



**16th Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group
“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

**“Between Fact and Fakery:
Information and Instability in the
South Caucasus and Beyond”**

– Programme and Workshop Outline –

9-12 November 2017

Reichenau/Rax, Austria

Purpose:

In 2012, the Austrian Ministry of Defence and Sports, through its National Defence Academy and the Directorate General for Security Policy, resumed the scientific work done by the PfP Consortium of Defence 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.

Past workshops held since 2012 in Reichenau and in the wider region (Tbilisi, Istanbul, Kyiv and Chisinau, Varna) have demonstrated that the Study Group had established a broad academic basis and cohesion necessary to undertake ambitious cooperative projects. The 12th workshop of the Study Group provided the opportunity for experts to present and develop ideas concerning the possibility of developing a sample media narrative and campaign that could prepare public opinion for the difficult decisions that South Caucasus political elite have to make regarding status and cooperation. Letting the media shape public opinion, even with biased information, is permissible as long as the result is in the public interest, and fosters the common good. In today's climate of rampant disinformation and misinformation, even benign neglect of the truth has serious implications for stability.

There are at least three levels of inquiry where faulty information can have disastrous results on regional stability. First, disinformation can have a devastating impact on the principles of freedom of information, freedom of speech and opinion. These democratic principles continue to be under threat in the South Caucasus, and the current ambiguity about information makes the media all the more suspect, which in turn, makes the principles of freedom of speech that underpin them suspect as well. Therefore, the democratic institution of a free and unimpeded media is all the more fragile. At the individual level, the paucity of information prevents constituents and consumers from making informed choices. Suboptimal choices have clear negative implications in health, finances and lifestyle. The negative outcomes of suboptimal choices are generally blamed on elected officials, and not on one's own decisions, leading to possible outbreaks of domestic instability. At the state level, disinformation can lead a government astray, and lead it to rely on ever more intrusive intelligence, raising the specter of a privileged bureaucratic class within the security establishment, erroneous or suboptimal decision-making, or worse, paralysis of decision-making. Any of these factors, or a combination thereof can aggravate regional tensions, and make regimes vulnerable to instability.

This is why the co-chairs are convening a workshop entitled **“Between Fact and Fakery, Information and Instability in the South Caucasus and Beyond” in Reichenau, Austria, 9-12 November 2016.**

Partners

The Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna/Austria, and the Directorate General for Security Policy of the Austrian Ministry of Defence and Sports, Vienna/Austria, are proud to be associated with The Dialogue of Civilizations, Berlin and Goettingen University, Goettingen whose generosity have helped our speakers find their way to Reichenau. We look forward to deepening our partnership with this and other like-minded organizations to help forward the RSSC SG's aims. We are also happy to have the consent of the European Geopolitical Forum in Brussels and the PfP Consortium in Garmisch-Partenkirchen for the leave they give to our co-chairs to assist us, as well as the Black Sea Institute in Paris, for allowing the presence of Dr. Michael Eric Lambert.

Topic Outline

In his acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize for Economics (2005), Robert Aumann defined rationality as “acting in one’s own best interest according to the information available.” The implications of such a definition are far-reaching for decision-making. Only when totally random decisions are made relative to one’s interests, can we see “irrationality”, such as when someone who knows that their house is on fire nevertheless takes time to look for the keys to the front door before escaping the flames. The emphasis on information reduces the scope of irrationality dramatically. In this sense, the criminally insane schizophrenic is acting rationally when he/she reacts or obeys to the vivid warnings from the voices inside their head. This is information to which the rest of us are not privy to. Mental illness does not equate to irrationality when the individual is convinced that all around him/her have bad intentions, nor does the pre-emptive strike that it logically invites sound so reckless. These conditions can be re-created to affect the social psychology of a whole population, and if not, definitely that of its leaders. Therefore false information can directly affect regional stability.

For the rest of us, of sound mind and body, we rely on our senses to make as “optimal” decisions as possible – whether as street cleaners, academics, policy-makers, presidents, ministers, or spouse thereof. This is why the current climate of media mis- and disinformation can have serious implications; it threatens to make the decisions of well-meaning, intelligent and educated people as optimal as those of the criminal schizophrenic. Extrapolate this condition to the South Caucasus region, and beyond to the international relations between large powers, such as the United States, Europe, Russia and Turkey, and the risks of conflagration increase exponentially.

In an earlier workshop held in Reichenau in November 2015 (The Media is the Message: Shaping Compromise in the South Caucasus), the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group had achieved far-ranging policy recommendations on how to incentivize the regional media in becoming more socially aware and constructive in its role as opinion shaper. It now looks like the conditions for the application and achievement of these recommendations are no longer present. The question of public interest information, regional stability and the future development of the South Caucasus must be contemplated from other angles. Upon further examination, there may even be opportunities for change. This workshop will explore the consequences of mis- and disinformation for the regional media industry (and beyond), for the ordinary people who rely on public information to make routine decisions about life choices (health, finance, domestic activities as well as politics), and finally, on how the regimes of the South Caucasus are equally vulnerable to false information. The aim of the workshop is to produce actionable recommendations to prevent the aggravation of regional tensions, and reduce the regional regimes’ vulnerability to fake news.

Another objective of this workshop is to take advantage of critical ex post facto awareness raising to the very real fact that disinformation is not new. The novelty has to do with the fact that a seemingly democratic and neutral medium, such as the internet and social media, can more easily be leveraged for psychological and information operations by non-state actors than ever before. This requires nevertheless the acknowledgement that, at some point in the past, the quality of the information we sometimes consumed was less than optimal, and that, as a result, opinions and decisions were correspondingly sub-optimal. The difference is that in days prior to the information revolution, this was a state prerogative used parsimoniously, such as when respected news outlet touted 25 years ago that Saddam Hussein’s SCUD missiles were being destroyed systematically by Patriot batteries (they were not). An important intention of this workshop is therefore to get the participants to realize that what they believe today may be the fruit of yesterday’s official lies.

Key questions

- How can we incentivize the regional media in the South Caucasus to avoid (or stop) spreading biased news?
- How can the sponsors and advertisers of South Caucasus media be sensitized to how fake news affects their reputation?
- What is the consequence of news fakery for freedom of speech in the South Caucasus?
- How can governments be sensitized to the dangers to their stability created by fake news?
- What legal recourses are available to governments to limit fakery?
- What are the consequences of informational confusion on government decision-making?
- How can the public be made aware, or educated to recognize and defend against fakery?
- Are the current conflicts in the South Caucasus the result of news fakery?
- Would it be advantageous to conflict resolution to “believe” that South Caucasus conflicts are the result of fraud?

PANEL 1: Impact of Fakery on a Democratizing Media

In this panel, speakers from the South Caucasus are invited to reflect on the process of freedom of information in their respective countries. This may take the form of sharing statistics on media use, comparative studies between internet and television and/or printed media. The panel can also look at the influence of each on individual decision-making outcomes. More important to the conclusions of this panel is the changing quality of reporting since the “snap-democratization” that followed the end of the Cold War and the liberalization in the Soviet- and later former Soviet Union. More widely, panelists can also assess the impact of the information revolution on their respective societies, and whether the newly-found “freedom” of opinion has found itself countervailed by self-censorship or the politicisation of the media (and the mind).

PANEL 2: How a Trusting Public can be lead to War

This panel will look at the technological, psychometrical and socio-psychological influences of new forms and methods of information creation and dissemination. There is a body of research that suggests that the human mind is not only infinitely malleable in the psychological sense of the word, but also in the biological and physical sense by the impact of information technology. Speakers are asked to show research on how technology shapes the perception of events. For example, what is the impact of the frequency of “new” news, of dubious reporting practices, and of the role of public relation companies in “campaigning” information, influencing and directing individual and collective decision-making? Speakers will be invited to present papers dealing with how new information ingestion limits the ability for comparison, corroboration and critical assessment of news, leading a community to believe false information, damaging its well-being.

PANEL 3: How Fakery acts to destabilize Regimes and Regions

Political theorist David Easton created a descriptive model, in 1957, of how socio-political systems take in information from their environment and produce legitimate decisions. The media, quite clearly, is an important import for public inputs into a political system. However how “optimal” the output of the political system will be will depend on how “factual” and accurate the information that shapes and supports public opinion is. Sub-optimal information can lead a political system, a public or its elected officials to make irrational decisions. The objective of this panel should be to raise awareness of this danger and propose solutions for

mitigation, and policy recommendations aimed at ensuring that South Caucasus governments develop the methods and self-confidence to absorb all sorts of information and input while at the same time remaining resilient to structural or societal stresses.

PANEL 4: From Information Warfare to Information Peacefare: Using yesterday's Lies for Tomorrow's Peace

Based on the foregoing panels, the Study Group and participants will explore how today's methods of shaping public opinion can be used to "redress" yesterday's abuses and misinformation. Speakers will be asked to show how this process can be implemented, whether special regulations might be needed, or legislation, and what kind of narrative should be promoted. The intention of this panel is to develop ways to better inform the public, protect the regimes from illegitimate influences and pressures and thereby safeguard internal stability. How would a campaign develop a common view on particular topics of concern, such as refugee or IDP return, non-use of force, or repatriation of territory? Further to the point, since disinformation and psychological operations are an integral part of hybrid warfare, can the same techniques be used for hybrid peacefare?

Programme

Thursday, 9 November 2017

till 18.30 Arrival of the participants

19.00 **Words of Welcome**

Benedikt HENSELLEK, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna

Key Note Address

Peter W. SCHULZE, Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, Berlin

Official Dinner

Friday, 10 November 2017

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 – 09.30 **Official Words of Welcome**

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

09.30 – 10:00 **Opening Speech:**

Orson WELLES, Mercury Theater, New York City
Reflections on the Outcome of the “War of the Worlds” Broadcast of 1938

10.00 – 11.30 **PANEL 1: Impact of Fakery on a Democratizing Media**

Chair: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Shushanik MINASYAN, Bonn University, Bonn

Akaki GVIMRADZE, Resonance Daily, Tbilisi

Iryna LYSYCHKINA, National Academy of the National Guard, Kharkiv

Jens WENDLAND, University of Arts, Berlin

11.30 – 12.00 Coffee Break

12.00 – 13.30 **PANEL 2: How a Trusting Public can be Lead to War**

Chair: Frederic LABARRE, Pfp Consortium Secretariat,
Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Siegfried BEER, University of Graz

Dariia SERIKOVA, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO)

Benyamin POGHOSYAN, National Defence Research University, Yerevan

Razi NURULLAYEV, “Region” International Analytical Centre, Baku

13.30 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 16.00 **PANEL 3: How Fakery Acts to Destabilize Regimes and Regions**

Chair: Peter W. SCHULZE, Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, Berlin

Vaso KAPANADZE, Free-lance journalist, Tbilisi

Ahmad ALILI, Center for Economic and Social Development, Baku

David SHAHNAZARYAN, Regional Studies Centre, Yerevan

Teona AKUBARDIA, National Security Council of Georgia, Tbilisi

16.00 – 16.30 Coffee Break

16.30 – 18.00 **Interactive Discussion**

Moderation: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

19.00 Dinner

Saturday, 11 November 2017

07.00 – 08.30 Breakfast

08.30 – 10.00 **PANEL 4: The Peace Potential of Fakery:
Using Yesterday's Lies for Tomorrow's Peace**

Chair: Elena MANDALENAKIS, McGill University, Montreal

Gregory SIMONS, Institute for Russian and Eurasian Studies,
Uppsala University

Thomas FASBENDER, Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, Berlin

Kieran PENDER, Free-lance journalist, Canberra

Elkhan NURIYEV, Leibniz Institute for East and Southeast European Studies,
Regensburg

10.00 – 10.30 Coffee Break

10.30 – 11.30 **Plenary Session: Interactive Debate for Policy Recommendations**

Moderation: Frederic LABARRE, PfP Consortium Secretariat,
Garmisch-Partenkirchen

11.30 – 12.00 **Conference Close**

Frederic LABARRE

Peter SCHULZE

12.00 – 13.00 Lunch

13.00 Departure to Side Programme

Sunday, 12 November 2017

Individual Departures