



**29th Workshop of the PfP Consortium Study Group
“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

**“Emerging Technologies in Conflict Prevention:
Leveraging Technology for Peacebuilding in the
South Caucasus”**

– Programme and Workshop Outline –

10 – 13 April 2025

Istanbul, Türkiye

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 Defense Academies and Security Studies Institutes on the South Caucasus. The “Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (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 rule, 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 has been launched in November 2022. This effort enables multinational collaboration towards a common goal. The RSSC SG is following up on that success with the production of a second handbook: “Building Resilience against Human Security Threats and Risks” aiming to roll later in 2025.

Past workshops held since 2012 in Reichenau/Rax, and in Tbilisi (twice), Istanbul, Kyiv, Chisinau (twice), Varna, Minsk, Berlin, Rome, and Naples have demonstrated that the RSSC SG has 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.

At its 16th workshop in Reichenau/Rax in November 2017, the RSSC SG discussed the impact of fake news on regional stability. The aim of this workshop was to examine the impact of false reporting on the development of a free media environment in the South Caucasus, on the existing stability of regional regimes, and on the competition for power and influence among major powers in the region. At the time, panelists argued that social media played a key role in creating the conditions for regional stability in the South Caucasus. Participants acknowledged, however, that it was difficult at the time to determine how new cyber technologies were encouraging or discouraging accurate reporting. This problem was exacerbated by the emergence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), Internet bots, and trolls, which had contributed to a loss of trust in elites, in the media, and in news as a public service. Several chapters of the RSSC SG Handbook on “Understanding Contemporary Information Landscape” thoroughly investigated the crucial role played by cyber technologies in supporting the implementation of common regional initiatives. These initiatives aim to facilitate networking among peace supporters (i.e., scholars, journalists, and civil society activists) and to help create synergies in promoting reconciliation and peacebuilding.

To further explore the latest rapid progress in leveraging cyber and other emerging technologies and the intensive public debate over their potential to generate risks and opportunities in regional security, confidence and trust building, the co-chairs are convening a RSSC SG workshop on **“Emerging Technologies in Conflict Prevention: Leveraging Technology for Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus”**, to be held in April 10-13, 2025, in Istanbul, Türkiye.

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
- European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
- Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul

Topic Outline

In the past, the RSSC SG had explored ways to generate and stimulate a common vision of the South Caucasus as a strategic region *sui generis*. As we strongly believe, the region could thrive through cooperation. However, a rapidly shifting geopolitical landscape and instable domestic political developments might prevent the South Caucasus countries to achieve this goal soon by traditional means. Yet, in recent years, the global landscape of conflict resolution and peacebuilding has undergone a profound transformation, driven by rapid advancements in emerging technologies. The South Caucasus region, which has experienced longstanding tensions and conflicts, presents both challenges and opportunities for the integration of innovative technologies into peace processes. Therefore, the co-chairs feel that it is time to explore how cutting-edge tools such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics or digital diplomacy as well as common challenges such as the ethical implications of new technologies (e.g. neurotechnology) can provide ways to support conflict resolution and, more importantly, peacebuilding in the region beyond the existing (geo)political divides.

Technological innovation has been both celebrated for enhancing human capabilities and feared for its potential to disrupt socio-economic structures and render human input obsolete. This duality is particularly evident in the defence industry, where potentially beneficial technology in civil life is leveraged for destructive purposes within the military realm. The South Caucasus region has experienced the transformative power of technology in conflicts: The 2008 Russia-Georgia War highlighted the role of cyber-attacks in modern warfare, demonstrating how technology can be weaponized to disrupt communication and infrastructure. Similarly, the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War showcased the effectiveness of unmanned aerial systems (UAS) in combat, altering the dynamics of traditional warfare. However, this workshop will specifically exclude discussions about emerging technologies to enhance the military capabilities of the South Caucasus republics.

Disinformation campaigns have further complicated the socio-political landscape by manipulating public opinion and instilling fear. In the South Caucasus, false reporting and media manipulation have been used to destabilize regional regimes and influence power dynamics. The impact of fake news on regional stability cannot be overstated, as it undermines the development of a free media environment and exacerbates existing tensions. The issues of disinformation through media and social media platforms in the region have already been the focus of the RSSC SG in 2015 and 2017, as well as through its publication “Understanding the Contemporary Information Landscape: A Handbook” in 2022.

Digital tools become increasingly relevant in countering disinformation and fostering dialogue and emerging technologies can help addressing these issues more effectively. Moreover, emerging technologies are being harnessed by peace-making actors to eradicate violence and maintain peace. These types of technologies are often referred to as PeaceTech, that is technologies, such as data analytics and Artificial Intelligence (AI), which are being leveraged by peace-making actors to transform conflictual situations into landscapes of peace and security. Training Large Language Models to be conflict sensitive is especially important in the ethno-political conflicts of the South

Caucasus to prevent deepening existing divides. New technologies have empowered conflict resolution practitioners by providing access to diverse resources and data, enabling them to develop innovative mediation strategies, monitor cease-fire agreements, and facilitate humanitarian aid delivery. These technologies have also led to the creation of new conflict resolution tools, such as online dispute resolution platforms and virtual reality simulations. Moreover, strategic foresight tools and methodologies play a crucial role in conducting informed analyses that incorporate future insights into strategic planning and policy-making for both conflict prevention and resolution. The integration of these technological advancements results in more effective negotiations and decision-making processes, ultimately reducing the time needed to achieve resolutions. Examples include collaborative decision-making platforms and automated negotiation systems, which significantly support peacebuilding initiatives by leveraging technology.

The RSSC SG co-chairs believe in the importance of determining the state of play and the opportunities for using cyber technologies in the South Caucasus region for peacebuilding. Moreover, the co-chairs want to explore the extent to which governments, international organizations, including Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) and Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), civil society, academic and research institutions, as well as private sector tech-companies could support existing or new conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in the South Caucasus region. It is imperative to take into consideration all options available for trust building and cross-border cooperation aiming to enhance the potential for an inclusive, long-lasting peace. These might include, but should not be limited to:

- enhancing relevant public communication and dialogue;
- strengthening governance and transparency;
- early warning and conflict prevention;
- cybersecurity;
- digitalization of regional transit corridors;
- eLearning, Working and Networking for Peacebuilders;
- virtual and augmented reality for reconciliation.

PANEL 1: The Role of Emerging Technologies in Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding

The first panel will set the stage by examining the transformative impact of emerging technologies on peacebuilding worldwide. This panel will explore the capabilities of emerging technologies to support conflict prevention, conflict management, conflict mediation, and conflict resolution, as well as peacebuilding and peace consolidation. Possible questions to be addressed in the presentations and subsequent discussions might include:

- What is PeaceTech and how relevant could it be for the South Caucasus region?
- What could cyber technologies do in support of conflict resolution and peacebuilding?
- What examples are there for the successful implementation of such technologies in support of peace in other conflict-stricken regions?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of integrating cyber technologies in sensitive fields such as conflict resolution and peacebuilding?
- What are the advantages and challenges of using or relying on AI and other cyber technologies in the design and conclusion of peace agreements?
- How could PeaceTech facilitate the inclusion of the public and the civil society in conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts?
- How could cyber technologies help educate the public, and in particular the younger generation, on conflict resolution and peacebuilding?

PANEL 2: Existing Frameworks for Governance of Cyber Technologies in the South Caucasus Countries

The second panel will explore the legal, policy, and practical frameworks for governing cyber technologies in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. It will further examine the ability and availability of external actors to support these countries in developing viable frameworks that permit the safe use of cyber technologies. Possible questions for the presentations and subsequent discussion might include:

- What national strategies, policies, and legislation for regulating the use and development of cyber technologies are there in Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan ?
- Which emerging technologies, beyond internet and social media, are already in extensive use in the South Caucasus countries?
- Which regional cyber-technology initiatives and/or projects already exist?
- What can be done and by whom to encourage their development?
- How could cyber technologies in general, and especially PeaceTech be harnessed to incentivize and support regional cooperation in the South Caucasus?

PANEL 3: What Way Ahead? Challenges and Opportunities for PeaceTech in the South Caucasus

The final panel will concentrate on the prospective advancements and applications of technologies in the realm of conflict resolution and peacebuilding within the South Caucasus region. It will further examine the prospects of their implementation, the challenges that must be surmounted for these technologies to have a substantial impact in the region, and any ethical caveats or dilemmas associated with these technologies and their implementation. Possible questions to feed, without limiting, the presentations and subsequent discussion might include:

- How could cyber technologies/PeaceTech be used to enhance conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts in the South Caucasus?
- How can stakeholders ensure that technology is used ethically and impartially in peacebuilding?
- How could external actors support regional cooperation in PeaceTech?
- How can the local academic and research organizations, and the civil society from each South Caucasus country participate in the creation, development, and implementation of PeaceTech?
- How can existing and future PeaceTech projects be supported?
- What role for the youth from the region in developing PeaceTech?

Interactive Discussions

The interactive discussions are the main moderated platform that allows the group of experts to develop actionable policy recommendations by the RSSC SG. We invite all participants to take advantage of this opportunity to make constructive proposals on each of the topics discussed. As always, these policy recommendations are disseminated throughout the PfP Consortium network, covering some 60 countries, and 800 policy and academic institutions. Like the rest of the workshop, they are held under Chatham House rule.

Programme

Thursday, 10 April 2025

- till 18.00 Arrival of the participants
- 18.20 Transfer to Bahçeşehir University
- 19.00 **Words of Welcome**
- Andreas F. WANNEMACHER, Directorate General for Defence Policy,
 Austrian Ministry of Defence, Vienna
- Esra HATİPOĞLU, Rector, Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul
- Official Dinner**
- 22.00 Transfer to the Hotel

Friday, 11 April 2025

- 06.30 – 08.00 Breakfast
- 08:00 Transfer to Bahçeşehir University
- 08.30 – 09.00 **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 Secretariat, Garmisch-Partenkirchen
- 09.00 – 09.30 **Keynote Address**
- Uluç ÖZÜLKER, Former Ambassador, Istanbul
- 09.30 – 11.00 **PANEL 1: The Role of Emerging Technologies in
Conflict Resolution and Peacebuilding**
- Chair:** George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels
- Dawn LUI, Geneva Centre for Security Sector Governance (DCAF)
- Giorgi BADRIDZE, Georgian Foundation for Strategic and International
 Studies, Tbilisi
- Jean-Marc RICKLI, Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP)
- Uğur Yasin ASAL, Istanbul Ticaret University

11.00 – 11.30 Coffee Break

11.30 – 13.00 **PANEL 2: Existing Frameworks for Governance of Cyber Technologies for Peace in the South Caucasus Countries**

Chair: Christoph BILBAN, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna

Andro GOTSIRIDZE, Cyber Security Studies and Education Center (CYSEC), Tbilisi

Vasif HUSEYNOV, Center of Analysis of International Relations, Baku

Gevorg MELIKYAN, Armenian Institute for Resilience and Statecraft, Yerevan

13.00 – 14.15 Lunch

14.15 – 15.45 **PANEL 3: What Way Ahead: Challenges and Opportunities for Future PeaceTech in the South Caucasus**

Chair: Elena MANDALENAKIS, Independent Researcher and Lecturer, Heraklion

Henry WATHEN, PeaceTalk, Geneva/Tbilisi

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

Ahmad ALILI, Caucasus Policy Analysis Centre, Baku

Atakan YILMAZ, Bahçeşehir University, Istanbul

15.45 – 16.15 Coffee Break

16.15 – 17.30 **Interactive Discussion, Part 1**

Moderation: George NICULESCU, European Geopolitical Forum, Brussels

17.40 Transfer to the Hotel

19.00 Dinner

Saturday, 12 April 2025

06.30 – 08.00 Breakfast

08:00 Transfer to Bahçeşehir University

08.30 – 09.30 **Interactive Discussion, Part 2**

Moderation: Elena MANDALENAKIS, Independent Researcher and Lecturer, Heraklion

09.30 – 10.00 Coffee Break

10.00 – 11.30 **Policy Recommendations Formulation**

Moderation: Christoph BILBAN, Austrian National Defence Academy, Vienna

11.30 – 12.00 **Official Closing Remarks**

12.00 – 13.00 Lunch

13.10 Transfer to the Hotel

afterwards **Departure to the Side Programme**

Sunday, 13 April 2025

Individual Departures