



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

**“Discussing a South Caucasus Short of  
Russian Dominance”**

**– Programme and Workshop Outline –**

**DRAFT 22 MAR 2023**

**30 March-2 April 2023**

**Tbilisi, Georgia**

## 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 will be officially launched in November 2022. 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 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 RSSC SG has continued its work throughout the Covid pandemic, hosting three virtual roundtables, each of which has produced actionable recommendations.

The current geopolitical upheavals that we have witnessed since the beginning of last year demand that the RSSC SG renew its efforts at raising awareness of the risks of persevering in the current conditions. There is no doubt that the tensions flaring up in the world today will be palpable in the conference room, but we trust our supporting organisations the PFP Consortium, and the Austrian National Defence Academy, as well as the workshop participants would help the co-chairs maintain a positive and constructive atmosphere for discussions. It is in this challenging international and regional context that the co-chairs are convening the RSSC SG workshop; **“Discussing a South Caucasus Short of Russian Dominance”** to be held March 30-April 2, 2023, in Tbilisi, Georgia.

## 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
- Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University
- European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
- Royal Military College of Canada, Kingston

## Topic Outline

For the 25<sup>th</sup> Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) workshop, the co-chairs seek to break the mould and produce a prospective and prescriptive workshop addressing (a) potential scenario(s) for the near future. It is deemed essential to prepare not only large powers and international organizations, but also South Caucasus' leaders for what the future might hold.

There is no avoiding the impact of the Russian war against Ukraine, regardless of the outcome. Thus, it would seem pertinent to assess what form the consequences of a change in the geopolitical landscape might take and how they might affect regional actors' postures and strategies in the South Caucasus region.

This is important because Russia is a Caucasus country. Much of the South Caucasus' stability depends on Russia. Certain actors in the South Caucasus, notably Armenia, and some non-recognized territories, continue to look towards the Russian Federation as a guarantor of security. Indeed, the stability between Armenia and Azerbaijan is secured by Russian peacekeeping forces. The vacuum created by the Russian inability to demonstrate the required coercive power to maintain stability might be met by challengers, and it may also provide certain actors with an opportunity to unlock security guarantees of their own. For instance, this could be the occasion to follow through with the recommendations made at the latest RSSC SG workshops in Naples and Reichenau and establish a truly neutral peacekeeping operation in Karabakh. It may be the occasion for Georgia to lunge forward towards its European and Euro-Atlantic integration goals (even without acquiring full control of its territory) as indicated at the last workshop also. While Russia might keep trying to create a new union with Belarus and Armenia, would it not be more advisable to consider South Caucasus regional integration instead?

An initiative such as this, which the co-chairs of the RSSC SG have pushed since 2012, would require a re-assessment of the value of multilateralism in the region for collective security and decision-making. As mainstream international organizations (IOs) have all but remained silent over the troubles of the South Caucasus (read: during the 44 days war between Armenia and Azerbaijan) and have also moved aside to let great powers and the national states handle security in the Russian war against Ukraine, it is reasonable to believe that regional policy- and decision-makers will view large IOs with some reluctance. Yet a demonstration of collective wisdom and commitment to stability might have to go through IOs. Whether they would be able to produce the needed regional security system/arrangements remains to be seen. It certainly needs to be considered.

Other powers may take advantage of Russia's current woes. China, India, Iran, and Türkiye are the most visible challengers aiming to benefit from the dwindling Russian power and influence in the Eurasian space. Some sort of multilateralism might be necessary for a peaceful transition towards the post-Russian dominance era across its Southern neighbourhoods. For example, in the wake of Western withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) might be taking the relay of multilateralism in Central Asia. The fate of the South Caucasus multilateralism is not clear yet beyond the Russia-Turkey tacit condominium, and the unfulfilled promises of the "3+" regional cooperation initiatives.

### **PANEL 1: The Likeliest Scenario(s) for Tomorrow's Russia**

Over the last year or so, it has become clear that the geopolitical objective of Russia today is not only Ukraine, but to reshape the rules of cohabitation within the new European security system. Moscow has implicitly acknowledged the failure of the OSCE-based European security system to effectively respond the structural power shifts, as well as the ideological and ethnic-religious cleavages proliferating over the last almost half of a century since it has been created. Consequently,

the post-Cold War European order is being perceived as broken into pieces, while a new European order is yet to be born. What would be the likeliest scenario(s) for tomorrow's Russia's? Whether Russia was included in the new order or not, the European peace will continue to be shaped by its long-term strategic interests and threat perceptions. Therefore, it makes a lot of sense to assess how Russia's regional influence might evolve in the near future, and how it might change the European, Eurasian, hence South Caucasus regional security. Can we anticipate a more or a less dangerous Russia? If we are facing a more pragmatic Russia, what impact will it have on the European security in general, and on the South Caucasus security in particular? Speakers at the 25<sup>th</sup> RSSC SG in Georgia will be asked to evaluate the chance, the nature, and scope of the changing Russian influence, and its likely impact on the South Caucasus region. The outcome of the first panel should enable the group to draft a possible regional security landscape of the near future on which Western and South Caucasus policymakers can rely for planning policy and programs.

## **PANEL 2: The Role of Multilateralism in a Changing Geopolitical Environment**

One of the great innovations of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has been the creation of supra-national IOs to oversee important changes. Will multilateralism provide the transitional answers to the challenges of maintaining stability at a moment when the local hegemon is getting closer to the end of its rope? Or will Russia's legacy privileges within the UN and the OSCE prevent these IOs once again to do the work they were meant to do? Would it be wise to exclude Russia from any new European security arrangements so that it may be prevented to undertake the corrosive role it used to play in the OSCE lately? Currently, the EU is the largest organization with a presence in the South Caucasus. Should the EU's further involvement in maintaining security and stability in the South Caucasus region be strengthened and what should it do more or better?

However, if no permanent resolution can be found to establish peace once and for all between Armenia and Azerbaijan, turning one's eyes to the OSCE and the UN will offer no valid solution. Thus, the prospect of an effectively managed security transition may have to go through a form of local integration of all three South Caucasus countries. The second panel should therefore consider the double impact of Russia's emerging weakness and loss of influence on the viability of multilateralism at the international/regional level, and the possibility of a new (smaller?) multilateral security organization/arrangement being created in the South Caucasus. The output of the second panel should be an image of regional cooperation that would transcend the current impasse, given the apparently insoluble Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, and Georgia's lost sovereignty over parts of its internationally recognized territory. The role of, and the links with, existing and potentially new (post-Ukraine war) multilateral security organizations/arrangements should be also considered.

## **PANEL 3: South Caucasus Survival and Tomorrow's Russia**

The third panel should therefore enable contributors to present their solutions for South Caucasus survival (that is; for Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan respectively, but also collectively). That is the prospect of survival for a region with a distinct (although contested) history. This panel could for instance assess the potential for current (and future) alliances and cooperation opportunities. For instance, is the prospect of a Russian-Belarus-Armenia union viable? If not, what are the risks and prospects for Armenia at a moment when China's appeal has also begun to pale? Similarly, is it wise for Azerbaijan to bank mostly on Türkiye (and vice-versa) to support national and regional ambitions? Are NATO and EU membership for Georgia still the best (and unique) ways to ensure national and regional security? There needs to be serious thought put into this at a moment when the security and political landscape is about to change dramatically. The end-product of this panel should be an image that could guide us effectively into the future, and perhaps provide a detailed plan as to how to generate regional integration.

**PANEL 4: Editorial Management Meeting: Building Resilience against Human Security Threats and Risks Handbook**

Based upon recommendations made at the November 2021 Reichenau workshop, participants to the 23<sup>rd</sup> RSSC SG workshop, held in Naples (Italy) on 24-27 March 2022, urged the launch of a new common project. The November 2022 Reichenau meeting was the occasion to make progress on the exact topic, scope, and reach of the Handbook. The fourth and final panel would be open for the contributors to the new Handbook on “Building Resilience against Human Security Threats and Risks” being developed by the co-chairs. Further details will be provided onsite, but we would invite new contributors from the 25<sup>th</sup> RSSC SG to participate as well.

## Programme

### Thursday, 30 March 2023

till 18.30 Arrival of the participants

19.00 **Words of Welcome**

Olaf GARLICH, PfP Consortium Operations Staff, Garmisch-Partenkirchen

Andreas F. WANNEMACHER, Directorate General for Defence Policy,  
Austrian Ministry of Defence, Vienna

Salome DUNDUA, Iv. Javakishvili Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi

**Ice Breaker**

### Friday, 31 March 2023

07.00 – 09.00 Breakfast

09.00 – 09.15 **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

09.15 – 09.30 **Opening Remarks**

Teona AKUBARDIA, Parliament of Georgia, Tbilisi

09.30 – 11.00 **PANEL 1: The Likeliest Scenario(s) for Tomorrow’s Russia**

**Chair:** George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Marat TERTEROV, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Fuad SHAHBAZOV, Independent Policy Analyst, Baku

Yeghia TASHJIAN, American University of Beirut

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

Nika CHITADZE, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi

11.00 – 11.30 Coffee Break

11.30 – 13.00 **PANEL 2: The Role of Multilateralism in a Changing Geopolitical Environment**

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

Artak AYUNTS, UWC Dilijan College  
Damjan KRNJEVIĆ MIŠKOVIĆ, ADA University, Baku  
Fuad CHIRAGOV, Center for Studies of the South Caucasus, Baku  
Vakhtang MAISAIA, Caucasus International University, Tbilisi  
Pikria ASANISHVILI, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

13.00 – 14.30 Lunch

14.30 – 16.00 **PANEL 3: South Caucasus Survival and Tomorrow's Russia**

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

Ahmad ALILI, Caucasus Policy Analysis Center, Baku  
Benyamin POGHOSYAN, Center for Political and Economic Strategic Studies, Yerevan  
Boris KUZNETSOV, Centre of International and Regional Policy, Saint-Petersburg  
David MATSABERIDZE, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University

16.00 – 16.30 Coffee Break

16.30 – 18.00 **PANEL 4.1: Editorial Management Meeting: Building Resilience against Human Security Threats and Risks Handbook**

**Moderation:** Elena MANDALENAKIS, McGill University, Montreal  
George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Tatoul MANASERYAN, Research Center “Alternative”, Yerevan  
Razi NURULLAYEV, “Region” International Analytical Center, Baku  
Nilufer NARLI, Bahcesehir University, Istanbul  
Zviad ABASHIDZE, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University  
Sanda SANDU, Konrad Adenauer Foundation, Chisinau  
David MATSABERIDZE, Iv. Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University  
Marat TERTEROV, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels  
Elena MANDALENAKIS, McGill University, Montreal

19.00 Dinner

## Saturday, 1 April 2023

07.00 – 09.00 Breakfast

09.00 – 10.30 **PANEL 4.2: Editorial Management Meeting: Building Resilience against Human Security Threats and Risks Handbook (Continued)**

**Moderation:** Elena MANDALENAKIS, McGill University, Montreal  
George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

Iryna LYSYCHKINA, National Academy of the National Guards, Kharkiv  
Olha LYSYCHKINA, National Academy of the National Guards, Kharkiv  
Andrzej KLIMCZYK, Georgian Strategic Analysis Center, Tbilisi  
Armen GRIGORYAN, Centre for Policy Studies, Yerevan  
Christoph BILBAN, National Defence Academy; Vienna  
Armine ARZUMANYAN, Independent Researcher & Consultant, Yerevan  
Nika CHITADZE, International Black Sea University, Tbilisi

10.30 – 11.00 Coffee Break

11.00 – 12.15 **Interactive Discussion – Policy Recommendations Formulation**

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

12.15 – 12.30 **Official Closing Remarks**

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

12.30 Lunch

14.00 **Departure to the Side Programme**

## Sunday, 2 April 2023

**Individual Departures**