



**26th Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group
“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

**“New Security Arrangements
for the South Caucasus”**

– Programme and Workshop Outline –

16 – 19 November 2023

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 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 by the RSSC SG 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 has also leveraged the assistance of outside partners to accomplish a policy recommendation made in November 2017 as Handbook project entitled “Understanding the Contemporary Information Landscape” which has been launched on November 2022. This effort represents a new line of products for the PFP Consortium, but, more to the point, accomplishes the promise of a multinational undertaking, uniting representatives of the South Caucasus towards a common goal. The RSSC SG is following up on that success with the production of a second handbook: “Building Resilience against Human Security Threats and Risks” aiming to roll it out in 2024.

Past workshops held since 2012 in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, and in Tbilisi, Istanbul, Kyiv, Chisinau, Varna, Minsk, Berlin, Rome, and Naples 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.

The geopolitical upheavals that we have witnessed over the last decade culminating i.a. into the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war, and the expansion of the war in Ukraine demand that the RSSC SG renew its efforts at raising awareness of geopolitical risks. Those wars have propelled the European Neighbourhood ever closer to the centre of the current geopolitical scene, as never since the end of the Cold War has this geopolitical area acquired more relevance for the security of the European continent. It is in this challenging international and regional context that the co-chairs are convening the RSSC SG workshop: “**New Security Arrangements for the South Caucasus**” to be held November 16-19, 2023, in Reichenau/Rax, Austria.

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

For the 26th Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) workshop, the co-chairs seek to further address a host of problems with potential consequences far beyond this region, like, for example, the denouement of the Armenian-Azerbaijani conflict and its possible implications for the war in Ukraine. What form of conflict resolution can be expected between the two neighbouring states? Can there be a regional solution created to move on from conflict? How would such a resolution affect the competitive interests and strategic goals of regional powers like Russia, Türkiye, and Iran? What could the South Caucasus states do to deal with the ensuing regional strategic competition? Furthermore, if this conflict escalated, as some well-known South Caucasus experts feared, how would it impact on the possible endgames of the war in Ukraine?

The risks of territorial expansion and further escalation of war remain palpable. That would be very dangerous as Europe, America and Russia might get bogged down into renewed nuclear confrontation, if not in all-out war. Talk of negotiations, let aside peace, have lately become nearly taboo in spite of human, infrastructure, and material losses mounting up on both sides. The impact of war on the trade of foodstuffs and energy is felt beyond, as well, by feeding inflation, socio-economic unrest, and political polarization far beyond the territories of the belligerents, including in the South Caucasus. Georgia, for example, has become an exclusive tourist destination to Russian visitors, which exacerbates the tensions within society regarding the country's political destiny – are Georgia's aspirations and efforts to belong to the Euro-Atlantic community still relevant and feasible in the post-war context? Meanwhile, three years after the Russian-mediated ceasefire of the 44-Day War, Armenia and Azerbaijan have not yet been successful in attaining peace. With the latest military actions in Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan seems to have resolved the territorial issue within its borders; the ultimate effects of the “reintegration” remain to be seen and are feared from at least the Nagorno-Karabakh Armenians. A peace agreement in the intrastate conflict between Yerevan and Baku, however, has yet to be negotiated, either due to a lack of willingness on either side or due to the fact that unresolved disputes are so deep that they do not allow for any compromises through mediation. Unsuccessful diplomatic efforts and foreseeable new political instabilities threaten to shatter the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process.

Russia, as it seems today, would not solely determine the security of the whole South Caucasus. The recent events in Nagorno-Karabakh and Armenia question the level of trust and the longevity of the Russo-Armenian security partnership. However, neither the Western regional influence should be taken for granted in any case, as new players, like China, Iran, and India are quietly challenging the post-Cold War regional order. Insecurity and different security aims heighten political polarization, that is not specific to the South Caucasus region as it expands into the Euro-Atlantic community, i.a. as a result of the war in Ukraine. The RSSC SG should investigate which agents are refractory to a peace deal in both Azerbaijan and in Armenia.

Political polarization may affect the prospects of long-term regional stability. The consequences would be dire for the existing security architecture; it would confirm NATO's inability to defend its values and the international legal regime that supports them. This Study Group workshop will investigate potential “middle ways” that can navigate away from deep divisions. In doing so, it would strengthen the Black Sea security and it would enhance the South Caucasus' relevance vis-à-vis Europe thus, prepare for the “post-war” world.

PANEL 1: Political Polarization and Its Dangers – Retaking the Initiative

Domestic political discourse and ideology influence a state's foreign policy formation. Consequently, increased political polarization and extremist ideology across the political spectrum will affect the bilateral and international relations of states. Political polarization has direct effects on the ability of actors to shape compromise solutions to complex problems. The outcome of the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan may result in such a level of intransigence that it may become more difficult to construct a lasting peace agreement, and less likely to enable both communities and countries to move on with a look towards the future. This panel should look at the issue of political polarization as a general problem, and panelists are urged to present papers where solutions to the problem of polarization are presented. The aim should be to re-introduce proper civil debate in domestic politics to generate solutions and policies that are objectively constructive in the South Caucasus and beyond.

PANEL 2: Building an Integrated South Caucasus – A Merger of Alternative Peace Plans?

One of the aims of this Study Group is to foster the notion of an integrated strategic persona for the South Caucasus, enabling it to emerge as a regional actor in its own right, promoting its interests constructively as a group of countries. Peace has remained elusive to achieve this goal. This would seem an appropriate time to enable the South Caucasus to reshape the diplomatic and political tools to maintain its links and relevance with the Western world. The first step would be to achieve a stronger basis (at least) to discuss peaceful settlement of disputes. Here the panelists may present their view of what a peace plan could look like for each of the conflicts that we encounter in the region; Georgia vs. Russia and Georgia's separatist territories, Armenia vs. Azerbaijan and how Baku is planning to reintegrate Nagorno-Karabakh while safeguarding human rights.

PANEL 3: External Factors of New Security Arrangements in the South Caucasus

The co-chairs are asking panellists to propose normative, legal, or other solutions that could be put in place with the help of Western organizations and institutions and with other Black Sea littoral states. Questions to consider could centre on the security of maritime trade, the "adaptability" of existing international legal regimes (like the Montreux Convention or the UNCLOS), and eventually, the creation of structures or procedures to alleviate shortages for the neighboring countries. We must also consider the place reserved for Russia as a regional player. How will it leverage its dwindling influence between Armenia and Azerbaijan? Another topic of discussion could be the impact of the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on the policies of external powers like Iran, Türkiye, India and China. How would a new security arrangement look like for the South Caucasus, what would be its contours?

Interactive Discussions

As usual, interactive discussions held in Chatham House Rules format are the main moderated platform to develop actionable policy recommendations by the RSSC SG. 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.

Programme

Thursday, 16 November 2023

till 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 Dinner

Friday, 17 November 2023

07.00 – 09.00 Breakfast

09.00 – 09.20 **Introduction to the Study Group “Regional Stability in the South Caucasus” and Administrative Remarks**

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

09.20 – 09.40 **Words of Welcome**

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

09.40 – 11.15 **PANEL 1: Political Polarization and Its Dangers – Retaking the Initiative**

Chair: Elena MANDALENAKIS, McGill University, Montreal

David MATSABERIDZE, Tbilisi State University
Armen GRIGORYAN, Center for Policy Studies, Yerevan
Razi NURULLAYEV, “Region” International Analytical Center, Baku
Nilufer NARLI, Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul
Marat TERTEROV, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

11.15 – 11.45 Coffee Break

11.45 – 13.15 **PANEL 2: Building an Integrated South Caucasus – A Merger of Alternative Peace Plans?**

Chair: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Benyamin POGOSYAN, Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies,
Yerevan
Ahmad ALILI, Caucasus Policy Analysis Centre, Baku
Elguja KHOKRISHVILI, Freie Universität Berlin
Andrzej KLIMCZYK, Georgian Strategic Analysis Center, Tbilisi
Damjan KRNJEVIĆ MIŠKOVIĆ, ADA University, Baku

13.15 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 16.00 **PANEL 3: External Factors of New Security Arrangements
in the South Caucasus**

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

Vasif HUSEYNOV, Center of Analysis of International Relations, Baku
Yeghia TASHJIAN, Issam Fares Institute for Public Policy and International
Affairs – American University of Beirut

Caroline STAMPFER, European Commission, Service for Foreign Policy
Instruments, Vienna

Nika CHITADZE, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi

Henry WATHEN, Peacetalk, Geneva

16.00 – 16.30 Coffee Break

16.30 – 18.00 **Interactive Discussion, Part 1**

Sub-group *Herodotus*:

New Security Arrangements for the South Caucasus

Moderation:

Mahir IBRAHIMOV, US Army Command and General Staff College, Fort
Leavenworth

Daria ISACHENKO, German Institute for International and Security Affairs,
Berlin

Sub-group *Thucydides*:

Status and Prospects of Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Process

Moderation:

Christoph BILBAN, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna

George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

19.00 Dinner

Saturday, 18 November 2023

07.00 – 08.30 Breakfast

08.30 – 10.00 **Interactive Discussion, Part 2**

Sub-group *Herodotus*:
New Security Arrangements for the South Caucasus

Moderation:

Mahir IBRAHIMOV, US Army Command and General Staff College,
Fort Leavenworth
Daria ISACHENKO, German Institute for International and Security Affairs,
Berlin

Sub-group *Thucydides*:
Status and Prospects of Armenia-Azerbaijan Peace Process

Moderation:

Christoph BILBAN, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna
George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

10.00 – 10.30 Coffee Break

10.30 – 11.30 **Interactive Discussion – Policy Recommendations Formulation**

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

11.30 – 12.00 **Official Closing Remarks**

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

12.00 – 13.00 Lunch

13.00 **Departure to the Side Programme**

Sunday, 19 November 2023

Individual Departures