



«THE BOSPHORUS ROUNDTABLE»

## **SOVEREIGNTY AND COERCION THE UNITED NATIONS IN THE WEB OF POWER POLITICS**

### **Executive Summary**

Istanbul, Türkiye, 12 September 2024  
RE/29578-is

On September 12, 2024, scholars, politicians, diplomats, and practitioners convened at the historic Çırağan Palace in Istanbul for the Bosphorus Roundtable, hosted by the International Progress Organization, continuing its tradition of tackling crucial issues in international affairs. The roundtable addressed the challenges and contradictions facing the United Nations system in maintaining international peace and security, focusing on the tensions between sovereignty and coercion in an increasingly multipolar world.

The event was structured around four sessions, each featuring distinguished experts who spoke on various aspects of sovereignty, power politics, and the future of the UN's role in global governance. The speakers discussed the foundational contradictions of the UN Charter, the veto power of the Permanent Five (P5) members of the Security Council, and the impact of realpolitik on the enforcement of international law.

In his opening remarks, Dr. Hans Köchler, President of the International Progress Organization, emphasized the contradiction between the UN Charter's principle of sovereign equality and the voting privilege of the permanent members of the Security Council. He highlighted how this inconsistency has led to a de facto system of "sovereign inequality" and discussed implications for world order and international peace. Dr. Köchler recalled the International Progress Organization's long-standing engagement with UN reform, dating back to its 1985 meeting in New York City on democracy in international relations.

Mogens Lykketoft, former speaker of the Danish Parliament, shared insights from his experience as President of the 70<sup>th</sup> General Assembly of the United Nations, focusing on the dynamics of the powerplay within the UN system and efforts to increase the relevance of the General Assembly. He stressed the importance of the UN as a forum for global dialogue while acknowledging the challenges posed by current geopolitical tensions. Lykketoft highlighted the UN's role in preventing direct confrontation between nuclear powers and its contributions to global health and life expectancy through agencies like the World Health Organization (WHO).

Professor Rauf Versan from Istanbul University (Türkiye) examined the dilemma of enforcement under Chapter VII of the UN Charter, highlighting the tension between the Security Council's mandate and the principles of international law. His presentation explored the Council's record in the peaceful settlement of disputes and the challenges posed by political divergences among its members. Versan delved into the historical context of international law and the evolution of the UN system, particularly focusing on the shift from the "right to wage war" to the current collective security framework.

Professor Chin Leng Lim from the Chinese University of Hong Kong provided a critical analysis of the "rules-based order" versus the UN legal order, discussing the interpretative disputes that arise between these two meta-narratives and their implications for international peace and security. Lim explored the tensions between different interpretations of international law, particularly in contentious areas such as the Israel-Palestine conflict and freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

In the second session, Dr. Karin Kneissl, former Foreign Minister of Austria, focused on the tension between normative and factual levels of sovereignty. She discussed the impact of technological changes on traditional notions of state sovereignty and raised the issue of extraterritorial jurisdiction. She particularly stressed the importance of permanent sovereignty over natural resources and highlighted, in that regard, the development of alternative forms of intergovernmental cooperation such as BRICS.

Professor Beatriz Bissio from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro (Brazil) offered insights on the concept of sovereignty from the perspective of the Global South, highlighting how violations of sovereignty of these countries often relate to interference in decisions about the use of natural resources. Bissio described the history of the debates on sovereignty in the context of decolonization from the 1955 Bandung Conference to contemporary discourses on economic sovereignty and control over resources.

Professor Berdal Aral from Istanbul Medeniyet University (Türkiye) analyzed the UN Charter's exceptions to the principle of sovereign equality and the consequences of this for world peace, focusing on the Security Council's decision-making processes in the period after the Cold War. Aral provided numerous examples of how the P5 have used their veto power to protect their interests and those of their allies, often at the expense of global peace and security.

The third session began with Professor Daniele Archibugi from the Italian National Research Council, who presented data on the use of the veto power by permanent members of the Security Council and discussed realistic options for reform. Archibugi

emphasized the need for greater transparency in the Council's operation and explored potential ways to make the use of the veto more costly for permanent members.

Professor Bardo Fassbender from the University of St. Gallen (Switzerland) provided a comprehensive overview of the right of veto in the UN Security Council, tracing its history, present status, and future prospects. He examined the political and legal importance of the veto power in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and considered possibilities for its reform or abolition, noting the significant challenges posed by the current geopolitical landscape.

Professor Hassan Diab, former Prime Minister of Lebanon, addressed the challenges to democracy in a multipolar world posed by the P5 veto power in the UN Security Council. He advocated for comprehensive reforms to ensure greater inclusivity, transparency, and accountability, proposing specific measures such as supermajority voting and a rotation mechanism for representation.

Associate Professor Gabriel M. Lentner from Danube University Krems (Austria) critically examined the role of the UN Security Council in international criminal justice, highlighting issues of selectivity and double standards in the prosecution and enforcement of international criminal law. Lentner discussed the complex relationship between the Security Council and the International Criminal Court, using case studies such as on the situations in Darfur and Libya to illustrate his points.

In the final session, Professor Said Saddiki from Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University in Fès (Morocco) discussed UN Charter reform, emphasizing the need to balance sovereign equality with effective functioning in the face of contemporary global challenges. Saddiki explored various models of voting rights in international organizations and proposed realistic options for reform, such as rotating veto power among non-permanent members.

The conference concluded with a presentation by Dr. Deepak Mawar from Tilburg University (Netherlands), who examined the challenges to liberalism in global governance, focusing on the impact of populist trends on the UN Security Council and international law. Mawar discussed the rise of nationalist movements globally and their potential effects on multilateral cooperation and the functioning of international institutions.

Through diverse yet interconnected presentations, the conference provided a comprehensive analysis of the tensions between sovereignty, coercion, and global governance within the UN system. Addressing both historical perspectives and contemporary challenges, the participants underscored the need for structural reform in international institutions to reflect current global realities and ensure a more equitable world order.

The papers presented at the roundtable conference will be published by the International Progress Organization in the series Studies in International Relations.