



**21st Workshop
of the PfP Consortium Study Group
“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

**“Risks and Opportunities of the
Emerging South Caucasus Regional Order”**

7-10 September 2021

*Understanding the Contemporary Information Landscape
Project Management Meeting*

10-12 September 2021

– Programme and Workshop Outline –

Rome, Italy

Purpose

In 2012, the Austrian Ministry of Defence, through its National Defence Academy and the Directorate General for Security Policy, resumed the scientific work begun in 2001 (but interrupted in 2005) by the PFP Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes on the South Caucasus. The RSSC SG has emerged as the premiere Track 2 diplomacy platform where intractable conflicts are discussed with discretion, in a serene 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 nearly a half dozen workshops being considered if not applied by South Caucasus actors.

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 are being 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 as Handbook project entitled “Understanding the Contemporary Information Landscape.” 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 held in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, since 2012 and the wider region (Tbilisi, Istanbul, Kyiv, Chisinau, Varna, Minsk and Berlin) 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 continue to produce policy recommendations that are both constructive and practical. The RSSC SG has continued its work throughout the Covid pandemic, hosting three virtual roundtables, each of which has produced actionable recommendations. Now it is time to take a chance and host the first workshop live, in the Third Dimension. We hope to further resume our regular workshops in November 2021.

This workshop would explore the situation in the South Caucasus which is still evolving one year after the start of the most recent Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict, which lasted until 9 November 2020. Much has happened since then, and while a new reality and a new stability have been established in the South Caucasus, it has been the catalyst for renewed diplomatic and government activity in the region. This calls into question new patterns of relationships and expression of interests mainly by great powers, but diplomatic and administrative initiatives are being carried out which align with the RSSC SG’s mission of helping forge a strategic personality for the South Caucasus. It is therefore necessary to explore those multi-varied developments at our next RSSC SG Workshop entitled **“Risks and Opportunities of the Emerging South Caucasus Regional Order”** to be held in Rome, Italy, 7-10 September 2021. This workshop will also be the occasion of an administrative meeting of the **“Understanding the Contemporary Information Landscape”** Handbook Project, from 10-12 September 2021.

Partners

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

Topic Outline

The Nagorno-Karabakh war has thrown the whole South Caucasus relations into convulsion. First the military action taken by Azerbaijan has successfully regained control over parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and over adjacent Azerbaijani districts. Second, it has propelled Russia into a dominant role as potential arbiter through the deployment of peacekeeping forces between Armenian and Azerbaijani belligerents. As Chinese aspirations are also being felt in the South Caucasus, one has to wonder whether the involvement of Russia is to support or balance that involvement. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has also consummated the inability of the OSCE Minsk Group of helping hammer out a working compromise between the parties of this conflict. It would therefore seem that Euro-Atlantic powers, including the United States and the European Union, have been somewhat marginalized from the region. Yet, probably buoyed by the more activist policy from the new Biden administration in the United States, we have been witnesses to renewed diplomatic activity from the United States in the South Caucasus, a more determined push by France and Germany to involve the EU more constructively with the Russian Federation, and a qualitative evolution of the language of the latest NATO Summit Declaration.

As discussed in the Third Extraordinary Virtual Roundtable held online on 7 June 2021, multilateral efforts which had been deployed by the United Nations and the OSCE since the beginning of the South Caucasus troubles some 30 years ago have now fallen into irrelevance. There seems to be a great power contest brewing over the South Caucasus which has substituted multilateral diplomacy. We can detect an increase in the attention of the United States regarding Georgia's challenging territorial integrity. Elsewhere, and following the recent NATO Summit, Turkey and Azerbaijan have embraced the "Shusha Declaration", while Presidents Biden and Putin were concluding their first bilateral Summit in Geneva. These are potent indicators of a ferment of activity which cannot be ignored.

Between Armenia and Azerbaijan, Russian peacekeepers are being deployed. But what kind of peacekeepers when reports indicate that these will come from border guard detachments? Assuredly, the news of the Turko-Azeri mutual security declaration has been met with sharp warnings from the Russian Federation, ever cautious about potential NATO flanking moves. Yet, while the Russian peacekeeping mission remains the better guarantee of Armenian-Azerbaijan stability, it does not offer a way ahead for an eventual relaxation of tensions. The RSSC SG would do well to lean on the possibilities offered by the new reality.

Amidst all this, Georgian diplomacy has never been more active, and more constructively so. First by facilitating the exchange of prisoners between Armenia and Azerbaijan, and recently, at the Antalya Security Forum, calling for a "trilateral dialogue", Georgia's international personality has rapidly evolved. It apparently shed the excesses of the Saakashvili regime, while calling into question the Georgian opposition's mantra that the current Ivanishvili regime was sold to Moscow. The creation of a "De-Occupation Commission" may be interpreted in the wake of the recent NATO Summit, but how different is it from the mission of the previous Ministry for Re-

Integration? How will its mission be achieved – especially as concerns matching the prospects of territorial integrity with those of Georgia’s NATO membership?

The NATO Summit held in Brussels on 14 June 2021 has produced interesting statements. First China is named as a clear and present danger to Alliance members. This increases the value of the South Caucasus exponentially. It is well known that China has economic interests in the South Caucasus, and Armenia and Georgia, in particular, have been seen as receptive to China as a potential regional balancer. Second, the Russo-Chinese rejuvenated strategic partnership is a geopolitical move that Euro-Atlantic actors cannot ignore. Little surprise then that the Biden-Putin Summit was hastily convened, and, while it seemed to have yielded little of note, France and Germany have been keen on bringing the European Union’s role in engaging Russia up to par.

These developments indicate a sea change in the structure of relations in the South Caucasus. It is clear that the West, supported by an alliances-restoring Biden administration, seeks to take advantage of the opportunities that are emerging. At the same time, change is the harbinger of risk. The aim of this RSSC SG Workshop is twofold; first to produce actionable policy recommendations to mitigate the risks and expand on conflict resolution possibilities. Second, to host a management meeting in parallel that deals with the on-going project on “Understanding the Contemporary Information Landscape.”

In particular we would hope that the participants would explore the following questions, among others;

- How could the June 2021 G7 and NATO summits decisions influence the regional powers’ interests in the South Caucasus?
- How did the regional states perceive the recent Biden-Putin summit and how would they assess its possible implications for the region?
- What is the geopolitical significance for the South Caucasus region of the change at the helm of the Iranian presidency?
- What are the possible regional implications of the electoral success of the Armenian Prime-Minister Nikol Pashinyan in the recent snap elections?
- What is the content of the “Shusha Declaration” and what does it mean for NATO and for the other regional players?
- What is the likeliest way ahead for the Armenia-Azerbaijan relations within the emerging South Caucasus regional order?
- Can NATO increase its stake in the South Caucasus through the DEEP programme?
- How close is Georgia from acquiring NATO and EU memberships and how should it fill the gap between now and then?
- What can be expected from the Georgian De-Occupation Commission?

PANEL 1: The South Caucasus after a “Summer of Summits”

How should Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan read the NATO Summit Communique? Georgia’s NATO membership aspirations are clearly a source of tension between Russia and the West. If it is felt that Georgia is getting closer to its goal of NATO membership, what can we expect security-wise? Should we be worried about the Shusha Declaration? In this context, can we interpret the dispatch of Russian border guards as peacekeepers as a response to an anticipated challenge owing to a stronger NATO presence in the region (at least as perceived by Russia)? While the OSCE Minsk Group has re-formed, it is but a shadow of itself. One would naturally wonder what is the future of that framework for the South Caucasus protracted

conflicts and whether new models cannot be developed. As President Emmanuel Macron and Chancellor Angela Merkel were leading the EU to resume the dialogue with Russia, how should this be seen from the region in relation to the meeting that took place between Presidents Joe Biden and Vladimir Putin? Can the West help mitigate adversarial inroads and still foster engagement with Russia?

PANEL 2: Regional Risks and Opportunities at Times of Great Power Rivalries

Small powers have frequently been the victims of great power machinations in the past. This is why we at the RSSC SG have frequently argued that the South Caucasus should unite to better defend its interests, rather than to cozy up to this or that great power. As the saying goes, great powers have no friends. Only interests. And these may be fleeting. So what are the Chinese and Iranian games in the South Caucasus? Speaking of NATO stakes in the South Caucasus region, if Armenia and Azerbaijan were to consider the recommendations made at the Third Extraordinary Virtual Roundtable on 7 June 2021, could the DEEP programme be adapted to cement the new stability so that NATO holds better stakes in the region? Also in this context, what is the meaning of Georgia's suggestion of a "trilateral dialogue"? As the RSSC SG has been tasked with helping shape an integrated "strategic regional personality" for the South Caucasus, this may be a promising opening to make good on that study group objective. Therefore, participants are encouraged to be creative in this regard.

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSION

As usual, interactive discussions held in Chatham House rules format are the platform to develop actionable policy recommendations by the RSSC SG, as moderated by the co-chairs. We invite all participants to take advantage of this opportunity to make constructive proposals on each of the topics discussed. As always, these policy recommendations are disseminated throughout the PFP Consortium network, covering some 50 countries, and 800 policy- and academic institutions.

Auxiliary event: "Understanding the Contemporary Information Landscape" (UCIL) Management Meeting

In this event, the third tranche of contributors and translators to this project will have an opportunity to present their research briefly to inform the final tranche of contributors who would also be present at that meeting. Translators and the managing editor in Russian language will also discuss technical issues concerning formatting.

Those of you who are invited as participants to the UCIL Management Meeting have been identified as such and will be contacted specifically. Please refer to that part of the agenda to see what the programme entails. On the Saturday, we will hear short (5-10 minutes) presentations about the texts that the second tranche of contributors have prepared. This will enable volunteer translators to evaluate which work they want to tackle. In the afternoon of Saturday, the editors and the translators will discuss technical issues concerning formatting of the English and Russian manuscripts. The objective is to make final decisions about formatting in preparation for publication. The rest of the event is to enable the translators and contributors to get acquainted, and also to set deadlines. Please refer to the agenda starting from 10 September 2021.

Programme

Tuesday, 7 September 2021

Until 18.30 Arrival of the participants

19.00 **Words of Welcome**

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

Official Reception

Hosted by Col Nikolaus ROTTENBERGER, Austrian Defence Attaché
to Italy, Rome

Wednesday, 8 September 2021

07.00 – 09.00 Breakfast

09.00 – 09.30 **Introduction to the Study Group “Regional Stability in the South
Caucasus” and Administrative Remarks**

Benedikt HENSELLEK, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna
LTC Olaf GARLICH, PfP Consortium Operations Staff, Garmisch-
Partenkirchen

09.30 – 11.00 **PANEL 1: The South Caucasus after the “Summer of Summits”**

Chair: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Teona AKUBARDIA, Georgian Parliament, Tbilisi
Yana LEKSIUTINA, Saint-Petersburg University
Ahmad ALILI, Caucasus Policy Analysis Center, Baku

11.00 – 11.15 Coffee Break

11.15 – 12.00 **PANEL 1: The South Caucasus after the “Summer of Summits” (cont.)**

Chair: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Benyamin POGHOSYAN, Centre for Political and Economic Strategic Studies,
Yerevan
Mahir IBRAHIMOV, US Army Command and General Staff College (CGSC),
Fort Leavenworth
Albina YAKUBOVA, Conflict Prevention Centre OSCE, Vienna

12.00 – 13.30 Lunch

13.30 – 14.30 **PANEL 2: Regional Risks and Opportunities at Times of Great Power Rivalries**

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

Razi NURULLAYEV, REGION International Analytical Centre, Baku
Nilufer NARLI, Bahcesehir University, Istanbul
Giorgi KANASHVILI, Caucasus Policy Analysis Center, Baku

14.30 – 14.45 Coffee Break

14.45 – 15.30 **PANEL 2: Regional Risks and Opportunities at Times of Great Power Rivalries (cont.)**

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

Yeghia TASHJYAN, Issam Fares Institute – American University of Beirut (AUB), Beirut
Boris KUZNETSOV, Center for International and Regional Policy, St. Petersburg

15.30 – 16.30 **Interactive Discussion**

Moderation: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels & Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

Select Discussion Kickers:

Elena MANDALENAKIS, McGill University, Montreal
Alan WHITEHORN, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston (VIDEO)

16.30 – 16.45 Coffee Break

16.45 – 18.00 **Interactive Discussion:**

Moderation: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels & Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

Al STOLBERG, RAND Corporation, Washington (VIDEO)
Feedback on Recommendations from 7 June 2021

Thursday, 9 September 2021

08.00 – 10.00 Breakfast

10.00 – 11.30 **Interactive Discussion: Policy Recommendation Formulation**

Moderation: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels & Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

11.30 – 12.00 **Closing comments**

Moderation: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels & Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

12.00 – 13.30 Lunch

13.30 Side programme

Friday, 10 September 2021

08.00 – 10.00 Breakfast

Individual Departures RSSC SG participants

Until 18.30 Arrival of UCIL participants

19.00 **Words of Welcome**

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

Saturday, 11 September 2021

08.00 – 10.00 Breakfast

10.00 – 11.30 **UCIL – Presentations**

Moderation: Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada

Myroslava ZABOTNOVA

Elena MARZAC

Sanda SANDU

Armen GRIGORYAN

Zlatogor MINCHEV

11.30 – 12.00 Coffee Break

12.00 – 13.00 **UCIL – Technical Discussions/Issues**

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

Polina VERSHININA

Marharyta MIAHKA

Olha LYSICHKINA

Myroslava ZABOTNOVA

Emmanouil MANDALENAKIS

Lisa TAGWERCHER

13.00 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 16.00 **Individual Consultations between Contributors and Translators**

16.00 – 16.15 **Official Closing Remarks – Deadline determination**

Moderation: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

Sunday, 12 September 2021

08.00 – 10.00 Breakfast

Individual Departures