

Editor's Note

The current special issue of the Caucasus Strategic Perspectives (CSP) journal entitled “*Azerbaijan as a middle power*” is dedicated to the topic of middle powers, their increasing roles in international politics, and the newly found image of Azerbaijan as an assertive and rising middle power. The journal also covers various topics related to middle powers and Azerbaijan’s role as a middle power.

The CSP’s special issue includes 5 articles. The authors of the special issue analysed the Azerbaijan’s rising role as a middle power, analysed the applicability of the keystone concept in the case of Silk Road region, explored the new geopolitical grouping of rising middle-power countries, conducted a comparative analysis of the potential of the rising middle powers, etc.

The special issue’s *Highlight* is the article of **Esmira Jafarova** titled “*Is Azerbaijan a Middle Power?*”. This article presents a fresh academic perspective on Azerbaijan’s growing international standing and activism via the prism of scholarly debate on middle powers. It argues that Azerbaijan, by virtue of its international initiatives and growing prestige, and having assumed the role of a norm entrepreneur, should no longer be characterized as a small state – despite its small geographic size – but as a middle power that demonstrates a high sense of global responsibility and supports international organizations, international development cooperation, sustainable development, global partnerships, multilateralism, multiculturalism, interfaith dialogue, etc.

The special issue’s *Articles Section* follows with **Damjan Krnjević Mišković’s** article of “*Superseding Middle Power Theory with the Keystone Concept: The Persuasive Case of Azerbaijan and the Silk Road Region*” explores the ‘keystone

state' concept, which according to the author, better explains geopolitical and geoeconomic developments in the 'Silk Road region'. The article's coda outlines five characteristics of 'Silk Road values' as a way to explain one important aspect of the region's strategic trajectory and its nascent institutional arrangements.

Carlos Roa's article of "*Between Giants: The HAIKU Nations' Dance on the Geopolitical Stage*" proposes a new geopolitical grouping of rising middle-power countries labelled "HAIKU" (Hungary, Azerbaijan, Israel, Kazakhstan, and the United Arab Emirates). The focus of this article is to examine these commonalities, the dynamics that have led these countries to adopt their foreign policy approaches, and the potential for alignment among these states.

Stanislav Alexandrovich Pritchkin's article of "*Middle powers' in the post-Soviet space in the context of the necessity for regionalization of international relations*" argues that in the post-Soviet space, and in particular in Central Asia and the South Caucasus, several countries can be classified as middle power (among them are Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Azerbaijan). The author reveals that, according to the totality of the analysis of various factors and characteristics among the three potential players that could be considered middle powers, in many respects only Azerbaijan meets the requirements for this status.

Daria Isachenko's article of "*To bother or not to bother with the middle power concept? The case of Türkiye*" argues that, in order to understand the foreign policy choices of states that matter, it is helpful to look at how they themselves perceive their place and role in the international arena. The article thus seeks to contrast the concept of a middle power with the concept of a central country, as developed in official Ankara's foreign policy discourse.

Finally, on behalf of the CSP team, we hope this special issue provides food for thought and contributes to and enriches the discussion on subject-matter issue.

Sincerely
Farid Shafiyev
Editor-in-Chief of CSP Journal