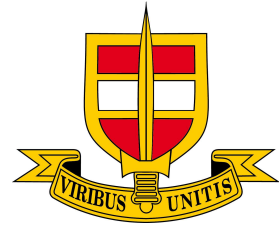




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**18<sup>th</sup> Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group  
“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

**“South Caucasus: Leveraging Political Change  
in a Context of Strategic Volatility”**

**– Workshop Outline and Programme –**

**Draft as of 6 November 2018**

**8 – 11 November 2018**

Château Rothschild  
Reichenau/Rax, Austria

## **Purpose:**

In 2012, the Austrian Ministry of Defence, through its National Defence Academy and the Directorate General for Security Policy, resumed the scientific work done by the PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes in the South Caucasus. This initiative built upon a Study Group which began already in 2001 but was discontinued due to internal strife in the region in 2005. In 2017, the work of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) attracted the favourable attention of the Dialogue of Civilizations' Research Institute (DOC/RI) in Berlin, which since then has been contributing topically, logistically and financially to the effort.

Past workshops held since 2012 in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, and in the wider region (Tbilisi, Istanbul, Kyiv, Chisinau, Varna, and Minsk) have demonstrated that the Study Group had established a broad academic basis and cohesion necessary to undertake more ambitious cooperative projects. In addition, as it has already proved in the recent past, the RSSC SG is an ideal “track-two diplomacy” tool that may enable an academic examination of original, and sometimes controversial, ideas which might inspire future political action. For example, in Minsk, the RSSC SG considered the feasibility and desirability of a broad re-forging of the Euro-Atlantic security architecture to protect the South Caucasus from the deterioration of relations at Europe's eastern edge. It now seems that the region is being racked by upheaval: protests followed by government reshuffle in Georgia, a “Velvet Revolution” in Armenia, a rejected Georgian offer for a peace deal with Abkhazia, and South Ossetia, creeping military tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan from the Nagorno-Karabakh Line of Contact to the border of Armenia with the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic of Azerbaijan against the backdrop of Russian “football” soft-power, political unrest in Nagorno-Karabakh. The question now is whether and how these changes are genuinely political and also whether they represent an opportunity for meaningful conflict resolution and stabilization.

As the 17<sup>th</sup> RSSC SG Workshop, held in Minsk, showed, those upheavals represent more than a risk to the South Caucasus actors and to the region itself; they also represent a risk to the mediation campaign expertly run by Belarus. So the stakes keep increasing with every new upset. It is therefore required to have a workshop examine the context of the recent public demonstrations in Georgia and other parts of the region, of the revolution in Armenia, of the creeping tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and also the peace overtures recently made by Georgia. Meanwhile regional powers like Russia, Turkey, and Iran have been grappling with their own challenges, which begs several questions about the input of these powers into South Caucasus regional and security politics.

This workshop has two purposes: the first is to provide an appreciation of the context of South Caucasus upheavals, and to determine connections between events (and non-events). More than half a decade into the work of the RSSC SG, this should prove to be a form of “stock-taking” event, the result of which should prove interesting academically. The second objective of the workshop is to identify opportunities for peace building, conflict management and resolution brought about by regional political change in the South Caucasus. It has been a busy year in the region, with elections in Armenia and Azerbaijan, peace offerings by Georgia, recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Syria, etc. No event being isolated, the conference should enable participants to work out inter-connections between events in the region, and to cast them against the backdrop of great power relations.

Therefore, the co-chairs are convening a workshop on **“South Caucasus: Leveraging Political Change in a Context of Strategic Volatility”** to be held in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, 8-11 November 2018.

## Partners

- PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes;
- Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna;
- Directorate General for Security Policy at the Austrian Ministry of Defence, Vienna;
- Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, Berlin.

## Topic Outline

Change is always pregnant with risk. But it is also harbinger of opportunity. The year 2018 so far has been a ferment of activity for the South Caucasus. By the middle of the year, Georgia had been seen approaching Abkhazia and South Ossetia with a new peace proposal, the first since the Russia-Georgia war of 2008. This is a significant change in Tbilisi's attitude in light of the stalemated Minsk process. That overture can probably not be seen in isolation of Syria's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, itself probably connected to Russia's support in the former's civil war. Lest we forget, Abkhazia's independence has been de-recognized by a pair of countries which initially recognized her (further casting doubt on the validity of the stabilizing virtues of international law). Certainly, Russia, as local hegemon, can impose on Syria to do its bidding. But to which extent does this hegemony reach, when Armenia's political establishment, seeking to maintain itself in power, collapses in favour of an outsider nearly un-opposed by Moscow?

The Armenian "Velvet Revolution" had many of the features of an event that should be alarming to Moscow, yet, the reaction has been tame. Several hypotheses can be offered; a) the preparations for the World Cup of football, which Russia hosts, take precedence as an effort in soft-power, b) the revolution is merely a change of administration, but not of direction (away from the Eurasian Economic Union, for instance, and from Russia). Still, a revolution is a revolution, and the Kremlin is usually afraid of "copy-cat" revolutions or of "contagion" at home. Of more importance is the restraint shown by Azerbaijan. Usually, domestic upheaval invites external intervention, but this does not seem to have happened in the case of Armenia. One hypothesis is that Aliyev's re-election itself needed stability, and that it was preferable to adopt a wait and see attitude regarding Armenia's changing landscape. In any case, the conflagration one could fear did not erupt, for which we must be thankful to the powers that be.

These were not the only events of note in the South Caucasus; Tbilisi was the scene of mass demonstrations in the late spring in protest against police heavy-handedness in night clubs, a sign that Georgia's youth (and economy) is starting to resemble Europe's in its aspirations; Western-leaning, but also pleasure-seeking. Could this be the opening that is required to move on from confrontation among protagonists? Similarly, demonstrations were also recorded in Nagorno-Karabakh. It remains to be seen whether, and if so how, protests there will resonate in Yerevan, now that the power holders are less connected with that region, and more broadly on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution process.

Finally, the great powers' bids in the South Caucasus are also influenced by events. Russia hosted the world cup. As the country rekindles its attempts at soft-power projection, will this have positive effects on its image, on its conflict management attitude? One would hope that the positive return of soft power would have this effect, and that the opportunities for conflict resolution in the region would be fastened upon. Turkey held elections on 24 June, in a bid for Erdogan to solidify his grip on the helm. The results should also enable Turkey to assert itself more decisively in the region, and perhaps to resume more coherent regional stabilization efforts.

## **Key questions**

- Does political change threaten or promote stability in the case of the South Caucasus?
- What is the overall context of South Caucasus upheavals?
- Why didn't Azerbaijan seek to take advantage of Armenia's domestic troubles?
- Why didn't Russia react more forcefully to the events in Armenia?
- Did the global attention triggered by the peace talks in the Korean Peninsula, and the soaring military tensions in the Middle East facilitate/precipitate political upheaval in the South Caucasus?
- What are the circumstances of Syria's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia? If sponsored from Moscow, is the recognition connected to Georgia's recent attempts at peace overtures towards them?
- What can be expected from the new government in Tbilisi?
- What can we expect from demonstrations in Nagorno-Karabakh?
- What foreign and security policy changes can be expected from the elections in Azerbaijan and Turkey?
- Has Russia decided to put all its eggs in the soft-power basket, at least during the FIFA World Cup?
- How are the current political changes in the South Caucasus linked to the ongoing confrontation between Russia and the West? What are their likely consequences over the EU-Russia and US-Russia relations?
- What recommendations can be made so that positive change may be sustained?

### **PANEL 1: Taking Stock of Political Change in the South Caucasus**

In this panel, speakers from the South Caucasus, as well as from Russia and Turkey, will provide an evaluation of the changes that have traversed the region since the beginning of the year. Of particular importance would be an accurate and un-emotional description of events, its actors, and objectives. Why did the Georgians go down in the street? What were the root causes and the domestic and regional policy consequences of the Armenian "Velvet Revolution"? Did the elections in Azerbaijan really maintain the status quo? What were the details of the Georgian peace deal to Abkhazia? Those are questions that this Study Group would like to seek answers to, and the speakers would be welcome in providing a comprehensive analysis.

### **PANEL 2: The Perspective of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and South Ossetia**

This workshop will be the occasion to more closely explore how geo-strategic events impact the region. Of particular interest would be their impression of the Syrian decision, and how this helps or hinders their relations with the titular countries. It would also be interesting to find out why, in the opinion of experts, the Nagorno-Karabakh Line of Contact remained so peaceful while the Armenian government wrestled with opposition figures in Yerevan. Mostly, is change perceived as a factor of risk, or of opportunity? Can we expect, for instance, an opportunity for peaceful resolution of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh thanks to the arrival of Mr. Pashinyan in office? Inversely, do Abkhazia and South Ossetia expect Tbilisi to harden its stance after Syria's declaration of recognition?

### **PANEL 3: The Perspective of Great Powers and the Prospect for Peace**

This panel will examine to what extent the upheavals seen in the South Caucasus are contingent upon great power confrontation and geo-strategic competition. We have been arguing for years at the RSSC SG that such confrontation detracts the South Caucasus countries from their responsibilities as providers to their populations. Are we therefore at a cross-roads where the constituencies are taking to the streets to assert their right, claim basic needs, or is this simply a well-chosen opportunity by demonstrators to manifest their dissatisfaction? How was Armenia's revolution perceived in Moscow? Why does Moscow prefer to demonstrate its soft power rather than its coercive side? Does it feel it has stolen a march on the West? Or is this all about Moscow's high expectations of presidents Trump and Putin forging a special relationship after the Helsinki summit against the starkly contrasting atmospherics of the Trans-Atlantic relations as exposed by the latest G7 and NATO summits?

### **PANEL 4: Re-energizing Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution**

This panel would be the occasion for speakers from the region to be heard about their country's ambitions, challenges and opportunities with respect to crisis management and conflict resolution. If the upheavals in the South Caucasus pose problems to the regional powers, perhaps the time is ripe to attempt to overcome the status quo in South Caucasus conflict management and resolution, perhaps bringing them once again to the attention of the UN Security Council, or in some cases agreeing to a thoroughly neutral peacekeeping mission or by reconsidering the frameworks and the rules for negotiations and conflict management. It would be important for the interactive discussions to yield concrete proposals on such ideas, so that they can be promoted to the OSCE, the EU, the UN, and with regional and other international stakeholders.

## Programme

### Thursday, 8 November 2018

till 18.30 Arrival of the participants

19.00 **Official Opening**

Andreas F. WANNEMACHER, Directorate General for Security Policy, Austrian Ministry of Defence, Vienna

**Official Dinner**

Dinner Speech: Prof. h.c. Dr. Peter SCHULZE, Founder, Dialogue of Civilizations' Research Institute, Berlin

### Friday, 9 November 2018

07.00 – 09.00 Breakfast

09.00 – 09.15 **Introduction to the Study Group “Regional Stability in the South Caucasus” and Administrative Remarks**

Benedikt HENSELLEK, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna

09.15 – 09.45 **Words of Welcome**

LTG Erich CSITKOVITS, Commandant, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna

09.45 – 11.00 **PANEL 1: Taking Stock of Political Change in the South Caucasus**

**Chair:** Elena MANDALENAKIS, Independent Analyst, Heraklion

Ahmad ALILI, Media Public Union, Baku

Armen GRIGORYAN, Matej Bel University, Banska Bistrica

Ia METREVELI, Social Service Agency, Tbilisi

Cyril WIDDERSHOVEN, Verocity, Amsterdam

11.00 – 11.30 Coffee Break

11.30 – 13.00 **PANEL 2: The Perspectives of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and South Ossetia**

**Chair:** George NICULESCU, The European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Rustam ANSHBA, Abkhaz State University, Sukhum

Zarina SANAKOEVA, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Tskhinval

Hrachya ARZUMANYAN, CSS Ashkhar, Khankendi / Stepanakert

Razi NURULLAYEV, “Region” International Analytical Centre, Baku

13.00 – 14.00 Lunch

14.00 – 15.30 **PANEL 3: The Perspective of Great Powers and the Prospect for Peace**

**Chair:** Frederic LABARRE, Security Governance Group, Kitchener

Giorgi DAVIDIAN, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi

Ruslan MAMEDOV, Russian International Affairs Council, Moscow

Anton CHABLIN, Centre for Social Innovation, Stavropol

Johnny G. MELIKYAN, Public Administration Academy of the Republic of Armenia, Yerevan

Leila ALIEVA, Oxford University, London

15.30 – 16.00 Coffee Break

16.00 – 17.00 **Interactive Discussion**

**Moderation:** George NICULESCU, The European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

19.00 – 21.00 Dinner

## Saturday, 10 November 2018

07.00 – 09.00 Breakfast

09.00 – 10.30 **PANEL 4: Re-energizing Crisis Internationalization**

**Chair:** Michael SCHMUNK, Amb. Ret. German Federal Foreign Office, Hamburg

Alexander DUBOWY, University of Vienna

George NICULESCU, The European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Maia SHERAZADISHVILI, Caucasus International University, Tbilisi

Benyamin POGHOSYAN, National Defence Research University, Yerevan

Elkhan NURIYEV, Reconnecting Eurasia, Geneva

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee break

11.00 – 12.00 **Plenary Session: Interactive Debate for Policy Recommendations**

**Moderation:** Frederic LABARRE, Security Governance Group, Kitchener

12.00 – 12.15 **Conference Close**

12.15 – 13.00 Lunch

13.00 **Departure to Side Programme**

## Sunday, 11 November 2018

07.00 – 09.00 **Breakfast**

**Individual Departures**