

“After 24 February 2022: Imagining South Caucasus Security”

Reichenau/Rax, Austria, 03-05 November 2022

04 November 2022

09:35 - 11.00 PANEL 1: Georgian Security, Breakaway Territories, and NATO (?)

- The invasion of Ukraine by Russia, and the ensuing Russia-West hybrid and economic wars:
 - threatened the current geopolitical structure and arrangements in the South Caucasus, possibly leading into inherent geopolitical choices of the regional states;
 - dimmed the prospects for cohabitation of the European and the Eurasian integration processes;
 - started to create geopolitical roadblocks to regional cooperation and infrastructure connectivity possibly ending up into a new “Iron Curtain” around, or cutting through, the South Caucasus region.
- Over the last months, NATO and the E.U. have strongly reacted against the so-called Russian “special military operation” in Ukraine. So far, this has resulted in strengthening NATO’s military posture on the Eastern flank and re-writing the NATO Strategic Concept. The E.U. have also agreed upon, and started implementing, several rounds of sanctions against Russia, delivered financial and economic support to Ukraine, and have granted candidate status to Ukraine and Moldova, while conditionally promising a similar status to Georgia.
- Meanwhile, Russian forces have expanded their control over Donbas, and over parts of Southern Ukraine, and are struggling to stop the Ukrainian autumn counteroffensive to liberate its territory, and probably mulling to expand their occupation across the whole Northern shore of the Black Sea to establish a land bridge to Transnistria, the Eastern separatist province of Moldova. Those most recent Russian and Western strategic moves across the Northern and Western Black Sea shores, respectively, have added to setting-up a Russian-Turkish condominium over the South Caucasus/ Eastern Wider Black Sea, in the wake of the 44 days war over Nagorno-Karabakh. Consequently, the Wider Black Sea regional balance of power is currently in flux. Within this “geopolitical storm”, how could Georgia survive the ongoing regional turmoil?

- Georgia has taken so far, a particularly prudent attitude towards the war in Ukraine, while continuing to claim its Euro-Atlantic and European aspirations. For example, in early February, the Georgian Parliament adopted a resolution in support of Ukraine that fell short of mentioning Russia. Opposition parties demanded a revision to the text that would explicitly name Russia as the culprit and aggressor. But the ruling Georgian Dream party refused to amend the document. Moreover, after the start of the war in Ukraine, Georgia eschewed imposing sanctions against Russia. And Prime Minister I. Garibashvili said that his country “will never again fight against the Russian Federation”. Consequently, in the June 2022 NATO Summit Declaration, Georgia was lumped together with Bosnia-Herzegovina and Moldova rather than having its place next to Ukraine, as it had been the case in previous NATO summit declarations. Nevertheless, the new NATO Strategic Concept recalled the decision taken at the 2008 Bucharest Summit with respect to Georgia’s (and Ukraine’s) NATO membership.
- *The E.U. has also differentiated between Georgia and Associated Trio fellows, Ukraine and Moldova, by recommending the former should gain a “European perspective” and be admitted as a formal candidate for European Union membership once it fulfilled certain conditions, such as reducing political polarization, strengthening the independence of the judicial system, and bolstering anti-corruption.*
 - How did the war in Ukraine affect Georgia’s security and defence strategy and policies?
 - Should, or should not Georgia consider neutrality or non-alignment for its security?
 - If Georgia, with or without Abkhazia and South Ossetia, is to be neutral or non-aligned, what kind of security status should it seek? What kind of relationship with Russia and with NATO?
 - Could Georgia’s current relationship with the EU offer any security and defence solutions?
 - Can Georgia’s separatist territories maintain their self-declared independence and continue to rely on Russian security guarantees while staying outside the war in Ukraine?
 - Can we expect a change of heart among the populations or leadership of Abkhazia and South Ossetia in view of Russia’s lacklustre performance, and how can their fears of forceful reintegration be attenuated? Is there not an opportunity to build

bridges between the breakaway territories and Georgia? If so, what kind of political integration can be imagined?

- What future for further Euro-Atlantic integration into the Black Sea basin? What alternative options could be offered to regional countries from outside the Western organizations?
- How could the Russia-Turkey strategic partnership in the South Caucasus shore up against geopolitical shock waves in Eastern Europe?
- What can be done to deter, prevent, and deal with inter-state aggression in the South Caucasus, and in the Wider Black Sea?

Conclusion

Recent regional developments are pushing Georgia in a regional balancing play mimicking (though at a much smaller scale) Ankara's "walk on a tight rope between the West and Russia". The Russo-Turkish informal understanding over the geopolitical picture of the South Caucasus, the long-term conflict with Russia over its separatist regions, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the lack of any Western security guarantees are pointing at strategic prudence as Tbilisi's safest choice. In such circumstances, continuing to cultivate close economic and security relations with neighbouring Türkiye might perhaps provide the best security guarantees. This might be crucial for preserving Georgia's widely popular Euro-Atlantic and European aspirations in the middle of the "geopolitical storm" ravaging the Wider Black Sea region. Most likely, this might also be the safest option for maintaining Georgia's key transit role in ensuring European energy security, as long as the E.U. is facing energy shortages while struggling to free itself from Russian energy dependence.

16.30-18.00 Editorial Workshop on Launching a New Handbook Project: Building Resilience against Human Security Threats and Risks

- Based upon recommendations made at the November 2021 Reichenau workshop, participants to the 23rd RSSC SG workshop, held in Naples (Italy) on 24-27 March 2022, urged the launch of a new common project. The main focus of this project, basically agreed in the approved Policy Recommendations, was on drawing up a **Handbook on building resilience across a broad range of human security threats**, in research areas including *environment, ecology, communications and transportation, water resources management, disaster relief, energy security, food security, health and medical security, cyber security, information security*.
- Using the power of the PfPC and the EaP networks, we could **aim to distillate current best practices on building resilience against human security threats into effective strategies, policies and concrete measures**. A common vision over the future should be translated into a comprehensive list of common regional goals and objectives to be pursued over the next five to ten years. This, in turn, should lead to a deeper common security threats assessment. The PfPC/RSSC SG experts' group in charge with developing this project should also look at the competitive advantages of each country, and at how to adjust joint human security efforts to various countries' political and security agendas.
- **Would there be enough interest in undertaking a new RSSC SG Handbook project focused on building resilience against human security threats and risks in the South Caucasus and beyond?**
- **What audiences could be interested?**
- **What title, scope of enquiry, tentative table of contents, timelines, and resources should be envisaged for such a project?**
- **How to move from collecting and acknowledging best practices to writing effective strategies and policies?** "Strategies and policies" are understood as regional, national and sub-national, i.e. as seen from the civil society, local communities and businesses levels.
- **What concrete contributions would you suggest?**
- **Whom else should we invite to join this project?**

Provisional Title: Building Resilience against Human Security Threats and Risks: from Best Practices to Strategies

Audiences: policy makers, businesses, students, teaching staff.

Provisional Structure of the table of contents: Theoretical Underpinnings of Human Security, Threat and Risks Assessment, Strategic Planning; From Lessons Learned/Best Practices to Strategizing: practical advice on setting goals and objectives, assessing the risks and challenges, and proposing strategic lines of action; Case Studies: regional, national, sub-national.

Timelines:

Resources: translation to Russian?