The Foreign Policy of Weak States: The Case of Lebanon
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Abstract
Foreign policy analysis often gives exclusive attention to great powers or ‘strong states’. Weak states are usually ignored as international actors due to their ‘system ineffectualness’. This paper aims for a better understanding of the foreign policy of weak states and looks at Lebanon as a case in point. Lebanon’s weakness does not only stem from military, economic or size factors, but also from the divisions of its multi-confessional society and its consociational political system. As a consequence, Lebanon is unable to agree on a national foreign policy agenda and, instead, produces multiple and inconsistent foreign policies.

Lebanon’s domestic identity groups enjoy a relatively high level of political autonomy and pursue their domestic interests in the international arena. Thus, domestic and foreign policy overlap tremendously. The analysis applies a constructivist approach at the nation-state level. Three domestic groups are analysed in more detail: the Maronite Christians, the Shia Muslims, and the Sunni Muslims.