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Panel: Foreign Policy

(Prof. Dr Ana Bojinović Fenko, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia & Assist. Prof Dr Marko Kovačević, University of Belgrade, Serbia)

Author: Maša Mihajilović, University of Belgrade

External engagement of Russia and the U.S. in the Levant subcomplex: Shaping the regional security dynamics since the outbreak of the Gaza war

This paper explores the external political engagement of the United States and Russia in the Levant subcomplex since the outbreak of the Gaza War on October 7th 2023, within the framework of Buzan and Waever's Regional security complex theory. The study addresses the broader problem of how great powers shape regional security dynamics in conflict-prone environments by examining their role in the Levant subcomplex, and investigates the specific impact of the Gaza War - treated as a rupture point - on their strategic behavior. The central research question guiding the analysis is in what ways have the United States and Russia shaped the regional security dynamic in the Levant subcomplex since the onset of the Gaza War. The initial hypothesis suggests that the Gaza war is considered as transformative moment due to its intensity, duration, and international visibility, which compelled both the United States and Russia to reassess their regional priorities, reassert influence, and respond to shifting political narratives and humanitarian pressures. Moreover, the conflict has been increasingly instrumentalized by both powers as a means to advance their own geopolitical interests - whether through rhetorical positioning, selective diplomacy, or strategic alignments within the broader Middle Eastern security landscape. Methodologically, the study employs a qualitative research design, using a comparative case study approach and qualitative content analysis of official statements, diplomatic activity, multilateral positioning, and rhetorical strategies. By tracing changes in methods of political penetration before and after the conflict, the research reveals how both powers have recalibrated their regional strategies in response to the war. The findings suggest that this recalibration has altered the balance of external influence in the Levant, contributing to an evolving pattern of security interdependence in the broader Middle East.



Author: Dana Nurgazinova, University of Glasgow, University of Tartu, Corvinus University of Budapest

Small State but Great Mission? Estonia's Finno-Ugric Identity in its Foreign Policy Roles

Estonia is a small state that revitalized its nation-building and national identity after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. It employed its Finno-Ugric roots to conduct foreign policies by promoting the collective rights of Finno-Ugric Republics in Russia and raising awareness

about them. Furthermore, Estonia participates in cultural, educational, and other types of cooperation targeting Finno-Ugric groups across Russia, and North and Central Europe. Hence, this research essay aims to understand how Estonia uses its Finno-Ugric identity in its National Role Conceptions (NRCs). Contributing to the Small States studies, NRC theory, and nation-building literature of International Relations (IR), this paper explores small states' expression of their national identities in their foreign policy, particularly national roles. This interpretivist study uses a qualitative method of content analysis and a manual coding tool to capture the perceptions of these phenomena. The study analyzed 21 textual primary and secondary sources available online for the time span of 2012-2024. The analysis of Estonian officials' statements and speeches delivered on bilateral, regional, and international levels allowed to retrieve the following results. It argues that in contrast to neorealist expectations of small states exercising less power and status than the great powers, small states like Estonia perceive their "smallness" as a source of power, solidarity, and influence, especially in opposition to neighboring major powers like Russia. Estonia's Finno-Ugric identity serves as a source of representation of Finno-Ugric people in Russia and inspiration for independence, self-determination, environmental protection, democratization, liberalization, and cultural preservation among Finno-Ugric groups in North and Central Europe and Russia. In theoretical terms, Estonia has NRCs of "regional protector", "liberation supporter", "defender of the faith", and "example" based on Holsti's terminology. These findings demonstrate the significance of small states' national identities for configuring national roles and suggest that small states perceive their systemic vulnerability as a source of solidarity and power.

Key words: Estonia; small state; National Role Conception; Finno-Ugric; Russia



Authors: David Tomažič & Miha Persyn & Matic Koširnik, University of Ljubljana

Explaining Serbia's Foreign Policy Inconsistencies: Juggling Between the East and the West

Serbia holds a foreign policy that at first glance appears inconsistent. In the last few years, three foreign policy issues have been exposed as self-contradicting. The first is the Kosovo question, where Serbia has been openly critical of the EU's role in the conflict. The second issue holding back EU accession is Serbia's close ties to Russia and China, which can be seen in its reluctance to join the EU-led sanctions on Russia. The third pressing issue in EU-Serbian relations is the opening of the Rio Tinto Lithium mine in Serbia. In the first two issues, Serbia has avidly resisted the EU, despite this meaning prolonging the accession process. The third issue, however, was supported by the SNS government of Serbia, despite opposition through protests against the government. To explain this set of inconsistencies of Serbia's foreign policy choices we used the concept of strategic hedging. We conducted a comparative analysis of Serbia's actions towards different foreign policy challenges, specifically looking for simultaneous and contradicting actions, and looking at the potential benefits of these contradicting actions. We

show that Serbia finds itself in a high-stakes and high uncertainty situation and meets conditions required for strategic hedging. This stance of conflicting actions helps Serbia keep both parties interested and engaged with it, with both of them providing economic and political incentives to Serbia. The research shows that Serbia pursues an incoherent foreign policy and, by doing so, hinders its progress toward EU integration, because it wants to keep its status as a strategic hedger and avoid aligning itself with EU or with Russia and instead leverages both relationships to gain as much as possible, depending on different situations. We argue that as long as one competing power – Russia or the EU – doesn't prevail over another one, Serbia will not align.

Key words: foreign policy of Serbia, strategic hedging, inconsistent



Authors: Filip Trajkovski & Stefan Trendevski, University of Ljubljana & University of Cyril and Methodius Skopje

Trade influences of Türkiye, China, and the EU in the Western Balkans

The Western Balkans presents a region of intense economic competition and influence, where EU, China, and Türkiye's trade policies show their geopolitical objectives and have an impact on regional development and sovereignty. This research identifies three different engagement models: Although the EU's rules-based strategy offers long-term stability, it has come under fire for its strict conditionality and stalled enlargement plan. It also uses financial help and political conditionality for integration and democratic reforms. China uses strategic lending through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which risks the sustainability of its debt and restricts strategic autonomy through dependency while offering quick infrastructure finance under favorable political conditions. Utilizing historical connections and soft power, Türkiye strengthens relationships through cultural and commercial influence; although economically smaller, this strategy upholds national sovereignty and has the potential to influence regional narratives. Maintaining control over their developmental paths and preserving policy independence while balancing these conflicting forces is the main problem facing WB countries. The study throws light on the economic and strategic dynamics in this contested territory.



Panel: The Western Balkans

(Assist. Prof Dr Faris Kočan, University of Ljubljana & Melika Mahmutović, teaching assistant, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia & Assoc. Prof Dr Soeren Keil, University of Passau, Germany)

Authors: Ajša Dobrin & Anej Bevk Peternelj, University of Ljubljana

From Unity to Division: National Identity and Conflict Narratives in Slovenian Textbooks After Yugoslavia

This paper delves into the reproduction of conflictual narratives after the Yugoslav wars, highlighting the textbooks as one of the main sources of conflict reproduction, since they serve as tools for shaping national identities and collective memories. Stemming from the methodological approach from previous research on Serbian, Croatian, and Bosnian textbooks from Pasašević Trošt and Trbovc the authors sought to analyse whether the Slovenian history textbooks reflected the shifting narratives of national identity construction caused by the dissolution of Yugoslavia. The research focused on the discursive analysis of five textbooks used in the final years of secondary education and differentiated between three periods: socialist, wartime and post-war. Through these phases the paper seeks to trace the transformation from a Yugoslav to a distinct Slovenian identity. During the socialist period textbooks promoted ideas of brotherhood, unity, and Yugoslavism. While this period already included traces of nationalism, the wartime period marks a sharp departure by detailing a separate Slovenian history. Through time the textbooks became increasingly critical of the Yugoslav regime, portraying the Slovenians as victims and the communist government as repressive. The findings strongly confirmed the findings in other nations' textbooks. However, the research found one main difference. The Slovenian textbooks excluded explicit antagonistic narratives by avoiding placing direct blame and not focusing on other ethnic groups, making them a unique case of relatively successful agents of post-conflict reconciliation.

Key words: National identity, Conflict reproduction, Narrative construction, Yugoslav wars, History textbooks



Authors: Ajša Dobrin & Eva Grozde & Ana Lavrin, University of Ljubljana

Strategic Compliance: The Accession of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the European Union through the lens of Game Theory

This paper uses game theory to assess the strategies of Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) and the European Union (EU) in the context of EU accession negotiations. The European Council opened accession negotiations in March 2024, despite BiH's limited progress in meeting the EU membership criteria. This raised questions about the strictness and credibility of EU

conditionality. The paper assumes that BiH and the EU are rational actors pursuing their respective interests. BiH aims to maximize benefits with minimal political cost while the EU wishes to uphold its credibility while still maintaining enlargement momentum and regional stability. The research contains four strategic scenarios based on two variables, BiH's strategy regarding compliance (full or selective) and the EU's strategy regarding enforcement (strict or flexible). Through theorizing using game theory, alongside qualitative analysis of policy documents and secondary sources, the paper assesses the implications of each scenario and attempts to analyze the logic behind the players' strategic choices. Findings dictate that the scenario of BiH's full compliance and EU's flexible enforcement is the most favourable for both actors, enabling accelerated integration and mutual gains. On the other hand, the scenario of BiH's selective compliance and EU's flexible enforcement presents the biggest threat to the EU's credibility and the long-term stability of both actors. This reveals a clash in the preferences of both players, since BiH's preferred scenario directly contradicts the EU's goal. This highlights the limits of EU conditionality, particularly when incentives are granted without genuine reform.

Key words: EU conditionality, Game theory, Bosnia and Herzegovina, EU enlargement, selective compliance



Author: Sabina Sali, University of Belgrade

National Identity Construction and Interstate Relations in the Western Balkans: The Impact of the Past on Contemporary Policies

This paper explores how collective memory and national identity shape the foreign policies and bilateral relations of countries in the Western Balkans. Although the post-Yugoslav states share the legacy of the 1990s wars, they have developed differing and often conflicting interpretations of that past, interpretations that play a central role in how each nation defines itself and its relation to other countries. The theoretical framework draws on the idea of collective memory as a socially constructed process and considers identity as something formed in opposition to the perceived "other." Special attention is given to the concept of memory diplomacy, where states use narratives of victimhood or deny responsibility as part of their international positioning.

The empirical section focuses on the recent adoption of the United Nations resolution on the Srebrenica genocide as a case study. It analyzes how Serbia, Croatia, and Montenegro each approach the memory of this event through different diplomatic strategies. While Croatia and Montenegro use narratives of victimhood to reinforce their legitimacy on the international stage, Serbia largely rejects collective guilt and presents itself as innocent. These opposing approaches fuel a cycle of mutual blame, deepening mistrust and obstructing dialogue.

The paper argues that as long as national identities in the region are grounded in mutually exclusive and often antagonistic historical narratives, meaningful cooperation and long-term

reconciliation will remain difficult to achieve. Breaking this cycle requires moving beyond rigid interpretations of the past and creating shared spaces for reflection, acknowledgment, and dialogue.

Key words: collective memory, national identity, Western Balkans, memory diplomacy, interstate relations.



Author: Gjorgji Hadji Vasilev, University of Cyril and Methodius Skopje

The Growing Influence of Hungary in North Macedonia Through the Prism of Constructivism.

This paper examines the growing influence of Hungary in North Macedonia through the prism of constructivist international relations theory. It argues that Hungary's engagement in the Western Balkans, particularly with North Macedonia's VMRO-DPMNE party, is driven less by material or institutional interests and more by shared ideological values and identity-based solidarity. Hungary's strategic involvement reflects an effort to build an illiberal political alliance across the region, positioning itself as a defender of national sovereignty, traditional values, and resistance to liberal Western norms. The constructivist approach explains how narratives of sovereignty, opposition to liberal EU conditionality, and identity preservation underpin this strategic alignment. Key moments—such as Hungary's asylum offer to former Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, media acquisitions by Orbán-linked actors, and Hungary's role in regional political mediation—demonstrate how identity politics and normative convergence guide bilateral relations. Rather than emphasizing economic integration or institutional cooperation, Hungary's influence is characterized by value-driven interventions that reshape political discourse and public opinion in North Macedonia. The analysis highlights pivotal moments in bilateral cooperation, including Hungary's intervention during the migrant crisis, its role in regional security coordination, and its symbolic and financial support for VMRO-DPMNE's political resurgence. The recent €1 billion loan—suspected to involve Chinese capital routed through Hungary—further illustrates how value-based diplomacy intersects with strategic financial instruments to enhance political influence. The paper concludes by suggesting that this relationship reflects a broader agenda to prepare a future bloc of ideologically aligned states within an expanded European Union. Thus, Hungary's presence in North Macedonia should not be seen merely as bilateral cooperation but as part of a wider geopolitical project to redefine future European political identity from within.

Key words: constructivism, Hungary, Orban, North Macedonia, VMRO-DPMNE.



Author: Amina Hadžić, University of Tuzla

Navigating Stability: The Interplay of Ethnic Tensions and EU Accession in the Western Balkans

The interplay between ethnic tensions and the European Union (EU) accession process significantly shapes regional stability in the Western Balkans. While the EU aims to foster peace and democratization through conditionality, the region remains marked by unresolved ethnic divisions, fragile institutions, and contested sovereignties. Applying Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) and securitization theory, the analysis reveals how political elites frame ethnic identities as existential threats to consolidate power—both domestically and across borders. These securitization strategies generate spillover effects that reinforce the region's interdependent insecurity. Case studies from Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, and Serbia demonstrate how ethnic narratives are instrumentalized, often undermining genuine reforms. Although EU conditionality can encourage positive transformation, its credibility has declined amid stalled enlargement, allowing nationalist actors to dominate political discourse. As a result, EU influence becomes ambivalent—simultaneously promoting cooperation while at times deepening divisions. The findings emphasize the need for a more holistic and regionalized EU strategy that accounts for the securitization of identity politics. Sustainable peace and meaningful integration require not only conditional incentives, but also political credibility, local ownership, and inclusive institutional development. Addressing the interconnected nature of identity and security in the Western Balkans is essential for unlocking the region's European future.

Key words: Western Balkans, ethnic tensions, EU accession, securitization, regional security



Author: Petra Stunja, University of Zagreb

The Struggle Between EU Requirements and Domestic Authoritarianism in the Western Balkans: A Losing Battle?

This study explores the ongoing conflict between domestic authoritarian practices and European Union conditionality in the Western Balkans, emphasizing how these forces interact to influence political development in six countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia, and Serbia. Even if every state has nominally embraced the language of democratic change and hopes to join the EU, many regimes have hybrid traits, maintaining electoral systems and democratic façades while continuing clientelism, elite dominance, and a weakened rule of law. Using a comparative and qualitative approach supported by document analysis, civil society assessments, and official EU publications, the study shows that the region's authoritarian resilience frequently undermines the EU's normative influence. Frequently, reforms are superficial, implemented to satisfy statutory requirements

without addressing deeper issues like political plurality, media freedom, and judicial independence. Due to a credibility gap and enlargement fatigue, the EU's influence has decreased, and local elites have strategically changed to seem compliant. The basic concept of this political environment is found in the idea of "stabilitocracy" - governments that provide exterior stability at the expense of internal democratic decay. Even while there has been considerable progress, especially in Albania and North Macedonia, structural barriers and long-standing power structures still prevent true democratization. The study comes to the conclusion that while the EU is unquestionably "losing the field," it is not completely losing its influence in the region. In the absence of more intensive involvement, more stringent conditionality, and increased support for civil society, democratic backsliding could solidify. It is necessary to understand this complex connection between internal resistance and external norms in order to rethink EU policy toward democratization in transitional countries.

Key words: Western Balkans, democratization, EU conditionality, hybrid regimes, authoritarianism



Panel: International Peace and Security

*(Assoc. Prof Dr Ljupcho Stojkovski, University of Cyril and Methodius Skopje, Macedonia &
Assoc. Prof Dr Marko Lovec, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia)*

Author: Leona Knežević Mužić, University of Zagreb

Is liberal internationalism waning? R2P and the case of Libya

This research critically examines the 2011 NATO-led intervention in Libya through the normative lens of liberal interventionism and the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine. While the intervention was initially framed as a multilateral humanitarian effort to prevent mass atrocities, its conduct and aftermath revealed significant tensions between liberal norms and strategic interests. Using a qualitative case study approach, the analysis evaluates the justification, execution, and post-conflict outcomes of the intervention against the criteria for legitimate intervention established by the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS): just cause, right intention, last resort, and proportional means. The findings highlight key divergences from the principles of liberal interventionism, particularly the shift toward regime change, the disproportional use of force, and the lack of a credible reconstruction strategy. These shortcomings not only undermined the legitimacy of the intervention in Libya but also contributed to the erosion of support for humanitarian military interventions in international politics. States became increasingly reluctant to invoke R2P in later crises, such as Syria, fearing mandate overreach and political manipulation. By linking the normative framework of liberal interventionism to its practice, this research offers both a conceptual clarification and a critical evaluation of R2P's operational limits. It argues that the intervention in Libya marked a turning point in the trajectory of liberal humanitarian norms, revealing the fragility of ethical intervention models in the face of geopolitical interests. It contributes to ongoing debates about the future of multilateralism, norm enforcement, and the credibility of international order in responding to mass atrocities around the world.

Key words: Liberal interventionism, R2P, Libya, humanitarian intervention



Author: Ana Susin, University of Groningen

Securitization as Irredentism: Development Plans and Military Tourism as “Greater Israel” Legitimization Tools for Israel’s 2024 Occupation of Syrian Golan Heights

This essay examines Israel’s expansion into the Golan Heights after the fall of the Assad regime, using discourse analysis of statements made by Israeli politicians and military spokespeople. It answers how irredentist paradigms of “Greater Israel” are used to securitize Israel’s recent occupation of the Golan Heights. Securitization entails constructing an issue as an existential threat, thus legitimizing emergency measures. Greater Israel irredentist ideology asserts the

right to ancestral Jewish homeland. Discourse analysis concluded that the newly-occupied territory is perceived as indivisible from Greater Israel, manifesting in two regards. First, development plans seek to settle and integrate the occupied area into Israel through settlement projects, energy infrastructure and demographic expansion. However, the plans also strengthen the state of Israel vis-à-vis strengthening its borders with Syria. Therefore, not only do the developments aim to reclaim ancestral land, but also frame it as a military imperative to ensure protection for its people. Second, military tours of the territory portray it as part of Greater Israel. This sightseeing is also securitized, framing access to the area as an activity requiring extraordinary measures. By blurring the line between military and civilian practices, permanent Israeli military control and civilian presence in the Heights is justified. The findings bridge the gap between irredentist and securitization theory, examining how the irredentist narratives are used through Israeli development plans and military tours to reinforce securitization of the Golan and legitimize Israel's current and future occupation of the territory.

Key words: Greater Israel, Irredentism, Securitization, the Golan Heights, Occupation



Panel: International Political Economy

(Assoc. Prof Dr Josip Lučev, University of Zagreb, Croatia & Assoc. Prof Dr Brian Schmitt, CY Cergy Paris University, France)

Authors: Aleksandar Jakovljević & Aleksa Jovanović, University of Belgrade

Saving the Planet, Dividing the Economies: How the Fight Against Climate Change Hurts Globalization

This paper critically examines the paradoxical relationship between international climate change mitigation and the global economic order, challenging the assumptions of neoliberal institutionalism. While liberal institutionalist theory posits that global environmental challenges can foster institutionalized cooperation based on absolute gains, recent developments indicate a retreat from multilateralism and the rise of protectionist responses to green industrial policies. Through case studies of the Montreal Protocol and the Paris Agreement, the paper traces the evolution of global environmental governance and highlights the growing divergence between environmental collaboration and economic integration. The Montreal Protocol exemplified effective, universal cooperation with minimal disruption to global trade. In contrast, the Paris Agreement, though similarly multilateral in scope, has spurred geopolitical rivalry, particularly in the race for green technology dominance. The EU's imposition of tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles in 2024, juxtaposed with its leniency toward similar U.S. green subsidies under the Inflation Reduction Act, underscores a shift from absolute to relative gains in environmental policymaking. This selective enforcement reveals how climate policy has become entangled in strategic multipolarity, reducing global institutions like the WTO and UNFCCC to arenas of transactional diplomacy rather than platforms for universal cooperation. The paper concludes that the success of climate innovation, ironically – may accelerate the fragmentation of globalization by triggering nationalist and protectionist impulses. Ultimately, this reveals a theoretical blind spot in liberal institutionalism, which underestimates the extent to which environmental cooperation is increasingly shaped by power politics and economic self-interest.

Key words: Liberal Institutionalism, Protectionism, Green Industrial Policy, Paris Agreement, Relative Gains



Author: Stella Alexandra Heath, Leiden University

Evaluating the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)'s Finance System Through China's Changed Circumstances

A \$1 trillion climate finance gap threatens the capacity of the world's most vulnerable and least responsible countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change (CC). The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the primary international treaty on

CC, plays an important role in mobilising climate finance. However, it only obliges certain OECD members at the time of the treaty's establishment in 1992 to be climate finance donors, despite significant changes in greenhouse gas emissions (GHG) and the global political economy. The essay examines whether the UNFCCC's list of climate finance donors should be expanded, utilising China as a case study. It employs the lens of distributive climate justice and the UNFCCC's principle of common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) and respective capabilities, which acknowledges a common obligation to protect the planet, while assigning higher responsibility to countries with higher GHG emissions and greater economic capacity. The essay thus first analyses China's GHG emissions and economic capacity. It then presents the country's existing climate finance contributions to determine whether China meets CBDR requirements outside the UNFCCC and concludes with a possible reform to the treaty's climate finance system. The study finds that China's changed circumstances since the establishment of the UNFCCC, namely its second-largest global cumulative GHG emissions and economy, mandate it to provide climate financing. However, China already provides 56% of the US's contribution outside the UNFCCC, which is approximately proportional to its performance on CBDR metrics. Nonetheless, China's investment does not always prioritise the most vulnerable countries and relies on loans, which can lead to unsustainable climate debt for recipients. Hence, the essay presents the option of institutionalising voluntary commitments from Non-Annex II countries within the UNFCCC system to reduce polarisation and facilitate the establishment of uniform investment rules to benefit climate finance recipients. This system would simulate positive reinforcement for voluntary investment from Non-Annex II countries, which now hold half of the global GNI compared to 20% in 1992, thereby helping to bridge the climate finance gap.

Key words: Climate Finance, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), Principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) and Respective Capabilities, Distributive Climate Justice, China.



Panel: International Environmental Protection

(Assist. Prof Dr Danijel Crnčec, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia & Prof Dr Julija Brsakoska Bazerkoska, University of Cyril and Methodius Skopje, Macedonia & Sara Cosatti, PhD, University of Trieste)

Author: Viera Carolina López, Jagiellonian University

Drowning in Open Water: Legal and Ethical Responsibilities of Major Carbon-Emitting Nations Towards the Disappearance of Tuvalu

This paper explores the legal and ethical responsibilities of major carbon-emitting nations toward Small Island Developing States (SIDS), focusing on the case of Tuvalu, a Pacific island nation facing imminent submersion due to rising sea levels. While global climate governance frameworks such as the UNFCCC, the Paris Agreement, and COP28 aim to facilitate cooperation and support for vulnerable states through mechanisms like climate finance and the Loss and Damage Fund, Tuvalu's reality underscores the limitations of current multilateral efforts. Under the theoretical framework of neoliberal institutionalism, this paper examines how international cooperation, reciprocity, and mutual benefit shape state behavior within these environmental regimes. The analysis shows that while institutional mechanisms encourage collaboration through flexible legal structures, enforcement gaps and geopolitical decisions, such as the U.S. withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, expose the fragility of such commitments. Empirical data on emissions highlight a stark injustice: Tuvalu contributed less than 0.01% of global emissions in 2019, while China, the U.S., and India accounted for over 44%. Yet, Tuvalu faces the most severe consequences, including land loss, freshwater salinization, and forced migration. Neoliberal institutionalism provides a normative framework to address such asymmetries, but it remains limited in practice. This paper argues that while climate finance and soft-law approaches reflect institutional progress, they fail to address the urgent and irreversible conditions in Tuvalu. The international system must consider establishing enforceable mechanisms that prioritize climate justice.

Key words: Small Island Developing States, climate finance, climate justice, neoliberal institutionalism.



Author: Zarja Bizjak, University of Ljubljana

Plastic Pollution: How Global Inequalities Inform Systems of Plastic Waste Management

Plastics are some of the most pervasive modern materials. Cheap, versatile, and easy to produce, they quickly found a market following their invention at the beginning of the 20th century and have enjoyed a steep and steady rise in production in the years since. But while plastic production technology has developed rapidly, its waste management technology has not. As

global systems of plastic processing struggle to keep up with the accelerating pace of production, waste management facilities widely employ harmful and dangerous processing methods. Nevertheless, plastic waste increasingly accumulates in natural environments. The extensive negative externalities of this scheme are disproportionately felt by vulnerable communities in so-called “waste havens”, predominantly developing countries of the Global South which have become target destinations for exports of global plastic waste. This relationship, which some have referred to as “waste colonialism”, represents the core of my research. In my paper, based upon a quantitative analysis of secondary sources, I first examine the specificities of plastics as a material, and the ways in which those contribute to their large negative impact once they are discarded. I then, relying on a timeline of plastic production and consumption trends through the years, explain the emergence of the current global waste management system from the pre-existing colonial and postcolonial dynamics between the developed Global North and the developing Global South, where the latter’s economic and political limitations have crucially conditioned its compliance with the regime established by the former. Finally, I examine current trends, particularly the shifting dynamics within the Global South itself, as traditional waste destinations grow weary of the practice in view of internal development on the one hand and growth of domestic plastic waste generation on the other, and new havens emerge to take on the ever-expanding burden.

Key words: waste colonialism, waste haven, waste management, plastics, plastic pollution



Author: Andrej Stojanović, University of Ljubljana

Protecting the Right to a Healthy Environment Beyond EU Borders during the EU Green Transition: The case of Rio Tinto’s Jadar Project in Serbia.

This research examines the paradoxes of the European Union’s (EU) external environmental engagement during its green transition, with a focus on the controversial Jadar lithium project in Serbia, led by Rio Tinto. While the EU's Green Deal aspires to climate neutrality and emphasizes fairness and sustainability, this case study reveals significant inconsistencies between the proclaimed values and actual actions. Through an analysis of legal documents, environmental impact assessments, and civil society reports, the study examines how the EU’s strategic partnership with Serbia on raw materials, formalized in a 2024 Memorandum of Understanding, facilitates a project linked to environmental degradation, procedural violations, and human rights concerns. Despite widespread opposition, compromised public consultations, and evidence of ecological harm, EU support for the project continued without binding oversight or enforcement mechanisms. The findings highlight how the EU’s external policy towards non-member states risks perpetuating 'green colonialism' by neglecting the right to a healthy environment, and the entitlement still absent from EU law. The paper argues that the EU’s failure to uphold its own environmental and human rights standards abroad undermines

the credibility of its green transition. It proposes key reforms, including the legal enshrining of the right to a healthy environment, mandatory independent impact assessments for EU-backed third-country projects, and conditionality based on meaningful public participation and local consent. The study concludes that unless environmental rights are fully integrated into both internal and external EU policies, the Union's green ambitions may come at the cost of justice, democracy, and ecological integrity, both in and beyond its borders.

Key words: EU external policy, Lithium mining, Environmental Justice, Jadar Project, Right to a healthy environment



Panel: European Union External Action: legal vs. political considerations

(Francesco Spera, PhD Candidate, University of Salento, Italy & Assist. Prof Dr Alice Cunha, Nova University Lisbon, Portugal)

Authors: Miha Persyn & Ajda Božiček, University of Ljubljana

The EU's Global Gateway: pushing the EU away from its norms?

EU development policy is a critical component of the EU's external action. In it, the EU holds the eradication of poverty as its primary goal, enshrined in its founding treaties. In spite of this, the EU's developmental policy has in recent years become "geopolitised", meaning it has become embedded in power rivalries, whereby the EU translates its economic and soft power into strategic leverage. This can be seen in the EU's new Global Gateway initiative, which aims to compete with China in gaining influence in the developing world. To analyse the effects that geopolitisation has had on EU development policy, we conducted a comparative analysis between EU and NGO reports on EU development action from 2013 and 2024. With our research, we find that in 2013, the EU focused more on altruistic goals, emphasizing moral responsibility and solidarity, and initiatives aimed at reducing poverty. NGOs criticised the EU for being ineffective in its development action. In 2024, on the other hand, poverty eradication is barely mentioned, replaced by a focus on investment instruments, strategic influence, and regions of geopolitical interest, particularly under the Global Gateway Initiative. NGOs reported diversion of aid from the poorest countries to projects more aligned with EU geopolitical and commercial interests. Under the Global Gateway Initiative, development has focused more on modernising the economies of EU partners and less on the immediate needs of the poorest nations around the world. This is combined with development aid being used as a tool for risk reduction for private EU investments, which leads to an overall shift in EU development aid becoming more self-serving than altruistic.

Key words: EU development policy, geopolitisation, Global Gateway Initiative



Author: Ana Sofeska, University of Cyril and Methodius Skopje

EU Climate Leadership and the Impact of Global Dependencies

This research essay explores the European Union's climate leadership ambitions within the context of global geopolitical and economic dependencies, with a particular focus on its relationship with China. The EU has positioned itself as a leader in the green transition through initiatives such as the European Green Deal. However, its heavy reliance on other countries, particularly China, for critical raw materials and advanced green technologies creates

significant vulnerabilities. China holds a strong position in important clean energy supply chains, controlling much of the production of rare earth elements, solar panels, and electric vehicle parts. This dependency poses risks to the EU's climate goals and its ability to maintain a strong and independent industrial base.

The essay examines China's role in these supply chains and discusses the potential risks for the EU's climate and industrial plans. It also evaluates key EU policies, including the Critical Raw Materials Act, the Net-Zero Industry Act, and the REPowerEU plan. While these policies are important steps forward, the paper highlights their current limits in fully protecting the EU's green transition.

Additionally, the essay considers the possibilities for cooperation between the EU and China on climate issues. It looks at how the EU can balance working together with China while also protecting its economic security and technological independence. Overall, this study emphasizes the need for the EU to diversify its supply sources, strengthen its own industries, and carefully manage its global relationships. These actions are essential for achieving the EU's climate ambitions and ensuring its strategic independence in a complex international environment.

Key words: Climate leadership, green transition, global interdependence, strategic autonomy, climate diplomacy



Panel: Political Discourse on War

(Polina Zavershinskaia, PhD Candidate, University of Leipzig, Germany & Melika Mahmutović, teaching assistant, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia)

Author: Marion Agape Simakungwe, University of Gothenburg

Counting Down to War: The Use of Time as a Tool to Manufacture Consent for the U.S. led Invasion of Iraq

In the years following the invasion of Iraq, the decision to enact ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ by the United States (U.S.) and its coalition forces has been widely deemed to be controversial and costly. Whilst the circumstances surrounding this decision have been analysed extensively by security scholars, less attention has been paid to the linguistic techniques used to justify the invasion by key actors in President Bush’s administration. Specifically, the role of then Vice President Dick Cheney in perpetuating these justifications to the public has been overlooked despite the vigour with which he endorsed the invasion and the intensity of his sentiments towards the threat posed by Saddam Hussein to the U.S. This is important to analyse as Cheney used his role in a unique way compared to his predecessors by frequently employing securitising language to manufacture consent for the invasion of Iraq. This essay looks at one instance of Cheney utilising his position as a credible source to reinforce the importance of the U.S. and its allies taking decisive steps against Saddam, speaking on a televised CBS interview just days prior to the invasion. I argue that the focus on needing to act quickly, so as to avoid the presupposed consequences of inaction, worked to validate Cheney’s claims of Saddam posing a security threat and thus requiring immediate intervention. I apply a narrative analysis to highlight how the evocation of a sense of urgency was intertwined with the way in which the threat presented by Saddam was crafted by Cheney. As a result, I find that Cheney was able to use linguistic techniques such as repetition and chronology to frame the lack of time to respond to Saddam as the main reason for the necessity of launching Operation Iraqi Freedom.

Key words: Iraq War, Manufacturing consent, Dick Cheney, time



Author: Mia Mladenovska, University of Cyril and Methodius Skopje

The Media’s Impact on International Pressure for Intervention in the Yugoslav Wars

This essay explores the pivotal role of international media in generating international pressure for humanitarian intervention during the Yugoslav Wars and in supporting the creation and operationalization of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). While regional propaganda has received substantial scholarly attention, the essay shifts focus to the global media and its moral framing of the conflict, particularly through the lens of the

"CNN effect." Real-time reporting from journalists such as Ed Vulliamy and Christiane Amanpour, as well as individual regional reporters, brought the horrors of ethnic violence, genocide, and mass displacement into the homes of Western audiences. By reframing the wars as humanitarian crises rather than internal disputes, the media challenged the neutrality of major international actors and galvanized public and political support for intervention. Coverage of atrocities such as the Siege of Sarajevo, the Srebrenica genocide and the Kosovo war intensified global outrage and contributed directly to diplomatic momentum for action. Furthermore, the essay highlights how journalistic materials and testimonies were later used as evidence in ICTY proceedings, solidifying the media's dual function as both a chronicler and contributor in international justice. Ultimately, this analysis underscores the media's influence not only on public opinion but also on legal and institutional responses to war crimes, positioning it as a critical actor in international relations and transitional justice.

Key words: media, CNN effect, Yugoslav Wars, ICTY, international justice



Author: Maria Vittoria Previdi, University of Trieste

The Role and Representations of Culture in the Siege of Sarajevo (1992-1995)

The paper analyses the perception of the role of culture and counterculture during the Siege of Sarajevo between 1992 and 1995. The research, starting from the broader research on the political discourse on war, explores this case study to try and analyse the impact of media representations of the besieged city during the Balkan Wars, and specifically of the role of culture and counterculture. To carry out the analysis, the essay focuses on Western viewpoints and media but tries to introduce local perspectives and sources as well. The ethnographic methodological approach allowed a detached reading of the different interpretations of the besieged Sarajevo's cultural scene and was applied to the qualitative data from secondary sources. This methodological approach, together with the fundamental definitions of what is culture and what is counterculture, lead to the conceptualization of three key points for this research. Firstly, the portrayal of besieged Sarajevo's cultural resistance is certainly grounded in historical facts, but experience was not universal for all the residents, and it is hard to define the actual extension of the people participating in the phenomenon. Secondly, international media played a key role in bringing attention to the Siege and Sarajevo's cultural resistance, but the journalistic efforts were not able to accelerate the Western powers' direct intervention in the conflict. Lastly, culture and counterculture in Sarajevo were able to bring about productions that allowed catharsis from psychological stress and offered a stance against violence and absurdity of war, but their role in conflict resolution and peacebuilding is rather modest. This paper tries to point out the need for deeper research and understanding of the cultural and countercultural dynamics of the Siege of Sarajevo, that should be able to offer a

complete historical overview of the events and a trustworthy representation of the cultural phenomenon.

Key words: Sarajevo, Culture, Counterculture, Besieged Population, Representations.



Author: Samir Sinanović, University of Tuzla

The Use of Moral Arguments in War Discourse: A Comparative Analysis of Political Speeches

This paper examines the use of moral arguments in political discourse on war, focusing on how political actors construct narratives to justify or condemn military actions. Drawing on key theoretical frameworks, including just war theory and international legal norms, the study explores how concepts such as human rights, sovereignty, and humanitarian intervention are strategically employed in political rhetoric. The paper highlights the distinction between *jus ad bellum* (the justification for going to war) and *jus in bello* (the moral conduct within war), as emphasized by theorists such as Michael Walzer. Through a comparative analysis of two prominent cases - the U.S. intervention in Iraq (2003) and the Russian invasion of Ukraine (2022) - the research illustrates how shifting narratives serve to legitimize warfare in the eyes of domestic and international audiences. In the case of Iraq, initial justifications based on weapons of mass destruction evolved into moral arguments for democratization and liberation. Similarly, Ukraine's defense strategy appeals to international legal norms and moral principles, especially Article 51 of the UN Charter, which affirms the right to self-defense. The analysis employs Theo van Leeuwen's typology of legitimization strategies - authorization, moral evaluation, rationalization, and mythopoesis - to uncover the rhetorical mechanisms behind war discourse. It argues that moral reasoning is frequently co-opted to support geopolitical interests, complicating efforts toward peace and conflict resolution. Ultimately, the paper concludes that while moral arguments are a powerful tool in shaping public opinion and legitimizing state actions, their instrumentalization in war discourse often hinders genuine dialogue and undermines international legal standards. Understanding these patterns is crucial for critically assessing the ethics of contemporary warfare and the political narratives that sustain it.

Key words: War Discourse, Moral Legitimization, Just War Theory, Political Narratives, International Law



Author: Selena Škrnički, University of Zagreb

Collective Memory and the Legacy of the Croatian-Serbian War: Narratives, Identity, and the Politics of Remembering

This essay looks at how the memory of the Croatian-Serbian war still shapes not only how both countries see themselves, but also how they interact with each other politically today. Using academic research from political science, sociology, psychology, and international relations, I explore how collective memory continues to influence national identity and foreign policy in the region. The work builds on Maurice Halbwachs's idea that memory is shaped by the social groups we belong to. In this case, war memories are not just personal—they're political. In Croatia, the war is often remembered as a fight for independence, while in Serbia, narratives of victimhood are more common. These different versions of the past show up in monuments, school textbooks, media, and politics. I also looked at how trauma from the war still affects identity. The theory of social identity explains how conflict can create strong "us vs. them" feelings, which are still visible today. Scholars like Jelena Subotić show how even transitional justice efforts, like war crimes trials, can fall into nationalist patterns and lose credibility. The essay also includes current events to show how memory affects politics today. For example, Croatian singer Severina was recently denied entry into Serbia after publicly supporting Serbian student protests and environmental movements. Incidents like this show how even peaceful expressions of solidarity can trigger political reactions tied to memory and identity. In the end, the essay argues that we need more inclusive education, space for complex public dialogue, and an understanding that memory isn't fixed—it evolves. Recognizing the political power of memory is essential if we want to build real cooperation and peace in the region.

Key words: collective memory, identity, Croatia, Serbia, politics, trauma, reconciliation



Panel: The Future of European Integration: Closing the Capability-Expectations Gap?

(Assist. Prof Dr Jure Požgan, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia & Prof Dr Susanna Cafaro, University of Salento, Italy)

Authors: Paola Ćibarić & Kamilla Virag Kalmar, University of Zagreb

Bridging Ambition and Reality: Rethinking European Integration for a Pragmatic Future

This paper looks into the ongoing challenges the European Union (EU) faces in trying to meet its high ambitions with limited practical abilities, especially during crises. It focuses on two recent and important examples: the war in Ukraine and the migration crisis. In both cases, the EU's response revealed a clear gap between what it aims to achieve and what it can actually deliver. With Ukraine, the EU reacted quickly through sanctions and military aid, but this unity was somewhat misleading. Under the surface, there were major differences between member states and a lack of shared strategic thinking became obvious. The EU was forced to improvise rather than act based on a common long-term plan, which points to deeper structural weaknesses in its foreign policy. Similarly, the migration issue shows how member states often agree in theory but not in practice. While there is talk of solidarity, in reality countries like Greece and Italy take on most of the burden. This has led to frustration and a loss of trust, not only between member states but also from citizens who expect the EU to offer real solutions. The paper discusses ideas like functional decoupling, which would allow smaller groups of states to move forward in areas like asylum policy without waiting for full consensus. At the same time, the EU must be careful not to give up on its core democratic values while trying to be more flexible. There's a danger that some countries continue receiving benefits while ignoring the rule of law. In the end, the paper argues that the EU doesn't need to become a superstate, but it does need to be more honest, more adaptable, and still strongly committed to its founding principles.

Key words: EU, foreign policy, migration, Ukraine, integration



Author: Jovana Milurović, University of Belgrade

EU Defence Integration and Readiness 2030: Addressing Strategic Gaps through Reform

This paper explores the evolution of European Union (EU) defence integration by examining the shift from the European Defence Fund (EDF) to the 2025 White Paper on Defence – *Readiness 2030*. Using Christopher Hill's capability–expectations gap as a conceptual framework, the study investigates whether the new strategy addresses the structural weaknesses that have historically limited the EU's effectiveness as a security actor. The EDF was intended

to boost defence collaboration among EU member states, but its impact was hindered by fragmentation, budgetary constraints, and misalignment with strategic needs. The geopolitical shocks of recent years—especially Russia’s invasion of Ukraine—have exposed the EU’s underpreparedness and prompted calls for deeper reform. Analyzing the EU’s effectiveness in a strategic turning point, this research offers a comprehensive and operational roadmap for strengthening EU defence capabilities. Through a comparison via qualitative analysis of *Readiness 2030* to earlier initiatives, the paper evaluates the document’s credibility as a mechanism to reduce fragmentation and move toward strategic autonomy. The paper concludes that while the White Paper signals a more realistic and readiness-focused approach, its success will hinge on the political will of EU member states to implement reforms collectively. Ultimately, *Readiness 2030* represents a critical opportunity for the EU to transition from aspirational rhetoric to real defence capabilities in an increasingly unstable global order.

Key words: EU defence integration, Readiness 2030, capability–expectations gap, strategic autonomy, European Defence Fund (EDF)



Author: Julie Van Elslander, Research intern at the Center of International Relations, University of Ljubljana

Reclaiming Europe: Marine Le Pen’s Alternative Authority in Post-Truth Europe

The rise of post-truth politics has significantly reshaped political discourse, especially within populist movements, challenging established epistemic authorities. Marine Le Pen’s National Rally exemplifies this trend, strategically shifting its narrative from advocating a confrontational Frexit stance towards promoting an alternative European institutional vision, the Union of European Nations, between 2018 and 2019. Based on a systematic frame analysis of Marine Le Pen’s speeches during this period, this study investigates how populist counterknowledge is constructed to delegitimize the European Union as an epistemic authority. It demonstrates how Le Pen’s discourse evolved from directly opposing EU institutions toward proposing a credible alternative framework that redefines European integration from within. Ultimately, the analysis argues for a deeper understanding of populist counterknowledge strategies, emphasizing the critical importance for European institutions to proactively address not only policy criticisms but also epistemic legitimacy challenges in contemporary political contexts.

Key words: post-truth, populism, counterknowledge, Marine Le Pen, European Union

