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**19<sup>th</sup> Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group  
“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

**“Geopolitical Challenges of European Security  
in the South Caucasus and Ukraine”**

**– Workshop Outline–**

**11 – 13 April 2019**

Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute

**Berlin, Germany**

## Purpose

In 2012, the Austrian Ministry of Defence and Sports, through its National Defence Academy and the Directorate General for Security Policy, initiated a resume of the scientific work done by the PfP Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes on 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. In 2017, and again in 2018, the work of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) attracted the favourable attention of the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute (DOC/RI) in Berlin, which has since been contributing topically, logistically and financially to the effort.

Past workshops held in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, since 2012 and the wider region (Tbilisi, Istanbul, Kyiv, Chisinau, Varna and Minsk) have demonstrated that the RSSC SG has established a broad academic basis and cohesion necessary to undertake more ambitious cooperative projects. In addition, as it has already been proven in the past, the RSSC SG is the ideal “Track 2 diplomacy” tool to enable an academic examination of original and sometimes controversial ideas to inspire future political action. For example, the 10<sup>th</sup> workshop of the Study Group was the opportunity for experts to present and develop ideas concerning the new divisions in Europe, and how the new fault lines that are emerging will affect the South Caucasus. It generated policy recommendations regarding the maintenance of formal and informal channels of communication between Armenia and Azerbaijan in November 2014 that seem to have finally been implemented in October 2018 with a crisis hotline between the two countries.

The 18<sup>th</sup> workshop, held in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, was the occasion for a stock-taking exercise after a series of upheavals had rocked the political scene throughout the South Caucasus. In effect, the Armenian “Velvet Revolution”, the successive elections in Azerbaijan, Georgia and Russia, the demonstrations in downtown Tbilisi which led to the resignation of the Prime Minister, and also the promising offer of peace made by Georgia to Abkhazia were as many reasons to pause and reconsider the direction of the work of the RSSC SG.

The 19<sup>th</sup> RSSC SG workshop picks up more or less where the 17<sup>th</sup> workshop left off, discussing the geopolitical pressures on the South Caucasus. Whereas in Minsk we asked what kind of European security architecture could be engendered by geopolitical challenges, in Berlin we will be asking what role external actors have in stabilizing (or not) the South Caucasus. By actors, we mean primarily countries, but they may also include non-state or multilateral actors as well.

The purpose of the workshop is twofold; first to widen the scope for appreciation of new actors (or competitors) who may enter the political scene in the South Caucasus, a region which hitherto had been torn between the normative attraction of the Russian Federation on the one hand, and that of the EU, NATO, and the Euro-Atlantic structures on the other. What will be the situation when other actors start competing for influence in what was for centuries Russia’s and Turkey’s battleground, and Europe’s and the US’ most recent ambition for reform? It should be noted that not every influence is beneficial, and therefore we include in our examination the potential for further destabilization. In particular, the workshop will try to trace links between the attempts of conflict resolution in Ukraine and in the South Caucasus. Second, to assess developments in European security since our workshop in Minsk and discuss steps towards building a new regional order in the Eastern European neighborhood. Such a new order should be underpinned by a joint Russian-Western commitment to respecting the current membership of existing institutions, and a joint effort to define a framework for the regional integration of non-member states, as well as a template for how both Russia and the West can relate to such a state without producing conflict.

This is why it is propitious to convene the upcoming 19<sup>th</sup> workshop of the Study Group entitled **“Geopolitical Challenges of European Security in the South Caucasus and Ukraine” in Berlin, Germany, from 11 to 14 April 2019.**

## **Partners**

- PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, Garmisch-Partenkirchen
- Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna
- Directorate General for Security Policy at the Austrian Ministry of Defence, Vienna
- Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, Berlin
- The European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
- Security Governance Group, Kitchener

## **Topic Outline**

The aim of this workshop is to wrap-up the geopolitical examination of the South Caucasus, begun in Minsk in April 2018, and to provide actionable policy recommendations through interactive discussions. With this workshop, we resume the breakout group format to explore particular aspects of each conflict.

The topic of this workshop begs the question of what is meant by “potential” and “actor.” For the purpose of helping participants prepare their presentations, “potential” is a matter of foresight, as well as a matter of quality. Participants are asked to give an appreciation of external actors’ eventual influence in the South Caucasus which could directly or not influence the process of stabilization already at work in the region. If this influence is seen by traditional regional players, are there grounds to fear an adverse reaction from one or some of them? For instance, how would Russia view the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); as a bridge-building exercise of exclusive commercial character, or as a normative pole of attraction for the South Caucasus? While nominally speaking the BRI should yield mostly benefits, its very existence – or the insistence of its sponsors to push it through – may be interpreted as an audacious geopolitical move. Also, an actor can have many definitions; as we have hinted just now, the actor could be China, but it could also be the BRI itself.

Actors could also be non-state; what would happen if the South Caucasus grew tired of a pointless Minsk or Geneva process? Would the parties in dispute seek mediation elsewhere? What would that mean for the reputation of traditional large powers having interests in the South Caucasus (such as Russia, Turkey and the US, for instance)? Actors can also be multilateral institutions, such as the OSCE, but they can also be individuals singly or in groups. The level of analysis adopted is left to the discretion of the presenters.

Actor may also be interpreted as “factor”. For instance the case of Ukraine cannot be seen in isolation from that of the South Caucasus frozen conflicts. What are the common points between them all? All conflicts are different, but commonalities exist in all, such as the extreme pressure brought to bear by Russia’s physical presence in or near the territories in dispute (or distress) be it Abkhazia, Armenia, Crimea, Donbas, or South Ossetia. Should it be understood that the resolution of a conflict in the South Caucasus necessarily entails or requires the resolution of the Donbas and Crimean crises? These are some of the questions that this workshop will seek to address.

## **PANEL 1: External Actors in Perspective**

This panel enables presenters to make their case for the soothing or disturbing potential of external actors as defined above. A light on the role of the Ukraine crisis is cast on the frozen conflicts of the South Caucasus in this panel.

## **PANEL 2: Adapting to Outside Pressure**

This panel informs on how South Caucasus actors can anticipate, mitigate and adapt to the in-roads made by external actors, or whether they should bandwagon with them. The panel also considers the likely consequences of either option; adaptation or defection to new hegemons.

## **PANEL 3: The Way Ahead for Geopolitical Competition in the South Caucasus and Ukraine**

This panel examines how the push and pull at work in the region, as large powers make their presence felt, could trigger renewed hostilities, or aggravate existing tensions.

## **BREAKOUT GROUPS**

Three breakout groups (one for the Western South Caucasus, the other for the Eastern South Caucasus, and one for overarching great power relations) will examine in more detail recent overtures in order to provide advice on how to develop opportunities for stabilization and conflict resolution (such as the new Armenian-Azerbaijani hotline and the idea of a dedicated conflict resolution platform for these two actors, or the peace offering made to Sukhum by Tbilisi) or propose avenues for stability in the context of geopolitical competition.