

**Editorial**

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With this second ‘post-transition’ issue of *JIRD*, we are presenting the first of several special features that we have planned for the journal over the next few months. In addition to two full-length research papers that have passed through the normal peer review process, this issue features a Forum on ‘International Relations in Central and Eastern Europe.’ It seems appropriate to spend a few lines discussing the process through which a Forum is constructed, as this is a different procedure than that followed by a research paper published in these pages.

In order to clarify this, let me briefly sketch what happens when we receive a research manuscript. With such manuscripts, we ask for assistance from peer reviewers whose identity is kept secret from the author(s), just as the identity of the author(s) is kept secret from the reviewers. When we receive a research manuscript, we send it out to two or three (preferably three) peer reviewers; these peer reviewers provide us with their expert judgment on the quality of the manuscript, including their overall recommendation as to whether the piece should be published, rejected, or sent back to the author(s) for revision. At this point, the members of the editorial team craft a letter to the author(s) summarizing and highlighting the most important points raised by the reviewers, as well as rendering an editorial decision on the manuscript: accept, reject, or ‘revise and resubmit.’ In the case of a ‘revise and resubmit,’ the manuscript must be revised and resubmitted to us within a few months, at which point it is sent out to anonymous peer reviewers — whenever possible, the same reviewers who looked at the previous version of the manuscript — for a further round of evaluations. Every research paper that you see in a peer-reviewed journal such as *JIRD* has passed through this process, and the reviewers’ comments are often invaluable to the production of the published version of the manuscript.

A Forum is a different kind of publication. Forum contributions are not generally submitted at the discretion of their author(s); rather, the contributions to a Forum are solicited by the editorial team, and are specifically solicited from scholars with expertise in the specific area that the Forum is intended to address. Forum contributions are also not sent out for anonymous peer review, but are reviewed internally by the editorial team. This does not mean that the authors of Forum contributions have not received detailed



feedback on earlier drafts of their manuscripts; on the contrary, those earlier versions received detailed comments from the editorial team, much in the same way that a research paper would have. The difference is that no anonymous peers provided feedback on or evaluation of Forum contributions.

The purpose of a Forum is to focus scholarly attention on some important topic that might be difficult to address in the framework of a traditional research paper. This is certainly the case with the Forum in this issue; it would be difficult to imagine a single paper that could address the state of the field of International Relations in six different countries, and also difficult to imagine the authorship of such a manuscript — who would have sufficient local experience in so many different places? A Forum is the obvious solution, as the format allows scholars to spend a little time reflecting on an issue (the field of International Relations, in this case), and by publishing all of these contributions together we can present you with a richer tapestry than a single paper might contain. A Forum is also an effort to foreground an issue by showcasing a variety of different voices. In this way, you might think of a Forum as the record of a scholarly conversation that you, the reader, get to listen in to. You might walk away with new ideas about a topic you might not have thought much about before — or, if you have thought about it, you might walk away with a new perspective.

As Petr Drulák, who coordinated the Forum, discusses the individual Forum contributions in his introduction, I am not going to spend any time doing this here. Instead, I will say a brief word or two about each of the two research papers in this issue. In our lead paper, William Vlcek interrogates the commonplace notion of a ‘level playing field’ among states in the global political economy; he concludes that this notion is less an accurate description of a situation, and more a rhetorical tool used by the powerful to secure their advantages. In our second paper, Cornelius Friesendorf and Ursula Schroeder trace efforts by international actors to combat crime in Bosnia; their analysis highlights the challenges faced in matching an international mandate to local conditions. In both of these papers, the authors urge us to move beyond the apparent or obvious meanings of terms or treaties and look more closely at their practical functioning. We are pleased to be able to present two different examples of this broad social-scientific strategy.

Patrick Thaddeus Jackson
Editor-in-Chief