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Re-thinking Multilateralism in Times of Change: A View from Central Europe

Aleksander Surdej^a, Anna Visvizi^{b,c}

^a Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Poland to the OECD

^b Institute of East-Central Europe (IESW)

^c Deree - The American College of Greece

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Aleksander Surdej, Anna Visvizi

Re-thinking Multilateralism in Times of Change: A View from Central Europe

The increasing velocity of multilateral exchange and the growing complexity of international, inter-regional and inter-continental collaborative arrangements are unfolding in a context defined by spectacular technological advancements, tectonic shifts in politics worldwide and an accompanying transformation of our societies.¹ As technological and social conditions change, earlier conceptions of power, authority and influence erode gradually. A trend still nascent in the 1990s,² today, the power and the authority of the state are challenged to an extent that renders it necessary to rethink not only the role of the state but also, and perhaps more importantly, the nuanced mechanisms and structures to which it may cling to safeguard its power, influence and legitimacy. Only in this way will the state be able to maintain its clout and deliver on its obligations towards its citizens. It is not to herald, however, the demise of the state – quite the contrary. After all, even

- 1 A. Visvizi, M. Lytras, 'Politics and ICTs: emerging issues, challenges, opportunities', in: A. Visvizi, M. Lytras (eds), *Politics & ICTs: Issues & Challenges*, Bingley, UK: EMERALD, 2018 (forthcoming).
- 2 J.N. Rosenau, *Along the Domestic-Foreign Frontier: Exploring Governance in a Turbulent World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

if the spheres of authority shift and the space increasingly opens up where non-state actors may also be involved in the process of shaping the global context, due to the doctrine of sovereignty, it is hardly possible for the state to ever be crowded out from processes aimed at ensuring safety and security globally.³

Indeed, as argued elsewhere, “the doctrine of sovereignty rather than foreclosing deliberative ways of navigating the complex challenges with global, regional, and subnational scopes, fosters collaboration between the variety of state and non-state actors that are involved. In this sense, it encourages ‘safety governance’, i.e., a particular mode of defining, regulating and managing interconnected dangers, risks, and injuries with regional, sub-national and global scopes that involve state and non-state actors in areas/fields where state-action alone is not enough to ensure the safety and enhance the wellbeing of society. Notably, the doctrine of sovereignty is assigned a fundamental role in this definition in that it reifies the centrality (and the responsibility) of the nation-state *vis-à-vis* ensuring safety.”⁴

While the doctrine of sovereignty defines ones of the dimensions of the debate on multilateralism today, it is equally important to query it from the perspective of public goods and, hence, international organizations’ capacity to deliver them effectively. The concept of public goods originates from the field of economics. As such, it highlights several goods available to all members of society and shared by them, and defined by two features: non-rivalry of consumption, i.e., the consumption by one individual does not reduce the amount left for others, and non-excludability, i.e., it is difficult, if not impossible, to exclude an individual from enjoying the good.⁵ The most frequently cited examples of public goods include: clean air, water, peace and security, but also public safety, social justice, gender equality and environmental sustainability. These qualitatively diversified concepts of a lesser and greater degree of abstractness are often elusive, subjec-

3 A. Visvizi, ‘Safety, risk, governance and the Eurozone crisis: rethinking the conceptual merits of ‘global safety governance’’, in: P. Kłosińska-Dąbrowska (ed.), *Essays on Global Safety Governance: Challenges and Solutions*, Warsaw: Centre for Europe, University of Warsaw, ASPRA-JR, 2015, p. 30.

4 Ibid.

5 G. Verschraegen, M. Schiltz, ‘Knowledge as a Global Public Good: The Role and Importance of Open Access’, *Societies Without Borders*, vol. 2, issue 2, 2007, p. 159.

tive, non-quantifiable and prone to uneven distribution.⁶ For instance, how can we perceive peace and security, on the one hand, and social justice, on the other hand, through the lens of the concept of public goods?⁷ The interesting observation at this point is that “modern states and modern societies operate on the assumption that public goods exist as if by default.”⁸ What follows is that the societies’ expectation is that the state, through its involvement in international forums of discussion and deliberation will assume the additional obligation of safeguarding the delivery of those public goods not limited to the territory of the state. This point posits the discussion on multilateralism at quite an unusual vantage point. In other words, it highlights that limits and constraints exist in establishing consensus among the parties involved. Arguably, the process of consensus-building will be contingent on a variety of additional factors, such as the emergence of new state and non-state actors presenting valid claims to their participation in the consensus-building process. Similarly, international organizations themselves and the day-to-day practice of their operation prompt several questions of their role in the process of consensus-building as related to the definition and delivery of certain public goods. As the global landscape evolves and the traditional notions of state power derived from sovereignty and legitimacy based on citizens’ direct participation are challenged by the emergence of more elusive conceptions of time and space, such as those related to virtual reality, the internet of things, etc., it is imperative that multilateralism and its features are rethought. This issue of the *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe* (YIESW) responds to this plea by opening the debate and suggesting a few possible research avenues. These must be followed up with subsequent research if the fragility inherent in today’s multilateralism is to be bypassed.

The twin notions of multilateralism and international organizations have been particularly relevant for the historical experience and

6 A. Visvizi, ‘Education, (the production of) knowledge and progress in context of the global public goods debate’, in: E. Latoszek, M. Proczek, A. Kłos, M. Pachocka, E. Osuch-Rak (eds), *Facing the Challenges in European Union: Re-thinking EU Education and Research for Smart and Inclusive Growth*, Warsaw: Polish European Community Studies Association – Elipsa, 2015, pp. 662-663.

7 For a detailed typology of public goods, cf. A. Visvizi, ‘Education...’, op. cit., pp. 662-663.

8 A. Visvizi, “Education...”, op. cit., p. 663.

current debates in Central Europe. Undoubtedly, a great number of third actors (state and non-state alike) were involved in supporting the transition process in Poland and other countries in the region. This was largely possible due to the institutionalization strategy that successive governments in the region followed by means of implementing their Euro-Atlantic vocation. Specialization of goals, membership requirements/conditionality, and cumulative membership management, enhanced by specialization of assistance and aid sequencing, played a mediating role between the elites and external actors involved in the transition process. These three mechanisms helped to establish a firm link between the domestic reform process and the broader external institutional framework to which Poland and other countries of Central Europe returned in the 1990s.⁹ The value of these experiences to these countries' past and present cannot be overestimated.¹⁰ The International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU), each in their own way and in their own field of engagement have played a profound role in the processes of systemic transformation in Central Europe. As the political and economic status of countries from Central and Eastern Europe evolved over the past two decades, their role in and their perception of international organizations has changed too. This qualitative shift has been accompanied by a change in the context in which these countries and these organizations operate. Clearly, a new set of factors and forces has emerged in the system, thus inducing new dynamics, interdependencies and causal relationships. This prompts several questions on the role and status of Central European countries in multilateral forums today, many of which are being addressed

- 9 This paragraph draws from A. Visvizi, 'A country is never on its own, others can be helpful. External linkages: institutionalization and support of individual states', in: K. Żukrowska (ed.), *Transformation in Poland and in the Southern Mediterranean. Sharing experiences*, Warsaw: Poltext, pp. 60-80.
- 10 Cf. B. Szent-Iványi, 'Irrelevant or transformative power? The OECD DAC and foreign aid policies in Central and Eastern Europe', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 14, issue 4, 2016, pp. 55-70; A. Pelle, E. Kuruczleki, 'Education policies and performance of the Visegrad countries in light of their OECD membership: a comparative study', *Yearbook of the Institute of East-Central Europe*, vol. 14, issue 4, 2016, pp. 174-207.

in the research agenda on which the editors of this issue of YIESW have already embarked.

The editors appreciate the honor and the opportunity to introduce a collection of papers and contributions that give insight into the state of multilateralism today. The editors are particularly grateful to the Permanent Representatives to the OECD of Finland, Mexico, Poland and Slovenia, serving in the rank of ambassadors, who kindly shared their views on multilateralism. Included in this volume, these practice-influenced voices add to the debate while at the same time allowing to build bridges between the world of diplomacy and academia. Building on the content of this volume, it is the intention of the editors to encourage research and debate on the state of multilateralism today. The urgent questions that need to be addressed include: What is the value-added of multilateral forums of deliberation, consensus building and decision-making; what are the sources of power and legitimacy of established multilateral forums; how to ensure that they function in a manner that, while efficient, fulfils the key imperatives of accountability and representation; how to ensure that the international organizations and other forms of multilateral dialogue deliver public goods; and, how to shield international organizations from misuse and instrumentalization? A very important question in this context is how to ensure that multilateral forums will indeed serve the interest of the state itself? Theoretical and empirical insights teach us that international organizations are dynamic structures in which the distribution of power and influence shift over time as the institutions themselves adapt to evolving external and internal circumstances.

This volume of YIESW would not have been possible without the wonderful group of people who were involved in its preparation. Special thanks are extended to the Ambassadors of Finland (HE Pekka Puustinen), Mexico (HE Mónica Aspe Bernal), Slovenia (HE Irina Sodin) and Poland (HE Aleksander Surdej) who agreed to contribute to this volume. The editors would also like to thank the authors, who responded to the open-call for papers distributed via social media, kept the tight deadlines and worked patiently on the editors' editorial suggestions and the reviewers' recommendations. The editors are indebted to all reviewers who agreed to provide their feedback on papers included in this volume, thereby adding a competitive edge to the content of the volume and the journal. The editors would like to

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The editors,
Ambassador Aleksander Surdej & Dr. Anna Visvizi
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