

Editorial

Dear Readers,

A constant struggle for power and influence between states has always figured among the main characteristics of international politics. Regional powers can be considered the middle management of world politics: sufficiently powerful to make their mark on the region and take on a political and economic leadership role, but not yet or no longer powerful enough to be able to fill this role at the global level as well.

In this connection, particular attention is due to those countries that have succeeded in developing into significant powers with regional influence or even further. This applies first and foremost to China, which has become considerably more influential in political, economic and military terms within just a few decades. One of the vehicles China uses to pursue its global political aims is the BRICS association which several authors deal with to start this issue off. While the article gathers different perspectives on BRICS, it illustrates above all one main point: the recent economic problems in most of the member states have strengthened China's dominance within the group even further.

The economic development in Vietnam, the second emerging economy in Asia investigated in this issue, over the last three decades has meant that this country also plays an increasingly important role in the region. Apart from Vietnam's economic strength, this has above all to do with the importance of its location on the South China Sea in terms of regional and geopolitics, although this not only entails opportunities, but also some risks, as Peter Girke reports.

On the African continent, there are actually several potential regional heavyweights waiting in the wings. In his article, Terence McNamee looks at Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa, investigating in particular the question as to the conditions that need to be created for these countries to be able to develop their full potential and play a positive role in shaping developments in their neighbourhood.

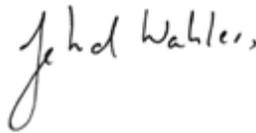
Hüseyin Bağcı and Çağlar Kurç explain that Turkey has a disputable record as a regional power. Once a successful mediator in regional conflicts, the country has managed to alienate itself from all sides in recent years through its foreign policy conduct. According to the authors, Turkey will only be able to regain credibility and influence in the region if it succeeds in reprising a constructive regional and international role.

Latin American Venezuela has also come increasingly under the spotlight. Despite its wealth of natural resources, the country has come to be at the brink of economic collapse, not to mention the political circumstances. Henning Suhr predicts that without a fundamental change in course Venezuela will find it difficult to take on an important role in the region despite its oil riches.

Whether we are looking at countries on the rise such as China and Vietnam or those on the decline such as Venezuela, we nevertheless only see a snapshot of the constant struggle for power and influence. And because nothing is as constant as change, as anyone knows, the rise and fall of regional powers will continue to characterise the international system.

I wish you a stimulating read.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'G'.

Dr. Gerhard Wahlers is Editor of International Reports, Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Department European and International Cooperation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (gerhard.wahlers@kas.de).