



**2nd Virtual Roundtable
of the PfP Consortium Study Group
“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

**“What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh in the
wake of the 2020 Six-Weeks War? –
Consequences for Conflict Settlement in the
South Caucasus Region”**

– Programme and Virtual Roundtable Outline –

Friday, 04 December 2020

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Purpose

The Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) of the PFP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes has emerged as the premiere Track 2 diplomacy platform for the region where intractable conflicts are discussed with discretion, in a serene professional and academic atmosphere, but within reach of political ears. Deliberations are conducted strictly according to Chatham House rules, and this has contributed to a steady stream of successes, seeing recommendations from more than a dozen workshops being considered if not applied by South Caucasus actors/decision makers.

For example, in 2015, the George C. Marshall Center held a high-level in-camera meeting for South Caucasus deputy ministers of defence, based on policy recommendations produced in November 2013. Armenia and Azerbaijan have enacted a crisis hotline, and an exchange of journalists based on recommendations made in past years. There is evidence that public communication techniques suggested in 2015 and 2017 by the RSSC SG have been put in practice in Armenia. The RSSC SG is also leveraging the assistance of outside partners to accomplish a policy recommendation made in November 2017 pertaining to media literacy. The co-chairs are glad to pilot this effort, and to see that the work of the RSSC SG is finding a constructive outlet. Much remains to be done, however, and we expect this work to continue for the foreseeable future.

Past workshops have demonstrated that the RSSC SG had established a broad academic basis and the cohesion necessary to undertake more ambitious cooperative projects. Thanks to this cohesion, and our participants' direct and indirect access to decision-making circles in their respective power centres, the RSSC SG continues to produce policy recommendations that are both constructive and practical.

In the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic crisis, the Operational Staff and the stakeholders of the PFP Consortium have strongly encouraged all working and study groups to continue their activities in virtual format, for the time being. This Study Group has already hosted two virtual events: a roundtable on "Assessing and Mitigating the Impact of the COVID-19 Global Crisis in the South Caucasus Region", on 25 June 2020, and the first meeting in a series on "Media Literacy Project – Best Practices Manual", on 23 October 2020. The former event concluded *inter alia* that: "*Within the context of the COVID19 pandemic, the unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus are increasing the political, socio-economic, and security burdens on the South Caucasus states and other actors. Unresolved conflicts could ultimately hinder capacities required to sustain competent state apparatuses, governments which citizens trust and listen to, as well as effective political leadership. The shortage of such capacities might accelerate existing trends and eventually produce growing regional instability, deeper geopolitical fragmentation, and even future socio-economic irrelevance and backwardness.*"

Indeed, on 27 September 2020 the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) entered a new phase featuring heavy military clashes involving air and land operations along the line of contact between the unrecognized Nagorno-Karabakh/Artsakh Republic and Azerbaijan. In essence, this has been a resumption of the 1992-1994 war that had been interrupted by the May 1994 Russia-mediated ceasefire. After having resulted in many thousands of soldiers and civilians killed or wounded, as well as in large numbers of civilian and military equipment and infrastructure destroyed or seriously damaged, this new war appeared to have exhausted itself in the wake of the Azerbaijani military advances over, and recapturing of, several districts around Nagorno-Karabakh, culminating with the town of Shusha/Shushi. Presidents V. Putin of Russia and R.T. Erdogan of Turkey called up the terms of a joint Statement providing for a ceasefire and a set of guidelines for a future peace deal that has eventually been signed on 10 November 2020 by the Armenian, Azerbaijani and

Russian leaders. This trilateral Statement¹ has provided for the deployment of Russian peacekeepers in Nagorno-Karabakh, the return of the Aghdam, Lachin and Kelbajar districts to Azerbaijan, still under Armenian control, the return of all IDP's and refugees to their homes, unblocking all economic and transport links, and the establishing of two symmetrical safety corridors allowing for the free flow of goods and people between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan, respectively. Since then, the cease fire has largely held, while the Russian peacekeepers have been deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh. However, Armenian domestic politics has become deeply unsettled by the news that prime-minister N. Pashinyan had signed such an unfavorable Statement.

In this given context we invite you to join us at the **2nd Virtual Roundtable of the RSSC SG on: “What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh in the wake of the 2020 Six-Weeks War? Consequences for Conflict Settlement in the South Caucasus Region”**.

Partners

- Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, Garmisch-Partenkirchen
- Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna
- European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
- Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

Topic Outline

The outbreak of the new war on Nagorno-Karabakh has hardly taken experts by surprise. Over the last few months, many local and international experts have warned on the danger of a large-scale resumption of hostilities in Karabakh. The July 2020 conflict escalation in Tovuz/Tavush, a region situated far away from the Nagorno-Karabakh line of contact, followed by joint military drills conducted by Armenia and Russia, and Azerbaijan and Turkey, respectively, heralded the closing of the latest window of opportunity for a peaceful conflict settlement. Several months prior to that, the policy recommendations from the 20th workshop of the RSSC SG, held on 07-09 November 2019 in Reichenau/Rax (Austria), had prompted the conclusion that the framework of negotiations based upon the Madrid Principles could hardly lead to breaking the existing deadlock of the peace process. Within such a highly volatile situation, Laurence Broers, a South Caucasus expert at the Chatham House, suggested that: *“These once hegemonic ideas [i.e. the Madrid Principles] are now challenged by global multipolarity featuring global and regional powers practising very different models of conflict resolution. [...] Russia and Turkey are two such powers.”*²

Indeed, while several joint calls for a ceasefire by the United States, Russia, and France (the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs) on the conflicting parties have been completely ignored, the key driver of the current geopolitical upheaval in the South Caucasus has been president R.T. Erdogan of Turkey. In the wake of the new outbreak of war, his public calls for a full Armenian withdrawal from Azerbaijani territory, while asking Baku to take the matters in their hands, and condemning what he said were nearly three decades of failure by major powers to resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict have dramatically shifted the pattern of the Azerbaijani foreign and security policy and the Armenian narrative on the conflict with neighbouring Azerbaijan. Eventually, the Russian and Turkish presidents prompted the signature on 10 November 2020 of the above-mentioned Statement by the Armenian, Azerbaijani and Russian leaders. Consequently, it appeared that peace in Nagorno-Karabakh was rather hanging on the broader balance of power between

¹ <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64384>.

² Laurence Broers, “Just Another Incident or an Evolving Status Quo?”, Valdai Discussion Club expert opinion paper, August 2020, from: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/just-another-incident-or-an-evolving-status-quo/>.

Russia and Turkey than on the ineffective multilateralism practised for the last 28 years by the OSCE Minsk Group.

However, the trilaterally signed Statement is far away from a peace plan. It leaves open some key issues, such as: the status of NK; the future role of the OSCE Minsk Group and of other international organizations and actors (other than Russia); the conditions for the return of the refugees and IDP's to NK, and how the growing mistrust and conflict-driven animosities between the Armenian and Azerbaijani communities would be overcome. In addition, the signature of the Statement by prime-minister N. Pashinyan has triggered serious social unrest and growing political instability in Armenia. There have been also reports from the field about clusters of Armenian soldiers in NK who wouldn't have accepted the actual defeat enshrined in the implementation of the trilateral Statement, and refused to cooperate with (or even fired against) the Russian peacekeepers deployed to NK. All these would make for "A Precarious Peace for Karabakh"³ and an uncertain future not only for the population of Nagorno-Karabakh itself, but also for the wider South Caucasus region.

The aim of this virtual roundtable will consist of:

- reviewing the current state of play in Armenia, Azerbaijan and in Nagorno-Karabakh, and their implications for the resumption of the conflict settlement process,
- assessing the influence of the regional instability potentially spilling over from the NK conflict into the neighbouring countries, as well as across the South Caucasus region,
- discussing the future of Nagorno-Karabakh, and the role different regional and international actors might play in conflict settlement in the foreseeable future.

To address the aims of this workshop, the co-Chairs are proposing the following questions to spur thinking among invited speakers:

- What are the key trends of the political, socio-economic, and security/military developments in Armenia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan over the short term? What were the positions of key political players and of the civil society over the implementation of the trilaterally signed Statement? What elements of the Statement have been / were likely to be implemented in the foreseeable future, and what are the elements whose implementation might remain pending on further developments? What prospects are there for the resumption of the Track-1 and Track-2 diplomatic process? How well prepared were the populations of Armenia and NK to accept the implementation of the provisions of the Statement, and what were their reactions to it? How well prepared is the population of Azerbaijan to further negotiate a compromise solution to the NK conflict? How likely is a resumption of the military operations in NK?
- What future for Nagorno-Karabakh would satisfy both Armenian and Azerbaijani interests over the medium and longer terms (2025-2030)? How to reach there?
- How were the six-weeks war over NK, and the ensuing trilateral Statement perceived by the regional states: Georgia, Russia, Turkey, Iran? What are the main regional security risks and threats arising from a possible deadlock in completing the implementation of all the provisions of the Statement or from the resumption of hostilities? How well prepared are the regional states to complement the current regionalization of security with finding ways to build bridges/seek security and humanitarian assistance from the wider European and Euro-Atlantic community in support of their efforts for NK conflict management and resolution? What would be the best framework to materialize a possible reintegration of the South Caucasus region with the wider European security?

³ Thomas De Waal, "A Precarious Peace for Karabakh", published on November 11, 2020 by Carnegie Moscow Centre, <https://carnegie.ru/commentary/83202>.

Modalities for the Virtual Roundtable

The RSSC SG virtual roundtable will take place according to the enclosed program. It is suggested that each South Caucasus country should have two representatives at the roundtable: one speaker and one discussant. Neighboring countries (Russia and Turkey) would only have one speaker. A discussant from a Western country could also participate in the discussion. The speakers would be invited to present a one-page outline including key points and possible concrete policy recommendations (no written analysis required). The policy recommendations should be formulated according to the perceived needs of his/her own country within the scope described by the aims and the questions framing the expected content of the roundtable discussion. The virtual discussion should focus on those presentations, under the moderation of the Co-Chairs. Discussants will be invited to kick off the interactive discussions by providing an initial set of comments and questions for the speakers, followed by the other participants. Building upon the outcome of the virtual discussion, the Co-Chairs will wrap-up and finalize the draft conclusions and policy recommendations.

N.B.: As usual, the conclusions and policy recommendations, as well as the ensuing discussion will be subject to Chatham House rules, while the final draft should be subject to a short silence procedure approval by all participants.

Programme

Friday, 04 December 2020

All times are Central European Time – CET (Vienna Time)

14:00 – 14.05 **Words of welcome** by Benedikt HENSELLEK, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna, and
Olaf GARLICH, PfP Consortium Operations Staff, Garmisch-Partenkirchen

14.05 – 15.00 **SECTION 1: State of Play in Armenia, Azerbaijan and in NK and Consequences for Conflict Settlement; What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh?**

Chair: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
Speakers (10 minutes/each):

Benyamin POGHOSYAN, Chairman, Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies, Yerevan
Elkhan NURYIEV, Humboldt Senior Fellow, Centre for East European and International Studies, Berlin

Discussants:

Ahmad ALILI, Caucasus Policy Analysis Centre, Baku
Alan WHITEHORN, Professor emeritus, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

Q&A

15:00 – 15:10 Individual Coffee Break

15.10 – 16.10 **SECTION 2: Dealing with Future Regional Instability in the South Caucasus – Regional or European Frameworks for Conflict Management?**

Chair: Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston
Speakers (10 minutes each):

Teona AKUBARDIA, Tbilisi Open University, Tbilisi
Yulia NIKITINA, MGIMO, Moscow
Nilufer NARLI, Bacesehir University, Istanbul

Discussants:

Michael SCHMUNK, Ambassador (Ret.), Hamburg
George TURAVA, Saint Petersburg University, Saint Petersburg
Alexander MIKHAILOV, Federal Council of the Russian Federation, Moscow

Q&A

16.10 – 16.40 **Section 3 – Drafting Conclusions and Policy Recommendations**

Moderation: Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

16.40 **Official Closing Remarks**

Benedikt HENSELLEK, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna
George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels