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South Caucasus: Leveraging Political Change in a Context of Strategic Volatility

10 November 2018, 09:00-10:30, PANEL 4: «Re-energizing Crisis Internationalization.»

Armenia’s “Velvet Revolution”, Karabakh Conflict Internationalization & Recasting Western Regional Strategies

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OVERVIEW



- ✘ *The “Velvet Revolution” Might Have Not Yet Significantly Changed Positions on Karabakh*
- ✘ *Do the US Change its European Power Play?*
- ✘ *The EU Struggles with Conflicting Economic and Geopolitical Interests in the Eastern Neighbourhood*
- ✘ *Conclusions*

THE “VELVET REVOLUTION” MIGHT HAVE NOT SIGNIFICANTLY CHANGED POSITIONS ON KARABAKH YET

- ✘ Armenia’s multi-vector foreign policy combined with relentless multi-layered pressure from Azerbaijan has resulted into a **hardening of the Armenian position on Karabakh.**
- ✘ This hardening could be equated with bringing the **international conflict management efforts to a deadlock.**
- ✘ At the UN General Assembly, prime-minister Nikol Pashinyan summarized Armenian position on Karabakh. **No major changes from the previous government.**
- ✘ Mirroring the Armenian multi-vector policy, Baku has also sought to strengthen ties with both Russia and the West. However, **Baku preferred so far to stop short of joining the CSTO and the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).**





- **DOES THE US CHANGE ITS EUROPEAN POWER PLAY?**
- In theory, **US policy suggested a new containment jointly with its Allies and partners against Russia and China.**
- Meanwhile, **president Trump's practice:**
 - reflected the demise of the old world order;
 - questioned the Trans-Atlantic relations in the name of the old Westphalian balance of power;
 - ignored legitimate interests of Allies and partners, under the disguise of "America first";
 - strived to undermine the unity of the European allies.
- In terms of **European security policy, the US might shift to an indirect warfare strategy following on to Mackinder's "Theory of Heartland".**
- In that vein, George Friedman suggested a few years ago a **US strategy of indirect engagement in Eastern Europe**, which would combine economy of force and finance while exposing the US to limited and controlled risk.
- The key element of that strategy would consist of an **Intermarium Alliance**, consisting of countries on the Estonia to Azerbaijan line.



- **THE EU STRUGGLES WITH CONFLICTING ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS IN THE EASTERN NEIGHBOURHOOD**
- Russia turned from a “strategic partner” into a “strategic challenge” for the EU;
- **EU Conditionality in restoring dialogue with Russia upon progress in implementation of the Minsk 2 Agreements;**
- **2018 RAND Study** on “Rethinking the Regional Order of post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia” proposed the negotiation of a **new ‘East European security deal’**: both Russia and the West would agree to include states “in-between” in a regional integration area, to complement the existing institutions: NATO, EU, CSTO, and EAEU.
- **The states “in-between” are seeking security guarantees** that would require a new regional order, and **are keen to diversify** their trade, foreign investment, and other economic **opportunities with the involvement of “third powers”**.





CONCLUSIONS

- Post-“Velvet Revolution”, Yerevan needs to enable/constructively respond international efforts for Karabakh conflict settlement.
- To facilitate the adjustment of positions on Karabakh, Baku should strictly abstain from any provocative actions and engage in confidence building.
- If a new ‘East European security deal’ was eventually implemented, the continuation of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus would be counterproductive to regional integration, and their resolution should become a central part of the new agenda.
- Conversely, in case the Russia-West confrontation would prevail and increasingly turn towards a broader European conflict, the South Caucasus’ conflicts are likely to turn into proxies for the broader Russia-West conflict.
- South Caucasus’ neighbourhood with the Middle East would increasingly test the viability of the multi-vector policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

DISCUSSION

