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Why Do the South Caucasus Countries Still Need Effective Multilateralism?

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According to established theoretical approaches, the three countries of South Caucasus are usually defined as small states in international relations, while one of them – Azerbaijan – is currently in transition from this traditional classification to the ‘middle power’ category. While small states and middle powers have the most to gain from effective multilateralism, the ongoing structural transition of the international system amid expanding great-power rivalry undermines some of multilateralism’s underpinnings.

Under such conditions, the benefits of multilateralism look less attractive and leave more space for regionalism and unilateralism. This article addresses the question of whether the South Caucasian countries should remain interested in multilateralism – and, if so, what specific characteristics make multilateralism effective for small states in a world in flux, or should they look for alternative formats of cooperation? It concludes that a structural reality that fully eliminates space for multilateralism is a historical rarity and does not exist today. Therefore, the article argues that the South Caucasian countries have every reason to continue relying on multilateralism as a source of their foreign and security policy, but without neglecting the additional power of regionalism. It offers criteria that will ensure that multilateralism remains effective for the region’s small states.

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