

The Struggle for Recognition or Enhancement of Status: Conditions for the Stability and Development of Unrecognized States Using the Example of Eurasia¹

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Abstract

In this article, the prospects for changing the status of unrecognized states in Greater Eurasia are analyzed. Status and recognition are close but distinct categories in international relations (IR) theory and international law. Status defines a state's rank in the hierarchical international system. Recognition is a different category; legally, it defines whether other states recognize a particular state as fully established and sovereign. Sovereignty is a third category related to the issue of recognition but not equal to it since it includes internal and external (international) sovereignty. There are examples of sovereign states that effectively control their territories and collect taxes, but which are not recognized as sovereign by other states.

The analysis in this article focuses on whether an unrecognized state can strengthen its status and improve its position in the international system. It is argued that this is possible, and that the absence of international recognition should not be regarded as an unsurpassable impediment to the economic development of the country.

Keywords: unrecognized states, Greater Eurasia, status

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The end of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st were marked by profound changes on the Eurasian continent, especially in its eastern and central parts, which have witnessed multi-fold expansion and intensification of ties among Eurasian countries in trade, investment, other sectors of the economy, and the political and other spheres. At the same time, the development of interstate relations has been accompanied by further disintegration of the actors. Mono-ethnic nation-states have emerged or asserted themselves in the space of former multi-ethnic states. Some scholars explain this process by the cyclic rise and decline of empires [Pomper, 2005] while others point to democratization as an incentive to, and a tool for, separating one part of society from another [Huntington, 1997]. Yet, all theories that describe disintegration generally put the emphasis on enlarged entities – the original states. Meanwhile, the emergence of many well-established – but not (yet) internationally recognized – territorial entities is already an accomplished fact.

The reasons for their unrecognition are obvious: the emergence of new states is usually accompanied by their secession from the multi-ethnic parent countries, often contrary to domestic legislation, which cannot suit those who lose territory, people, resources, and part of their prestige. Meanwhile, international law does not provide a clear answer to the question of what is to be done in such situations. On the one hand, there is the right of people to self-determination; on the other hand, secession entails violation of the principle of territorial integrity. If the conflicting parties fail to come to terms regarding a model of secession, then recognition, first, becomes dependent on the political will of individual states (that is, if there are any states ready to support this step), and second, does not evoke a universal response from the sovereign members of the world community. In practice, there are always states that sympathize with the disintegrating country and are not ready to recognize the “separatists” officially.

The lack of international recognition imposes certain constraints on a state that has turned sovereign internally but has not yet obtained sovereign status internationally. Obviously, sovereignty is an important element of a state’s status because it serves as a basis for gaining additional reputation, authority, and influence in the international system – that is, everything that ensures its sustainable existence and development. At the same time, the question arises: is sovereignty in the case of an unrecognized state a “blocking” condition, or are there other opportunities for such a state to achieve a certain status and improve its position?

This article lays out an attempt to answer this question. It is structured as follows: first, we define the place of unrecognized states in the modern international environment. Then we describe the difficulties that unrecognized states encounter on the way to recognition and the implications these difficulties entail for their development. Third, we examine the concept of status in international relations and offer a broader understanding of status with regard to actors that are not centres of power in international relations. Fourth, we analyze the experience of dependent territories, demonstrating that a certain status can be achieved even in the absence of sovereignty (or in the case of limited sovereignty), which, as the fifth section shows, is important for newly established, unrecognized Eurasian states.

Unrecognized States and Their Place in International Relations

As a result of decolonization in the second half of the 20th century, the concept of the sovereign state was finalized as a key element of international politics and the system of international law. As the principle of sovereignty, supported by mutual international recognition and participation in international organizations, spread far and wide, colonial forms of territorial entity ceased to exist. As a consequence, modern international relations are relations between sovereign states. The so-called mainstream international relations (IR) theories – realism and liberalism – were largely built on this principle.

However, a closer look at the political map of the world shows that such states are its main elements but are not the only ones. Not all territorial entities fall under the definition of sovereignty in the original understanding. Here, S. Krasner's approach may be useful: he showed that IR actors can vary in the degree of their sovereignty, including in certain attributes of sovereignty [1999]. Hence, on the modern political map, one can find forms of political structure that differ from the conventional understanding of a sovereign state. Several situations are possible.

First, there are *dependent territories*, whose status enjoys international recognition. Although some of them appear on the United Nations (UN) list of non-self-governing territories and are characterized by the UN General Assembly as territories "whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government" in matters of internal governance and development, the dependent territories have a certain autonomy and independence in decision-making. However, despite their autonomous status, in the context of international relations these territories (the term "state" is not used in relation to them for good reason) are not actors in the full sense of the word. Often, such territories include small or micro entities (with the exception, perhaps, only of Greenland), which objectively do not possess either the strength or the will for self-determination and complete distancing from their patron. The best example of this is the transfer of Hong Kong and Macau (from the United Kingdom and Portugal, respectively) to China at the end of the 20th century, which indicated the possibility of transfer of a dependent territory from one owner to another and the liquidation, albeit gradual, of the status of an internal autonomy in favour of the status of a constituent part of a sovereign state.

Second, there are numerous *political entities* and *separatist regions* – poorly controlled spaces and disputed territories (de jure owned by the state, but de facto not controlled by it and sometimes contested by neighbouring countries). These are grey zones that have not yet developed as full-fledged states. Such zones can be found in the heartland of continents in sparsely populated areas (the jungle of South America, the desert regions of the Middle East, and mountainous regions in the centre of Eurasia), as well as in places with deep-seated, smouldering conflicts where the state was ousted by rebel or terrorist groups.

The key distinction between this group and dependent territories is the desire for self-determination and, most often, independence. Typically, such "deviations" from sovereignty are not recognized inside the country. They rarely gain international recognition due to obvious legitimacy problems. The latter, in turn, predetermines the internal conflict and instability of such entities. The main feature of these political entities is poor internal governance and unestablished statehood; these are territories that have no clear geographical (border) ambitions and no official support from other countries.

Unlike the more anarchic second group of political entities, the third group of states is comprised of well-structured entities, which we call *unrecognized states*. At first glance, this group of "countries" does not differ much from the previous one, where the desire for self-determination is strong enough, too. Nevertheless, in our classification, we place the emphasis on the political governability (territoriality, as opposed to the more anarchic term "space") and statehood (established institutions of governance) of these territories. In other words, unlike the previous group, such "states," lacking all attributes of international sovereignty, are characterized by greater internal stability and sovereignty, or at least governability and clear geographical "scaling." The desire for independence and relative stability are the important attributes that put the unrecognized states closer in status to IR actors.

Such self-proclaimed countries, although not recognized by the entire global community, are often described as "quasi-states with internal sovereignty" and are opposed to "quasi-states–former colonies," which, although they have achieved international recognition, failed to establish effective control of their own territory and internal politics [Caspersen, 2011; Kol-

stø, 2006]. Unlike the latter, the self-proclaimed countries in the third group are not recognized by all sovereign states. The lack of common recognition deprives them of an opportunity to realize their potential at the international level due to the lack of legal personality. At the same time, even limited recognition by several states is an important support for their state (sovereign) status, albeit truncated.

Returning to the subject of the internal structure of unrecognized states, we must admit that their political stability (which in our analysis is the main feature that distinguishes the third group from the second) is not always equivalent to internal sovereignty. Sometimes stability (like a declaration of independence itself) is a result of external incentives and, not least, external assistance [Jones, Clark, 2020]. The most striking examples are Kosovo, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, whose internal institutions are still fragile, and their stability depends on external support (financial or advisory).

The proposed classification is rather abstract and certainly not perfect and invariable. At the same time, such classification makes it possible to better differentiate political entities according to the degree of their substantiality, stability, and integration (or potential for integration) in world affairs. Some of them (dependent territories) have not proven themselves as sovereign states but they are very stable territorial units. Others are poorly governed territories with little control over domestic affairs and the bounds of their influence. Still others (unrecognized states) are distinguished by internal stability and governability but are only partially recognized at the international level and therefore do not fully realize their potential.

Adverse Beginnings of Eurasian Unrecognized States

The issue of unrecognized states is not new, but it remains among the unsolved problems of international relations. Today, there are 15 unrecognized states around the world (including those that are partially recognized). We include in this list stable state entities that have declared their secession within clearly defined boundaries and have gained international recognition, though by far from all countries. Although the criteria for recognition are not completely clear (theoretically, recognition by even one state is enough), it is still believed that the ultimate sign of complete recognition is admission to the UN (even though the United Nations itself, not being a state, does not have the right of recognition).

What makes the recognition process complicated is that, although international law includes the right to self-determination, in practice the policy of many states and international institutions is geared to maintaining peace and the territorial integrity of states, and in most cases it interprets the “right to self-determination” as the right to self-determination of all people who reside in the given state and not some separate part of it. The UN Security Council resolutions on Rhodesia (216 and 217 of 1965), on Northern Cyprus (541 of 1983), and on the Republic of Srpska (787 of 1992) are usually referred to as the basis for such an interpretation. Since all unrecognized states emerged as a result of civil wars and secession against the will of the parent state, the process of their recognition is extremely difficult and, more often than not, unsuccessful.

In this respect, the unrecognized states that emerged on the territory of the former Soviet Union are no exception. South Ossetia and Abkhazia appeared as a result of civil wars and ethnic conflicts; the fate of several other political entities remains uncertain, and in the future, under a certain set of circumstances, they may join the group of unrecognized states in the post-Soviet space – Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Donetsk People’s Republic and Lugansk People’s Republic (for more details about the unrecognized states in the post-Soviet space see: C. King [2001], V. Kolossov and J. O’Loughlin [1999], D. Lynch [2002], and S.M. Markedonov [2012]).

In the Eurasian space, some other examples can be found. One of the partially recognized states in the Middle East is Palestine, whose legislative body announced in 1988 the creation of an independent state in East Jerusalem. Another example of an unrecognized state in Eurasia is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which declared independence in 1983 but never earned international recognition. One of the most remarkable examples is Taiwan. Disagreements over its status date back to the civil war in China. Since 28 countries have officially recognized Taiwan as an independent state, some authors suggest classifying the sovereign status of the island as something between an “unrecognized state” and a “quasi-state,” that is, a state with incomplete sovereignty [Kolstø, 2006].

The absence of comprehensive international recognition is not critical, but it certainly complicates the life and development of newly founded states. Their main problem is the lack of opportunity to take part in international political and economic institutions that set the rules of the game. Another problem is that unrecognized states often develop a strong military bias and spend on their defence programmes considerable resources so much needed for economic development. Their bias for militarization stems from the fact that international law does not protect such a state, and it can rely only on itself or, if possible, on the external allies that have recognized it. There are some other inconveniences, including restrictions on the international movement of citizens, dependence on the patron country,² low investment attractiveness, and fragility of government institutions due to immaturity and militarization.

Because of these factors, some unrecognized states failed to survive and disappeared from the political map. Among them, for example, were two African states, Katanga and Biafra, as well as Tamil Eelam in Southeast Asia. Some unrecognized states in Eastern Europe were subsequently incorporated into the countries that gained independence following the collapse of Yugoslavia. In 1995, the Republic of Srpska received the status of a territorial entity within Bosnia-Herzegovina, while the self-proclaimed state of the Republic of Srpska Krajina lost most of its territory and was integrated into Croatia.

However, some unrecognized states prove to be viable. Several factors act in their favour: a high level of nationalism cementing the population, the militarization of society, the weakness of the parent state, support from an external patron and the international community’s reluctance to intervene [Kolstø, 2006]. In other words, the lack of recognition as such does not doom the state to failure. Perhaps one of the most successful examples of this is Taiwan, whose gross domestic product per capita is one of the highest in the world according to the International Monetary Fund [IMF, 2020] and whose foreign exchange reserves amount to \$543.3 billion according to indicators available from the country’s Central Bank [2020]. Many sovereign states possess far smaller forex reserves.

The foregoing allows an assumption that the key parameter of survival after obtaining the attributes of statehood, such as territory and institutions, is not only and not so much recognition, but economic and social development. Consequently, for unrecognized states (falling into the third group in our classification), the main challenge is sustainable development precisely in conditions of long-term non-recognition.

An analysis of this issue can be approached from two points of view. The first constitutes a relatively new approach in the IR theory that assesses the stability of a state and its success on the world stage through the lens of status. Although the bulk of the literature on this topic is devoted to sovereign countries, we believe that it can be useful in analyzing the survival of less sovereign actors. The other approach is to explore the experience of dependent territories from the first group in our classification, which successfully combine incomplete sovereignty with

² More on the forms and degree of such dependence see A. Tokarev, A. Margojev and A. Prikhodchenko [2021].

long-term development. On this basis, we can formulate a hypothesis about how status influences the survival and sustainable development of international actors with limited recognition.

The Problem of IR Status and Unrecognized States

In one of the classic texts of modern political science, R. Gilpin, noted that status is the ultimate goal of political leaders, many of whom are obsessed with investing in it, achieving it, and defending it [1983].

Let us try to project this postulate to the level of international relations. On the one hand, as is known, relations between states take place under conditions of anarchy, which is one of the key characteristics of the international system. On the other hand, despite the absence of an omnipotent hegemonic authority that might overcome anarchy and dictate uniform rules of the game to everyone, these relations are subject to established hierarchical structures in which some states find themselves under the influence of other, more powerful ones. This situation embraces not only individual institutions (for example, the UN Security Council, where five countries have exclusive veto rights), but also implies the ability of one state to influence the foreign policy of others, both with regard to military issues and economic relations [Lake, 2009]. Consequently, status delineates a state's position in the international system (hierarchy) relative to the position of other states [Renshon, 2017].

Other studies prompt the conclusion that status in international relations is closely related not only to the concept of authority, that is, the ability of a state to project its influence on other actors and impose a certain pattern of behaviour [Lake, 2014], but also to the legitimacy of power. In other words, the image of a state, its authority, and its status, which are created and subsequently maintained through interaction between states, form a kind of superstructure lying over the state's recognition. This suggests that power per se does not determine status as long as it is not recognized, and it is even rejected as illegitimate by other participants in the international system. It is the recognition and belonging to the family of sovereign states that provide the basis for the development and strengthening of status in the international system.

Status and the search for international prestige, as understood by classical and structural realism, were considered the primary tasks of states seeking to increase their influence in the international arena and, in this way, to improve the chances of survival [Mearsheimer, 2001; Morgenthau, 1948]. At the same time, the concept of status in the international system has undergone significant transformation over the past decades as a result of globalization, the spread of the market economy model, and the growing role of economic factors as the main determinants of state power [Gilpin, 1983]. With the development of economic relations, participation in international trade and the international division of labour gradually supplanted territorial expansion as a tool for increasing the strength and maximizing the state's welfare [Ibid.]. Hence a state's status began to depend on its ability to cooperate with other actors in the international economic system, including trade and financial relations.

In sum, status is a country's place in the world or regional hierarchy and its rank in a status-conscious community. This community can be global, regional or local, depending on the reference group used to assess the status of a certain state. In all these cases, status is also understood as a rank, the ordinal number of a country in the eyes of the other members of the community, that is, a group of countries with which the given state competes and compares itself [Renshon, 2017]. Some experts also believe that state status is associated with membership of a status group [Lake, 2014]. For example, Russia in the 1990s aspired to membership in the Group of 7 (G7) mainly to bolster its status. At the global level, the main such group is the UN, which confirms the sovereign status of its members.

Status can be universal and particular. A country may enjoy a high status in a particular area, for instance, serving as a model of economic growth, being led by a charismatic leader, or enjoying acclaim for its computer engineers, but have no status in other respects. This happens because the world system incorporates not one main hierarchy, but a multitude of them (for details, see D.A. Lake [2011]). The country that is rated highly in many hierarchies also possesses a high universal status.

Modern status studies mostly focus on large states and centres of power [Chan, 2007; Johnston, 2003; Krickovic, Weber, 2018; Murray, 2018]. This is not surprising: such countries have not only sovereignty and international recognition, but also power that can be converted and invested in status. Moreover, these countries dictate the rules of the game and the functioning of many international and regional institutions. However, as we have shown above, although power is an important factor, it is only a superstructure compared to the very fact the state interacts with other countries, building an appropriate reputation, authority, and status. In the modern world, we deal with a multitude of statuses, so acquisition of international – as opposed to regional or local – recognition as a mandatory precondition for achieving a status that can be converted into an advantage for economic development no longer appears vital for small (or less powerful) states. Indeed, many studies have noted that even small countries can advantageously use their minor status for economic development. N.Y. Kaveshnikov [2008] pointed to the benefits that small European states (Malta, Cyprus and Luxembourg) derive from their “banker” status, while Hong Kong profits from serving as China’s window to the world and a trade gateway to that country for the rest of the world.

If we accept international relations in all their diversity, that is, the entire spectrum of their actors, including unrecognized ones, then the concept of status should be approached more flexibly. This also applies to the geography of recognition (by the whole world or an individual region or subregion) and to its constituent elements, where, alongside absolute and universally recognized sovereignty, there may also be functions that an international entity performs in a particular community of states. Moreover, if these functions are performed in accordance with generally accepted rules, this gives a state not just a mechanical role in the system, but precisely the status of an actor state (regardless of the issues of recognition) that performs this role. Hence, as far as status is concerned, there still is room for self-expression and self-realization both for small countries and for the other political actors we consider in this article. An analysis of the positive and negative experience in the development of their status from this point of view can show how this factor influences the capabilities of other, not quite sovereign entities.

How Dependent Territories and Partially Recognized States Can Use Their Status

Although small states and microstates, as well as dependent territories, have a limited degree of autonomy (since the former are dependent in their actions on the decisions made by large centres of power and the latter are not formally sovereign), many of them are characterized by a relatively high level of economic development and integration into the global economic space. It is precisely economic integration that appears to be the most appropriate strategy for small states and microstates, many of which have successfully established a flexible system of trade with more economically developed countries [Armstrong, Read, 2003]. In some cases, involvement in the global financial system in the capacity of offshore zones (for example, the Faroe and Caribbean Islands) compensates for limited political autonomy. Others focus on developing niche markets, including in finance (some insular nations such as American Samoa, Saint Lucia, and Trinidad and Tobago) and tourism (Fiji and Mauritius). In such a way they attract

foreign capital to offset the limited scale of the domestic market and the lack of a sufficiently rich resource potential.

The ability of small states and microstates with limited autonomy to create an advantageous legal basis for trading and financial transactions with more developed partners ensures their stable economic development, which would be impossible to achieve with only status as a sovereign state to rely on. Sovereignty and a high degree of autonomy are unable to provide additional advantages that dependent territories lack [Armstrong, Read, 2003]. It is no coincidence that only two dependent insular states, Palau and East Timor, have received sovereign status over the past 40 years, which made scholars conclude that “subnational island jurisdictions (SNIJs)” do not seek greater autonomy or sovereign status [Grydehøj, 2020]. Research shows that complete rejection of foreign economic assistance for the sake of achieving full sovereignty looks to be a disadvantageous strategy even to Greenland, which has a sufficient degree of autonomy from Denmark and a fairly high level of economic independence [Grydehøj, 2020].

Many developing small states and microstates, including insular territories with limited autonomy, are also dependent on foreign aid. Firm economic ties with the parent states, most often former colonial empires, help maintain a steady influx of resources to dependent territories [Grydehøj, 2020]. In the second half of the 20th century, after the collapse of colonial empires, some countries, for example Cuba and Taiwan, were involved in a bipolar confrontation, which yielded certain economic benefits [Schmitt, 2021]. However, despite independence (if any), the influence of external actors – in most cases, former colonial empires – did not disappear with the end of the Cold War. Britain’s “overseas territories” in the Caribbean region are still under significant economic and political influence of the parent country.

Remarkably, historical examples of using one’s niche status and its conversion into a developmental resource can be found both among small and microstates (that is, sovereign) and dependent territories (non-sovereign but recognized), and among partially recognized state entities.

One of the main positive examples is Taiwan, which has shown outstripping economic growth in recent decades, despite the formal non-recognition by many countries due to mainland China’s policies. Taiwan successfully maintains economic ties with many countries in Asia, Europe and America, including such major partners as Japan, China, the U.S., Korea and Saudi Arabia, as well as international institutions (Taiwan is a member of the World Trade Organization, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the Asian Development Bank and other regional economic organizations). One of the reasons for this success was the establishment of Taiwan’s effective control of the group of islands in the Taiwan Strait following a military clash with China in the second half of the 20th century [Shaw, 1985]. Although the contested islands Jinmen and Matsu are close to mainland China’s borders, the Taiwanese government’s ability to establish and maintain control over these offshore islands enabled Taiwan to subsequently gain the status of one of the leading financial centres in Asia and the world at large. And of course, the political and economic support that Taiwan receives from the United States and Japan is important.

Another example, though far less successful, is Palestine, whose development opportunities have been severely constrained for decades due to the lack of internal governance and political stability. Despite an attempt to resolve the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the 1990s, the agreements signed in Oslo and the transfer of some responsibilities to the Palestinian National Authority did not resolve the existing differences between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. As a result, recurring hostilities impede the country’s development, while a significant part of its population is on the verge of poverty [Farsakh, 2008]. The emphasis on the struggle for independence, which is deeply ingrained in Palestinian society, leads to radicaliza-

tion of the political agenda and an objective lack of conditions for obtaining a status crucial to attracting external resources to the economy, even at the regional level.

Thus, we can conclude that the emphasis on the struggle for full sovereignty not only hinders successful development, but to a certain extent contradicts development goals. Moreover, the rejection of the autarchic model in favour of integration into the international economic (and not necessarily political) system is a prerequisite for economic growth and a higher standard of living. This fully applies to countries and territories whose status is universally accepted and recognized (small states, microstates and dependent territories). Since these functional elements of status are less dependent on the global consensus, it can be assumed that their presence or absence may affect the capability of unrecognized states not only, and perhaps not so much, on the global scale as at the regional level.

Eurasian Unrecognized States: A Problem of Recognition or a Problem of Status?

In the Eurasian space, the emergence of unrecognized states in the second half of the 20th century was, to one degree or another, linked with two events: decolonization and disintegration of multi-ethnic states. In some cases, these processes overlapped. At the same time, in all such cases, the “countries” that failed to achieve prompt international recognition were forced to look for ways of ensuring their stability and development in a situation of limited international sovereignty.

Today the list of such countries on the Eurasian continent looks as follows. First, there is Taiwan, which isolated itself from mainland China as a result of the civil war caused by the struggle against Japanese colonialism. Second is the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, which emerged following the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the mandate system of governing territories until they acquired sovereignty. Third, Kosovo. This problem has remained unresolved since the collapse of Yugoslavia. Fourth, Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Their independence and partial recognition are also related to the consequences of the multi-ethnic Soviet Union’s collapse.

Such cases as Transnistria, Nagorno-Karabakh, Palestine, as well as some other separatist movements in European countries (including Catalonia and Scotland) are absent from this list. Our choice was based on the criterion of a high degree of statehood. We attached the tag of an unrecognized state only to those entities that managed to gain control over a clearly defined territory and establish a stable state order there (on their own or with external support). In all other cases, the state entities or political movements in question are supported from the outside, but do not have stable internal sovereignty.

Nevertheless, all these cases indicate that the process of national self-determination in the Eurasian space is far from complete. The system of sovereign states, which we used as the starting point of our discussion, is the main, but not the only, criterion of modern international relations. New states continue to emerge. For some of them, existence without universal international recognition and outside international institutions created by sovereign states becomes an everyday routine. How can unrecognized states ensure not only survival, but also internal stability and development in this case?

Obviously, the struggle for sovereignty as the goal of joining the club of sovereign states with all the attendant benefits such a position implies cannot be regarded as the main strategy. The above examples of unrecognized states in Eurasia clearly confirm the international community’s conservatism in this matter. Experience shows that if sovereignty is not recognized in the first months or years following the declaration of independence, the chances of success

in the further struggle for universal international recognition look bleak. It might be logical to assume that in this case focusing all diplomatic and economic efforts on securing the confirmation of independence may be a popular (as well as populist) strategy, but economically such a policy is not quite expedient.

At the same time, the experience of Eurasian unrecognized states, with the exception of Taiwan, shows that partial recognition has clear regional or local specifics: the “core” of the countries that have recognized sovereignty is located in the same region/subregion as the unrecognized state itself. Kosovo is widely recognized by the countries of the European Union; Abkhazia and South Ossetia, by Russia; and Northern Cyprus, by Turkey. Hence unrecognized states may try to integrate into local and subregional trading, economic, and financial organizations, which are currently booming in Eurasia.

Of course, this strategy is not as straightforward as in the case of the dependent territories, whose international status is universally recognized. There are several likely obstacles to this strategy. First, the country’s geographic location can make it difficult to select potential partners (though in the case of Switzerland or Luxembourg, as well as insular quasi-states and dependent territories located far away from continents, the geographical position of the state was not an obstacle). Second, some states that not only refuse to recognize the independence of a newly formed state, but also actively fight against its independence, will not hesitate to go to great lengths in an effort to prevent its integration even into non-political structures.

Despite possible obstacles, changing the goals — from the acquisition of international sovereignty (recognition) in favour of strengthening the functional elements of the status of a state that provides services to everyone on equal terms and regardless of the readiness for the political recognition of this state — is seen as more advantageous for several reasons. First, this approach reduces the conflict potential. If the struggle for universal recognition is removed from the agenda, and a state entity enjoys certain security guarantees, for example, from a patron or a partner who has recognized it, and is engaged in the development of economic ties without preconditions, then the global centres of power will be less interested in politicizing and problematizing the issue of recognition. On the contrary, an overemphasis on security and military cooperation to the detriment of the economy may reproduce the conflict in the regional and even international context. Furthermore, giving priority to the economic sphere allows an unrecognized state to focus resources on its internal stability and economic development, which seems more appropriate in the long term, as long as international recognition remains unachievable. Setting global strategic goals would be wrong, likewise. Eurasia is witnessing booming regionalization, including at the local and subregional levels, and it is integration into these processes that an unrecognized entity should begin with.

Conclusion

Through an examination of unrecognized (partially recognized) states that have a certain level of sovereignty and internal stability and resilience, but do not have the full status of a recognized sovereign state and membership in the UN, we have shown that the traditional logic of the relationship between status and sovereignty (sovereignty first, status second) does not always apply to small, unrecognized states in Eurasia. For large, full-fledged states, status is a kind of superstructure over sovereignty. Centuries-old statehood, stable geopolitical interests, and a long history of rivalry and cooperation with partners are the realities that large, historically established states take for granted, and their status develops on this foundation in accordance with their successes and weaknesses at one time or another.

Newly founded, unrecognized states do not have such a solid foundation. Building and strengthening it may take a long time. For unrecognized states, whose sovereignty cannot be finalized quickly enough, the status should be created on a different basis. In this article we expand the understanding of status and include in it (in addition to sovereignty) other components of authority, such as the level of integration in the international (or regional) community and the performance of certain functions. We believe that in the future our approach can contribute to further theoretical study of status in relation to international relations.

Although the issue of sovereignty is important for unrecognized states, its priority and absoluteness (indivisibility of sovereignty) in matters of survival and development is rather factitious. Without full sovereignty and recognition, it becomes more important to create an alternative, non-political status that will help find a niche in other areas, while leaving aside the issue of sovereignty at the international level. This conclusion is based on the positive experience of both dependent territories and individual unrecognized states, primarily Taiwan. And it is indirectly confirmed by the lack of significant economic results in many unrecognized states of Eurasia, which have concentrated their efforts on gaining recognition (international sovereignty) but have not yet exerted any efforts to display their potential in a different capacity.

International recognition (external sovereignty) is not a universal means a young state can employ to win acclaim, while non-recognition is not a critical problem. Moreover, it is very difficult to overcome non-recognition, and sometimes it is completely impossible. On the other hand, it is quite realistic for a young state to achieve a certain status, especially at the regional level, among neighbours and countries interested in certain services it can offer. This is the important factor that confirms the capability of an actor in its own right and may be the first step toward converting a state's internal stability and, in a sense, internal substantiality into full-fledged international recognition.

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