

Geopolitical Challenges of European Security in the South Caucasus and Ukraine

**19th Workshop of the “Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group”,
Berlin, 11-13 April 2019**

12 April 2019, 14:30-16:00, PANEL 3: “The Way Ahead for Geopolitical Competition in the South Caucasus and Ukraine”

- This 19th RSSC SG workshop picks up more or less where the 17th workshop held in Minsk in April 2018 left off: discussing the geopolitical pressures on the South Caucasus and on Ukraine and their prospects for leading to regional stability. Whereas in Minsk we asked what kind of European security architecture could be engendered by geopolitical challenges, here in Berlin we have asked about what role external actors may have in stabilizing (or not) the South Caucasus and Ukraine.
- First two panels looked in detail both at external actors (who entered the political scene besides Russia and the West) and at how individual states can respond to the in-roads made by those external actors. Should external actors be included in attempts at balancing traditional regional powers via multi-vector policies? Should SC states bandwagon regional powers in the hope of getting protected against traditional great powers’ politics? Or should they stay neutral, i.e. at arm’s length distance from external actors to avoid annoying regional hegemon?
- This third panel is meant to trace links between the attempts at conflict resolution in Ukraine and in the South Caucasus, thereby assessing recent, and aiming to forecast future, developments in European security. To stimulate discussion, I’d like to share one possible vision for the way ahead for geopolitical competition in the South Caucasus and Ukraine, which might solve many of the security problems facing us today in Eastern Europe and beyond.
- The source of the current Western geopolitical confrontation with Russia is highly controversial, even among Western scholars, let alone the Russians. On the one hand, there is a large score of analysts who blame Moscow’s expansionism. For example, Jan Bugajski is persuaded that the primary objective of Moscow’s foreign policy is to restore Russia as a major pole of power in a multipolar world. Moscow’s

overarching goal would be to reverse the predominance of the United States within Europe and Eurasia.

- On the other hand, professor John Mearsheimer contended that the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis of 2014 could not be blamed entirely on Russia. He pointed instead at the triad of Western liberal policies in Ukraine, and more broadly in EU's Eastern neighbourhood, i.e. NATO's enlargement, EU's expansion, and the promotion of democracy. Mearsheimer further explained Russia's aggressive reaction in Crimea and Donbas from a geopolitical perspective where great powers would always be sensitive to potential threats near their home territory. Mearsheimer suggested that the United States and its Allies should consider making Ukraine a neutral buffer between NATO and Russia instead of striving to Westernize it. The goal would be to have a sovereign and independent Ukraine that falls neither in the Russian nor in the Western camp.
- Irrespective of the reasons of the current crisis in Western-Russian relations, this could only come to an end by agreeing upon a new European security model, hopefully reflecting a 'new European security deal'. Such a new model should re-balance the international system at both global and at European levels and should reintroduce predictability in international relations by means of new international law or other political, economic or military tools.
- For example, a 2018 RAND Study on "Rethinking the Regional Order of post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia" proposed the negotiation of a new East European security deal. Such a deal would require that both Russia and the West would commit themselves to respecting the current membership of existing institutions, and to define a framework for the regional integration of non-member states, and a template for how both Russia and the West can relate to such a state without producing conflict. The proposed compromise would consist of both Russia and the West agreeing to establish a regional integration area, resembling to a buffer zone, that would complement the existing institutions: NATO, EU, CSTO, and EEU.
- Unfortunately, we are far away from such an outcome, mainly due to diverging perspectives of relevant actors on the nature, scope, and rules of a new European security model.

Conclusion

- In conclusion, although both the West and Russia would benefit from strategic dialogue and from opening targeted cooperation avenues with each other, major geopolitical divergences on how to effectively manage the common neighbourhood have stood so far in the way.
- The states “in-between” are seeking security guarantees that would require a new regional order, and are keen to diversify their trade, foreign investment, and other economic opportunities with the involvement of external powers: Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan clearly want to further diversify their foreign policy and economic engagements.
- Although the challenges posed by external powers are different for Russia and the West, they are affecting the economic and security interests in the common neighbourhood of both. That is why the West and Russia need to look for concrete ways for mutually acceptable power sharing and for keeping their stand-off over the common neighbourhood under tight control.

13 April 2019, 09.00 – 11.00, BREAKOUT GROUP “LINCOLN”

- Over the recent years, the situation on the Karabakh Line of Contact became worse. Armenia’s multi-vector foreign policy combined with relentless multi-layered pressure from Azerbaijan resulted into a hardening of Yerevan’s position on Karabakh. This in turn brought the conflict management efforts by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs to a deadlock, hence dramatically raising the risk of resuming the war with Azerbaijan.
- In 2018, the ‘Velvet Revolution’ in Armenia raised hopes for a significant change in Armenian position on Karabakh. Such hopes have so far largely proved illusory given they only resulted in an apparent acceleration of the conflict resolution process without leading to concrete substantive progress. However, agreement was achieved over:
 - setting up a new operative communication line (crisis hotline) between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Dushanbe, September 2018);
 - the need to develop concrete measures to prepare populations for peace (Paris, January 2019);
 - the need to develop measures in the humanitarian field (Vienna, March 2019).
- Meanwhile, PM Pashinyan questioned the validity of the format of the OSCE MG negotiation process and asked for clarifications on the Basic (Madrid+) principles, that underpinned the OSCE MG Co-Chairs conflict resolution paradigm since 2007.
- In 2016-2018, the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) of the PfP Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes (PfPC) developed several policy recommendations proposing innovative ways to expand the use of ‘Track 2 diplomacy’ in Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution. *For example, a recommendation has been agreed last November in Reichenau for setting up an “OSCE Minsk Group Plus (+)”. That is a “Track 2” framework for discussions and recommendations, from within which academics, civil society and media experts should support the work of the Co-chairs to change the mainstream belligerent narratives on the conflict, and prepare the public for a comprehensive, compromise-based solution. This recommendation is consistent with the broadly shared view within the Study Group regarding the*

establishment of dedicated discussion panels for confidence building and peacebuilding measures between Armenians and Azerbaijanis.

- How to optimize the use of ‘Track 2 diplomacy’ tools in NK conflict resolution, given that there are quite different understandings in Baku and Yerevan on their role, scope, and priorities within the conflict settlement process? And how to link the use of such tools with the ‘Track 1 diplomacy’ part of the peace process?

Discussion

- Track 1 diplomacy leading to what compromise/ win-win solutions? Alternative solutions to the Madrid+ 3 principles and 6 elements (Non-Use of Force, Territorial Integrity, and Equal Rights and Self-Determination of Peoples. Six elements: return of the territories surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani control; an interim status for Nagorno-Karabakh providing guarantees for security and self-governance; a corridor linking Armenia to Nagorno-Karabakh; future determination of the final legal status of Nagorno-Karabakh through a legally binding expression of will; the right of all internally displaced persons and refugees to return to their former places of residence; and international security guarantees that would include a peacekeeping operation)?
- “Step by step” or “package deal”?
- Strengthen ties between Track 1 and Track 2? How? More transparency over the negotiations process?

Track 2 Diplomacy

- Joint approach of both governments to mutually preparing populations for peace?
- Engagement of broader civil society groups?
- Challenge the negative conflict narratives within society?
- People-to-people contacts? Inter-community dialogues?
- What confidence building measures could be agreed upon?
- Look forward rather than backwards: post-conflict scenarios?
- How to engage external actors in Track 2 peacebuilding?

Conclusion

“External actors can help by **building out a broader peacebuilding infrastructure as a new space for intermediate agreements, new kinds of regularized interaction or specific ‘win-win’ transactions that contribute to a web of interactions beneath and beyond the Minsk Process.** With a **networked infrastructure within which the principle of inclusion can be managed and implemented,** the entire process would be less hostage to volatility when leaders come and go.”¹

¹ Laurence Broers – “Armenia and Azerbaijan: Leadership Rapport Is No Substitute for a Deepened Peace Process”, from <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/armenia-and-azerbaijan-leadership-rapport-no-substitute-deepened-peace-process?fbclid=IwAR0k7Q5g8dNcjAfpj3lcLXffzP8gspGHo2DcvE-UNik4MBHXXclaHbmTfi0>