



**3rd Virtual Roundtable
of the PFP Consortium Study Group
“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

**The Way Forward in the South
Caucasus: What Role
for Pragmatic Multilateralism?**

– Programme and Virtual Roundtable Outline –

Monday, 07 June 2021

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Purpose

The Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) of the PFP Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes has emerged as the premiere Track 2 diplomacy platform for the region where intractable conflicts and other issues with impact on regional stability are discussed with discretion, in a serene professional 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 more than a dozen workshops and two virtual roundtables being considered if not applied by South Caucasus actors/decision makers.

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 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 have been put in practice in Armenia. The RSSC SG is also leveraging the assistance of outside partners to accomplish a policy recommendation made in November 2017 pertaining to media literacy. The co-chairs are glad to pilot this effort, and to see that the work of the RSSC SG is finding a constructive outlet. Much remains to be done, however, and we expect this work to continue for the foreseeable future.

Past workshops 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.

In the wake of the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic crisis, the Operational Staff and the stakeholders of the PFP Consortium have strongly encouraged all working and study groups to continue their activities in virtual format, for the time being. So far, this Study Group has already hosted four virtual events: a roundtable on "Assessing and Mitigating the Impact of the COVID-19 Global Crisis in the South Caucasus Region", on 25 June 2020, and, on 4 December 2020, "What Future for Nagorno-Karabakh after the 2020 Six-Weeks War", as well as two management meetings on "Understanding the Contemporary Information Landscape – A Handbook", on 23 October 2020, and on 22 January 2021.

Once again, there is the feeling that the South Caucasus is at a crossroads. The outcome of the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh war has had many impacts. The ceasefire agreement has created a new geopolitical reality, especially thanks to the adroit coordination between Russia and Turkey. It has also galvanized Armenian society in such a way as to question Prime-minister N. Pashinyan's hold on power, and it precipitated a serious political crisis. The perceived expansion of Russian area of influence in the South Caucasus has also been felt in the political struggle emerging from the contested outcome of last autumn's legislative elections in Georgia. Both European and U.S. emissaries attempted to persuade the Georgian government and opposition parties to overcome the existing political tensions and work together towards finding a reasonable political compromise. There too, manifestations and demonstrations have been frequent, and intense. Meanwhile, the situation remained tense in Nagorno-Karabakh, where Russian peacekeepers have been quickly deployed. Their indispensable role in ensuring the security of the local Armenian population has transformed the former internationally unrecognized state into another *de facto* Russian protectorate, at least for the time being. The establishment in the Agdam region of Azerbaijan of the Turkish-Russian Joint Monitoring Centre to oversee peacekeeping operations in and around Nagorno-Karabakh has been hailed as a historical shift in geopolitical trends in the South Caucasus:

a step forward in the regionalization of hard security. As the United States remained a key component of multilateral institutions to which all South Caucasus countries rely on, American policy remains an important barometer for international organizations' role in the South Caucasus. Although European Union's regional influence appeared most wrinkled by its passive approach during the 2020 Karabakh war, Brussels has clearly signaled its continued interest in maintaining a significant South Caucasus role by sending Charles Michel, the president of the European Council, to Tbilisi to re-energize Georgia's drive to democracy and European integration.

Within this complex political context, we invite you to join us at the **3rd Virtual Workshop of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group** entitled: **“The Way Forward in the South Caucasus: What Role for Pragmatic Multilateralism?”**

Partners

- Partnership for Peace Consortium of Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes, Garmisch-Partenkirchen
- Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna
- European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
- Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

Topic Outline

The policy recommendations from our previous virtual roundtables highlighted, inter alia:

- Participants' concerns that “Within the context of the COVID19 pandemic, the unresolved conflicts in the South Caucasus might accelerate existing trends and eventually produce growing regional instability, deeper geopolitical fragmentation, and even future socio-economic irrelevance and backwardness.”
- Warnings that “a peace deal [on the 2020 Karabakh war] that one party [i.e. Armenia] viewed as “a capitulation” would hardly be a reliable foundation for stable and long-lasting peace. On the contrary, it might fuel more inter-ethnic mistrust, tensions, and could eventually lead to another war”.
- Demands from regional experts that “The European Union (EU) should make use of the existing Eastern Partnership (EaP) cooperation framework to develop a reinforced and effective European role in responding to diverse new challenges in the EU's Eastern neighbourhood”.

In addition, an individual assessment by one of the Co-chairs noted that “the largest geopolitical risk stemming from the new pattern of “balance of power” conflict management applied to Nagorno-Karabakh is that the South Caucasus region might end up entangled with the ongoing Russia-West unmanaged geopolitical confrontation.”

Against this backdrop, the aim of this virtual roundtable will consist of assessing the influence of regional instability spilling over from the geopolitical changes and the unfinished business of the 2020 six-weeks war over Nagorno-Karabakh into the neighbouring countries, as well as across the South Caucasus region. This will entail:

- evaluating the role of “*pragmatic multilateralism*” pursued by various regional organizations and initiatives (such as, the OSCE, the European Union, the Eurasian Economic Union, the “Caucasus Cooperation Platform” initiative, the January 2021 “Trilateral Statement by Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan leaders on unblocking of economic and transport links”) in conflict resolution, and in building regional cooperation;

- assessing the impact of the political crisis/ domestic instability¹ on Georgia's prospects for Euro-Atlantic and European integration;
- evaluating the performance of the peacekeeping mission in Nagorno-Karabakh, and the operation of the Turkish-Russian Joint Monitoring Centre and the prospects for their impact on conflict resolution in the South Caucasus region.

The goal of this workshop is to produce recommendations based on expert opinions pertaining to the above topics. The overall objectives of the RSSC SG have been to stimulate thinking on ways to get the South Caucasus to emerge as an integrated strategic region; a region with its own formal or informal mechanisms of inter-relation, which could provide a single partner to the European Union, NATO, or other regional actors. The aim is to bolster stability by increasing the political weight of the region, thereby offering the chance of more balanced economic, social and structural development.

Thus, panelists are invited to evaluate the way forward in the South Caucasus along the paths highlighted here above while keeping in mind the ongoing geopolitical shifts at global, European, Middle Eastern and South Caucasus levels, and the socio-economic, psychological, and security constraints. The intention is to produce commonly agreed and actionable policy recommendations to be presented to the capitals of all South Caucasus regional actors, including Russia and Turkey, as well as to the headquarters of other external stakeholders, be they states, international organizations (both IGO's and NGO's), and multinational companies.

To address the aims of this workshop, the co-Chairs are proposing the following questions to spur thinking among invited speakers:

- What are the main regional security risks and threats arising from a possible deadlock in completing the implementation of all the provisions of the Trilateral Statement on the ceasefire in Nagorno-Karabakh of November 9, 2020?
- What potential role is there for pragmatic multilateralism pursued by regional organizations and initiatives in support of conflict management and resolution, and of enhancing regional cooperation in the South Caucasus?
- What would be the best institutional framework to materialize a possible reintegration of the South Caucasus region with the wider European security?
- What were the possible links of the Georgian political crisis/instability with the regionalization of security in the South Caucasus in the aftermath of the 2020 Karabakh war? How could the latter influence Georgia's plans for conflict management and resolution in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia? What role has played the European and Euro-Atlantic integration agenda of Georgia in the resolution of that political crisis? How does the growing confrontation between Russia and the West impact on Georgia's foreign policy?
- What lessons were learned by the Russian and Turkish peacekeepers while fulfilling their mandate in and around Nagorno-Karabakh? What end-state in Nagorno-Karabakh would warrant the withdrawal of the peacekeepers? How does the growing confrontation between Russia and the West impact on the future Turkish-Russian collaboration on peacekeeping?

Modalities for the Virtual Roundtable

The speakers would be invited to present the audience with a one-page outline including their key points and possible concrete policy recommendations (no written analysis required). The policy recommendations should be formulated according to the perceived needs of his/her country of origin within the scope described by the aims and the questions framing the expected content of the roundtable discussion. The virtual discussion should focus on those presentations, under the

¹ Assuming that the political crisis has been overcome by early June 2021.

moderation of the Co-Chairs. Participants will be invited to contribute the interactive discussions by providing comments and questions for the speakers, as well as their own proposals for policy recommendations. Building upon the outcome of the virtual discussion, the Co-Chairs will wrap-up and finalize the draft conclusions and policy recommendations.

N.B.: As usual, the conclusions and policy recommendations, as well as the ensuing discussion will be subject to Chatham House rules, while the final draft should be subject to a short silence procedure approval by all participants.

Programme

Monday, 7 June 2021

All times are Central European Time – CET (Vienna Time); all Speakers to be confirmed

13:00 – 13:05 **Words of welcome**

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

13:05- 13:25 **Keynote Speech:** Laurence BROERS, Conciliation Resources, London

Q&A

13.25 – 14.15 **SECTION 1: What Role for Pragmatic Multilateralism in South Caucasus Conflict Resolution and Regional Cooperation?**

Chair: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Speakers:

Tatoul MANASSERIAN, Founder & Director, Research Centre “Alternative”, Yerevan

Nilufer NARLI, Bahcesehir University, Istanbul

Elkhan NURIYEV, Centre for East European and International Studies, Berlin

Q&A

14.15 – 15.15 **SECTION 2: The US, NATO, and Georgia’s Membership in Times of Political Crisis**

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

Speakers:

Michael CECIRE, Eurasia Democratic Security Network, Washington DC

Q&A

15:15 – 15:25 Individual Coffee Break

15.25 – 16.25 **SECTION 3: Russian-Turkish Peacekeeping in the South Caucasus and the End-state in Nagorno-Karabakh**

Moderation: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Speakers:

Leonid KARABESHKIN, Independent Political Analyst, Tallinn

Benyamin POGHOSYAN, Centre for Political and Economic Strategic Studies, Yerevan

Fuad SHAHBAZOV, Centre for Strategic Communications, Baku

Mariam MAISURADZE, Civil Society and Democratic Dev. Centre, Tbilisi

16.25 – 16.55 **Policy Recommendations Drafting**

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

16.55 **Closing remarks**

Benedikt HENSELLEK, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna
George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
Frederic LABARRE, Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston