What a 'New European Security Deal' Could Mean for the South Caucasus

Policy Recommendations[1]
Study Group Regional Stability in the South Caucasus (RSSC SG)

17th RSSC SG Workshop
Minsk, Belarus, 18-21 April 2018

PfP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes

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Executive Summary:

The Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group of the PfP Consortium (RSSC SG) convened its 17th workshop on "What A 'New European Security Deal' Could Mean for the South Caucasus" in Minsk, Belarus, on 18-21 April 2018. This workshop had two aims:

1) to lead the representatives of the South Caucasus to better consider the role of their region as a unified force to help shape security outcomes that matter to them;

2) to consider developing an outline for a new workable agreement over European security, based upon a review of the reasons for failure of past attempts, and an assessment of potential implications for the South Caucasus region.

The following recommendations were agreed by the workshop participants:

1) to strengthen the agencies and other bodies of the OSCE as a preferred vehicle for inter-state dialogue on European security issues;

2) to stem the "escalation of distrust", stimulate confidence building and greater reliance on international institutions on the basis of comprehensive de-escalation mechanisms (which may include neutral peacekeeping missions);

3) to mitigate propaganda, demonization, and negative narratives, create a special group of the civil society in the South Caucasus to analyse attempts at vitiating international media communications; and

4) to create a dedicated group of experts on the post-Soviet region ("Eastern Table") to discuss and seek solutions to ongoing conflicts, which would then be integrated into a wider pan-European security model. The "Eastern Table" should also have separate baskets, dealing with: regional economic issues; strengthening the "responsibility for conflict prevention"; transnational security threats to provide foresight and response capacity; confidence and security building measures (CSBMs).

INTRODUCTION

The policy recommendations of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group's (RSSC SG) 12th workshop, held in Reichenau in November 2014, urged the international community to develop a new security architecture that would preserve the interests of great powers as well as the relative latitude of action of smaller actors in the South Caucasus. The increasing instability and unpredictability of international relations and the inconsistencies between the post-Cold War European security architecture and current realities have made those recommendations and the work of the RSSC SG more relevant and challenging than ever. The 17th RSSC SG workshop, convened for the first time ever in Minsk, Belarus, aimed to look at ways of peacefully transforming the Euro-Atlantic security order. Below is a synopsis of the discussions that took place 18-21 April 2018 in Minsk and the policy recommendations that were extracted from the break-out groups.

PANEL 1

The first panel was tasked with drawing a diagnosis of the current European strategic environment, as it affects the South Caucasus. The proposals that came forth surprised many by their originality.

The first panelist argued that in spite of inherent difficulties at the policy/diplomatic level, it is both sides' security instruments which should benefit from enhanced dialogue and interaction.
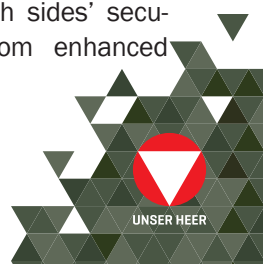
Namely, NATO and the CSTO should establish mechanisms to control military escalation, and avoid "war by mistake", thereby formalizing an inter-institutional security relationship. This prospect is being held back by the absence of a sense of common security within the CSTO, and by the evolving roles and postures of the respective alliances.

The second panelist lamented the absence of evolution in security narratives, and the aggravation of regional tensions and unresolved conflicts not only in the South Caucasus, but more broadly in Europe. The South Caucasus, although not openly declared, remains at the forefront of large powers' strategic calculations. A change of narrative – not institutions or security mechanisms – is what is being proposed here. À propos of which, the third panelist surprised everyone by orienting his presentation on technological developments and security threats that put the fabric of society at risk. According to this panelist, there is not a clash of ideologies or of geostrategic interests of great powers, but a clash of postures brought about by miscommunication. For him, as decision-makers became strategically more skillful and responsible than ever before, perspective technologies could have a great positive impact on future security issues. This panelist further argued that the essence of strategic communications consists of the synchronization of image, words and deeds (the latter being a crucial element in strategic communication). When there is mismatch of image, words and deeds, propagandists and targets find themselves compelled to manage perceptions, which distracts the public's and decision-makers' attention from technological revolutions which will affect the fabric of society. The tragedy being that adversaries will be defending socio-political systems and mechanisms that are increasingly obsolete.

The last panelist concluded the panel on a sour note; no new security architecture could be expected anytime soon due to mostly ideological/governance differences between Russia and the West. These are also most visible in the South Caucasus, where unresolved conflicts are undermining regional stability and security cooperation, including efforts to rebuild the security architecture in line with local actors' best interests. Anthony Cordesman, from the Washington-based Center for Security and International Studies (CSIS) was quoted as saying that strong states will continue to bend the rules in their interests, meaning that eventually most local

actors were persuaded that either only NATO or only Russia/CSTO could ensure their security.

PANEL 2

The first panelist argued that any NATO-CSTO dialogue, in a putative OSCE framework, would ensure that a new conception of European security takes all points of view into account, and would result in an inclusive architecture. This would of course soothe the disquiet of South Caucasus actors which would be involved actively in the creation of formal inter- and intra-institutional linkages.[2]

The second panelist took a Realist School perspective. The post-Cold War period, to him, was merely a historical bridge between bipolarity and a new global order. Currently, no one wants global leadership, not even the US, implying that the post-Cold War order was now over. This leads regional powers into an un-checked competition for regional hegemony. As a result, geography has become once again a bargaining chip in international relations. Might, not right, would thereby regulate security relations.

The third panelist conceded the point that Realist self-help was making a return, and that attempting to reform international law and juridical instruments might not be good enough, or even feasible, in some cases. The role of international law in making international relations predictable has always been exaggerated, according to this presenter. During the post-Cold War, too many grey areas have been allowed to mushroom, and there, rules cannot be enforced, so that the actors themselves have to be relied on to ensure predictability. This panelist concluded that weakening the OSCE was a big mistake, and that it was far better to strengthen and more creatively apply the instruments that exist than to create new ones.

The fourth panelist dedicated his presentation to non-recognized states from the South Caucasus. International organizations, according to him, can provide them with administrative support necessary for the respect of important precepts of international law (such as human rights) without legitimizing any national claims. In such cases, NGOs, IOs and civil society would provide essential services. Allowing civil society and business to take their natural courses may carry the seeds of stabilization and conflict resolution.

The final panelist summarized the thinking prevalent in the panel. There is no need to reinvent the wheel, but to strengthen the observance of international law.

In a context of sustained contradiction and confrontation, where self-help tends to supersede institutionalization, arms racing tends to supplant disarmament arrangements, and both recognized and un-recognized actors co-exist with mutual incertitude, the current European security regime

does not meet the needs of any regional or global power. The solution would therefore seem to require: greater focus on inclusive organizations, preferably the OSCE, and on their fundamental commitments; enhanced economic cooperation as an incentive for re-building mutual trust; a review of EU enlargement's security impact.

PANEL 3

The first panelist of the last panel stressed on the growing role of non-Western regional actors (Russia, Turkey, Iran) in designing the South Caucasus security architecture. While it would be unreasonable to expect Russia to take a step back in the South Caucasus even with a commitment to non-enlargement by the EU or even NATO, it is obvious that European and Euro-Atlantic institutions are simply less active than Russia in the region. A "New European Security Deal" sounds to South Caucasus states like the West preparing to abandon the region. That would be damaging their current balancing policies against regional powers.

The second panelist came up with a practical solution, based on the fact that new conflict resolution mechanisms can stimulate a new security order where Russia does not feel her interests threatened, and where others find a voice. Thus, this panelist proposed convening a European Strategic Group, where Russia and the EU can exchange views on European security. He also argued for a form of "OSCE 2.0" which would revive the Helsinki Final Act's forgotten instruments, featuring an "Eastern Table" for conflict resolution in Ukraine, Moldova, and the South Caucasus. Harmonizing relations between NATO and CSTO as well as EU and Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) should also become "OSCE 2.0" priorities.

The third panelist reiterated that the current confrontation, especially between great powers, could not endure much longer before a conflagration engulfs all sides. The operations in Syria show the danger of escalation between protagonists. At the same time, great powers are the most effective actors in this crisis, which begs the question whether more decisive unilateral actions are to be foreseen in international and security affairs. A new hegemonic security structure for the South Caucasus could also include a triangular alliance between Moscow, Ankara and Tehran.

The fourth panelist was adamant that any new security architecture must include credible conflict resolutions mechanisms. Such mechanisms are urgently needed according to him, because waiting is not an option (ergo the suggestion we made at the 13th RSSC SG workshop in Kyiv about "strategic patience" would seem inoperative), because youth is more radical than the elders. At the very least, a policy of "engagement without recognition" (à la Peter Semneby) would be well received, provided there is engagement.

The final panelist of the conference reminded us that there was no military solution for the conflict in Transnistria currently on the table. The conflict settlement is frozen, since there are no talks about status, but only about socio-economic and humanitarian issues. Although no one wanted to see a resumption of open hostilities, there was a manifest military buildup taking place since at least 2014. In this context, a military de-escalation process was suggested, possibly including a civilian CSDP-CSTO peace-building mission.

Following those discussions, Peter Schulze delivered a key note address to inspire breakout group discussions. He made several suggestions; first, he argued, we must recognize that all the elements of a peaceful international order were already codified in the Paris Charter of 1990. Yet, during the decade of the 1990s, Russia barely influenced international political developments. It took Russia's own efforts at re-establishing herself as a force to be reckoned with in the middle of the 2000s for her to be taken seriously, but at the same time affecting the feeling of security that prevailed between the West and Russia. Only now has the US abandoned the idea of unipolarity, and while the status quo seems the best option, multipolarity carries the seeds of disarmament if particular dialogue mechanisms are revived, such as the NATO-Russia Council and the Normandy framework. He said "we need to challenge the post-Cold War international order, but with new and inclusive institutions."

Subsequently, two interactive discussion sessions and two breakout groups yielded rich exchanges leading to policy recommendations presented below.

BREAKOUT GROUP DISCUSSIONS

The breakout group discussions emphasized the need for greater civil society interaction and track 2 (non-official) diplomacy. The latter should focus on problems of conflict resolution, radical extremism, uncontrolled migration and other similar topics of common interest.

A structured dialogue – a dedicated diplomatic platform – should be erected to urge country leaders to look at projects for the common benefit.

This must have emotional appeal so that they can easily be sold to the respective publics.

Much reform of existing international institutions needs to take place to fully be inclusive and operational. In this view, the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter could be updated.

The groups concluded that Russia and the West could minimize the negative impact of their current geopolitical confrontation if they focused on economic integration, conflict resolution, as well as on addressing new security risks, such as the problem of terrorism, religious extremism and radicalism. Root causes of extremism must be addressed especially in the South Caucasus and Central Asia. This, as well as initiating some form of dialogue on countering hybrid threats, could be ground for renewed security dialogue and cooperation in the OSCE format as well. Making significant progress in Donbas conflict resolution and starting talks on resuming confidence and security building measures in Europe should be higher priorities.

Finally, the groups reconciled themselves to the notion that, for the foreseeable future, joint problem solving would co-exist with inter-state competition. While a new European security model could be developed at a later stage, there is a need to switch off from the current all-out confrontation to developing common security issues definitions pertaining to regional responsibility, assessing the scope of burden sharing for security, and reviewing the overall framework for European security dialogue. In particular, there needs to be a much better correlation between the concepts of territorial integrity and self-determination.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Upon the conclusion of discussions, the co-chairs asked the assembled participants to give their broad approval to the formulation of the following policy recommendations:

1) In general, the OSCE should be the preferred vehicle for inter-state dialogue and some of her agencies and institutions should be strengthened for better use.

2) In general, there should be comprehensive de-escalation mechanisms put in place (which may include neutral peacekeeping missions) to stimulate confidence building and greater reliance on international institutions. The objective is to stem the "escalation of distrust". This might offer an opportunity to address most pressing problems with the mutual exchange of information and the es-

tablishment of joint contact groups by different security organizations dealing with vital issues on the European agenda. Coordination could then be achieved inter alia upon agreements on mutual decision-making mechanisms. An example could be the conduct of peacekeeping/civilian monitoring missions using the resources and infrastructure of the OSCE, CSTO, and the EU.

3) Civil society in the South Caucasus should create a special group to analyze attempts at vitiating international media communications. The aim would be to mitigate propaganda, demonization, and negative narratives.

4) Along the line of point 3 above, a dedicated group of experts on the post-Soviet region ("Eastern Table") should be created to discuss and seek solutions on South Caucasus conflicts, which would then be integrated into a wider pan-European security model. This Eastern Table should have separate baskets, dealing inter alia with regional economic issues, stimulating a "responsibility for conflict prevention" perhaps within a neutral peacekeeping framework, also a basket on transnational security threats to provide a conflict foresight and response capacity, and in general, a special focus on confidence and security building measures (CSBMs).