Glocal Soft Power as an Instrument of China's Strategic Influence in the South Caucasus: A New Model of Integration and Geopolitical Consequences*', Paylak Yengoyan and Zhanna Grigoryan discuss the main political issues of China's

soft power strategy in the South Caucasus, which is applied by four countries, plays a key role in shaping international perceptions and strengthening cooperation in many areas. China's modern soft power refers to a country's ability to influence others through attraction and persuasion rather than coercion or force. In this context, China's soft power involves using cultural, educational, and intellectual assets to enhance a country's global status and influence. The authors' comparative analysis provides an in-depth look at the various soft power strategies employed by China in relation to Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. By analyzing the similarities and differences in their approaches to educational diplomacy, cultural exchange programs, language promotion, and academic cooperation, one can gain insight into the effectiveness and impact of their soft power initiatives. For obvious reasons, studying China's soft power in various spheres has broader implications for international relations and diplomacy in the South Caucasus. Understanding how China uses its educational resources and institutions to enhance its global image and influence in the South Caucasus can shed light on the dynamics of contemporary international politics and international cooperation. The authors argue that within the framework of the modern foreign policy strategy, China strives to develop a soft power strategy in the post-Soviet space, adapting it to national characteristics and priorities. The implementation of the ambitious goal of creating a powerful cultural state requires significant financial investments, structural changes in the sphere of cultural industries and the concentration of administrative and managerial resources. It is noteworthy that the Chinese approach to soft power is characterized by a two-pronged approach: in addition to projecting influence outward, considerable attention is paid to the need for internal countermeasures to the dimension. In this regard, the key tasks are to strengthen the cultural self-awareness of the Chinese people, to form a sense of pride in national culture, and to create a competitive cultural product.

In '*The Nexus between International Humanitarian Law and Peacebuilding in Africa: A Comprehensive Assessment of Preventive Mechanisms*', Abraham Ename Minko examines the growing role of international humanitarian law and the accumulated peacebuilding experience in ensuring comprehensive security in African countries. According to the author, the activation of regional providers of peacekeeping assistance in Africa continued to strengthen and gradually became a reality that the UN and leading countries should take into account when planning humanitarian activities. In examining the international legal dimensions of UN peacekeeping activities, the author focuses on the priorities of African countries and the African Union in modern humanitarian and peacekeeping activities. Particular attention is paid to the conditions when the power vacuum in various African countries persisted and even intensified. The author provides a comparative analysis of how the UN adapts to the specifics of the humanitarian and peacekeeping environment on the African continent in the context of the emerging security regime complex there. The author attempts to identify the challenges that hinder effective UN humanitarian and peacekeeping activities in Africa and how developing cooperation with African regional organizations can help overcome them. To achieve the stated goal, the author set the following objectives in the article: 1) study the evolution of theoretical and practical approaches to UN peacekeeping in Africa; 2) identify factors of international humanitarian law that

complicate UN peacekeeping activities on the continent; 3) assess the changes that the UN makes to its peacekeeping practices in order to adapt to the challenges that its missions face in Africa; 4) analyze the experience of UN interaction with African regional organizations in the field of peacekeeping; 5) clarify the significance of cooperation between the UN and other organizations with African regional organizations in terms of its adaptation to the specifics of the peacekeeping environment in Africa.

The author comes to the conclusion that the UN, through international humanitarian law, is trying to adapt to the specifics of the peacekeeping environment on the African continent by changing its approaches to peacekeeping and strengthening cooperation with African regional organizations. In this sense, if the first method of adaptation has largely exhausted itself, the second has significant potential.

In '*New cybersecurity challenges: digital transformation and the political implications of their implementation*', Anna Sisoyan conducts a comparative analysis of the competitiveness of states and the evolution of international digital competitiveness. The author analyzes new challenges to cybersecurity, pointing out that modern cybersecurity depends on the ability of the economy to innovate. Within the framework of the stages of competitiveness development, modern states go through several corresponding stages, including: 1) competition based on production factors (underdeveloped countries); 2) competition based on investments (developing countries); 3) competition based on innovations (developed countries); 4) competition based on welfare (leading states).

The undertaken study allowed the author to identify a number of key factors that determine the leading position of countries in terms of cybersecurity and international digital competitiveness, and to propose a conceptual approach to assessing the indicator in question considering them. The author uses the results obtained to systematize the specifics of the development of cybersecurity in countries at the present stage in the context of international interaction. In addition, an important objective of this article was to develop practical recommendations for strengthening the digital competitiveness of Armenia based on the achieved conceptual developments. The undertaken study allowed the author to identify a number of key factors that determine the leading position of countries in terms of cybersecurity and international digital competitiveness, and to propose a conceptual approach to assessing the indicator in question taking them into account. The results obtained by the author are used to systematize the specifics of the development of cybersecurity of countries at the present stage in the context of international interaction. In addition, an important task of this article was to develop practical recommendations for strengthening the digital competitiveness of Armenia based on the achieved conceptual developments. Accordingly, the scientific hypothesis put forward in accordance with the purpose of the study that the mechanisms for the formation of international digital competitiveness of leading countries are determined by the complex interaction of various factors was confirmed, and their experience is applicable to identifying the features of assessing the digital competitiveness of Armenia at the present stage.

In '*Dynamics of Russian-Turkish relations after the Second Karabakh War: new priorities of national interests and strategies of struggle in the South Caucasus*',

Gevorg Harutyunyan, Marut Vardazaryan and Svetlana Jilavyan analyze the significant intensification of political, economic, cultural and trade relations between Russia and Türkiye, which has been taking an increasingly prominent place among Russian business partners since 2020. Türkiye has always attached exceptional importance to foreign economic relations, which have borne the main burden in ensuring the development of its economy. In this regard, it seems very relevant to trace the development of bilateral political, trade, economic and cultural relations and analyze their role in establishing new priorities of national interests and the strategy of struggle in the post-war South Caucasus. The authors, using the case of the Second Karabakh War of 2020, conclude that much has changed in Turkish-Russian relations in recent years, and the current trends in their development require political analysis. Considering the importance of historical events and elements that directly or indirectly influenced the course and results of the Second Karabakh War, the article studied not only the historical causes of the war, but also their cause-and-effect relationships that directly influenced the dynamics of the war. The scientific novelty of this article is that, given the multi-layered nature of the Second Karabakh War, it is important to study them for the concept and analysis. Within the framework of this article, an attempt was made to study the Second Karabakh War, starting from its genesis, the reasons for the outbreak of the war, its structural elements, the course and the entire negotiation process, which allows us to understand the reasons why war remains the only way to resolve conflicts. According to the authors, since 2020, relations between Russia and Türkiye have been complex, multi-level and are not limited to regional issues.

In her work '*Transforming governance in Armenia: from Soviet legacy to strategic reform*' Marina Margaryan analyzes the main trends in the transformation and democratization of public administration, which are an integral part of the current stage of development of public administration in Armenia. The article notes that the transformation of governance in Armenia is fundamentally changing the processes of interaction between the state and citizens and civil society, as well as reducing bureaucratic procedures, simplifying the receipt of public services, increasing openness and transparency. According to the author, digital technologies play an important role in collecting and analyzing data for making management decisions, ensuring information security, as well as the introduction of predictive analytics mechanisms, technologically integrated within the framework of creating management decision support systems, allows improving the processes of monitoring and evaluating activities aimed at achieving strategic goals and objectives of state development. However, the use of digital technologies in public administration is characterized by a number of challenges associated with the need to ensure cybersecurity and personal data protection, as well as the need to take into account the interests of all population groups and ensure equal access to public services for all citizens. Based on the results of the analysis, the author has developed a set of recommendations for the effective and democratic transformation of public administration in Armenia, differentiated within the framework of a number of key aspects of digital development.

In '*The Crisis of Small Towns in Armenia: Territorial Peculiarities and Transformations of the Regional Settlement System*', Artur Mkrtichyan and Vahan Yengidunyan analyze the change in the socio-demographic situation, the organization

of interaction between state, regional and local government bodies, the transformation of economic relations, which necessitate the study of Armenian cities in general, including small ones. The relevance of the study is primarily due to the fact that small towns are an important element of the urban framework of settlement in all Armenian regions, which close the network of rural settlement. According to the authors, small towns and district centers are the core in solving many problems of social and economic development of rural areas, their dispersion allows for the management of a vast territory, solving social and economic development problems in the entire region. The authors note that in the conditions of the formation of market relations, the shortcomings of small towns, inherent to them as a type of settlement, have become even more acute. The monofunctional structure of the economy, the orientation of city-forming enterprises in the past to regional sales markets determined the great dependence of small towns on fluctuations in the leading production. The reduction or complete absence of state support has also led to a drop in production volumes, social tension has increased (an increase in unemployment, the indicators of which are dozens of times higher than those of large cities; a decrease in the standard of living of the population). Of particular concern is the exacerbation of demographic problems: a decrease in natural growth is accompanied by a migration outflow, and small towns have ceased to be centers of attraction for the population from their immediate surroundings. Not having sufficient internal potential, small towns are currently losing support from rural areas; the proportion of people over working age is growing. Settlements remote from the district center are losing population in migration exchange with large cities of the region. These problems require a sociological study of the development features of small towns in Armenia.

Editorial Board