

South Caucasus: Leveraging Political Change in a Context of Strategic Volatility

Frederic Labarre und George Niculescu (Eds.)

Study Group Information



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“Regional Stability in the South Caucasus”**

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Preface

George Niculescu and Frederic Labarre

The Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group of the PFP Consortium (RSSC SG) convened its 18th workshop entitled “South Caucasus: Leveraging Political Change in a Context of Strategic Volatility” at Château Rothschild, in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, on 08-11 November 2018. This preface opens the publication of the proceedings of that workshop including articles/speaking notes from the panellists and the ensuing Policy Recommendations.

The planning of this workshop started under an optimistic mantra; “change is always pregnant with risk. But it is also harbinger of opportunity.” The year 2018 was rich in political upheavals across the South Caucasus (SC) region. Let us take up the most relevant event-driven political changes: protests followed by government reshuffle, and a tough presidential election in Georgia; a successful “Velvet Revolution” in Armenia pragmatically accepted by Moscow as no “colour revolution”; a rejected Georgian offer for a peace deal with Abkhazia, and South Ossetia followed by Syrian recognition of the statehood of the latter steering natural diplomatic protests from Tbilisi; creeping military tensions between Armenia and Azerbaijan from the Nagorno-Karabakh Line of Contact to the border of Armenia with Azerbaijan’s Nakhichevan Autonomous Republic against the backdrop of pragmatic abstention by Baku to take military advantage from domestic turmoil in Yerevan; an embryonic political unrest in Nagorno-Karabakh quickly shut-down by an apparent adjustment of local leadership with the new authorities in Yerevan. To this add national elections in Russia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, street demonstrations followed by political resignations.

Does political change threaten or promote stability in the case of the South Caucasus? How could we mitigate/inhibit political changes or, upon the case, benefit from them as opportunities for positive regional transformation? How are the current political changes in the South Caucasus linked to the ongoing confrontation between Russia and the West?

With such an ambitious agenda in mind, we dared a slight departure from the regular working methods of the RSSC SG, i.e. choosing a thematic topic and then looking at the South Caucasus region through its lens with a view to projecting realistic policy recommendations. Unlike in the past, this workshop was rather event-driven. We thought it as an initial “stock taking” exercise aiming to determine connections between events (and non-events) in one particular year (i.e. 2018). That was followed up with insights into how event-driven political changes might be contingent upon great power confrontation and geo-strategic competition in the region, and an assessment of opportunity for meaningful conflict resolution and stabilization. This new working method, reflected in the structure of the discussion, and in most speakers’ briefings and articles, yielded more substantive outcomes than expected. This is a clear proof for the higher level of maturity reached by the RSSC SG over the last several years.

At our previous workshop, in Minsk, we noted the increasing instability and unpredictability of international relations, and the inconsistencies between the post-Cold War European security architecture and current realities. On the same occasion, we agreed that existing international institutions needed reforms to make them more inclusive and operational within the changed international context. Furthermore, we concluded that while having a major influence on SC regional stability, Russia and the West could minimize the negative impact of their current geopolitical confrontation by focusing on economic integration, conflict resolution, as well as on addressing new security risks, such as terrorism, religious extremism and radicalism.

In Reichenau, while having those conclusions in the back of our minds, we entertained a structured, focused and reasonably productive discussion among workshop participants along the lines described above. The diversity of answers to the questions asked was quite impressive.

For example, one line of thought drawing upon the assumption of a new ‘East European security deal’, as suggested by a 2018 RAND Study¹, envis-

¹ Charap, Samuel, Shapiro, Jeremy, Demus Alyssa. (2018). “Rethinking the Regional Order of post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia.” Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation.

aged the South Caucasus as an integral part of a wider regional integration process agreed by Russia and the West, instead of the current two competing European and Eurasian integration processes. Obviously, the continuation of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus would be counter-productive to achieving regional integration, and their resolution should become a central part of the new agenda. However, in the new geopolitical context, the onus for conflict resolution might move from the local to regional actors, such as Russia, the EU, the US, and Turkey, who might need to get much more involved in the conflict resolution processes than they have done so far.

Conversely, in case the Russia-West confrontation would prevail and increasingly turn towards a broader European conflict, the South Caucasus' conflicts are likely to increasingly transform into proxies for the broader Russia-West conflict, potentially slipping towards significantly larger scales than at present. For example, a most recent Stratfor Worldview Assessment² speculated that if the Russian-Armenian relationship continues to fray, other powers, including the United States, Iran and Turkey, could make inroads in the Caucasus country and weaken Russia's position. This, in turn, could force Russia to focus more on bolstering ties with Azerbaijan raising the prospect of greater instability in the region.

On the other hand, the South Caucasus' close neighbourhood with the Middle East would increasingly test the viability of the multi-vector policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. For example, as it has been recently seen during the visit to Yerevan of President Trump's national security advisor, John Bolton, the demand from Washington to help "squeeze Iran" would conflict with critical Armenian economic and political interests. Joining the US efforts to isolate Iran would not only deprive Yerevan from one of its own outlets to relieve its economic isolation due to the ongoing Turkish-Azerbaijani blockade, but it might also negatively impact on Russia's and EU's broader regional interests in the Middle East. In such a situation, Armenia might have a hard time in choosing its priorities between

² Stratfor Worldview, "What the Chill in Russian-Armenian Relations Means", published on 21 January 2019, on: <<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/what-chill-russian-armenian-relations-means#/discussions>>, last retrieved on 22 January 2019.

maintaining a hard-line Karabakh policy, and pursuing a flexible and, ultimately, a viable multi-vector foreign and security policy to preserve its own independence and sovereignty. The same conclusion might also go for Azerbaijan, not only because of Baku's economic interests for maintaining open its border and energy and transport projects with Iran, but mostly because of the damaging effect of joining Washington's demands for its relations with Moscow, and the related prospects of Karabakh conflict resolution.

More concretely, at the level of local actors, the "Velvet Revolution" in Armenia did not immediately bring about the sweeping changes in Armenia's policy on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution that might have been expected in Baku and by the international community. In his address to the UN General Assembly in New York, on 25 September 2018, prime-minister Nikol Pashinyan summarized the position of his government on Karabakh, which did not appear significantly changed from the previous government. A moderate disappointment with the apparent lack of Armenian progress in softening its positions on Nagorno-Karabakh clearly emerged during the workshop.

However, the autumn of 2018 brought about a new operative communication line ("crisis hotline") established between Armenia and Azerbaijan, agreed on several weeks before by the president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the Prime-Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan during an informal meeting held in the margins of the CIS summit in Dushanbe (Tajikistan). This has been a positive step that has significantly decreased the level of military tension on the Line of Contact (LoC) between the conflicting parties (as of November 2018, from about 90 reports of ceasefire breaches/day to about 20 reports/day). Although the idea of a "crisis hotline" had been voiced before, one policy recommendation of the RSSC SG might have helped bringing this solution to the top of the mind of decision-makers.³

³ Pfp Consortium Operations Staff. (2018). <<https://www.pfp-consortium.org/index.php/item/347-armenia-and-azerbaijan-welcome-decrease-of-ceasefire-violations-in-nagorno-karabakh>>, last retrieved on 22 January 2019.

This was followed by warming up Armenian-Azerbaijani relations manifest at the January 16, 2019 foreign ministers' meeting in Paris. On that occasion, they agreed upon the necessity of taking concrete measures to prepare the populations for peace and to discuss possibilities to cooperate economically. Preparing the populations for peace has been supported and substantiated with concrete proposals by the RSSC SG throughout the last six years. For example, one relevant recommendation of this workshop proposed the setting up of an "OSCE Minsk Group Plus (+)" framework for "track-two" discussions and recommendations, from within which academics, civil society, and media experts might support the work of the co-chairs to change the mainstream belligerent narratives regarding the conflict, and prepare the public for a comprehensive, compromise-based solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

At the end of this booklet, the Policy Recommendations summarize the discussions in each part of the workshop, as well as introduce a number of policy suggestions which met the unanimous agreement of the workshop participants to: call the co-chairs to review the OSCE Minsk Group's *modus operandi*; set up a new mechanism to streamline and manage "track-two" diplomacy in support of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution; involve Moscow in breaking the deadlocks in conflict resolution; further develop the role of European institutions in sustainably stabilizing the situation, by, for example, creating a Strategic Peacebuilding Group under the Eastern Partnership; de-link problematic issues and establish strong confidence and security building measures (CSBMs); redouble Georgia's efforts at cultural and public diplomacy aimed at the region.

The editors would like to express their gratitude to all authors who contributed papers to this volume of the Study Group Information (SGI). They are pleased to present the valued readers with the analyses and recommendations from the 18th RSSC SG workshop and would be happy if its Policy Recommendations could help turning political changes into harbingers of opportunity in the South Caucasus region.

One shall not forget that this booklet is a vehicle for the expression of analysis, thoughts and opinions from the region. One contributor has chosen, for personal reasons, not to divulge his real name, while preferring a pseudonym instead. We have also added to this SGI an article originally

written for the previous workshop, held in April 2018, in Minsk. This article did not make it to the draft of the 17th volume of the RSSC SGI in time for its publication. However, the co-chairs have deemed it relevant enough to the work of the Study Group and decided to let it into this SGI as a supplement to the previous one.

There is no denying that the South Caucasus is still tension-filled. Therefore it should be no surprise to the reader to notice emotionally-charged contributions now and then in our SGIs. The editors have done their utmost to respect the feelings of such contributions while at the same time pursuing harmony with the usual academic style of this publication. Editing therefore is made in the spirit of coherence and does not mean to belittle personal loss.

Nevertheless, the editors (and co-chairs of the RSSC SG) have sought to maintain true to the intent of the contributors and did their best to avoid significant changes of the meaning of the written word herein. To that end, we have sought to present the papers in the best light possible, with minimum repetition, maximum clarity, and adequate style. In the end, the content of the contributions is that of the presenters and contributors, and in no way reflect the position of the National Defence Academy of the Austrian Republic, or that of the PfP Consortium. We very much trust this publication will prove itself as most useful to the readers.

Acknowledgements

Work of this scope would not have been possible without the support of the Austrian National Defence Academy, the Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute (DOC/RI) as well as the contribution of the authors and participants. Too often we neglect the graceful facilitation offered by those who work in the background. We therefore want to recognize here Ms. Raffaella Woller of the Austrian National Defence Academy for helping make this event and the resulting Study Group Information (SGI) possible.

Furthermore, the workshop on which this SGI is based explored recent South Caucasus peace initiatives. The co-chairs want to salute all those from the region whose courage make such steps possible.

Abstract

The year 2018 has been rich on political upheavals and protests across the South Caucasus. In April the Georgian government submitted a reconciliation initiative at the de facto regimes Abkhazia and South Ossetia which has been the first peace proposal since the Russo-Georgian War in 2008. At the same time there were mass demonstrations in Yerevan related to the appointment of Serzh Sargsyan, member of the Republican Party, as Prime Minister who at this point had been President for two consecutive terms already. This “Velvet Revolution” ended one month later with the designation of the leader of the protest movement Nikol Pashinyan as the interim Prime Minister. In December his political alliance finally got elected by an absolute majority. Furthermore, Tbilisi became the scene of mass protests in late spring after some incidents of police violence in night clubs.

The 18th Workshop of the Partnership for Peace Consortium Study Group “Regional Stability in the South Caucasus” held in Reichenau/Rax, Austria, from 8 to 11 November 2018 was convened under the title “South Caucasus: Leveraging Political Change in a Context of Strategic Volatility”. It aimed at discussing the current political situation in the South Caucasus and the latest events, looking at it from the different perspectives of all involved conflict parties. This Study Group Information publication, as a compilation of all written contributions of the workshop speakers, therefore provides a broad view on the present circumstances in the region.

Key Note Address

A Surfacing New World Order: The Crisis of the Old West

Peter W. Schulze

Introduction

The transience of the contemporary period, characterised by the evolution of the multipolar world order, differs fundamentally from both the now bygone yet long-lived bipolar era and the short interim of the unipolar world.

Back then, the Cuban crisis acted as a game changer, tackling the threat of nuclear confrontation and opening avenues for the building of a solid and acceptable basis of predictable policies. Mutually assured destruction (MAD) neutralised aggressive policies on both sides, as John Herz and Kenneth Waltz had predicted. The nuclear stalemate created a balanced security equation throughout Europe and the northern hemisphere, respected by both the USSR and the US. In order to avoid deliberate or unintentional war, Cold War diplomacy led to agreements and treaties on the reduction of geostrategic and conventional arms, and respect for non-military intervention in opposing spheres of interest, at least in Europe. Regime change was not on the agenda, but the accumulated tension and massive military build-up in Europe found an outlet in proxy wars across the developing world.

Elements of the bipolar order are still with us, like the nuclear stalemate. But the transient period of a newly emerging global order is multi-layered and even more complicated than the preceding eras. This period is characterised by the confrontation between the outgoing and emerging world orders. The unipolar world under the hegemonic assertiveness of the United States is gradually giving way to a multipolar order. This process is being – whether knowingly or unintentionally – accelerated by the present administration in Washington.

Pointedly, Wolfgang Ischinger, the chairman of the highly renowned Munich Security Conference, states that Trump is “not a factor of stability.”¹ He believes a withdrawal or weakening of US leadership will jeopardise the basis of international relations. The unpredictability of the new US president has serious consequences for the transatlantic community, for Europe, and for Germany. “Trust is lost” and crises could escalate faster and more forcefully.²

This new order, still in its early formative stage, has neither a broad socio-political consensus nor universally accepted norms. What is even more problematic is that it is not based on established institutions and so lacks leadership, stability, and security.³ In this context, the chances of reforming and democratising the United Nation are rather slim. Mutual trust and consensus regarding the essential challenges facing the world’s chief international actors are missing. The very foundations of world order are under attack. Consequently, expert communities in most countries throughout both the East and the West are concerned about a noticeable nationalist and protectionist backlash with global repercussions and presenting serious consequences for peace and security. Regions exposed to unresolved conflicts will be most affected.

Multilateralism, the indispensable edifice of the old world order established at the end of World War II by the West, is being challenged by a retreat to protectionism, national interests, and a weakening of the rule-based global order. We must therefore assume that the newly emerging multipolar order will barely be able to guarantee territorial security and prospects for peaceful development.

¹ Ischinger, W. (2018). *Welt in Gefahr: Deutschland und Europa in Unsicheren Zeiten*. Berlin: Econ, p. 92. (Author’s translation).

² *Ibid.*, p. 94. (Author’s translation).

³ For a more enhanced analysis of the transient order see Schulze P., Ed. (2018). *Multipolarity: The Promise of Disharmony*. Frankfurt: Campus.

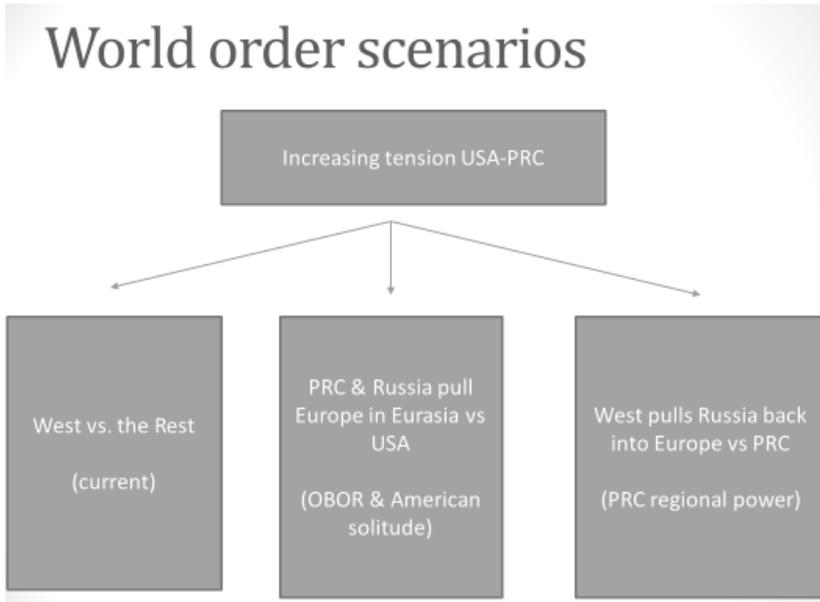


Fig. 1: Drivers and challenges of the multipolar order;
Source: Post-Western World Orders.⁴

Trends in the transient international order are no longer characterised by the search for democratic, law-based institutions enhancing universal human rights.⁵ Persistent instability is due in part to a backlash that aims to re-establish the traditional social-political centrality of the nation-state. Instead of enhancing and projecting democratic and internationally agreed governance or strengthening multilateral agreements and networks, the focus of national actors has now shifted. Stability and security have replaced the objective of enhancing democracy.

⁴ Marchetti R. (2018). “Post-Western World Orders.” In: P. Schulze Ed. *Multipolarity: The Promise of Disharmony*. Frankfurt: Campus, p. 96.

⁵ Schulze, P. (2018). “A New Cold War or a Road Map for a Comprehensive and Collective European Security?” In: Labarre F./ Niculescu G., Eds. *What a “New European Security Deal” could mean for the South Caucasus*. Vienna: Landesverteidigungsakademie, p. 17f.

The central question is whether the emerging multipolar order can provide security and welfare for the international community and enhance rule-based multilateral relations? Uncertainty has given powerful impetus to the rise of populist, anti-democratic forces in both Western and Eastern societies. Such forces challenge the political establishment from within as political movements, NGOs, or newly formed parties.

Amid this process, the leading actors and drivers of global transformation are also themselves exposed to drastic changes and often unwilling to act as mediators to de-escalate tensions or conflicts.

In this context, recent debate in Germany on the future of Western alliances, the transatlantic community, and Europe's place in the international system's new constellation of forces will be decisive for the survival of the EU, its potential for reform, and for its relations to another key international actor, Russia. Moscow, despite all its differences with the EU, probably shares the same fears, namely being side-lined by the major drivers of global change, the US and China. Russia's nuclear status means it can exercise some constraint, but the EU does not have enough economic or political strength to shape the design of the future order.

Let us assume that the hegemonic position of the US – along with the attraction of its prevailing ideological scheme, *institutionalised international liberalism* – is steadily evaporating.⁶ Given this fact, both actors, Russia and the EU, will eventually be forced to decide which power to cooperate with. The options are very limited, especially for the EU. As Ischinger argues, the EU needs to become an assertive actor in international politics but it can never renounce its alliance with Washington.⁷

To complicate the issue even further, neither China nor Russia are currently – or likely to be so in the foreseeable future – able to act as an ally or

⁶ This insight has successively prevailed in circles of the US expert world since 2009. Against this background, both the cautious and selective orientation of former President Obama's foreign policies, his restraint in terms of military interventions, and the neo-isolationist approach under Trump are understandable.

⁷ Ischinger W., *Welt in Gefahr...* p. 98.

substitute for declining US leadership in global affairs. Chinese experts deny “that China can step into the role of world leader in the near future.”⁸ And if we follow the views of the Russian expert community, as aired at the Valdai conferences, or via the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) or in *Russia in Global Affairs*, the country is too weak economically to assume a dominant global leadership role.⁹

However, the withering away of both the old bipolar order and the short and transitional unipolar order are creating opportunities for Russia. The political analyst Sergey Karaganov stresses that a “governance vacuum” will eventually be created and then filled with a new order in which Russia will play a key role.¹⁰

According to Karaganov, Russia “has re-established itself as a balancing influence within the global order.”¹¹ Russia and China have been able to “build an increasingly robust partnership” that is challenging US hegemony.¹² Or as Dmitri Trenin of the Moscow Carnegie Centre puts it, “The Russia-China relationship can be defined in strategic terms, based on clear common interests.”¹³ The concept of Greater Eurasia and the pursuit of a more balanced multipolar world order demonstrate unity in resisting US

⁸ Qingguo, J. (2018). “Looming Threat: The Decay of the Existing International Order.” In P. Schulze, ed. *Multipolarity: The Promise of Disharmony*. Frankfurt: Campus, p. 53ff.

⁹ Karaganov, S./ Suslov, D. (2018). “A New World Order: A View from Russia.” In P. Schulze, ed. *Multipolarity: The Promise of Disharmony*. Frankfurt: Campus, pp. 58-93.

¹⁰ Karaganov, S. (2017). “Mutual Assured Deterrence.” *Russia in Global Affairs*. <<http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/Mutual-Assured-Deterrence-18609>> argues that a “big troika” of China, the US, and Russia should create the conditions for a peaceful transition to a more stable world order. Such an order should be expanded to other countries and based on “multilateral nuclear deterrence.” Former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer of the Green Party, argues along similar lines, stating that the basis of the old order, dominated by Western powers, is eroding. The question considered absurd merely a few years ago, namely whether the West would survive, is now on the agenda. See Fischer, J. (2018). *Der Abstieg des Westens: Europa in der neuen Weltordnung des 21. Jahrhunderts*. Koeln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Trenin, D. (2018). *European Security: From Managing Adversity to a New Equilibrium*. Moscow: Carnegie Moscow Center.

dominance in world politics and opposing the export of the US institutionalised liberal democracy project.

Nevertheless, Russia and China operate in accordance with different geopolitical models. “China’s geopolitical strategy to enhance its global position rests on its economic and financial assets. The penetration of markets, giant infrastructural and industrial projects like the One Belt One Road initiative, and the securing of energy supplies and resources for its advancing economy are Beijing’s main tools.”¹⁴ In this respect Russia has very little to offer. Or, as Ischinger puts it, Russia has little to offer besides energy and military strength; it is a “Scheinriese” (a phantom giant).¹⁵

Looking at the European Union, only daydreamers would argue the EU has a chance to play a major role as an influential geopolitical player in the foreseeable future. Despite several attempts, like Javier Solana’s security doctrine of 2003 and the *Shared Vision, Common Action: A stronger Europe* reports of 2016, the EU is still characterised by its inability to conduct an independent foreign policy due to the dominant position of the US and its transatlantic allies within NATO and the EU.¹⁶

The *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe* report is definitely a document of assertiveness, written to unify the EU against external challenges.¹⁷ Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union for foreign affairs and security policy, even admits that under the present international system’s instability, the “purpose, even existence, of our Union is being questioned.”¹⁸ She calls for collective “responsibility”, so that the EU will play a major role “as a global security provider.”¹⁹

Mogherini does not define the global reach of the EU in hard power terms of military potential, but follows the traditional path of EU policies, point-

¹⁴ Schulze, P., “A New Cold War...”, p. 156.

¹⁵ Ischinger W., *Welt in Gefahr...*, p. 99.

¹⁶ Council of the European Union (2016). *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy*. Brussels, p. 135f.

¹⁷ Schulze, P., “A New Cold War...”, p. 135.

¹⁸ Council of the European Union. *Shared Vision...*, p. 3.

¹⁹ Ibid.

ing to the relevance of domestic social and political capabilities. However, in light of the international system's lingering unpredictability, the EU must face reality. In concrete terms, the EU cannot exclusively remain a *civilian power*. Widespread investment in EU foreign policy is required, particularly in security and defence cooperation. Mogherini shows awareness of such challenges in the strategy's introduction: "As Europeans we must take greater responsibility for our security. We must be ready and able to deter, respond to, and protect ourselves against external threats."²⁰

However, Brussels' lack of capacity as a geopolitical power presents a different image. The EU is challenged and immobilised by a multitude of combined internal and external factors including Brexit, the Trump Administration's unpredictable foreign policy, rising anti-EU sentiment within Member States, the ongoing catastrophe of the refugee crisis, the unresolved Ukraine conflict, and the hopelessness of overcoming persistent financial crises since 2009.

The West in Crisis: The German Debate

Paradoxically enough, despite early warnings, a debate on the future world order and its impact on Europe's role in the international system only recently came alive in Germany. For four years, the issue of the emerging global order has been overshadowed by domestic and external challenges like the refugee crisis, the divisions within the EU, the fight against terrorism, and the rise of a national-revisionist party which is deeply – and probably permanently – altering the spectrum of German political parties.

All these factors figured significantly in the German parliamentary elections of 2017 and have retained prominence since. The electoral results caused a political shock wave which rippled through the EU, complicating its already fragile cohesion. Unusually for stability-obsessed German politics, it took months of intense negotiations to form a coalition government composed of Christian Democrats and Social Democrats, just as was previously the case. Germany's position as a rock amid the storm, an island of reason in troubled times of international turmoil has shattered.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 19.

But neither is the coalition government solid nor the political crisis yet over. Two factors have dominated political infighting since the elections. First, the rise of a nationalist and populist party, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD), which succeeded in entering not only all the German *Länder* parliaments but also the *Bundestag*, with an astonishingly 13 percent of the vote. Second, the unresolved refugee crisis has acted as a game changer in European politics since 2015, especially so in Germany. Nevertheless, the political struggles within the CDU and the SPD, the latter having failed miserably in the most recent regional and national elections, has given rise to speculation that new elections are looming in 2019. The political establishment of both parties is under attack from within. The governing parties are confronted with an unquestionable erosion of voter loyalty, while the opposition Greens are moving forward, claiming the former place of the Social Democrats in the political spectrum.²¹

As a result, the confluence of factors seen in 2017, Berlin lost credibility as an anchor of European stability and engine of further integration. In autumn 2018, Chancellor Merkel declared her intention to step down from the position as chair of the CDU and announced that she would not seek re-election in 2021. Her announcement created a bombshell, although in a way it had been expected – even longed for – by large portions of society.

Immobilised by internal power struggles and suffering a loss of authority, Berlin is unable to play a leading role in European politics. As a consequence, the EU's position as a mediator for conflict resolution in and beyond Europe is seriously troubled.

Surprisingly, and in contrast to the standstill in German politics, an open – and some would say divisive – debate has suddenly materialised in Germany's political community to define the position of not only Germany herself, but also Europe, amid the accumulating challenges of the international arena. All at once, leading former decision-makers from the Green Party,

²¹ In follow up regional elections in Bavaria and Hessen, both coalition parties lost more than 10 percent each; the future looks even more disastrous for the Social Democrats. In a recent poll they figured at 14 percent in national polls.

Die Linke, the CDU, the CSU, and the Social Democrats joined the discussion. Those with previously divided assessments have concurred, bridging old left-right antagonisms.

Across the political spectrum, the consensus has been that Europe has arrived at a crossroads because its future is uncertain. Jürgen Trittin, a leading member of the Green Party and spokesman in the Foreign Affairs committee, bluntly declared that the “old West” is dead.²² In theory, Trittin argued, the alliance between the US and Europe rested on common values, interests, and institutions. But those common values are eroding under the Trump Administration. Trittin identified Trump as the “grave digger of the political West.”²³ He argued that Europe must emancipate itself from the US project of a liberal institutionalised order. He shared Chancellor Merkel’s idea that Europe must look after its own security interests in its neighbourhood. The US is no longer a trustworthy partner. However, contrary to statements made by other Greens in the *Bundestag*, and those of the CDU, especially those of the German Minister of Defence Ursula von der Leyen, Trittin warned that Europe’s security would neither be guaranteed by military interventions nor a rise in defence spending: “The security of Europe is predominantly threatened by failing states and by new types of wars at Europe’s southern border, but not by Russia.”²⁴ His stance is that higher defence spending and militarily deterrence will not help against these threats.

Instead, Europe must attain an independent position as a structural pillar in the emerging multipolar world order. This may even imply flexible alliances set up on the basis of multilateral interest. Europe’s strength lies in its economic potential and its use of soft power. Europe should take responsibility for pushing through civil, global governance. Military intervention is a fruitless means of assuming responsibility in the international arena, Trittin argued.²⁵

²² Trittin, J. (2018). “Kreuzzüge Scheitern.” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. 18.10.2018, p. 13.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid. “Europas Sicherheit ist nämlich vor allem durch Staatszerfall und Kriegen neuen Typs an der südlichen Grenze bedroht, nicht durch Russland.” (Author’s translation).

²⁵ Trittin, J., “Kreuzzüge Scheitern.”

In contrast to Trittin, the former German Foreign Minister Joschka Fischer predicted a gloomy scenario for Europe and also for the stability and security of international relations more widely in a recent article in the German weekly, *Die Zeit*, if the trend towards isolationism under the Trump Administration continues. If the US gives up its global leadership role, he argued, and regresses to a narrow variant of national interests and particularism, or even launches a trade war with the EU and China, severe consequences for international stability could follow. The West would suffer. In that event the very existence of the Western model would be at stake. Fischer warned that if US foreign policy under Trump became a security risk the “whole system would cease to function.”²⁶

Given the deplorable state of the European Union, Fischer insisted that the EU has reached a moment of truth. Either the integration process would deepen and attain a new political quality or there would be a backlash of national particularism similar to what was seen in the 19th and 20th centuries. Neither a solid consensus nor a political will to reform and democratise the EU is currently in sight, and any retreat into nationalism could provoke a collapse. Fischer therefore embraced the notion of a “vanguard” for Europe.

He supports the idea of creating a core Europe, i.e., assembling a “group of the willing.” The concept is based on French-German partnership as the traditional engine for integration.²⁷ Its main objective – of keeping the EU together – is not exclusive. It would be open for countries to join if certain standards and conditions are met. Nevertheless, this would imply a Europe of “two speeds.” This is not the most favourable solution and Fischer is aware of the danger a ‘Core Europe’ concept could present but it could boost the political, social, and fiscal integration process. The division of the EU into core and peripheral states would open the door to external non-European forces, like China, to penetrate the European space with investments and large-scale projects.

²⁶ Fischer, J. (2018). “Abgesang auf Amerika.” *Die Zeit*. 8.03.2018.

²⁷ Fischer, J. (2018). *Der Abstieg des Westens: Europa in der neuen Weltordnung des 21. Jahrhunderts*. Koeln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, p. 123ff.

Fischer's position also differs from Trittin in emphasising that the main security risks for Europe are the war in Ukraine and the still unresolved dormant conflicts in the Balkans. For him, Russia remains the highest threat to Europe's security. In this respect he is in accordance with his unrelenting transatlantic credentials. Fischer fears that the Russian elite still longs for superpower status, just as in the bipolar era. Despite its economic and technological weakness, Russia's military strength means it could embark on a "risky foreign policy."²⁸ Obviously, this would be directed against Europe. Interestingly enough, Fischer sees Russia as exposed to the changing constellation of forces in the international system as well. Russia lacks a specific strategy on how to deal with the challenge of what its place in the new world order could be. As a result, the Kremlin is torn between three options:

- a) Remain in self-isolation at a low level of socio-economic and technological development;
- b) Strengthening and accelerating its Eurasian preference and becoming a subordinate collaborator to Beijing;
- c) Returning to Europe.

Because of its Eurasian heritage, Russia will remain an exceptional actor and the country will always play a special role in European politics. This needs to be recognised by Europeans.²⁹ In dealing with Russia, the European Union should be aware that Russian identity is deeply rooted, historically and geopolitically. Fischer therefore recommends that Western powers, especially the EU, conduct diplomacy ruled by strategic patience, endurance, and respect. This would eventually allow Russia to return into the European community.

Gernot Erler, a high-ranking Social Democrat and formerly the German coordinator for cooperation between German and Russian civil society, has raised the question of whether the shock waves of transition that are currently rippling through the international system will eventually give rise to

²⁸ Ibid., p. 134.

²⁹ Fischer, J., *Der Abstieg des Westen...*, p. 137.

new power relations. A new world order is emerging, but without the West, he argues provocatively.³⁰

Erler defines Russia, China, the US and the EU as global players which influence and drive processes of change.³¹ Because of their different interests and objectives, they are unable to shape the emerging order according to their own views. Unquestionably, a multipolar global order is emerging, but what configuration of power relations will emerge at the end is far from obvious. Erler persuasively argues that experiences and decisions of the past still shape the political context of today and will continue to influence the new order that will be created.

Erler points to several past experiences which, in his opinion, have lasting effects for the present and the future:

1. Military Intervention

Interventions in Afghanistan, Kosovo, Libya, and Iraq have been the most telling, since they all produced catastrophic results and failed to succeed in their objectives. In some cases, the legal basis was questionable; in other cases, failing states were created or a whole region was artificially secured through external measures. Each of these cases directly influenced in world politics a negative manner and gave rise to interstate tension. As a result, relations between the West – i.e., the US and the EU – and Russia deteriorated substantially.

2. Regime Change

Military interventions have often been supported by soft power, which is a more flexible variant of hard power, consisting of infiltration, media usage, propaganda, and support for opposition groups, parties, and NGOs. These instruments and methods belong to the classic repertoire of all political powers, but they have really come to prominence since the end of the bipolar era.

³⁰ Erler, G. (2018). *Weltordnung ohne den Westen: Europa zwischen Russland, China und Amerika*. Freiburg: Herder.

³¹ Ibid., p. 191.

Since the ‘colour revolutions’ in the post-Soviet space, Moscow has reacted – or overreacted – to plans and initiatives to steer those countries out of the Russian sphere of influence. There is no doubt among the Russian expert community and power groups linked to the Kremlin that all those efforts were assisted financially and organisationally by the US and Western NGOs.³² Regime change was openly declared as an objective by Russian opposition groups and in Western circles. As a disastrous side effect, as with the sanctions regime since 2014, opposition efforts and initiatives in Russia have come to be seen as externally designed and have therefore been exposed to repressive measures.

3. Double Standards and the Battle against Terror

Since 2001 and the proclamation of the *Global War on Terrorism*, the authority and established values of Western society have suffered tremendously. Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib, water boarding, and other practices of torture and humiliation have undermined esteem for the West around the world. The moral high ground of the US and its Western allies is practically gone, having collided with a reality characterised by savage brutality in the use of force, disregarding human and civil rights. The West’s double standards are now clear for the world to see, as Moscow claims.

Erler throws open an interesting question, one barely raised elsewhere in the debate. In the framework of his painful analytical description of the present international scenery, he asks what would happen if one of the driving forces of global change were to collapse or leave the field. In real terms, what would happen if Europe ceased to project its values, rules, and institutions and softened its reliance on controlling power through a pluralistic and democratic civil society?

Summing up, Erler is confident that a global order without Europe is not possible.³³ He enthusiastically embraces the French President Emmanuel Macron’s 2017 Sorbonne speech, which advocated re-establishing a sover-

³² Erler, G., *Weltordnung ohne den Westen...*, p. 194.

³³ Erler, G., *Weltordnung ohne den Westen...*, p. 202.

eign, democratic, and unified Europe.³⁴ However, in light of the political backlash and social battles in France, as in other EU Member States, it seems highly doubtful that a ‘new start’ for Europe will begin in France.

Wolfgang Ischinger shares Erlers’s reassuring optimism and demands an active European policy to successfully conclude Europe’s and Germany’s projects of reconciliation with all neighbouring states, including Russia.³⁵ To accomplish this, the EU needs to become a global player, adapt to the changing international environment, and begin its own transformation toward majority-based decision-making in foreign policy. The creation of a Defence Union and the effective protection of Europe’s external borders are mandatory. Ischinger echoes Mogherini’s call for more realism. But according to him, such realism can only be achieved through higher defence spending and by maintaining close ties with the US, regardless of the present Trump Administration. Ischinger refers to the familiar old idea of the Common European Home and concludes that the danger of a new division of Europe can only be met if a balanced relationship can be established with Russia. However, this goal cannot be achieved from a position of weakness. Building trust and a readiness to counter aggression should become the backbone of Europe’s global objective to guarantee a peaceful future.

The German debate is indicative of the fact that the EU and Germany are at the crossroads of change; Europe cannot escape the challenges resulting from the international system’s process of transition and must assert its position as a global actor, at least on the continent itself and throughout the European neighbourhood.

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³⁴ Ibid., p. 200.

³⁵ Ischinger, W., *Welt in Gefahr...*, p. 281.

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**PART I:
TAKING STOCK OF POLITICAL CHANGE
IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS**

Foreign Policy and Security Challenges for Azerbaijan in a Post-Oil Boom Era

Ahmad Alili

Introduction

Azerbaijan – a resource-rich country – experienced an oil boom from 2003 until 2014. In 2015, Azerbaijan entered a new era – following the period of rapid economic growth fuelled by high oil prices on the world market. This created new opportunities for domestic reforms in Azerbaijan, which might also lead to changes in its foreign and security policy.

Since 2010, the country's oil production capacity had been in decline. The 2014 oil price slump has affected all oil-fuelled economies in the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) region, including Azerbaijan. The decline in both oil production and oil prices caused Azerbaijan's national currency to depreciate twice in 2015: by 21 percent on 21 February and by 47.6 percent on 21 December. This disturbance of the national economy created monetary problems, which had long-standing financial implications for the national economy.

The effects of national currency devaluations could be witnessed in the subsequent year: 2016 was one of the most painful years for the national economy and the social well-being of the general population. According to official statistics, the country's economy witnessed a 4 percent decline; the national currency – Azerbaijani Manat – continued to depreciate and the inflation rate moved into the double digits – reaching 12.1 percent. The latter trend had not been witnessed in the Azerbaijani economy since the first years of independence. Most importantly, the real income of the population also decreased by 3.2 percent, which created a problem for bank loan repayments.

In order to attract foreign investment, the government proposed Strategic Roadmaps to reform the economy and create a better environment for the

non-oil sector in the country. This would require structural changes to the roles of the economic decision-making institutions.

These changes will not be limited only to the economic decision-making institutions. The economic challenges have the potential to spill over into political and social challenges. They have also the potential to transform the foreign policy agenda of the country.

How will they affect Azerbaijan's foreign policy-making and how the country may tackle its security problems? What kind of political trends will Azerbaijan demonstrate in this new post-oil age?

The main priority for Azerbaijan's foreign policy is the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions. This conflict has shaped Azerbaijan's foreign policy agenda since the late 1980s. The oil income was also the main source for modernising the Armed Forces of Azerbaijan and for yielding hard-power pressure against Armenia.

The so-called "Velvet Revolution" in Armenia and Pashinyan's transformation of the country created high expectations for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The "revolutionary" processes in Armenia attracted much more attention, and practically overshadowed the current transformations in Azerbaijan. However, the new economic trends in Azerbaijan lent a new importance to those changes which needs to be reviewed.

This paper intends to link the ongoing economic transformation of Azerbaijan with the ongoing changes of its foreign policy and security agenda. The paper will also look at the post-oil boom environment in the country and the political and security transformation that has continued since 2015. It will analyse how Azerbaijan's political elite has adjusted to this new reality, the presidential elections in 2018, and the rise of radical groups. The paper will follow with the analysis of the Nagorno-Karabakh policy in the recent years and provide conclusions.

Economy – Basis for Political Policy-Making

The correlation between the performance of economic institutions and that of political ones is a well-established fact by many scholars. We can expect that improvements to the economic institutions in Azerbaijan will positively affect the country's political decision-making institutions.

Prior to the massive influx of oil money into the Azerbaijani economy the country's fiscal policy was considered to be stable and expansionist. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and other energy projects have provided the country with large amounts of money, which created an expected pattern for a developing nation – the Resources Curse. It is a phenomenon, which occurs when countries with abundance of extractive industry resources perform worse than the countries with no natural resources. The Resource Curse occurs, when a country focuses only on one sector of the economy, ignoring other sectors – which leads to overall underdevelopment, and does not create opportunity to attract the investment to other sectors of the economy. In Azerbaijan, the oil sector has come to dominate the economy and the export share of the non-oil sector has shrunk to 7 percent.¹

Nevertheless, the national government of Azerbaijan managed to accumulate some portion of oil revenues in the State Oil Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan (SOFAZ). The Azerbaijani government has received several awards by the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI) for its effective use of the funds in developing the regions and achieving important socio-economic tasks. This fund later became an important asset for re-establishing macroeconomic stability in the country, following the negative effect of the 2015 economic slowdown.

Starting in 2003, the SOFAZ also became one of the main sources for the budget. Between 2006 and 2014, the Azerbaijani economy has seen a strongly expansionist fiscal policy, largely thanks to the asset transfers from the SOFAZ. This period is also called the “oil-boom period” for Azerbai-

¹ Hasanov, R. (2018, June). *Amendments to the 2018 State Budget in Azerbaijan: Back to the oil boom period?* CESD Press and Breban, D., Jahangirli, N., and Rasulova, L. (2018, April). *Higher Oil Price: Sustainable or Temporary Economic Growth?* CESD Press.

jan. During this time, the country enjoyed transfers from the oil sector. Some of the contributions to the budget were taxes paid by international oil companies, which were not considered SOFAZ transfers. Tax collection and tax policy were not a high priority during that period.

For Azerbaijan, 2011 was the year of peak oil production and oil income. The prognosis on the decline in oil production and oil income in the following years did not affect the country's expansionist fiscal policy. Starting from the last quarter of 2014, oil prices plummeted, and this trend continued in 2015. The budget deficit reached 842 million Azerbaijani Manats. The devaluation of the national currency created additional problems for international debt payments and local debt liabilities of the population toward the banks.²

Throughout 2016, the government was looking for ways to move the country's economy out of the devaluation shock that began a year before. 2017 started with the approval of 12 Strategic Roadmaps, which covered all major directions and sectors of the economy in Azerbaijan. The documents were aimed at decreasing the country's dependency on extractive resources by eliminating unfavourable conditions for non-oil sector actors and providing sustainable and competitive development.³

The reforms in customs, financial markets, banking sector, and agriculture did not only change the government programmes, but they have also set new standards and rules for the existing players. Soon, the economic reforms gave rise to a replacement of the old high-ranking officials with younger ones.

² Hasanov, R. (2017, January 9). *Macroeconomic Forecasts for Azerbaijan in 2017: Independent Review*. CESD Press.

³ Mukhtarov, E. (2018, January). *The Economy of Azerbaijan in 2017: Brief Overview*. CESD Press.

Before and After the Presidential Elections of 2018

In the years following the downward slope in oil prices and the economic slowdown, transformations in Azerbaijan's political landscape could be categorised as following:

- continuing changes in the government,
- presidential elections and change of the election date,
- increased activity by radical and marginal groups.

The very first effect of the economic problems in the political arena occurred even slightly before the economic slowdown itself: arrests of wealthy business people. On the eve of the First European Games, several well-known people were arrested because of non-payment claims made against them by banks. These wealthy business people were considered important members of the country's political elite. Most of them were indebted to the International Bank of Azerbaijan – the largest bank in the country. In the following months, the head of the International Bank – Jahangir Hajiyev – was arrested. He was suspected of fraud and misappropriation of public funds; the final court verdict was to imprison Hajiyev for 15 years.⁴

Following the arrest of wealthy businessmen indebted to the International Bank, the Minister of National Security, Eldar Mahmudov was sacked. Mahmudov's deputies were arrested right after his dismissal. Another powerful official who was dismissed in the following year was the Minister of Transportation, Ziya Mammadov. Both officials had been considered influential political players. Earlier that year, Mammadov had been accused by the *New Yorker* of having established closer links with the political elite in Iran.⁵ The dismissals continued with other important officials, who en-

⁴ Vestnik Kavkaza. (2016, October). "IBA ex-chairman Jahangir Hajiyev jailed for 15 years." Retrieved from <vestnikkavkaza.net/news/IBA-ex-chairman-Jahangir-Hajiyev-jailed-for-15-years.html>.

⁵ *New Yorker*. (2017, October 20). "The Iran Business Ties Trump Didn't Disclose." Retrieved from <<https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/the-iran-business-ties-trump-didnt-disclose>>.

joyed long years of public service in high-ranking positions. A significant number of heads of state-owned enterprises lost their positions. These state-owned enterprises were having noteworthy debt problems, which in earlier years would have been paid off by the state budget. Their lack of transparency and efficiency turned them into a burden for the national budget, in the new realities.⁶ These people, with influence in the society, had to be dismissed.

Right after the presidential elections, well-known political-decision-makers, including the Prime Minister, Artur Rasizade, and several other ministers, lost their positions. Although the official explanation of these dismissals may differ, many local and international commentators linked these dismissals to the post-oil boom era.

At the same time, the 2018 Azerbaijani presidential elections saw more complex questions from the outset. The decision of President Aliyev to move the election date from autumn 2018 to April 11, 2018 was surprising and unexpected. According to the results of the 2017 constitutional referendum, the President of Azerbaijan was entitled to call for snap elections, but he had not been expected to make use of it so soon.

The decree didn't provide information on the reasons for such an urgent decision to hold a snap election. Nevertheless, Ali Hasanov, the presidential aide on social and political issues publicly endorsed President Aliyev and explained the decision to hold the general elections in April by references to some technical issues:

In the 2018 elections, the president would be elected for seven years. (Previously, the presidential term had been five years. This, too, changed during the 2017 constitutional reforms.) The next presidential elections were to be held in October 2025. However, parliamentary elections were also scheduled for November 2025. Hence, there would have been a clash of the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2025.

⁶ Hashimova, K., & Kadyrov, Z. (2017, December). *The Current Situation and Problems of State-Owned Enterprises in Azerbaijan*. CESD Press.

Although this may be true, the local experts' community was more interested in the most fundamental reasons for this decision. The following is a summary of opinions of regional and national experts on why the presidential election dates were moved to April 2018.⁷

1 – Elections in Russia

Russia held its presidential elections in March 2018. According to some experts, the world powers' and European organisations' focus on those elections would help Azerbaijan to hold the elections with less criticism by the international community. Additionally, the elections in Russia would also make the Kremlin leaders busy. Hence, they would interfere less in the Azerbaijani elections.

2 – Economic Problems

In early 2018, Azerbaijan was enjoying a relatively stable economy. The positive development of economic indicators, the growth of the foreign exchange reserves and the rise of oil prices created positive expectations amongst the population. Compared to the other countries in the region the exchange rate of the Azerbaijani Manat was also stable – for most of the population that is a key indicator of macroeconomic stability.

⁷ See: Mamedzade, M. (2018, February 6). “Snap election in Azerbaijan: Fighting elite, Russia’s factor and economy.” *Eurasia Daily*. Retrieved: <<https://eadaily.com/en/news/2018/02/06/snap-election-in-azerbaijan-fighting-elite-russias-factor-and-economy>>; Geybullayeva, A., & Grigoryeva, T. (2018, February 15). “What’s behind Azerbaijan’s snap elections.” *Balceni Caucaso*. Retrieved: <<https://www.balcanicaucaso.org/eng/Areas/Azerbaijan/What-s-behind-Azerbaijan-s-snap-elections-186093>>; Bagirova, N. (2018, April 11). “Azerbaijan’s Aliyev wins fourth term as president.” Retrieved from Reuters.com: <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-azerbaijan-election/azerbaijans-aliyev-wins-fourth-term-as-president-idUSKBN1HH3CJè>>; Bagirova, N. (2018, April 11). “Azerbaijan’s Aliyev wins fourth term as president.” *Reuters*. Retrieved: <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-azerbaijan-election/azerbaijans-aliyev-wins-fourth-term-as-president-idUSKBN1HH3CJ>> and Rahimov, R. (2018, February). “Perfect Timing: Azerbaijan Calls Snap Presidential Elections.” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. Volume: 15 Issue: 23. Retrieved from James: <<https://jamestown.org/program/perfect-timing-azerbaijan-calls-snap-presidential-elections/>>.

3 – Bringing Stability to the Ruling Elite and Facilitating the Economic Reforms

According to this opinion, the presidential election had to be held earlier because there was a need to replace some members of the ruling elite. Replacing some of the officials before elections would not be productive in terms of the stability and predictability of the political processes. In addition, prior to the presidential elections the major economic reforms were put into halt. Urgent major economic reforms could not be implemented before elections, so that the elections were moved in order to enable the implementation of those reforms. Some members of the Cabinet needed to be replaced in order to bring fresh minds to the different positions and restart the economic reforms at the earliest.

4 – Interference by Other Foreign Powers

In addition to Russia, Azerbaijan also neighbours Iran and Turkey. Iran was thought to be frustrated by high-ranking Israeli officials' visits to Azerbaijan – last year, the Prime Minister of Israel, Benjamin Netanyahu, paid a visit to Azerbaijan. For a long time, Baku suspected Tehran of supporting pro-Iranian religious communities in Azerbaijan. Those groups, supported by the foreign powers, could have become a decisive factor in creating instability within the country during the presidential elections.

Azerbaijan has strategic relations with Turkey: Baku and Ankara share their perspectives on many aspects of their foreign policies. Nonetheless, the developments in Turkey in the recent years, the internal struggle with FETÖ (Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü), and other trends in Turkish politics affected Azerbaijan.⁸ Several years ago, senior-members of Azerbaijani government were critical of the so-called “Nurcular” movement and other Fethullah Gülen sympathisers⁹ in Azerbaijan.¹⁰ The domestic political tur-

⁸ Butov.az. (2015, September 22). “Ərdoğanın “nurçu”lara qarşı ikinci savaşı – Azərbaycanda.” Retrieved from <<http://www.butov.az/xeber/siyaset/2645-erdoganin-nurchulara-qarshi-ikinci-savashi-azerbaycanda.html>>.

⁹ Robinson, F. (2014, April 17). “Gülənçiləri Nurçular adlandırmaq düzgündürmü?” BBC Azerbaijan. Retrieved: <https://www.bbc.com/azeri/azerbaijan/2014/04/140417_gulen_nursi_analysis>.

moil of Turkey also might have had an effect over the elections in Azerbaijan. For a long time, Fethullah Gülen's sympathisers enjoyed close relations with some Azerbaijani officials. Most of them were dismissed in the recent years.¹¹

Hence, Aliyev decided to gain time in order not to allow hostile forces abroad to shake up the situation in the Republic. The political factors affecting the decisions in Azerbaijan's close neighbourhood – in Iran and Turkey have been hardly predictable. This has also created an environment of uncertainty for Baku, which had to be tackled.

5 – Elections in Armenia and the Conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh

There is also the belief that President Aliyev scheduled the elections for April to decrease the time difference between the elections in Armenia and Azerbaijan. By April 2018, Armenia was supposed to have completed the process of transformation from a presidential political system to a parliamentary one. Right after the elections in Azerbaijan and Armenia, President Ilham Aliyev and former Armenian Prime Minister Serj Sargsyan would have had no reason to prolong the conflict and would have been able to start a constructive negotiation process, which had been halted after two meetings following the April 2016 military escalation at the line of the contact.

All of the above-mentioned points could be seen as factors which might have affected President Aliyev's decision to change the presidential election date. For the sake of the simplicity, this paper will take into consideration

¹⁰ Cumhuriyet.net. (2014, April 11). "Nurçular"ın hakimiyyət planları. Retrieved from Cumhuriyet.net: <<http://www.cumhuriyyet.net/sonxeber/16028-nurchularin-hakimiyet-planlari-2.html>>.

¹¹ Abdiyeva, N. (2014, April 16). "Dini Komitənin 3-cü sədr müavini "nurçularla mübarizə" üçündürmü?" BBC Azerbaijan. Retrieved: <https://www.bbc.com/azeri/azerbaijan/2014/04/140416_nurcu_religion_commite_qmi> and Rubrika.az. (2016, August 31). "Azərbaycanda Nurçular Revanşa hazırlaşır." Retrieved from Rubrika.az: <<http://rublika.az/maraqli/18352-azerbaycanda-nurchular-revansha-hazirlashir-shok.html>>.

only the last two points to explain the changes in Azerbaijan's foreign policy agenda in the post-oil boom era.

The change in date of the presidential elections is interesting to analyse also from the perspective of the interference of other political powers. The events in Ganja during the summer of 2018 raised the interest against the activity of foreign powers and the rise of religious marginal groups in Azerbaijan.

In early July 2018, Ganja – the second biggest city of Azerbaijan – witnessed an attack against the mayor of the city, Elmar Valiyev. He survived the assassination attempt in spite of having been heavily injured. In the following week, two senior police officers, one of whom – Ilgar Balakisiyev – was the head of the city police department, were killed by a sharp object, the shape of which resembled a sword. The State Security Service of Azerbaijan, alongside the General Prosecutor's Office and the Ministry of Internal Affairs, issued a joint-statement blaming radical religious groups for the attacks.¹² According to the statement, the situation was under control. In the following weeks, more than 20 people were arrested and accused of attempting to assassinate the mayor and murdering two police officers. The local media broadly commented on the educational background of these people – they were educated in Iran and had business activities in Russia.

During the week prior to the Ganja events, the country had experienced a nationwide electricity blackout.¹³ In the following weeks, a fire was set under the major electricity lines, which raised additional suspicion of the involvement of foreign powers in the developments in the country in June and July 2018, and in the rise of the radical organisations.

The processes prior and after the Ganja events, and the increased activity of radical groups in July 2018 highlighted more interesting facts. Azerbaijan

¹² Ministry of Internal Affairs of Azerbaijan Republic. (2018, July 10). *Information by the Republic's General Prosecutor's Office, Ministry of Internal Affairs and State Security Service*. Retrieved from Press Service: Ministry of Internal Affairs: <<https://www.mia.gov.az/?/az/news/view/1213>>.

¹³ CESD Research Group. (2018, July). *Azerbaijan's country-wide electricity blackout: Problems, Causes, and Results*. CESD Press.

is a secular state, but it has a Shia-Muslim background. The religious people in Iran and Azerbaijan share the same branch of Islam. Both countries' religious communities were to hold religious ceremonies in the autumn of 2018 to commemorate the fallen religious leaders in the 7th century "Ashura." The religious ceremonies, which would usually be accompanied by mass rallies, would have lasted more than one month and a half. In 2018, those religious ceremonies were supposed to coincide with the presidential elections in Azerbaijan – which were traditionally held in mid-October. Hence, the date of the presidential elections might have been changed to April 2018. The sudden rise of the religious groups in the pre-election period could have been deemed dangerous for the stability of the country for they might have led to disastrous processes.

At first, the post-oil boom era for Azerbaijan might have started with economic problems and proposed reforms for the resolution of long-standing domestic problems, but it soon gained momentum and transformed itself into something more significant: changes within the elites, and the change of the date of the presidential elections being among these shifts. The Ganja events also demonstrated how foreign powers willing to spread religious marginalisation might be successful in a country undergoing economic transformations. These factors might have also shaped the country's vision on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Post-Oil-Boom Period

Regardless of the other problems, including major economic ones, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has always been on the public agenda in Azerbaijan. One of the reasons for changing the presidential election dates might have been linked to the negotiations process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Lack of results in the resolution of the problem could be a pretext for opposition groups to accuse the government of ineffective policy concerning the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Therefore, the government cannot afford to lack a strong policy agenda for the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict in the post-oil boom era.

Following the Ganja events, the local print and broadcasting media were critical of foreign governments' support to religious and radical groups in

Azerbaijan. The possibility of foreign powers using the conflict as an alleged reason to gain mass support among the youth and nationalist circles might have created a stronger urgency for achievements on conflict resolution.

During the rise of religious groups, their merger with the opposition parties would increase the impact of the protests against the government. Hence, President Aliyev's and his team's bold statements on military actions against Armenia could see another rise in the following months, if there were no achievements regarding the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

In the oil-boom era, the army-building rhetoric was dominant on the public agenda for the return of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding regions under Azerbaijani control. The constant increase of the country's military budget created a comfort-zone for the government. In the post-oil-boom era, although Azerbaijan would continue to build its military power, it seemed unlikely for Azerbaijan to spend on defence the same amount of money it used to.

President Aliyev's speech during the meeting of the Cabinet of Ministers dedicated to the results of socio-economic developments in the first half of 2018 demonstrates the mood in the ruling circles of Azerbaijan in the post-oil-boom era:

“Just have a look at what is happening in Armenia... The regime of Sargsyan disgracefully thrown out of power actually represents a collapse of Armenian statehood... I can say that we also played a role in the fall of this regime. I do not want to blow this out of proportion and, as they say, take credit for that. However, the truth is that as a result of our policy, Armenia was deprived of all the projects that could bring it an income. We have successfully carried out a policy of isolation against them and, without fearing anyone... As a result of this policy, Armenia has suffered an economic collapse.

I must also note that the April fights that took place two years ago further undermined the rotten and shaky foundations of Armenia. The April fights became such a huge blow to the regime of Sargsyan that they could not recover from it in two years, and the myth they created of their allegedly strong army was shattered to pieces, of course. We have destroyed this myth. In a matter of a few days, we destroyed the «strong defence» they had been creating on the line of contact for many

years. And this caused great disappointment in the Armenian society. Therefore, everything that happened to Armenia was inevitable and logical...”¹⁴

This statement illustrates the satisfaction with the processes going on in Armenia, and President Aliyev taking credit for the ongoing processes thereby Pashinyan overthrew the old Armenian political establishment. Hence, we may assume that, despite the economic and political transformations in the country, no changes of policy direction of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict will take place. The ongoing internal transformation processes and the emerging foreign challenges might increase the urgency of the resolution of the conflict, but it will not change the direction of the policy.

Other reasons for the activation of efforts are the economic problems currently existing in Azerbaijan. The devaluation of the Manat in 2015 has had a gloomy effect on the reputation of the government. The level of economic development and success of Azerbaijan, as compared to other regional states, and the stable exchange rate of the Azerbaijani Manat to the United States Dollar had been a source of national pride for Azerbaijan. This could be also used by the opposition parties and the supporters of foreign powers in Azerbaijan against the government. This is another factor pushing the government to take bolder steps towards a resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

Conclusion

During the period of massive oil-money incomes, Azerbaijan enjoyed years of economic prosperity and equipped its army. The economic success of the country was a source of pride and demonstrated upstanding economic and public policy.

Since February 2015, the economic trends have changed in Azerbaijan, creating new internal and external realities for policy-makers. The new ex-

¹⁴ Official web-site of President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. (2018, July 08). Ilham Aliyev chaired meeting of Cabinet of Ministers dedicated to results of socio-economic development in first half of 2018 and future objectives. Retrieved from: <<https://en.president.az/articles/29335>>.

ternal and internal challenges have pushed the Azerbaijani government to introduce reforms of the economy and public-policy. The remodelling of the economy has also affected the political-decision-making institutions. New economic reforms demand new policy-makers, which led to the change of large numbers of political elites being replaced by a younger generation.

The rapid change of the ruling elite members, the change of the presidential election date and the Ganja events have unearthed a stream of interesting transformations happening in Azerbaijan which might be assessed as outcomes of the economic slowdown in 2015.

The change of date of the presidential elections and the Ganja events have demonstrated that the foreign policy and external challenges still have a significant impact on Azerbaijan policy-making. The government is afraid of the interference of external powers aiming to destabilise the country by using the existing economic realities and the lack of concrete results in the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. This propels the government, not to change the direction, but to increase their activity towards the resolution of the conflict.

The processes in the other countries of the South Caucasus have also created a political momentum for the transformations in the country. The political dynamics in neighbouring Armenia – Serzh Sargsyan’s resignation and Nikol Pashinyan’s reshaping of the country – overshadowed the developments in Azerbaijan. Nevertheless, the country is experiencing rapid movements in all of its spheres – compared to the previous years – and this is going to be reflected in the upcoming months in the government’s policy on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

The Armenian “Velvet Revolution”: What Next?

Armen Grigoryan

The Cause and the Course of the Revolution

The Armenian “Velvet Revolution” in April 2018 was quite unexpected. Citizens’ general dissatisfaction with the previous government was well-known, yet social mobilisation on such a high level was surprising. Such massive movements had not happened since 2008, when after fraudulent presidential elections and 12 days of mass demonstrations police and army units attacked the demonstrators on 1 March, and killing ten of them. Certainly, the 2013 presidential elections had also led to mass protests, yet without a general strike totally paralysing the automobile traffic in Yerevan, or other expressions of civil disobedience on a level comparable to April 2018. Moreover, the opposition also could not mobilise public support running up to the referendum on constitutional amendments, which changed the country’s political system from a presidential to a parliamentary one in December 2015.

Opposition mobilisation and mass protests against election fraud, which might possibly threaten regime stability, had traditionally been related to presidential elections, while parliamentary elections, including the most recent in May 2017, which finalised the transition to a parliamentary system, had not resulted in protests on a comparable level. Thus, as of March 2018 the government’s position seemed stable and secure, and then-President Serzh Sargsyan’s intention to occupy the Prime Minister’s post and continue ruling seemed a safe bid. The transition to a parliamentary system had probably been considered the safest option for Sargsyan, compared to either the Russian model, i.e. appointing a “placeholder” and standing for election again in five years, or removing the ban on a third presidential term. Considering the experience of previous presidential elec-

tions, in either case large protests were likely to follow a contested election.¹

Yet, a 24-day protest campaign led by a journalist-turned-politician Nikol Pashinyan resulted in regime collapse. The latter term seems particularly appropriate as the course of events occurring between 31 March and 23 April 2018, resulting in a regime change, is quite consistent with a model described by Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan:

“Regime collapse [...] can be counterposed both to being overthrown and to transition through negotiation. Collapse is different from a regime overthrow in that there is no storming of the seats of power and no occupation of the television station, the governmental buildings, the army bases, or the communication network, either by the military in a coup or by revolutionary activists and masses. There is no arrest, shooting, or immediate flight of the regime leaders.... Consequently, there is no violence.

Regime collapse is also different from our model of negotiated reform and transition in that the incumbents cannot negotiate the conditions under which they will leave power. They cannot impose rules governing the transition, delay the process significantly, or exercise some control of the future. They cannot do so because they believe that, if they should attempt to hold power until an election, they will provoke an immediate outburst of popular anger or a coup. Incumbents no longer believe they can count on the coercive apparatus to support them. In addition, on the side of the democratic opposition, there is no reason to negotiate conditions for the transition because they are convinced of their overwhelming relational power. Collapse is the result of rigidity, ossification, and loss of responsiveness of elites that does not allow them to make timely decisions anticipating crises and change.”²

Already after the 1 March 2008 events it was suggested that a negotiated transition requiring free elections organised by the incumbent authorities had become an unrealistic scenario, and civil disobedience aiming at regime collapse remained the only possibility for a peaceful, non-violent regime

¹ Grigoryan, Armen: Protesters in Armenia Demand Snap Parliamentary Elections and Prime Minister Sargsyan Resigns (April 2018). <<https://jamestown.org/program/protesters-in-armenia-demand-snap-parliamentary-elections-and-prime-minister-sargsyan-resigns/>>, accessed on 23.10.2018.

² Linz, Juan J./Stepan, Alfred: Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe. Baltimore 1996, p. 322.

change.³ As a matter of fact, the Armenian “Velvet Revolution” followed that logic, and Pashinyan’s insistence on the need to dissolve the National Assembly with a majority of seats still controlled by Sargsyan’s Republican Party of Armenia (RPA) also was consistent with it.

Russia’s Reaction to the Revolution

Remarkably, Pashinyan avoided mentioning a geopolitical choice during his protest campaign, and such an approach is understandable. First, until 23 April, when Serzh Sargsyan, who had just been appointed Prime Minister six days earlier, resigned, it was uncertain whether he would attempt to use force like his predecessor Robert Kocharyan did in 2008. In fact, on 21 April, during an attempt of negotiations with Pashinyan, Sargsyan threatened a possible repetition of the 1 March 2008 events. Moreover, Sargsyan had signed an agreement within the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) framework, allowing Russia to participate in suppression of “anti-constitutional revolts” threatening stability in member states.⁴

Openly pro-Western protests might provoke the use of force, which could be backed by Russia, whereas an understanding that the new authorities in Yerevan would not risk disappointing Russia by an attempt to leave the CSTO or the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) could have contributed to restraint on Moscow’s behalf. Besides, as the number of protesters grew from dozens to dozens of thousands within few days, Pashinyan could be confident of strong domestic support.

However, after Sargsyan’s resignation Pashinyan had to deal with an attempt by the acting Prime Minister, Karen Karapetyan (a former Gazprom executive with extensive connections to Russian officials and oligarchs), to occupy the highest executive post. A powerful Russian billionaire of Armenian origin, Samvel Karapetyan (not related to Karen Karapetyan), who is

³ Grigoryan, Armen: Regime Change Is on the Agenda [in Armenian]. In: Zhamanak, 13.6.2008, p. 3.

⁴ Grigoryan, Armen: Armenia’s Prime Minister Resigns amid Extensive Protests (May 2018). <<http://cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13511-armenias-prime-minister-resigns-amid-extensive-protests.html>>, accessed on 24.10.2018.

on the United States Department of the Justice's "Kremlin list," travelled to Yerevan on 24 April with a group of supporters in order to facilitate Karen Karapetyan's grip on power. Simultaneously, Russian state-controlled media attempted discrediting Pashinyan, labelling his movement "another Maidan" directed by the West.⁵ On 26 April, Karapetyan sent acting Deputy Prime Minister Armen Gevorgyan and Minister of Foreign Affairs Eduard Nalbandyan to Moscow to conduct negotiations with Russian officials. Then, a 10-member group representing both chambers of the Russian Federal Assembly (parliament) held meetings with members of the National Assembly of Armenia in Yerevan on 27 April, and Russian emissaries attempted to intimidate Pashinyan.⁶ However, as Pashinyan did not give in, and even managed to increase the number of protesters, Karapetyan had to forfeit his ambitions.

Apparently, after the unsuccessful attempt to support Karapetyan's bid for power, official Moscow chose a more balanced, pragmatic approach: further attempts to stop Pashinyan were likely to antagonise him and his highly mobilised supporters who had showed considerable immunity to propaganda activities. Remarkably, just hours before Serzh Sargsyan's resignation, one of the key officials in his cabinet, Minister of Defence Vigen Sargsyan, complained that younger citizens comprising the core of the protest movement had stopped watching TV and preferred the Internet as an information source, so the government had been unable to transmit any convincing messages to them.⁷

Quite naturally, Russian authorities remain suspicious of Pashinyan's government, and do not miss occasions for reminding about their hegemony,

⁵ Abrahamyan, Eduard/Melikyan, Gevorg: Moscow Worries Armenian 'Velvet Revolution' Could Lessen Its Leverage over Yerevan (May 2018). <<https://jamestown.org/program/armenias-velvet-revolution-threatens-moscows-continued-leverage-over-country/>>, accessed on 24.10.2018.

⁶ Grigoryan, Armen: Armenian Revolution Aided by Restraint of Military, Security Services (May 2018). <<https://jamestown.org/program/armenian-revolution-aided-by-military-security-services-restraint/>>, accessed on 23.10.2018.

⁷ Vigen Sargsyan about the Arrest of Pashinyan [in Armenian] (April 2018). <<http://araratnews.am/vigen-sargsyaneh-phashinyanin-dzerbakalelu-masin/>>, accessed on 24.10.2018.

also seemingly being unable not to interpret events from a point of view of geopolitical rivalry, as a zero-sum game. So, for example, Russia's Foreign Ministry's spokesperson made a statement concerning US National Security Adviser John Bolton's visit to Armenia:

“US National Security Adviser John Bolton who visited Yerevan the other day demanded openly that Armenia renounce [sic] historical clichés in its international relations and hardly bothered to conceal the fact that this implied Armenia's traditional friendship with Russia. He also said that he expected Nikol Pashinyan to voice initiatives on the Nagorno-Karabakh settlement after the national parliamentary elections. [...] Incidentally, not all of John Bolton's statements in Yerevan deserve to be criticised. In his October 25 interview to Radio Liberty, he made a wonderful comment: «I think that's really fundamental to Armenia exercising its full sovereignty and not being dependent on or subject to excessive foreign influence». It would be good if John Bolton thinks [sic] over the meaning of his own words.”⁸

Apparently, Moscow considers any foreign influence, except its own, excessive. To sum up, it is hardly a secret that Russia's kindness towards the government in Yerevan depends on a certain level of loyalty. Probably the gravest foreign policy mistake made by Pashinyan's government so far – an announcement made in September about planning to send some military personnel to Syria on a “humanitarian” mission – can hardly be interpreted otherwise than as an attempt to please some Russian officials, possibly President Vladimir Putin himself. It remains to be seen if after the elections, which have produced a comfortable majority supporting the government, Pashinyan will try to diversify and balance Armenia's foreign policy. However, considering the regional situation and various threats, attempts to avoid antagonising the Kremlin will likely continue, despite the probability of additional concessions to Russia in line with getting involved in Syria.

⁸ Comment by the Information and Press Department on statements made by US National Security Adviser John Bolton in Armenia (October 2018). <http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/-/asset_publisher/cKNonkJE02Bw/content/id/3384686?p_p_id=101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw&_101_INSTANCE_cKNonkJE02Bw_languageId=en_GB>, accessed 30.10.2018.

Armenia and the Eurasian Economic Union

So far, Armenian officials keep repeating their predecessors' statements about the need to deepen the Eurasian integration, to become a bridge between Iran and the EAEU, or even a bridge between the EU and the EAEU, and so forth. However, such "bridging" scenarios do not seem realistic or conceivable, taking into account the isolated geographical position, underdeveloped transportation and other infrastructure, and other factors. Such a reality was quite predictable already years ago; "Armenia stands as an exception in the worldwide picture of customs unions, as it does not share any border with other EAEU members."⁹

Before Armenia joined the EAEU, it had already been known that the EAEU had mostly adopted Russia's tariff levels, so other members were obliged to raise their tariffs. Therefore, in addition to making consumer goods, machinery and equipment imported from non-EAEU member countries more expensive, the EAEU membership would incur additional costs in the future. As Popescu noted, EAEU membership complicated Kazakhstan's World Trade Organisation (WTO) accession process, and Armenia and Kyrgyzstan would also breach their WTO commitments by raising the tariffs, so other WTO members could potentially make compensation claims.¹⁰ Recently Ukraine launched complaints at the WTO concerning the tariffs imposed by Armenia and Kyrgyzstan on steel pipes, as their tariffs are "higher than necessary, erroneous and based on deficient rulings, procedures and provisions." A similar complaint against Kazakhstan had already been filed.¹¹ A number of similar complaints should be expected in the near future, as the temporary exemptions for around 800

⁹ Delcour, Laure/Kostanyan, Hrant/Vandecasteele, Bruno/Elsuwege, Peter van: The Implications of Eurasian Integration for the EU's Relations with the Countries in the Post-Soviet Space. In: *Studia Diplomatica*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (2015), p. 18.

¹⁰ Popescu, Nicu: *Eurasian Union: The Real, the Imaginary and the Likely*. Chaillot Paper, 132/2014, Paris, pp. 12-13.

¹¹ Miles, Tom: *Ukraine Takes Armenia and Kyrgyzstan to WTO Over Steel Pipe Duties* (October 2018). <<https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-ukraine-steel-wto/ukraine-takes-armenia-and-kyrgyzstan-to-wto-over-steel-pipe-duties-idUKKCN1MW1WV>>, accessed on 23.10.2018.

goods negotiated by Armenia before the EAEU accession are going to expire.

Returning to the notion of a bridge between the EU and the EAEU, it should be remembered that it is hardly feasible also because of the EU's policy in this regard. A few reasons for such an approach have been outlined. As Delcour and others noted, first, the EAEU raises new obstacles to trade, particularly by its tariff provisions, rather than facilitates it. Second, there are also general concerns about the compatibility of the EAEU with the WTO rules. Third, "the EU's formal recognition of the EAEU would also have significant geopolitical implications. In particular, it could be perceived as a signal that the increasing bi-polarisation of Europe is accepted and that the EU is willing to follow Putin's logic of 'bloc to bloc' negotiations."¹² The likelihood of additional sanctions against Russia makes the current prospects for EU-EAEU cooperation even less realistic.

To sum up, the scope of economic opportunities and international trade will remain restrained by the EAEU membership. It is quite a disappointment that there was a lack of open and sincere discussion on the economic perspectives during the run-up to the parliamentary elections. However, despite all attempts not to displease Russia (as well as some subjective reasons related to the electoral code, which will be reviewed below) such a discussion should be welcomed after the elections. It seems inevitable, in fact, considering the growing payments of foreign debt interest, the expected decline in the amount of remittances – the largest source of hard currency so far – because of the likely economic recession in Russia driven by declining oil price and the looming new sanctions, and other factors.

The Post-Revolution Period: Waiting for Snap Parliamentary Elections

The events in the few months of the post-revolution period were strongly conditioned by Pashinyan's plan to dissolve the National Assembly and to

¹² Delcour, Laure/Kostanyan, Hrant/Vandecasteele, Bruno/Elsuwege, Peter van: The Implications of Eurasian Integration for the EU's Relations with the Countries in the Post-Soviet Space. In: *Studia Diplomatica*, Vol. 68, No. 1 (2015), p. 14.

hold snap elections. An intention to proceed in that direction was expressed immediately after the “Velvet Revolution” and was reiterated by Pashinyan in August, after the first 100 days in office. Furthermore, the *My Move* alliance, formed by Pashinyan’s Civic Contract party and some supporters, won the Yerevan city council elections on 23 September in a landslide, obtaining 57 of 65 seats, and unlike most previous elections, no serious fraud was reported: the police effectively prevented most of the familiar practices, such as vote buying or voter bussing. Thus, Pashinyan decided to proceed with snap parliamentary elections in December.

The RPA, which did not participate in the municipal elections, attempted to prevent the planned dissolution of the parliament and to sustain its majority, even though it had continuously been facing pressure by the demonstrators in order to get votes in favour of decisions proposed by Pashinyan’s cabinet. The RPA was joined by Prosperous Armenia and Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaktsutyun (ARFD), which had joined Pashinyan’s minority government in May, but openly opposed his political course during the run-up to the municipal elections.

As Pashinyan’s snap elections plan relied on a constitutional clause stipulating that the National Assembly must be dissolved if the Prime Minister resigns and the parliament fails to appoint a new Prime Minister during next two sessions, on 2 October, the RPA, the Prosperous Armenia and ARFD factions called for an extraordinary session and promptly amended the parliament’s procedural rules. According to the amendment, in case of inability to reach a quorum, a parliamentary session would be considered active and ongoing rather than failed, so the parliament could not be dissolved. However, as thousands of Pashinyan’s supporters took to the streets demanding snap elections, first the leader of Prosperous Armenia, Gagik Tsarukyan, gave in and agreed to early elections, and then several RPA members defected.¹³ Pashinyan resigned on 19 October, and, as requested, the National Assembly did not appoint another Prime Minister on 24 October and on 1 November, so the parliament could be dissolved,

¹³ Grigoryan, Armen: Armenia’s Revolutionary Reformist Government Faces a Crisis (October 2018). <<https://jamestown.org/program/armenias-revolutionary-reformist-government-faces-a-crisis/>>, accessed on 5.11.2018.

while Pashinyan remained acting Prime Minister. Meanwhile, President Armen Sargsyan, after waiting for the maximum period of 21 days, said on 23 October that he would not sign the amendment adopted on 2 October but would send it to the Constitutional Court for a review. So, the amendment did not come into force in time to disrupt Pashinyan's plan to dissolve the parliament. While a rather slow pace of reforms did not undermine Pashinyan's approval rating yet, and there was a general understanding that the overwhelmingly hostile attitude of the parliamentary majority posed serious obstacles to attempts at changing the entrenched system, Pashinyan got an opportunity to proceed with his plan.¹⁴

Yet, the RPA refused to adopt the amendments to the electoral code proposed by the government: It suggested reducing the threshold from 5 to 4 percent and abandoning the mixed proportional system in favour of a simple proportional one by means of eliminating regional constituencies and leaving only the national party list. The regional constituencies system promotes a specific kind of cronyism: it stimulates voting in favour of someone known locally and makes vote buying easier; more generally, it benefits parties having more financial resources.

As the voting system increased the importance of acquaintances and reduced smaller parties' chances, the RPA and Prosperous Armenia were considered the main contenders faced by Pashinyan's *My Step* bloc, while some parties, including the Armenian National Congress and the Heritage party, decided to abstain from participation in the snap elections. Besides, the quality of debates during the electoral campaign suffered considerably. While a televised debate with participation of leaders of all parties and blocs was a new practice and caught considerable attention, otherwise the campaign was rather bleak. The RPA focussed on propaganda against Pashinyan's government, mainly attempting to provoke a scandal, by means of repetition of familiar allegations about connections with George Soros, "betrayal of traditional values" by means of "sponsorship of religious sects and the LGBT community," or plans to "sell Nagorno-Karabakh," i.e. to

¹⁴ Grigoryan, Armen: Armenia's New Government Faces Resistance (November 2018). <<http://cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13543-armenias-new-government-faces-resistance.html>>, accessed on 8.11.2018.

make unilateral concessions. In the latter context, even a rather bizarre statement that “[Armenia’s] current government is a much more dangerous threat for Nagorno-Karabakh than Azerbaijan” was made.¹⁵ As a result, Pashinyan’s regional rallies also generally lacked meaningful discussion, focussing on the opponents’ former sins and present behaviour. Only some sectoral programmes were presented in the media, including a concept of healthcare reform by Minister Arsen Torosyan – himself a subject of continuous character killing attempts since taking the office in May, as he already initiated some reforms which harmed business interests of Serzh Sargsyan’s in-laws.

The ARFD took its usual niche of ethnic nationalism. In case of Prosperous Armenia, the strict policy against vote buying prevented party’s leader and principal financier Gagik Tsarukyan from his previously habitual role of benefactor and sponsor who would distribute free stuff to voters, provide scholarships for students, and so forth. Instead, he repeated a rather ridiculous promise that he had already made before the 2017 elections that his friend, Kuwaiti sheikh Ahmed Al-Fahad Al-Ahmed Al-Sabah, impressed by Tsarukyan’s business success, would invest 15 billion US dollars in Armenia, creating many jobs, and also told a similar story about other potential investors – British lords and “lordesses” (sic).¹⁶ Prosperous Armenia also made a half-hearted attempt to act as a guardian of “traditional values”: an acting member of parliament, Tigran Urikhanyan, submitted a draft law which would ban same-sex marriages. However, the government argued against its adoption, stating that the current civil code does not require the registrars to register such marriages anyway.¹⁷ Prosperous Armenia abstained from further speculations about the subject: probably, after facing pressure and accommodating to Pashinyan’s demand to hold snap elections, Tsarukyan was reluctant to engage in a protracted dispute with the prospective winner.

¹⁵ Grigoryan, Armen: Armenia’s Revolutionary Government Wins Snap Elections (December 2018). <<https://jamestown.org/program/armenias-revolutionary-government-wins-snap-elections/>>, accessed on 11.12.2018.

¹⁶ Ibid. The actual term is “Ladies”.

¹⁷ Papyan, Siranuysh: Deputy Minister: The Laws Do Not Give an Opportunity to Register Same-sex Marriages (December 2018). <<https://www.1in.am/2469726.html>>, accessed on 1.12.2018.

As the director of the Yerevan-based Regional Studies Centre, Richard Giragosian, noted,

“there is a sense of renewed optimism, as the change of government has also ushered an equally dramatic shift in the country’s political landscape. Most notably, there is a pronounced new degree of political accountability, matched by a greater sense of legitimacy and responsibility. At the same time, there are justified expectations for a serious improvement in the conduct of elections as well.”¹⁸

Yet, he also observed that with an underdeveloped political culture still in place, the tendency to choose personality over policy has also persisted.

The vote on 9 December resulted in a rather predictable victory of Pashinyan’s bloc, which received 70.4 percent of votes. The election code stipulates that a single party cannot get more than two-thirds of seats in the parliament, while excessive votes are redistributed in favour of other parties passing the threshold, so the result shows a rather accurate level of support, without a significant distortion by redistribution possible in case of a higher percentage. The turnout was 48.67 percent – the lowest in national elections held so far, but that is quite understandable in the absence of voter bussing and illegal voting on behalf of registered but absent voters (guest workers in Russia and others). The two other parties passing the threshold were Prosperous Armenia with 8.27 percent of votes and Bright Armenia with 6.34 percent. The latter was Pashinyan’s partner in the National Assembly elected in 2017 but did not support his radical agenda during the revolution in April. Ironically, the RPA, which had not previously agreed to reduce the threshold, came fourth with 4.7 percent of votes and was left out of the parliament.¹⁹

With revolutionary processes coming to an end on the Election Day, the government now has to clearly define a number of policies, ranging from foreign policy issues, including the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution, to a number of domestic issues, such as governance and judicial reforms,

¹⁸ Giragosian, Richard: Armenian Politics: Choosing Personality Over Policy (October 2018). <<https://www.aravot-en.am/2018/10/29/221153/>>, accessed on 30.10.2018.

¹⁹ Grigoryan, Armen: Armenia’s Revolutionary Government Wins Snap Elections (December 2018). <<https://jamestown.org/program/armenias-revolutionary-government-wins-snap-elections/>>, accessed on 11.12.2018.

economic policy, poverty reduction, education policy, and so forth. While a number of essential reforms will probably be unpopular and will, at least in a short term, damage the government's approval rating, the government must also take into account that the post-revolution euphoria cannot last for years, so the "window of opportunity" to reform the country must not be lost.

In the reform context, there are also other issues requiring careful consideration. Börzel and Risse noted that one of the important conditions for institutional reforms is strong pressure from below by domestic actors having political autonomy to mobilise in favour of compliance with democratic standards.²⁰ However, both Prosperous Armenia and Bright Armenia may be expected to be quite conforming to the government, although Bright Armenia acts as a more pro-Western force. Besides, the government may face a trouble from within its own team. With many people's way of thinking and working methods still built on persisting Soviet- and post-Soviet era mentalities, and with the remaining disproportionate reliance on Russia, the momentum for change may easily be lost. In addition, even though the resistance of the remnants of the former regime temporarily became less significant after the elections, they should be soon expected to mobilise and use their considerable financial and media resources to compromise the government. So, additional strong leverages may be needed for overcoming path dependence, and it remains to be seen if actors supporting reforms, including civil society and the non-profit sector, will be able to mobilise and to keep sustaining the positive momentum.

The Current Perspectives of the EU-Armenia Relations

In the short and mid-term perspective, the development of Armenia's relations with the European Union may be outlined by the provisions of the Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement (CEPA) signed on 24 November 2017. As of December 2018, the agreement has been ratified by Armenia, the European Parliament, and eight EU member states: Bulgaria, Denmark, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Poland and Ro-

²⁰ Börzel, Tanja A. and Risse, Thomas: From Europeanisation to Diffusion: Introduction. *West European Politics*, Vol. 35, No. 1 (2012), p. 12.

mania. Although in the first few months after the revolution the Armenian government seemed mostly preoccupied with other issues, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Garen Nazarian held consultations with diplomatic representatives of some EU member states concerning the ratification process in their respective countries. In October consultations concerning the future CEPA implementation with participation of Armenian experts and civil society representatives were launched.

In addition to general statements about EU's support to the on-going democratic processes in Armenia, the head of the EU Delegation to Armenia, Ambassador Piotr Świtalski, made some significant statements as a keynote speaker at a seminar titled "The importance of snap parliamentary elections in the context of Armenia-EU relations" on 3 November. Particularly, the ambassador noted that after the revolution he and the majority of foreign diplomats expected that snap elections would take place even earlier, already in July. According to Ambassador Świtalski, the failure to amend the election code was quite disappointing. He mentioned that the mixed proportional system including regional constituencies had previously resulted in fraud, and that the previous administration, including President Serzh Sargsyan, had insisted on adoption of such a system despite being warned about the potential consequences. The ambassador suggested amending the election code in the future. He also expressed hope that the elections on 9 December would result in formation of a stable government backed by a parliamentary majority, which will be able to do planning for a longer term, as the EU is planning to offer a substantial increase of financial support in the next seven-year period, based on reform performance.²¹

At the first meeting of the Partnership Committee under the CEPA, presided by Garen Nazarian and Deputy Managing Director for Europe and Central Asia at the European External Action Service, Luc Devigne, the draft CEPA implementation roadmap prepared by the Armenian government was discussed, and further possibilities of cooperation were outlined. A joint press release states that with the CEPA as a key tool for reform and

²¹ Babayan, Nelli: Piotr Świtalski: "I and the Majority of Ambassadors Thought That the Elections Could Already Take Place in July" [in Armenian] (November 2018). <<https://www.aravot.am/2018/11/05/991453/>>, accessed on 5.11.2018.

modernisation it is foreseen that Armenia would approximate with the EU legislation in the coming years, including the fields of transport, energy, environment, climate action, taxation and consumer protection. Furthermore, the sides agreed to consider the opening of a visa liberalisation dialogue in due course.²²

While it may be expected that the Armenian government will remain cautious in order not to antagonise Russia and may prefer not to make radical changes in certain areas, even implementation of certain sectoral reforms could help to consolidate the peaceful democratic transformation in the country, contributing to stability and predictability – important factors for development of cooperation with the EU and other partners. In summary, considering the possibility of a substantial increase of EU’s support based on reform performance, in accordance with the “more for more” principle, a “strong love and tough conditionality” approach may be suggested.

²² Joint Press Release: European Union – Armenia Partnership Committee (November 2018). <https://eeas.europa.eu/delegations/armenia/54509/joint-press-release-european-union-armenia-partnership-committee_en>, accessed 27.11.2018.

Speaking Notes

Saakashvili's Legacy and the Tbilisi Protests of 2018

Ia Metreveli

Ladies and Gentlemen!¹

Thank You very much for giving me an opportunity to introduce the wide society in the very heart of Europe to the bitter truth and reality that the Georgian population had to face through years of Saakashvili's governance. I have been deprived of the joy, happiness, and the right to motherhood by this regime. I would also like to draw connections between the current and the past situations in our country, what was going on in 2003-2012 and what has been happening since 2012 till present.

Let me start with my personal tragedy, how this regime and the system, created by Saakashvili has shot my 19 year-old son. Saakashvili was the one, who declared a policy of zero tolerance to crime which the Minister of Internal Affairs, Vano Merabishvili applied, which supported the policy through fear and abuse of police powers.

On the sinister day of the 23rd of November 2004, on the religious celebration of Giorgoba (St. George's Day), the government of Saakashvili was celebrating the anniversary of the Rose Revolution; therefore, the safety measures were strict in the streets and the police had been mobilised. I have to apologise in advance for the unpleasant issues I will be referring to during my speech, which will be hard to hear for your ears.

My only son, Buta Robakidze, was shot without any reason right in front of the church at the Didube Pantheon. Unfortunately, my Buta was the first victim but he would not be the last. The total number of the people killed

¹ The editors would like to remind the readers that this is the author's opinion (edited for coherence and length). The editors further remind the readers that violence among youth is present in other societies as well, regardless of the ferocity of the regime.

in the streets reached 160. I have the list of killed people with me, which you can see upon request.

My son was visiting his friend's family together with his friends and father; they were all sitting round the table, celebrating the feast, the youngsters were just talking. I want to draw your attention that none of the boys had drunk any alcohol. It was about 1:30 o'clock in the morning, when they all left by car for home and when the police car stopped them near the Didube Pantheon. The boys obeyed the police immediately, stopped and got out of the car, Buta came out of the car to congratulate the Giorgoba celebration to the police and express his respect towards the patrol officers; people were so excited about the newly come government, all thought that democratic processes would be automatic and would help build a new government.

From the beginning, the conversation between the police and the boys was quiet. Nothing would have happened if additional police had not been called for. Nobody knows why they were called, the police could not specify the reason during the trial; the policeman just stated that he was kind of afraid of something. Assistant patrol officers urgently arrived, who were extremely aggressive, they started terrible verbal and physical insult towards the young boys and made them fall down to earth violently (it is all well visible on the video record). The young boys were only 19, 20 and 21 years old. Right at the moment when Buta was down on the ground with hands up the assisting patrolman suddenly shot. This is very hard for me to talk about, but I need to pay special attention to extreme the brutality and the fact of violating human rights from the side of the police. When wounded Buta fell to the ground, instead of calling the emergency and helping my son, they put handcuffs on him. They did not provide my wounded child with medical assistance in time, which resulted in Buta's death. After this, the police kept brutal treatment with boys, physical and verbal violation. Once the police realised that they had killed an innocent child, the high ranked police officers arrived immediately together with all the officials of armed forces and started discussing how to sneak away from this crime. They got instructed from higher rank officials and particularly from Saakashvili that they had to hide away this fact, i.e. the truth, and blame the boys in everything, so that the image of the Police was not tarnished as the

reform of the police was one Saakashvili was so proud of, so casting a shadow over it was not acceptable.

Later, the police planted weapons at the spot putting guns, pistols, and hand grenades (“limoncas”) into the boys’ pockets. They put the machine gun in front of my dead son Buta as if he had been shooting at the police and that had been the reason for his liquidation.

Then Rustavi 2 television advised the Georgian public that the police arrested a group of gangsters who showed armed resistance to the police and that one of them had been liquidated. The young boys were left on the ground several hours in that terrible weather, under the rain and wind; and later were taken to prison and kept there for eight months under terrible pressure and abuse to make them confess to carrying weapons, but the boys were not broken.

It is very hard to re-tell all the grief we have gone through, in such a short time; but I will still try to help you image the lawlessness that governed our country at that time, when the tyrant Saakashvili was even called the beacon of democracy among the Western political forces by then.

Having learnt the truth, my family started looking for justice. I was too naive from the beginning, and I strongly believed that Saakashvili would have punished the police and give an example to others, before I found out who I was dealing with. I was so deeply mistaken. It turned out that Saakashvili was and still is the initiator of all that. He is still trying to do the same from abroad. He is making all his efforts to cause instability in the country through the distance and return back to the government through revolt, because he is sure neither him, nor National Movement can ever enter the government through elections.

We have been addressing everyone, the chief public prosecutor, head of armed forces, chairman of the Parliament, the members of the parliament, but unfortunately, the deaf wall was erected in front of us, none listened to us and no one let us approach them.

I must draw special attention that no television cast light on our tragedy and the country was in total information vacuum back then. All the televi-

sion channels had been oppressed by Saakashvili, however, later there came up the public broadcasting company “IMEDI” thanks to Mr. Badri Patarkatsishvili, which gave out the total truth to the public about the hard situation in Georgia. This television revealed the truth about the murder of Sandro Gvirgvliani and Buta Robakidze. Later, there was the TV “Maestro”, which was fighting against political pressure. This is already confirmed that Saakashvili terrified the free media and these televisions were facing a risk to stay on air. You may have even heard of closing down of “IMEDI” TV and of attacks against “Maestro” TV stations.

Our voice had not been heard anywhere until the next victim – Sandro Gvirgvliani – was killed by the authorities. The 28-year old Sandro Gvirgvliani was tortured, left in the cold in a forest near Tbilisi; the young lad bled and finally froze to death. Sandro and Buta lived in the buildings next to each other. The coincidence of these two tragedies is quite symbolic. Both of them have been the only children, of similar profession (both were financial workers), lived in the same street; in both cases one and the same criminal was involved, the head of the press centre of the police, Gurgen Donadze who was very influential at that time. Donadze was the one who actually managed the patrol police. The main thing in this tragic story is that Sandro and Buta became symbols of victory over the evil and the beginning of ending the Saakashvili’s regime.

Sandro’s and Buta’s death awakened the Georgian society, people came to their senses; they realised how terrifying the government was. They understood their sons could be next. After the deaths of Buta and Sandro, people massively came out in protest, carrying photos of Buta and Sandro. People’s protest converted into mass demonstrations later and finally on October 1st of 2012, fortunately, with the help of Mr. Bidzina Ivanishvili the united opposition and the efforts of the Georgian people, we all defeated Saakashvili’s regime.

For nine years people were massively standing out in the street, in the wind, in the freezing cold or in the heat and protested against bloody actions by Saakashvili; I witnessed the unhappiness of families, even minor crimes were not amnestied and underage children were arrested for trifles. The representatives of the intellectual elite of Georgia had been announced as “purged” by Saakashvili; he fired scientists and respected professors from

their positions only because they did not tow the line. There was no family in Georgia, which was not hit with this regime directly or indirectly. Georgia became one big prison, where 45 000 prisoners were sent behind bars, 250 000 probationers were under the permanent danger of imprisonment all the time. A lot of families got into poverty, because they had to sell their homes to pay for court procedures.

I think you are all aware of what was going on in prisons, if not, I can remind you that the videos from prison have startled the whole Georgian society, especially the truth before the elections of 2012, which finally broke Saakashvili's regime. Most were imprisoned in inhuman conditions. The Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg has acknowledged these facts on the allegations of abuse suffered by another prisoner; Sandro Tetradze, who died in custody. The death rate in prisons increased exponentially. In many cases they did not even notify the families about the death.

Every structure was politicised including the police. Their appearance terrified people, who were so scared that they spoke in whispers to each other even at home, because tapping took place everywhere and they kept all communication channels under surveillance. Despite the pressure we did not stop and kept organising manifestations at high risk; we did not know whether we would return home alive or not. Crowds were dispersed with special severity. At the end of the rallies, when people scattered around leaving for home, they were kidnapped; especially young boys, men and even teenagers. For example, the 15-year-old son of political prisoner Sulkhan Molashvili was kidnapped directly from the street and was beaten severely so the boy had the clavicle and the skull fractured; had the mother not found out about that by accident, the boy would not have survived. I should remind you that Sulkhan Molashvili, having been mercilessly tortured in prison, got sick and died soon after. The Strasbourg Court proved his innocence and acknowledged him as a political prisoner and a victim of torture. It was he who divulged that Giga Bokeria supervised his torture in person. Unfortunately, I can give lots of similar examples, but the time limit does not allow me to do it.

Saakashvili and his government had the whole country in their pockets and did whatever they liked to do, justice system, legal structures, banks, business structures, media were all under their thumb.

Democracy was pretending to be the successful reform in the country, which was only on the surface. In order to wrap this up, Saakashvili paid a great deal of money to PR companies in the USA and Europe, as well as to the broadcasting company Rustavi 2, in order to get stronger. While the public broadcasting company Rustavi 2 kept the population in entire falsehood. It has greatly contributed to Saakashvili's government, bringing it to the head and making it stronger afterwards. The hardest thing for us has been that the government of Saakashvili had been broadcasting absolutely false information all over the world, showed off with his reforms, how the country advanced and succeeded, how democracy was flourishing in Georgia. Unfortunately, he made the West and the States believe these lies. The truth became known later, whatever was made or built in the country, Saakashvili was so proud of, had been financially supported by Bidzina Ivanishvili.

The Tbilisi Protests in 2018

I will start with the fact that made people come out on the streets again this spring; a terrible tragedy has occurred in one of the public schools in Tbilisi, where two teenagers fought each other in the street and both of them were killed by knife.

If we try to look for the reason what caused such severity among teenagers, where does this aggression come from, I believe we can find it in the years of Saakashvili's administration. These years full of violence have terribly affected children and teenagers and it is not surprising at all that they behave this way, as children got used to hear words like "killed, died, wounded, raped, deprived, arrested" etc. on TV. They could watch live how Special Forces with masks burgled into homes and arrested people; this mostly happened in the presence of the family members, often including even children.

Georgia was extremely startled at this terrible fact and when the father of the murdered boy Zaza Saralidze complained about the public prosecutor's office and the court, declaring that the processes were not proceeding fairly. Every single citizen was astonished at the condition of the father, whose son was killed and we all supported him.

However, soon a different scene developed when the court convicted two teenagers of the crime and sentenced them to ten and twelve years of imprisonment; Saralidze misled the whole society declaring that the killers of his son were still at large and asked for support so they all gathered for the protesting manifestation in front of the public prosecutor's office; he claimed against the latter that the investigation hid away the guilty persons, so the Georgian people thought, they were facing injustice from the public prosecutor, court and the government. They shared the grief of Saralidze, who in fact had confused people. This is the reason the population came out on Rustaveli Boulevard.

There were also active members of the National Movement next to him, who were not accepted by the society because of their past. Later it became known that Zaza Saralidze himself was the coordinator of the National Movement, which showed that the National Movement was standing behind him and that these manifestations had political motives; people offered Saralidze to get rid of those criminal representatives of the party and the people would support them, but he categorically refused.

The second day, the number of people at the manifestation sharply decreased. Along with Saralidze, Malkhaz Machalikhvili, another father from the Pankisi Gorge, whose son Temirlan had been killed during the operation fighting against terrorists also protested against the government at the rally. I cannot say anything about him at this stage, as the prosecutor's office has broadcasted the material about his connection with the terrorists; the investigation process is still going on and the dead person has not been linked to terrorism yet, however, the proceeding has started against the special force soldier, even without proving his participation in the terrorism. I think, the special operation should have been more professional and the arrest should have been made without bloodshed.

When people started questioning the public prosecutor's office, the chief prosecutor took a very noble step and resigned, which was actually what Saralidze was demanding. Moreover, the Prime Minister came to Saralidze at the rally and promised to take the case under his personal control up to the end. The public prosecutor's office started working straight away. Sections of the Parliamentary opposition demanded the establishment of a parliamentary committee, which was finally created and staffed mostly with

members of the opposition party including the chairman; so the committee was completely satisfying the requirements of Saralidze and the opposition. However, Saralidze was not still satisfied with that. His rallies have acquired a political character asking for support from political parties and himself supporting the presidential candidate from the National Movement Grigol Vashadze, so the society realised who Saralidze had been backed up by and it also became evident that his political demands were orders from the National Movement, so people stopped supporting him. Saralidze is actually the representative of the National Movement, which is part of the plan to trigger instability in the country right before elections, cause massive revolts and return to the government through violence.

The Parliamentary committee has finished its work, however, there was nothing more investigated apart from what the prosecutor's office had already done. Saralidze was not still satisfied and demanded changing the government in front of the Parliament building. Moreover, he even went as far as trying to provoke the police, attempting physical and verbal insult. But no one responded to him and he was even treated quite well by the authorities. Because of such behaviour, people lost respect for him.

I tried to give the details of those two tragedies, so you could draw parallels between the story of my son and Saralidze's. Now, you can judge how our former government treated us and how the present government has been treating Mr. Sasralidze. I want to stress this point again that our sons have been shot by the government, while Saralidze's son was killed in the street fight by the friends. The public prosecutor of that time not only did he not left his position, but no one ever showed to people, on the contrary, the families, whose sons were killed, were under terror and fight to make us top. Had we insulted any of the police, we would not have survived.

As for the special operation held at night clubs, the situation with drugs in our country has been really difficult; a lot of young people are dying every day, drugs are imported but users can also order online the chemical stuff to produce the drugs locally, which kills people in few seconds. These drugs are also sold in the night clubs. People are disturbed with this situation and demand strict measure from the government against drugs. This was the reason for the government to organise the special operation in the night club. Though, the police did not abuse its authority during these op-

erations. This is proved by witnesses, who were present there during the special operation. The new Minister of Internal Affairs of Georgia, Mr. Giorgi Gakharia is strict in fighting against the drugs dealers, most Georgians are very happy about that. While the protest broadcast from the television of the National Movement and that from the side of the night club owners and drug addicts was pure lie. This was another attempt of the National Movement to create instability in the country. They have only one goal, to return to the government through revenge and violence.

If we compare the periods of the former government and the current one with each other, there is a huge difference between them; there is a great progress from the view point of fundamental protection of human rights, but not economically.

A reform I must outline here are those implemented in the penitentiary system which have also been quite successful. Human rights are better protected there now. There are higher standards of incarceration conditions for prisoners. The atmosphere is calm, there are no cases of abuse any more, which is confirmed by various international organisations for the protection of human rights; while during Saakashvili's governing there was the real hell of torture, raping, beating and killing prisoners, unbelievable severity, extraction of human organs, concealing dead bodies; video proofs are still available.

Thank God, we have peacefully defeated the criminal government of the National Movement and said "NO" to the party with the help of Bidzina Ivanishvili in 2012 by pulling up efforts of the whole Georgian nation. However, Georgian people are disturbed with the enforced so called "cohabitation", due to which the period of Saakashvili's government has not been duly evaluated, or publicly judged. Nor has the government acknowledged it as a regime, the National Movement party has not been prohibited. Thus, it led them to opposition, which has resulted in them attacking the government and people, creating sabotage situation in the country, they are all trying to prevent development in the country and cause instability, so they can return to the government with violation, but our nation will never accept it any more. Nine years of Saakashvili's regime has been hard for the

country, which has been recorded in the latest history of Georgia with blood.²

² Please contact the co-chairs to obtain video evidence of the author's opinion.

Southern Caucasus Stability and Energy Security

Cyril Widdershoven

The Southern Caucasus region, including Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and a multitude of smaller entities, has been on the mind of international power players since the end of the 19th century. Not only the geographical situation of the region, as a natural bridge between Eurasian Russia, Central Asia and the Middle East, has been pivotal in the geopolitical and economic power plays of global powers (US, Europe and Russia), but also its access to immense oil and gas reserves. The discovery and development of oil and gas in Azerbaijan, and later on the bordering regions, has pushed the region into the limelight, which has never really diminished. Its former role as one of the leading hydrocarbon regions still is of interest, but not anymore on the same level as it was in the 1960s. A short re-emergence of interest and prominence occurred shortly after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when the Caucasus and Central Asian popped up as potential new energy supply partners for Europe, and more fetching to the USA. This Caspian-Central Asian prominence however did not last long, as other emerging hydrocarbon regions emerged, while the FSU republics showed a tendency for instability, post-Soviet practices and Russian obstructions. The overall cost profile of oil and gas in these largely landlocked producing areas also put large constraints on future developments, especially gas and oil pipeline projects.

Western interest was low for an extended period, while Russia and increasingly China have emerged as power players. Several former US-EU dreams about locking Central Asia and Caucasus into a Western influence sphere, including oil and gas, have been put on ice. Others have been tweaked into a Russian supported strategy, which the last years has been directly linked to Iran and Turkish interests. The Russian-Middle East-North Africa (MENA) angle has now become a source of interest and a worry for Western parties not to be underestimated.

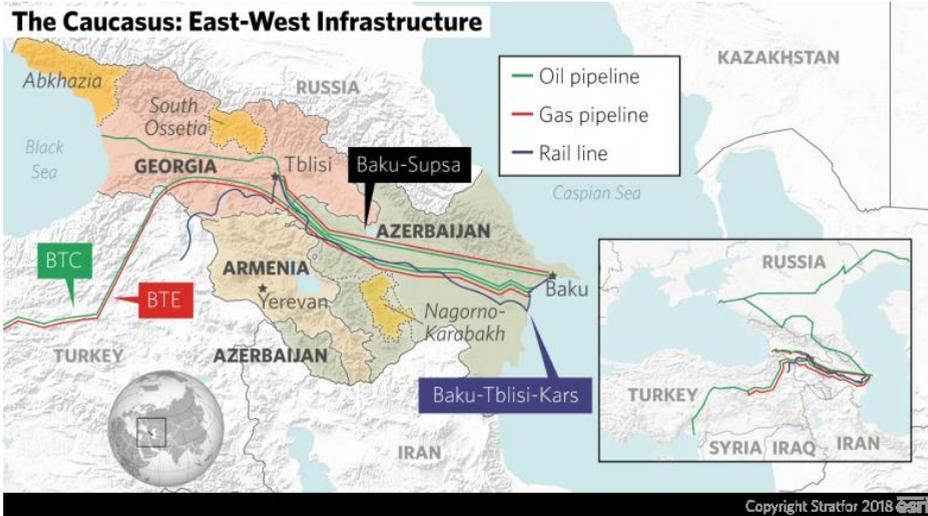


Fig. 1: The Caucasus: East-West Infrastructure;
 Source: <<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/caucasus-competition-will-limit-cooperation>>.

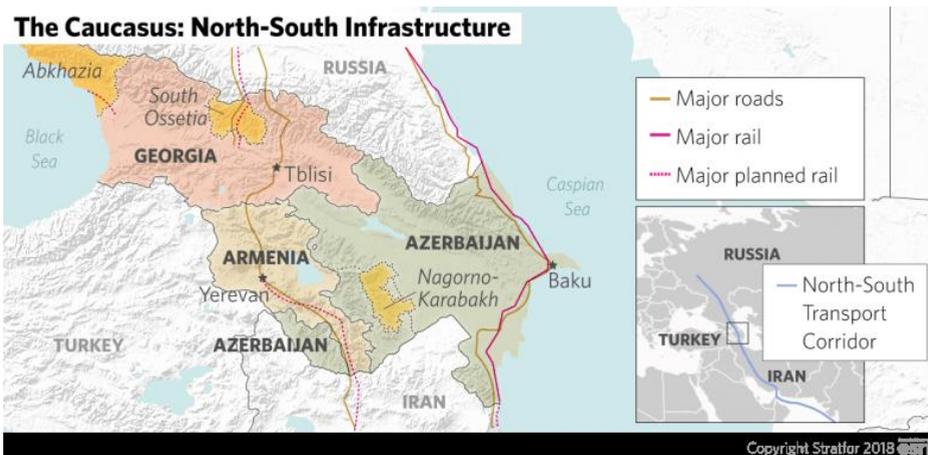


Fig. 2: The Caucasus: North-South Infrastructure;
 Source: <<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/caucasus-competition-will-limit-cooperation>>.

When looking at Azerbaijan the interests of the West are clear. As indicated by the visit of US National Security Advisor John Bolton, there is an intricate web of bilateral interests, but mainly in the economic, energy and many other areas of diverse cooperation. At present, the US and European focus is largely focused on the large-scale Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) project. The role of SGC is important, as the project, targeting by 2019 volumes of 10 billion cubic meters (10 BCM) of Azerbaijani gas, with a potential target in future of 30+BCM per year, could diversify Europe's gas imports substantially.¹ On another level, Washington, but also Brussels, is interested to increase joint efforts in the fight against international terrorism, as well as the security problem in the region. Officially the Armenia-Azerbaijan-Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is on the priority list, but looking at the last decade, energy and terrorism have had a higher priority than this still unresolved conflict. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is largely being addressed via the OSCE Minsk Group approach.

At present, the US support for the Southern Gas Corridor has been again confirmed. Washington reiterated, as indicated by Bolton, that this project is extremely important and promising. The Trump Administration, in contrast to the Obama Administration, has again put its weight behind Azerbaijan's role as an alternative supplier of energy resources. The overall US approach should not be looked at as an energy security issue for the US market, but as a continuing response to the perceived Russian influence in the energy security and security of energy supply of the European Union. Washington sees its involvement in the Southern Caucasus as partly an instrument to support the necessary European energy security development. At the same time, no doubt exists that additional factors at present are also taken into account. The regional stability of the region, as repeatedly stated by Washington and Brussels, but also via NATO, is on the mind of military-geopolitical analysts in NATO and the respective countries. To maintain stability in the Southern Caucasus region is a prime target, as it not only will suppress ongoing Turkish and Russian influence spheres but also will have a direct influence on the ongoing confrontational position

¹ Ilgar Gurbanov. "The Perspective of Trans-Caspian Gas Flow to Europe." *Natural Gas World*. 21.11.2018. <<https://www.naturalgasworld.com/the-perspective-of-trans-caspian-gas-flow-to-europe-ggp-66093>>.

taken by Washington with regards to Iran (and its perceived proxy allies, such as Iraq, Syria and potentially Turkey).

However, the Southern Caucasus, when looking from a geopolitical realism approach, has been added to the top priority list of Europe-US military thinking. The land bridge, as some are looking at the region, plays a major part in international efforts to counter international terrorism, human trafficking and potentially blocking proxy-wars of others. Azerbaijan has been incorporated by all in their respective security strategies, shown by the fact that Azerbaijan has been an active participant in various programs of international cooperation to ensure security in the region. Azerbaijan at present has an in-depth cooperation with NATO, as shown by the country's contribution to the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), participation in NATO operations KFOR, ISAF, and Azerbaijan's contribution to the Resolute Support Mission.



Fig. 3: South Caucasus Pipeline;
Source: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/South_Caucasus_Pipeline>.

In addition to Azerbaijan's position, the West is keeping an eye on the developments inside and surrounding Georgia. Regional threats, such as a continued pressure by Russia on break-away regions, and the country's

important role in possible energy transit routes, are considered of strategic importance to the West, and Europe in particular. The US is heavily involved, especially on the military-security side, as Washington is assisting the country's security sector reforms. The US-Georgia Strategic Partnership, signed in January 2009, is still valid, based on a security-economy-defense cooperation. Discussions are still ongoing with regards to Georgia's membership of NATO, as an answer to the perceived threats by Moscow, but the outcome of this has become very disputable. A growing number of Georgian politicians is currently looking at a so-called non-alignment position, in a move to prevent new conflict in the region.

Armenia, a long-time trouble spot, involving a growing list of contenders, such as Turkey, Russia, Iran and others, is still in limbo. The continuation of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, threatening a possible regional military confrontation between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but possibly involving other regional powers, such as Turkey, Russia, or Iran, is considered at present by the West as a high priority issue. Washington's position in all of this is confusing to say the least. John Bolton's trip in fall 2018 seems to have supported a new wave of pro-US statements made in Armenia, based on the perception in Yerevan circles that Washington wants to push the country into the US sphere of influence. This would be a push for a renewed confrontation with Russia, currently the main power broker in the Armenian constellation. For Armenia to put all its eggs in the US basket would be a major mistake, as US-Western interests are still largely linked to Azerbaijan. Washington also has stated that there needs to be a solution for the Nagorno-Karabakh issue, possibly by returning areas currently occupied (according to some) by Armenia.

As the EU is looking at an energy import dependency, which is expected to increase substantially due to fledgling European oil and gas production, which has been increased due to the unilateral Dutch decision to end gas production on Europe's largest onshore field in the coming years, new supply routes are needed.² Renewables and alternative routes at present are

² Frédéric Simon. "Europe Grapples with the Dutch Gas Production 'Collapse.'" *Euractiv*. 16.05.2018. <<https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/europe-grapples-with-dutch-gas-production-collapse/>> and Adrian Stoica. "Clearing Up

still insufficient to counter with the growing demand for power generation and others sources of energy. Hydrocarbon sources are still expected to be providing the overwhelming majority of energy for the next decades to come. Brussels is therefore looking for new opportunities in terms of energy sources and security of supply. The EU currently pursues a soft energy policy, creating a common energy policy which can allow the Member States to formulate their energy strategies freely in line with their national interests. In addition to the widely commented US shale gas and oil revolution, the emergence of a global LNG spot market, or volumes from West Africa and the Middle East, the Southern Caucasus-Central Asian region is of interest. Reliability of energy transport and transit routes however are in this particular case of concern. At present, existing and planned routes via the Caucasus, mainly Azerbaijan and Georgia, are being assessed and supported. Since the so-called Contract of the Century (the Agreement on the Joint Development and Production Sharing for the Azeri and Chirag Fields and the Deep Water Portion of the Gunashli Field in the Azerbaijan Sector of the Caspian Sea) was signed on September 20, 1994, Azerbaijan's oil and gas have entered the global market, while at the same time Georgia has become part of the main transit route in the region. Since the demise of the Soviet Union the main European countries have expressed a keen interest in the region. Brussels at present strongly cooperates with Azerbaijan and gives serious support in order to implement gas projects by Azerbaijan.

At present, geostrategic policies of European states incorporate, without any doubt, the potential role of the South Caucasus in regard to its natural resources and position. The current developments have also the direct possibility of linking Central Asian energy resources to the European (and global) markets. The strategic location is seen as a land-bridge between Asia and Europe. Several analysts and politicians have always been looking at another option, which is linked to the Southern Caucasus, access to new oil and gas export volumes from Iran and Iraq. At present, most of these volumes have been exported via the southern outlets, over the Arabo-Persian Gulf. Security threats and long transit routes, constrained by the Strait of

Energy War in Europe” *Energy Industry Review*. 1.11.2018. <<https://energyindustryreview.com/analysis/clearing-up-energy-war-in-europe/>>.

Hormuz, Gulf of Aden and the Suez Canal, have partly inhibited a full force European-Iran/Iraq strategy. Pipelines however have been built between Iran and Turkey, partly linked to Iraqi and Southern Caucasus networks. The potential to open up more of Iran-Iraq's hydrocarbon resources is there, and in a more normal, stable and geopolitically less diffuse situation, these options would have been in place already since the 1990s.

At present however, the situation is totally the opposite. With civil wars in Syria, Yemen and Iraq, combined with the US sanctions on Iran, a new political situation has emerged. All Iranian oil and gas projects, and deals, are currently being put under a major sanctions regime, directly and indirectly blocking any transactions with Iran. Even the current waivers, as been given to China, Turkey and some others, are not going to support any future oil and gas transactions with Iran. At the same time, possible Iranian oil and gas markets, such as in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus are going to be hit, or even totally blocked.

As reported above, the US sanctions on Iran will have a negative and possible destabilising effect on the political and economic situation of the main Caucasus countries. The latter impact is not caused by a dependency of one of the countries on Iranian crude oil, but mainly due to their gas import relations and ongoing economic integration. In a surprise move, the US also has refrained from giving any waivers to any Caucasus states, even while Turkey, as one of the largest clients of Iran, has been given a temporary waiver.³ Azerbaijan, as a major exporter of both crude oil and natural gas, and a sometime importer of Iranian gas, is looking at a difficult situation. The country does not only hold long land and maritime borders with Iran, but nevertheless has several ongoing of undeveloped Caspian oil and gas fields, which are all subject to a joint development agreement signed in March 2018. The future of these new developments is looking bleak. On other oil and gas projects, US sanctions will not really have an impact, such

³ Eurasianet. "These Nations are the Hardest Hit by Iran Sanctions." (Oilprice.com), 10.11.2018. <<https://oilprice.com/Geopolitics/International/These-Nations-Are-The-Hardest-Hit-By-Iran-Sanctions.html>>; Michael Tanchum. "Amid Sanctions, Iran Looks East." *East Asia Forum*. 22.11.2018. <<http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2018/11/22/amid-sanctions-iran-looks-east/>>.

as Azerbaijan's main gas field, Shah Deniz. Even that the field is being developed by a BP-led consortium, with Iran's NIOC holding a 10 percent stake, the future is still clear. Washington, at least at present, is not yet considering any actions to be put in place against this project, as it is the only source of gas for the long-planned, EU-backed Southern Gas Corridor, aimed at lessening Europe's dependence on Russian energy. The Trump Administration has made it clear in August 2018 that it will back off from hitting the Shah Deniz and the SGC project, as the US Treasury Department granted a permanent waiver from Iran-related sanctions for the development of natural gas and the construction and operation of a pipeline to transport natural gas from Azerbaijan to Turkey and Europe.

The impact of the US Iran Sanctions on Azerbaijan still needs to be assessed over the coming months. Some analysts even are arguing that the Iran Sanctions are partly godsent as higher oil prices (at present struggling) would benefit the Azerbaijani government and economy. Short term gains, such as higher revenues; however, could be hit very soon by non-economic factors, such as Iranian actions against Western interests in the Arab world and possible other regions. Additionally, Azerbaijan's dependence on Iranian gas imports also will put a damper on too much optimism. Not only did Iran supply smaller volumes of natural gas to Nakhichevan, but Iran has been an important land-route for Turkmen gas exports to Azerbaijan. Part of the Turkmen gas volumes have also been transported further to meet Azerbaijani export commitments to Georgia, which is expected to import around 2.7 billion cubic meters of gas from Azerbaijan in 2018.⁴

For Georgia, the same situation is in place. As long as Azerbaijan's gas exports are not affected, Georgia will not feel the economic effects of the US sanctions on Iran. The only possible repercussions could be higher natural gas prices, if contracts are oil-indexed.

⁴ Ilgar Gurbanov. "The Perspectives of Trans-Caspian Gas Flow..." ; and EurAsia Daily. "Gas Gernatvales: Georgia Promotes Turkmen Gas in Europe." 31.01.2018. <<https://eadaily.com/en/news/2018/01/31/gas-genatsvales-georgia-promotes-turkmen-gas-in-europe>>.

US sanctions however are going to have hit Armenia hard, as the latter is landlocked and without a wide range of regional political options. Even that the bulk of Armenia's gas imports is being provided by Russia, via Georgia, the country still is importing heavily from Iran. In 2017 Yerevan has imported around 400 million cubic meters of Iranian gas. The latter deal is based on an agreement that Iran received power from Armenia. Since the end of 2017, Armenia is setting up a strategy to increase its Iranian gas imports by around 25 percent.⁵ Even if both countries have signed a natural gas-power agreement, a lot is still unclear. If sanctions will partly constrain the Iranian gas supplies, Armenia is heading for a stormy period, as the country's natural gas pipeline network is owned by Russian gas giant Gazprom. If Washington forces Armenia to end its Iranian connections, the country will become solely dependent on Russia's power plays.



Fig. 4: Azerbaijan; Source: <<http://www.turan.az/ext/news/2018/11/free/Wantpercent20topercen20Say/en/76665.htm>>.

Iran at present is not sitting still. Just before the implementation of the US Sanctions regime (November 5, 2018), Tehran held its first “Regional Security Dialogue” summit (September 2018), in which national security advi-

⁵ “Iran Unveils Gas Swap Details with Azerbaijan.” *AzerNews*. 15.05.2018. <https://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/131973.html>; and “Iran Voices Interest in Increasing Gas Exports to Azerbaijan.” *AzerNews*. 18.01.2018. <https://www.azernews.az/oil_and_gas/125687.html>.

sors from Russia, China, and India took part. Tehran has been trying to set up a multilateral framework for Eurasian security cooperation. Even though officially Afghanistan was the prime focus of the summit, parties have agreed to a wide-sweeping stabilisation agenda extending from Syria eastward to include all of Central Asia. The red-line in all has been Iran's role in the so-called emerging architecture of Eurasian commercial connectivity, which is based on the ongoing Belt and Road Initiative (OBOR) of China. Iran has been very active to play a pivotal role in the establishment of secure transit routes using existing infrastructure as well as creating new infrastructures.



Fig. 5: China Silk Road;

Source: <<https://www.indiatoday.in/world/story/china-silk-road-summit-asian-infrastructure-investment-bank-xi-jinping-976452-2017-05-11>>.

This is directly linked to the Caucasus region, as Iran forms a crucial link in a China-Europe rail route that does not cross Russian territory. China's currently planned route via the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway requires ferrying cargo across the Caspian Sea from Central Asia to Azerbaijan. Connecting with existing north-south Iranian rail links not only is more cost effective but also provides an essential vertical axis connecting China's main East-West Corridor to the Middle East and the Arabian Sea. India at present is discussing the same approach, via Iran's Chabahar deep-sea port and the INSTC running northward through Iran and Afghanistan will provide New Delhi vital access to Central Asian, Russian, and ultimately European markets.

The Chinese-Indian strategies however now seem to partly collide with Russian interests. Moscow has always had an interest in a north-south corridor with India, but the China-India projects could be seen as a possible threat to Moscow's influence over the South Caucasus and Caspian Sea Basin. Moscow already has been wary about the success of Turkey's energy and transportation partnership with Azerbaijan, which has brought Turkish president Erdogan's influence in the South Caucasus and extends it further into Turkmenistan and the other Central Asian republics.

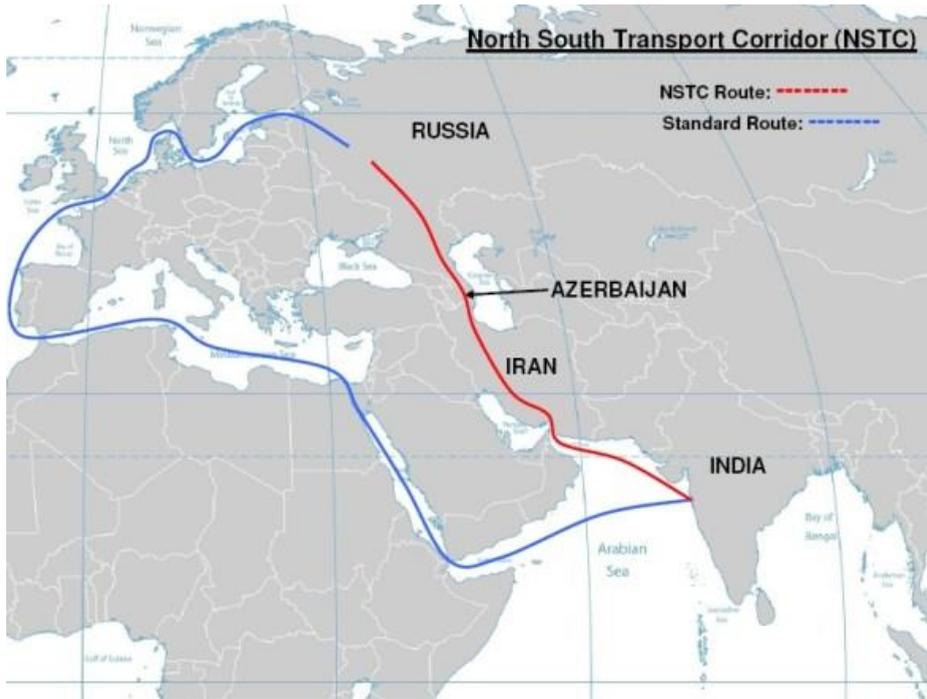


Fig. 6: North South Transport Corridor (NSTC);
Source: <https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFijnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/North-South_Transport_Corridor.html>.

The growing power projections of China, India and especially Turkey into the soft belly of the perceived Russian empire will have its negative repercussions on bi- and multilateral agreements of the respective Caucasian states. Moscow is very worried about Ankara's expansion of power and influence among the Turkic peoples of the South Caucasus and Central

Asia, as well as within the territorial borders of Russia (and China). In all, Iran is playing a pivotal role, as the country works together with all four main parties to open up and link the southern rim of the Eurasian land-mass, which includes the Middle East and the Caucasus. Hence, the soft approach by all non-US powers linked Asian parties and Russia not to get into a real confrontation with Iran.

The period 2018-2019 could become another watershed in regional politics. After years of US-Russian confrontation and power plays, new powers have emerged on the chess-board. In addition to the intra-regional conflicts, such as Azerbaijan-Armenia or break-away regions in Georgia, a power play of global order is emerging, in which a non-Caucasian state, namely Iran, is playing a central role. Growing economic and military power projections by China and India, mainly via incorporating Iran into their global plans, have brought new threats and challenges to the region. Energy interlinkage, the ongoing quest of the European countries to counter Russian natural gas and oil power by diversifying their imports, upcoming potential for Iran-Iraq and Central Asia to be part of this, is currently being combined with growing regional interconnections in the field of transport, power generation and energy. At the same time, outright realism power strategies, including regional fights against terrorism, fundamentalism or separatism, have brought in military links with the US, Turkey, Russia and even Asian parties. Proxy support is also available, as Shia and Sunni militias and extremists have entered the fray again. The coming years, the latter could become a real issue again, if the Syrian ISIS/Daesh dreams are over and hundreds of Caucasian Daesh and other extremist group fighters will return to their homelands.

Even while Caucasian stability and prosperity have been largely assessed at local or national issues, such as democratic order, NGOs and civil society, it should not be forgotten that the region is a strategically important transfer and transport route for global powers. These effects have been slightly neglected the last years, due to a positive vibe in civil society in the region. At present, outside threats and power plays could however put a full stop to this, with an outcome not yet to be overseen. Energy, global power plays and religious-ethnic conflicts could be making new headlines soon.

**PART II:
THE PERSPECTIVES FROM ABKHAZIA,
NAGORNO-KARABAKH,
AND SOUTH OSSETIA**

Abkhazia and the Key Events of the Year 2018

Daut Apsanba

Introduction

The year of 2018 marked two important events for the modern history of Abkhazia; the 25th anniversary of Abkhaz state and the tenth anniversary since the first international recognition of its statehood. This year was an important one for reflecting on the achievements of the past quarter of a century and setting up of new goals for the future. Abkhazia has gone a long way within the years of self-governance, however, the daily life of its residents and the full potential of the place has yet to be fully realized due to the lingering presence of the unresolved protracted conflict with Georgia. The Georgian-Abkhaz conflict is one of the conflicts that have roots going deep into history, its violent stage coincided with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and it remains unresolved in present day. Together with conflicts around South Ossetia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Transdniestria, the case of Abkhazia is usually referred to as a *frozen* conflict.

The *frozen* does not fully depict the situation on the ground in any of the unresolved conflicts but relates more to the lack of progress in the resolution process of each of them. The status related deadlock does not in any way mean that the situation on the ground is not evolving; as with any other society and entity, Abkhazia and its residents are changing and are in a constant move to try and find solutions to the issues facing them. The academic literature covering the conflicts of the Post-Soviet countries provides an abundance of terminology describing them, however, there is never one term that can fully depict the entire complexity and sensitivity of the situation. The sides are standing on mutually exclusive positions and have very little common ground where they can agree on anything, this overt politicization must be kept in mind by anyone working on these special cases.

This paper will provide a brief overview of the main events that shaped the political agenda in and around Abkhazia in the last year, such as Syria's recognition of the Abkhaz independence; the newly presented plan of the

Georgian government on engagement with Abkhaz residents. The final part of the paper will cover the upcoming presidential elections in Abkhazia and questions that would have to be addressed by election campaigns of the yet to-be nominated presidential candidates.

A Step Closer to the Ultimate Goal

The month of August of 2008 proved to be one of the hottest months of that year, and it was not only related to the weather conditions or the spectacular opening ceremony of the 29th Summer Olympic Games in Beijing, but also by the developments in South Caucasus. What is now referred to as the five-day war in South Ossetia sent shock waves throughout Europe and required the European Union – in the person of the French President – Nicolas Sarkozy to actively work on managing a ceasefire agreement and sign a six-point Medvedev-Sarkozy plan.¹ Less than a month later, Russia recognized both Abkhazia and South Ossetia² and established full-fledged diplomatic relations with the respective capitals. Moscow vouched to provide for security and further support of the two South Caucasian republics' aspirations for the worldwide international recognition and their ultimate introduction into the international world family.

However, unilateral separation, even as a result of a bloody war, still is seen by most of the international community as a threat to the existing world order, and therefore, the territorial integrity is a principle that is prevailing in any country's decision on how to address a self-determination case. Following Russia's recognition of the Abkhaz independence in August 2008, many in Abkhazia hoped for a similar parade of recognitions that followed Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008. The Abkhaz claim for recognition was met with a very hostile policy by Geor-

¹ President Medvedev signed a plan to resolve the Georgian-South Ossetia conflict, based on the six principles previously agreed on, <<https://web.archive.org/web/20120729135328/http://archive.kremlin.ru/eng/text/news/2008/08/205406.shtml>>. Retrieved 07/12/18.

² Statement by President of Russia Dmitry Medvedev, <https://web.archive.org/web/20080902001442/http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/speeches/2008/08/26/1543_type82912_205752.shtml>. Retrieved 07/12/18.

gia³ and its allies against *de jure* recognition of *de facto* reality. In ten years, only Russia, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, Vanuatu and Syria recognized the independence of Abkhazia, while Tuvalu had to retrieve their recognition under the pressure of Georgia.⁴

In May 2018, Syria recognized the independence of Abkhazia⁵ and established diplomatic ties the following month. A number of commentators stated that the main reason for Damascus's action was linked to Moscow. Indeed, the different reactions that followed Kosovo's and Abkhazia's declarations of independence, showed that the allies do matter and, in many ways, shape the position on both cases. Therefore, while Russia's involvement in developments in Syria played a role in Damascus' decision to recognize Abkhazia, the role of Abkhaz diplomacy should still be given the due credit. Even prior to the first international recognition, Abkhazia pursued the policy of establishing various-level ties with the outside world; after 2008, Sukhumi activated these activities and broadened the geographical scope of its diplomacy.

Since 2008 Abkhaz state ministers carried out a series of informal meetings with statesmen from Syria, including Ambassadors and Ministers.⁶ With the beginning of the Civil War in Syria, the Abkhaz leader stressed his support to the war "against international terrorism."⁷ An important factor that put the first stone into the establishment of the official diplomatic relations between the capitals of the two countries was a program of voluntary and free relocation or re-migration of Syrians of Abkhaz and Abaza background from Syria to Abkhazia. After their ancestors were sent to exile

³ "Russia recognises Georgian rebels." BBC News. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7582181.stm>>. Retrieved 07/12/18.

⁴ "Tuvalu Retracts Abkhazia, S.Ossetia Recognition." <<http://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=27093>>. Retrieved 07/12/18.

⁵ "Syria, Abkhazia, Ossetia agree to exchange recognition, set up Embassy-level diplomatic relations." <<https://sana.sy/en/?p=139109>>. Retrieved 07/12/18.

⁶ "Sukhum Believes Syria to Recognize Abkhazia Independence in Future." *Sputnik News*. 21.12.2015. <<https://sputniknews.com/politics/201512211032073497-syria-recognize-abkhazia-independence/>>. Retrieved 08/12/18.

⁷ "Abkhazia President to SANA: We support Syria in its war against terrorism." SANA. <<https://sana.sy/en/?p=94706>>. Retrieved 07/12/18.

during the early 19th century, more than 5,000 Syrians of Abkhaz origin resided in Syria up to the present day.⁸ The re-migration program required the establishment of contacts and consultations between the two parties. Within the first five years of the Syrian Civil War more than 500 Syrians⁹ of Abkhaz and Abaza background chose to return to Abkhazia, where they were provided with free housing and a program to support their further integration.

Abkhazia further continued to scale up these contacts; in 2017 Abkhazia provided humanitarian assistance to Syria.¹⁰ Later in the same year, the delegate for the foreign relations of Abkhazia Daur Kove visited Damascus and conducted meetings and consultations with the Prime Minister of Syria Imad Khamis.¹¹ The Chamber of Commerce and Trade of Abkhazia established and further developed strong ties with the Syrian counterpart. In December 2017, the Abkhaz Parliament received the first delegation from Syria and discussed potential economic and trade links between the two.¹² The official recognition of the Abkhaz independence followed shortly, in May 2018; the Georgian government condemned the move and broke off their ties with Syria.

The decision on recognizing or not of an entity or a territory is never solely based upon the country's stance on the issue, but on its relations and position on various issues, as well as on the overall political situation. With this said, there is still space for the entity to actively work on establishing informal links and ties with various countries that would lay a very important foundation for the process of eventual formalization of relations.

⁸ Interview at Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Abkhazia. January 2018.

⁹ "Abkhazia Invites Diaspora in Syria to Return." *EurasiaNet*. <<https://eurasianet.org/abkhazia-invites-diaspora-in-syria-to-return>>. Retrieved 26/12/18.

¹⁰ "Abkhazia provided humanitarian aid to Syria." <<http://mfaapsny.org/en/allnews/news/othernews/abkhaziya-okazala-gumanitarnuyu-pomoshch-sirii/>>. Retrieved 26/12/18.

¹¹ "Syria, Abkhazia discuss strengthening parliamentary relations." SANA. <<https://sana.sy/en/?p=112245>>. Retrieved 26/12/18.

¹² "Georgia Protests Syrian Visit to Abkhazia." <<https://civil.ge/eng/article.php?id=30493>>. Retrieved 26/12/18.

Syria's recognition of Abkhazia is seen by many in Abkhazia as a chance to establish economic ties and trade due to the geographic proximity and the presence of the representatives of Abkhaz diaspora in Syria. Both Syria and Abkhazia expressed their intentions on opening their Embassies in the foreseeable future. The Syrian recognition comes as a reminder and reassurance of the main objectives of the Abkhaz political aspirations – full-fledged international recognition.

An Initiative Too Late or Too Early?

The year 2018 was also a year when for the first time a post-Saakashvili's Georgian government came up with a new proposal to Abkhazia and South Ossetia – the plan is framed as a peace initiative called “A Step to a Better Future.”¹³ The plan mainly focuses on the two components: trade and education. The main difference of the plan from the previously presented ones is that it does not have a political preamble and it does show the Georgian government's commitment to peaceful means of conflict resolution. The plan outlines concrete proposals on how to open various education and trade opportunities that Abkhaz residents might benefit from. However, at the same time, the initiative lacks an understanding of the current reality and state of affairs in Abkhazia.

One of the main proposals of the economic bloc of the initiative is that Abkhaz products will have access to European markets through the EU-Georgia Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement. However, when one looks closer into the details, one understands that Abkhaz producers have no incentives of pursuing this. Abkhaz economy is very small, and it is mainly built upon two sectors: hospitality and agricultural products, which are both closely tied with the Russian market. The agricultural sector is very much limited to few producers that cannot even supply the demand of their products on the Russian market. To get a tomato, grown on a farm in Abkhazia, to a supermarket in Austria, it would need to comply with very strict requirements and standards of the European Common Agricultural Policy, which none of the producers in Abkhazia can do. Another factor limiting the interests of Abkhaz producers is the fact that the capabilities

¹³ Peace Initiative, “A Step to a Better Future”, 2018.

for mass production are very low and developing them would require major human and capital investment, as well as painful restructuring of the entire sector. These changes indeed are very much needed to revamp and strengthen the economy, however, there are very little incentives to do that, and the Initiative fails to provide any clarity on how this needed update will happen.

The education remains one of the most important spheres to strengthen in Abkhazia. However, the proposal lists several initiatives on how to provide access of Abkhaz residents to higher education, but they all are linked to doing that through Georgia, which for most Abkhaz population is a too high price to be paid.¹⁴ The initiative does not provide anything new on the freedom of movement of residents of Abkhazia, it still advocates for the so-called “neutral passports” that were initially introduced by the Saakashvili’s government. These travel documents do not have a visible affiliation with Georgia, however, the country code is still linked to the latter. Only a handful of Abkhaz residents opted for these travel documents, while for the absolute majority of Abkhaz population the ‘string-attached’ to any development plan is of a paramount importance.

Therefore, even though the overall peaceful proposal can be considered as a positive step in the Georgian Government’s approach to the conflict, the plan fails to address the needs and does not offer much for Abkhaz to consider. It should not be a surprise that it received such a negative reaction from the Government of Abkhazia; the Foreign Minister of Abkhazia simply slammed and dismissed the plan.¹⁵

A number of Abkhaz noted that the entire nature of the Initiative’s presentation and launch leads them to think that the plan was never fully ad-

¹⁴ “Georgia’s Overtures to Abkhazia and South Ossetia Are Flawed.” *Chatham House*. <<https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/georgia-s-overtures-abkhazia-and-south-ossetia-are-flawed>>. Retrieved 05/01/19.

¹⁵ The commentary of Daur Kove on the new peace initiative of the Georgian government “A Step to a Better Future.” <http://mfaapsny.org/en/allnews/news/statements_speeches/kommentariy-daura-kove-o-novoy-mirnoy-initsiative-pravitelstva-gruzii-shag-k-luchshemu-budushchemu-/?sphrase_id=3384>. Retrieved 05/01/19.

dressed to Abkhazia and was crucial for Georgia in pursuing its policies outside of the region. The ideas in the plan could have been more effective in case, they were not put in a complex package, but were implemented unilaterally.

Election Mood

For someone living in the South Caucasus and working on the conflicts related sphere, expecting elections seems to be almost the permanent state that must be kept in the back of the mind. Abkhazia is not an exception and will be having presidential elections in summer 2019. Unlike the USA, Abkhaz presidential campaigns are not launched 2 years in advance, however, they do start taking shape way in advance. Abkhazia has a good track-record of conducting presidential elections and Abkhaz political establishment has seen peaceful shifts of power between the government and the opposition.¹⁶ And the elections' culture and institution are probably among the very few well-organized and clearly articulated procedures functioning in Abkhazia.

The final composition of the list of presidential candidates is yet to be finalized and it will most likely take shape in early spring of 2019. However, it is already known that the current President Raul Khadjimba will be running for the second term; the opposition may still fail to unify and support one candidate, therefore, it is expected that more than 2 candidates might be representing the different blocks of the opposition, as well as prominent businessmen will test their political ambitions at the upcoming presidential campaign.

It is still unclear whether any of the candidates will present a concrete program and run with a team or they will rely on personal charisma and emotions of the population. What will be new for the upcoming elections is the general fatigue of the population. A significant share of the population has not yet articulated or voiced this, but there is a sense that the society wants things to be working and that people want change and reform. Abkhaz

¹⁶ O Bechain, Donnacha. (2012). "The Dynamics of Electoral politics of Abkhazia", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, pp. 165-174.

institutions have achieved significant results, keeping in mind that the setting up of those institutions coincided with war, the international blockade and the isolation that followed. Abkhazia mainly succeeded in building a functional society with institutions that served the needs of the society at most times. However, the present-day reality, the need for technological advancement and modernization as well as new challenges demand reforms and changes of those structures. The society craves that change; one of the relatively new and emerging trends in Abkhaz society is a growing awareness and concern about the environmental issues and threats. A series of campaigns were carried out by various groups in the last two years on issues related to pests and the overall environmental situation in the country. It is already clear that all candidates will have to include the environmental agenda into their portfolios. This type of relationship between the public and the running candidates will be a very new thing for the Abkhazian electoral landscape.¹⁷

The unresolved political conflict and the limited international exposure of Abkhazia significantly affect the overall dynamics of internal politics, and therefore, processes take place at a different speed and nature in comparison to other post-communist countries. And the Abkhaz society has yet to establish a culture of holding politicians accountable for their promises demanding the delivery of government programmes from them. Slow progress is taking shape now, but if it continues in the same direction remains an open question.

Conclusion

Abkhazia is in many ways a unique case, and that uniqueness shapes the entire situation in and around it. The *frozen* nature of the protracted conflict with Georgia has severe implications for the internal developments inside Abkhazia that are in many ways everything but frozen. The events addressed and described in this paper show the aspirations of the Abkhaz population to develop and be a part of the world. Even though it has been constantly denied and rejected by the international community, it has tried, to the best of its abilities, to comply with international standards in con-

¹⁷ Discussion and monitoring of social media.

ducting and shaping internal developments. At the same time, isolation may lead to ineffective measures and policies being introduced, and then justified by external limitations.

Abkhazia has managed to survive for a quarter of a century, and it is clear now that it will not cease to exist in the long run. Looking back at the last twenty five years, one can easily notice a lot of lost opportunities and in order not to find ourselves in a similar situation, in another quarter of a century from now, the international community should establish a meaningful engagement with the population of Abkhazia, who in the future will address the conflict related issues.

Perspectives from South Ossetia

Zarina Sanakoeva

The year 2018 appears an uneasy one for Georgian-South Ossetian relations, even though these relations have been far from normal. This is primarily due to worsened relations between Russia and the United States.

No matter what is said about the relations between South Ossetia and Georgia, these two states are on opposite poles of the world politics. Therefore, it is deemed pragmatic to consider the statement made both by South Ossetian and Georgian politicians with this particular factor taken into account. Georgia's NATO and EU aspirations and South Ossetia's pro-Russia orientation with any form of co-existence with Georgia rejected (except for a co-existence with a "neighbouring country") are our today's "political constants".

During the last few years, international organizations and the West have been focused on the conflicts in Ukraine and in Syria. Georgia has been losing much of the attention and financial aid as a country in the "active" state of settling its conflicts.

In March 2018, the Georgian Prime Minister Georgiy Kvirikashvili made a statement addressed to Russia, which is sort of an appeal calling for peace. It speaks about intended direct dialogue with "Abkhazians and Ossetians", while South Ossetia is still referred to as "Tskhinvali Region".

In South Ossetia, Kvirikashvili's statement towards Russia found a well-expected and predictable scepticism. The same is relevant when it comes to the "Step to a Better Future" initiative. Some people in South Ossetia still bothered taking a close look at the "Step to a Better Future" program, which consists of three main pillars. First, it foresees broadening of trade along the conflict divides through building new capacities. Second, new opportunities are created for South Ossetian and Abkhaz youth for quality education. And third, residents of South Ossetia and Abkhazia receive access to such "benefits" as visa free movement to EU countries.

To continue with, the “favorable conditions for trade along the conflict-divides” imply identification of Abkhazia and South Ossetia residents under some personal ID number without any reference to their citizenship. This allows registration of a legal person, receive grants, have access to bank services and education in Georgia. It provides for export of goods to Europe, and, apparently, labelled “Made in Georgia”. The idea of trade along the borders seems to be very popular among those seeking reconciliation between Georgia and South Ossetia. The main reason is in the pre-war experience with the Ergneti market, which had been functioning until 2004 at the border between South Ossetia and Georgia, and was, in fact, a place where people not only from South Ossetia and Georgia, but also from all over South and North Caucasus had been interacting and were involved in trade relations. This experience was very promising indeed, but one should not forget that it nonetheless did not help prevent the war.

The second pillar around “Developing education opportunities for residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia” proclaims protection and development of Abkhaz and Ossetian languages. For this purpose, a special state program has already been created in Georgia. Students from South Ossetia and Abkhazia may take educational opportunities through scholarships available for them. This means they may pass their exams in Russian, as for their mother tongue – Abkhaz and Ossetian respectively. The third pillar provides for visa-free visits to EU countries.

You can hardly imagine this put in practice. I believe, Georgia’s new initiative is either designed by people having no understanding of the real situation in South Ossetia and the existing attitudes in the society there, or it was written for eyes and ears of the international community only. Reasons for this might vary from strife for political dividends to financial benefits.

This is equally relevant for the statements made by Kvirikashvili about the readiness for direct talks with Russia, South Ossetia and Abkhazia. These statements are primarily meant for Western countries and the international community in general. Georgia is taking further steps towards its accession to NATO. The statements should be added to the “political portfolio” of the country and its political authorities.

We have been observing existing informational vacuum in issues related to Georgian-South Ossetian relations. Georgian officials continue to be completely detached from the reality or they tend to neglect it, when it comes to South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia's peace initiatives are said to have been working throughout the decade after 2008, and I think that the results could be better weighed and evaluated in Georgia, at least in terms of assessment of achievements against initial expectations.

The Geneva process is perceived in South Ossetia as useless. The reason for this, in my opinion, is in the absence of a direct dialogue between Georgian and South Ossetian representatives in the talks. The Incident Prevention and Response Mechanism (IPRM) in this sense may serve as a positive example, as it helps solving concrete problems to a greater extent that the Geneva International Discussions do.

As to the non-use-of-force agreement perceived by the South Ossetian side as the ultimate goal of the Geneva Discussions, there is nothing to comment on. Yet, Kvirikashvili gave no hint on the possible format for such agreement, as so far, Georgia had categorically denied any possibility of signing any paper of the kind with South Ossetia.

During the presidential campaign in Georgia, we have the opportunity to hear the candidates' vision on the majority of issues of high importance for the country's population. South Ossetia and Abkhazia are not among those. Neither of the candidates has mentioned these entities. This fact might have many explanations. It might happen that the population is simply not interested in the topic. Politicians themselves might be satisfied with the existing situation. Or, the country's political elite contributes and supports the informational vacuum I have already mentioned to deny the conflicts with Abkhazia and South Ossetia and present Russia as a part to the conflict instead.

Today, there are no new developments in South Ossetia's attitudes towards Georgia. It seems that unlike Georgia, South Ossetia finds it easier to run its foreign policy with independent development path chosen by the people. A year-long presidency of Anatoly Bibilov who came to power with aspirations towards South Ossetia's accession to the Russian Federation is worth mentioning. Nonetheless, Russia's position here remains unchanged;

the Russian authorities continue to emphasize their support for the independence of South Ossetia.

South Ossetia's recognition by Syria has been perceived the way the recognition by such countries as Venezuela and Nicaragua back in 2008, but this time, the interstate relations with Syria are more actively developing. The contacts are both political and economic. The South Ossetian Parliament recently ratified the South Ossetian-Syrian Cooperation Agreement; representatives of the South Ossetian Chamber of Commerce paid several visits to Syria. It is too early to speak about the results of these visits, but the fact is, South Ossetia had not had an exchange of the kind with any of the states which had previously recognized it.

Despite all the above-mentioned developments, the 2008 crisis stands as the key division point and nothing has considerably changed in the situation.

Another fact, which might become symbolic, is the change in the economic policy with the opening of movement through the TRANSKAM road to connect Russia with the South Caucasus states. One might contemplate on the possible opportunities this route may bring about, but this analysis can hardly be of any value now, as it very much resembles an equation with too many unknown elements. This topic has been discussed a lot within expert communities and among authorities both in South Ossetia and in Georgia. Despite this, there are no details put in concrete terms how this transit might be implemented. The "Step to a Better Future" does not have any details on this routing of goods either.

Among all Georgian programs meant for South Ossetia, the one in healthcare sector is worth considering. I may assume that this program may boast of high records and high rate of implementation, including the amounts of funds spent for the program. South Ossetian residents are often transferred to Georgia for urgent treatment or surgery. There were a number of negative media reports against these transfers, and the ICRC in Tskhinval was criticized for implementing this activity, whereas the ICRC's function was only in facilitating the transportation of patients. Now that the South Ossetian authorities are building local healthcare capacities, these allegations are irrelevant. Thus, the healthcare program did not yield the

expected results. I am not certain about the initial goal of this program, but none of those who were treated in Georgia had ever expressed their willingness to stay and live in Georgia.

To continue with the criticism against the “Step to a Better Future” program, I would say that the primary objective in any conflict settlement is to achieve security and stability. It must be admitted that there is no security between South Ossetia and Georgia. The fact that there is no exchange of fire is owed to the presence of the Russian military contingent in South Caucasus. If it were not for this military presence, South Ossetia would hardly exist today. I would go even further and imagine that the Russian troops have already withdrawn from South Ossetia. The result is the same – South Ossetia would cease to exist. There are no reasons or substantial grounds to think differently. Before South Ossetia and Georgia undertake their responsibility for their relations, before the non-use-of-force agreement is signed, before there is a thorough assessment of the events of the last three decades, accepted by all sides, all the initiatives, past or future will remain stillborn.

Velvet Revolution in Armenia: Challenges and Opportunities

Hrachya Arzumanyan

Introduction: Context of the Velvet Revolution

In the understanding of the Velvet Revolution in Armenia,¹ an important role belongs to the context and logic of the post-Soviet space. After the collapse of the USSR the political and socio-economic structure of Armenian statehood remained Soviet and the ruling elite gravitated towards authoritarian government models and aimed to capture the inherited economic potential of the Soviet Union. Like all other post-Soviet states, with the exception of the Baltic countries, Armenia was doomed to become a country with an oligarchic authoritarian political order. The declared intentions of the new states to build a modern state and a civil democratic society immediately after the collapse of the USSR did not have a basis and ultimately boiled down to an imitation of some of the democratic procedures and institutions, the real content of which had nothing to do with civil democratic society. This development of the post-Soviet states is objective, since time and change of at least one generation is needed before it is possible to talk about an actual transit from an authoritarian political order to a democratic one.

What is happening in the post-Soviet space is not unique and a similar pattern could be observed, for example, during the collapse of the colonial system after World War II. Many former colonies ultimately became authoritarian, after gaining independence and declaring their intention to follow the democratic path.

Nevertheless, despite the common pattern, the Armenian case turned out to be distinctive and divergent from the logic of the post-Soviet space. First of all, this is due to the specifics of the Armenian SSR, which by the time

¹ In the following text, the term “Armenia” will be understood as inclusive of people living both in Armenia proper and Artsakh, otherwise called Nagorno-Karabakh.

of the collapse of the Soviet Union could have been attributed to the developed countries. Soviet Armenia had a developed and diverse industry. In the economy of Armenia, a large part belonged to the IT sphere – from the production of microelectronics and computers to operating systems and software for the large military systems of the USSR. Up to 30 percent of the adult population of Armenia had higher education, and the presence of the Armenian diaspora and contacts with the outside world made the society more open.

Artsakh Problem

The other important element of the post-Soviet transition of Armenia was the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) problem, which almost immediately became pan-Armenian. The history of the problem can be traced back to at least the 19th century and the entry of the Russian Empire into South Caucasus.

In the form, in which it is known after the collapse of the USSR, the problem was formed in the 1920s, together with the formation of the USSR. Overcoming international isolation, the leadership of the USSR in the framework of establishing bilateral relations with Kemalist Turkey passed Artsakh and Nakhichevan to the Azerbaijani SSR. Attempts of the Artsakh Armenians in 1988-1990 to solve the problem by peaceful means within the framework of the USSR legal norms provoked a harsh reaction from the central Soviet leadership and authorities of the Azerbaijan SSR. In Azerbaijan, including the state capital Baku, the Armenian population was violently repressed. Ultimately, by 1991, many Armenians of Azerbaijan were forced out of the country as well as Nagorno-Karabakh.

The proclamation of the Republic of Artsakh, which was forced to organize its self-defence from the first days of its creation, was a response to the policies of Kremlin and Azerbaijan. By 1992, the military actions of Azerbaijan against Artsakh acquired the characteristics of an existential war. The solution of this task required the rapid creation of an armed force capable of conducting not only irregular, but also large-scale conventional operations, which were characteristic for 1988-1991. The task was successfully accomplished, and Artsakh was able to win military campaigns in 1992-1994.

The current border with Azerbaijan is the result of warfare and is fixed in the armistice agreement concluded with the mediation of Russia in Bishkek in 1994. Small changes in the border crossing occurred in April 2016, during the “Four-Day War”. Thus, on the territory of the former Azerbaijani SSR, two states were created; the Azerbaijan Republic recognized by the international community and the unrecognized Republic of Artsakh. The Republic of Armenia and Armenian people in general, including the Armenian diaspora, act as security guarantors.

The existential nature of the confrontation with Azerbaijan excluded the possibility of following the logic of the post-Soviet space for the Armenian statehood. The Armenian people were forced to build a modern state capable of waging war against an adversary with greater economic potential and capabilities. Only a civil democratic society is able to ensure a long-term mobilization of the people. This imperative did not allow the Armenian statehood to follow through the creation of an oligarchic authoritarian political order. The signing of the 1994 truce led to the departure from this imperative and the oligarchic authoritarian order began to form up in Armenia, although the society repeatedly tried to return to the path of building a modern democratic Armenia. One can mention the presidential elections in the Republic of Armenia 1996, 2003, 2008, 2013, the shooting of the parliament on October 27, 1999. Nevertheless, the fact of being in the post-Soviet space, the influence of Russia, as well as the need to maintain the military balance in the context of the regional security system of the South Caucasus allowed Armenian authorities to suppress protests.

The emerging oligarchic authoritarian order was in deep contradiction with the commitment of Armenian people to democratic values and the need to ensure the national security of Armenia in the long term. As a result, a significant part of Armenian population left the country, realizing the fundamental injustice of the emerging political order and its inability to solve the tasks of providing national security. These trends reached their peak by April 2016, when, due to the supply of offensive weapons and military equipment by Russia and Israel, the military balance was disturbed.

The April 2016 war made it obvious for Armenian people that under the conditions of an oligarchic authoritarian political order, Armenia is doomed to degradation of statehood and military defeat. The return of the con-

scripts, who took part in warfare, who survived the catastrophe and returned to society until now, made the national revolt and Velvet Revolution inevitable.

The Dynamics of the Velvet Revolution

The trigger for the beginning of the national revolt and the Velvet Revolution was the violation of the social contract concluded by Serzh Sargsyan with the Armenian society in 2015 during the adoption of the new constitution and the transition to parliamentary government. Understanding all the threats of such a transition in the conditions of war and the immaturity of political parties, the society agreed to adopt a new constitution, upon the condition that Serzh Sargsyan would not try to claim the position of first person for the third time. Going for a third term, Serzh Sargsyan sharply inflated the situation in Armenia. Moreover, the isolation from society led to the fact that already during the process of appointment to the post of Prime Minister, Serzh Sargsyan allowed himself a number of statements that crossed the red line. The society saw the threat of repetition of the scenario on March 1, 2008, when blood was shed on the streets of Yerevan, in the words of Serzh Sargsyan.

The action of the political opposition “My Step” led by Nikol Pashinyan, unfolding by this time, began to change its status, largely regardless of its leader, but rather due to the radicalization of society. Having launched a rally in one of the Armenian cities as an opposition leader, Nikol Pashinyan entered Yerevan, that was ready to rebel, but now in a different capacity, and to his honor was ready to accept a new role and lead the revolt, aimed at overthrowing Serzh Sargsyan and the ruling Republican Party of Armenia.

By mid-April, protests acquired a pan-Armenian scope, and Nikol Pashinyan received the mandate of a national leader, called upon to carry out political transit and dismantling of the oligarchic authoritarian political order in Armenia. The taboo on spilling blood left an imprint on the revolt, which acquired a non-violent character and respecting the principle of the rule of law. The original style of the Armenian Velvet Revolution was formed, the first stage of which ended with the resignation of Serzh Sargsyan and the appointment of Nikolay Pashinyan as Prime Minister.

The next stage of political transition should be the holding of early parliamentary elections. Internal threats to the chosen course today can be considered minimal. The undertaken attempts of revenge by the political forces of the old regime led to a sharp and unequivocal rebuff from society and the understanding of the necessity of holding early parliamentary elections as soon as possible, in December 2018. And, if in the early stages of the Velvet Revolution, Nikol Pashinyan's appeal to the rule of law and non-violent methods of struggle was perceived as an approach slowing down the revolutionary process, the events of the fall of 2018 show that this was a justified attitude. The chosen strategy makes it extremely difficult for the losing oligarchic system to counteract, as it is not accustomed to operating with non-violent methods and within the framework of public forms of political struggle.

Moreover, the attempt of a counter-revolutionary revenge in early October showed that appealing to the rule of law accustoms the society to non-violent methods of struggle, strengthens the corresponding political culture, which in itself is an important achievement of the Velvet Revolution. The support of the Armenian people is the main and, as of today, practically the only factor allowing Nikol Pashinyan to preserve the power. The direct mandate of the people, as an awakened sovereign, makes it extremely difficult for the former regime to neutralize Nikol Pashinyan. The intention of the leader to give the society the control over the political transition based on the principle of the rule of law and non-violent methods, raises the level of political consciousness within the society, thus creating prerequisites for holding early elections and moving to the next stage of the Velvet Revolution.

Possible Ways of Unfolding the Next Stage of the Velvet Revolution

The comprehension of the possible ways of unfolding the Velvet Revolution requires the development of a framework, within which the analysis will be carried out. It is important to understand that the decisive elements of the changes in the society are the institutions, without considering the ways of evolution or transformation of which, it is impossible to formulate the principles of the reforms.

The Institutions of the State and Political System of Society

Samuel Huntington's definition of institutions as "stable, valued, recurring patterns of behaviour"² will be used in this work. Samuel Huntington lists four pairs of criteria for assessing the degree of development of the institutions that form the state: adaptability-rigidity, complexity-simplicity, autonomy-subordination, and coherence-disunity.³

The more adaptable, complex, autonomous and coherent is a state institution, the more effective it should be. An adaptive institution is able to assess changes in the internal and external environment, and change its own structures, functions, and procedures for surviving and forming responses to challenges and threats.⁴

The criteria "autonomy" and "coherence" of institutions are closely related. Autonomy characterizes the degree of development of the corporate identity, which allows it to draw a line and distinguish an institution from other institutions and social structures. Coherence is a systemic measure of the degree of consistency of the functions of the elements and organizations of an institution or the political system as a whole. In a political system with low coherence, there is an overlap in the functions of various institutions, which makes it difficult or even impossible to identify the dominant institution responsible for ensuring this function.

In patrimonial or decaying societies, family members of the leader or his clan receive overlapping powers in the system of government and power. Moreover, special positions in power can be created for certain individuals. Loyalty in such societies turns out to be a more important criterion than the professionalism or talent of a state or political figure. In this case, the formal structure of the state apparatus ceases to correspond to the real

² Huntington, Samuel P. (2006). *Political Order in Changing Societies*. With a new Foreword by Francis Fukuyama. New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 12.

³ Ibid., pp. 12-24.

⁴ For the problems of adaptability of military institution consider see: Арзуманян, Рачья В. (2012). *Кромка хаоса. Парадигма нелинейности и среда безопасности 21 века*. Издательский дом «Регнум», Серия Selecta XIX, Москва.

distribution of power, leading to a loss of institutional coherence or, even, breaks in the system of power and government.⁵

Political transition and the development of the society are historically determined processes – each country follows its own path, which is shaped, inter alia, by the historical context. Following this logic, it is possible to come to the controversial conclusion, that the unfolding of political institutions in another society requires the creation of a historical context similar to the one in which they originated. However, this view is not entirely correct, and political history shows that institutions that provide benefits to their societies are copied and improved by others through learning, mimicry and adaptation to their own institutions. The latter is inevitable, since the institutions are conservative and have great inertia. Societies rarely follow the path of complete destruction of existing institutions, and new institutions are layered upon existing ones, allowing the old ones to exist for long periods of time.⁶

Understanding the importance of the historical context of the emergence of institutions helps to realize the complexity of their implementation in other societies. Often, political institutions are born as a result not of political, but other challenges and threats. For example, the rule of law has historically been of religious origin, and the attempts to root it basing solely on political factors are extremely difficult.⁷ Institutions are the product of a long chain of events, but the historical context is less important than the functionality of the institute, which allows other societies to deploy it, and sometimes in completely unexpected ways. For example, it would be extremely difficult and simply impossible to imagine the situation that developed in the Republic of Armenia in early October, when the national leader urged his supporters on the streets of Yerevan to follow the rule of law and non-violent forms of struggle against the members of parliament who tried to carry out a counter-revolutionary coup.

⁵ Fukuyama, Francis. (2011). *The Origins of Political Order: From Prehuman Times to the French Revolution*. First edition, New York, NY: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p. 474-75.

⁶ Ibid., p. 437-38.

⁷ Ibid., p. 439.

Violence and Dysfunctional Balance

Possessing natural conservatism, institutions often delay in adapting to the changes in the internal and external environment. In addition, any institution or system of institutions provides preferences and benefits to certain groups in society. Yes, an established political system of the society can provide public goods for all of its members, but this does not suggest the absence of elite groups with privileged access to national wealth, opportunities and benefits. Using privileged access, such groups seek to extract rents from their positions, ensure greater speed of capital increase, preserve social position, etc. Moreover, elite groups, having their share in the control of institutional mechanisms, seek to protect the status quo. Although society as a whole would benefit from institutional changes and reforms, elite groups can resist, if changes bring a decrease in profits and benefits with them, seeking to preserve a stagnant and dysfunctional balance.⁸

The ability of the society to initiate institutional changes depends on the ability to neutralize elite circles interested in the current status quo and able to veto reforms. This is the essence of politics and the art of a political leader to initiate reforms using the combination of power, legality, intimidation, negotiation, charisma, ideas and organization. Historical experience shows that social mobilization turns out to be an important source and tool for the destruction of the dysfunctional balance of traditional elites, immured within coalitions that receive rent from state and public institutions. What is happening in Armenia can be considered a classic example of the ability of the society to take such actions.

The stability of stagnant balance explains one of the reasons why violence plays such an important role in institutional reforms. Sometimes violence turns out to be the only way to convince the elite groups blocking institutional changes and reforms⁹, and the question is what form it takes. In this

⁸ Fukuyama, Francis. *The Origins of Political Order...*, p. 483-84.

⁹ Bates, Robert H. (2009). *Prosperity and Violence: The Political Economy of Development*. Norton Series in World Politics, Second edition, New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company; North, Douglass C. / Weingast, Barry R. / Wallis, John. (2009). *Violence and Social Orders: A Conceptual Framework for Interpreting Recorded Human History*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

sense, we can talk about legal, political, economic, military and other types of violence. Separately, it is worth noting the fear of violent death, which is stronger than the desire for material gain and is able to provide the necessary motivation for reform¹⁰. Nevertheless, violent methods of reforming institutions are becoming a less acceptable form of overcoming political deadlocks. The way of creating a modern and efficient state in the 21st century may be less violent, when the main burden of implementing institutional innovations and reforms lies on non-violent mechanisms. A vivid example of such an approach to reforms is the Velvet Revolution in Armenia, which can be considered a model of this approach to reforms in the post-Soviet space.

The Logic of the Transition of Society

The central postulate of Samuel Huntington's book "Political Order in Changing Societies" is the statement that political development has its own logic, which is connected, but different from the logic of economic and social development. A society may not cope with political transit and endure a decline and even a catastrophe when economic and social modernisation is not coordinated with political development. It is necessary to distinguish between political, economic and social dimensions of reforms and to understand how they correlate and interact with each other in a particular society.

Such a view on political development, as a process with its own logic, conflicts with the classical theory of modernization developed by 19th century thinkers such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Max Weber, and others, who sought to comprehend changes in European society brought by the industrialization and the development of industrial and financial capitalism. The classical theory of modernization seeks to explain its logic, based on the historical period since the Protestant Reformation. Huntington, engaging in a controversy with them, argues that the basic institutions and procedures of modernity do not necessarily reinforce each other. Democracy, for example, did not always contribute to political stability. The political order, which is actually identified by Huntington with the category of the state,

¹⁰ Fukuyama, Francis. *The Origins of Political Order*, p. 489.

should take priority over democratization, and the development strategy, which became known as the “authoritarian transition,” confirms this conclusion¹¹. One can give an example of South Korea or Taiwan, who modernized the economy under authoritarian rulers and only later opened their political systems for democratic transition.

The European way of modernization is not a simultaneous movement in all dimensions of transition and development after the Reformation, but rather a series of shifts on a much larger time scale spanning at least fifteen centuries. This way, individualism at the social level of development could precede capitalism, the implementation of the principle of the rule of law - the formation of the modern state, and feudalism and resistance of the central government become the basis of modern democracy.¹²

In the 21st century, the perspectives for political development are more diverse due to the possibilities of intensive economic growth, which provides more resources for the states to reform through the mobilization of new social forces, which over time tend to become political actors. For example, in the unfolding Velvet Revolution in Armenia, a large role is played by young people working in the sphere of high technologies, who are at the stage of self-organization and awareness as a new social group.

At present, countries have the opportunity to choose from the many models of transition and development around the world.¹³ The other side of the coin shows the negative phenomena and processes that in the era of globalization easily cross the borders of states. In the 21st century, it has become much more difficult to provide functions related to the traditional notion of political order and state. In other words, at present, there is no possibility to talk only about “national transition and development”, but it is necessary to take into account actors and forces that are outside of the state, when giving a holistic assessment of both society and its international con-

¹¹ Zakaria, Fareed. (2003). *The Future of Freedom: Illiberal Democracy at Home and Abroad*. New York, NY: Norton.

¹² Fukuyama, Francis. *The Origins of Political Order*, p. 463.

¹³ Gerschenkron, Alexander. (1962). *Economic Backwardness in Historical Perspective*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

text.¹⁴ This conclusion is more than relevant for Armenia and the South Caucasus.

Thus, it is necessary to pragmatically consider and take into account the historical aspects of the origin of political and state institutions. On the other hand, institutions cannot simply be transferred to other societies, regardless of the norms and rules established in it, or the political forces that support their unfolding. The implementation and deployment of an institution is not an engineering task and requires hard work in convincing people of the need for institutional changes. It requires the creation of a coalition supporting changes that can overcome the resistance of old elites interested in preserving the old system.

It is also necessary to convince people to accept new behavioural patterns as an established order. Often, new institutions must be complemented by cultural shifts. For example, electoral democracy will not function effectively in the absence of an independent press and a self-organizing civil society, which allows it to provide control over the government. The survival and development of institutions is associated with the ability to meet the needs of society, and in this sense, they are universal. This fact makes it possible to draw general conclusions regarding political transit and the development of political and state institutions, bearing in mind the need for their compliance with the requirements of the internal and external environment.

Possible Future of the Velvet Revolution

At present, it is very likely that the second stage of the Velvet Revolution in Armenia will be completed when Nikol Pashinyan and the coalition of parties supporting him win a double-digit victory in the parliamentary elections and the Republic of Armenia enters 2019 after completing the transition of executive and representative branches of power. The following logic and stages of the follow-up Armenian reforms are plausible. In 2019, the Republic of Armenia will have the opportunity to make changes in the judicial branch, which will make it possible to talk about the end of transit and the possibility of transition to systemic reforms. Changes in the judiciary are

¹⁴ Fukuyama, Francis. *The Origins of Political Order*, p. 507.

crucial. In the 21st century, methods of selectively using anti-corruption investigations to raise government revenue and intimidate political opponents can also be observed in some states.

The Transition of Power at Other Government Levels

The completion of the transition of power in the Republic of Armenia will allow initiating a similar process elsewhere in the Armenian state structure. The Velvet Revolution in Yerevan initiated similar processes in Artsakh concurrently. However, the Armenian people quickly came to the understanding that simultaneous revolutionary changes are extremely risky, given the state of war with Azerbaijan. There could be a situation, where the rising tension could lead to loss of control, chaos and, ultimately, defeat. After the end of the transition of power in the Republic of Armenia, it may be possible to carry out a similar process elsewhere not by revolutionary methods, but in a softer form of transformation, when the change of power takes place without the need of the street.

The transformation of power should not take place based on an agreement within the ruling elite, but through a public political process, as was the case in the Republic of Armenia. In addition, corrupt individuals cannot claim the key positions of the President and Speaker of the Parliament of Artsakh. These should be persons, who have not stained themselves in corruption and other criminal schemes and are accepted by large sections of the Artsakh society. In the time remaining before the next presidential and parliamentary elections there, this problem should be solved and politicians and public figures who are capable of carrying out systemic reforms should be put forward by and from the society.

Initiation of Systemic Reform

Together with the initiation of judicial reform and the transition of power in Artsakh, the new government should begin to develop and implement systemic reforms. The task is complicated by the fact that the Velvet Revolution in many ways was unexpected for its organizers, forcing them to act in a parallel way, when the reform will be carried out simultaneously with the development of the reform project. Taking into account the originality of the Velvet Revolution it will be extremely difficult to find counterparts

in world political history to rely on. It will also be difficult to find precedents of systemic reforms in the context of an active military threat in a dynamic security environment.

One of the few guidelines for such reforms can be the Huntington approach, when it is necessary to distinguish political, economic and social dimensions and talk about interrelated reforms with the selection of those that will be the engine of qualitative changes in society. Political changes were the first to be initiated in Armenia, but it is not guaranteed that after the end of the transition, the political reforms will endure. In addition, it is important to understand that in this case it is not only and not so much about theory, but practice, which will be determined by the evolving intra-Armenian and regional contexts.

The success of systemic reforms in Armenia will largely depend on the ability of the new government to maintain a holistic vision of the changes taking place, forcing ad hoc changes not only in tactics, but also in the strategy of reforms. This requires the new government to choose an institution that will provide holistic view of the Armenian society and statehood during reforms. The most logical decision would be to delegate these functions to the respective Security Councils, solving the task of synchronizing the activities of these structures throughout the Republic of Armenia. The staff of the Security Council of Armenia could become a center for the development and maintenance of Armenian reforms, allowing them to be separated from everyday state and political activities and focusing on the national security of Armenian people.

Nevertheless, at present, we can speak confidently only about the completion the stage of transition of power and the necessity to prepare for the complex phase of judicial and systemic reforms in the conditions of dynamically changing contexts, both within Armenia and in the region – an activity that must be attributed not only and not so much to science, but also to the art of politics, national security and strategy.

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No Solution Without Global Players' Sincerity

Razi Nurullayev

I have built my paper around clear theses and recommendations.

First thesis: Georgia's breakaway republics' recognition by independent states has fully aggravated the situation in the region and gave hope to other unrecognized entities

First of all, it must be stressed that Russia's recognition of South Ossetia and Abkhazia on August 26, 2008 following Russia-Georgia war aggravated the situation for the peaceful resolution of the conflicts not only in our region, but also far beyond its borders across the globe.

The relevant decrees were signed by then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev. In his statement, the head of the Russian state stressed that he had made this decision, "taking into account the free expression of the will of the Ossetian and Abkhazian peoples and following the provisions of the UN Charter, the 1970 Declaration on Principles of International Law concerning Friendly Relations among States, the CSCE's 1975 Helsinki Final Act and other fundamental international documents."¹

By then-Russian President Dmitry Medvedev's statement totally changed the situation in the region and deepened the gap between the states and breakaway regions. Russia justified its move with Kosovo's declaration of independence on 17 February, 2008 and its divided international acceptance, which prompted speculation that caused implications for the frozen South Caucasus situation. Then-President Medvedev in his article in the *Financial Times* of 26 August, 2008 stated that

"Western countries rushed to recognize Kosovo's illegal declaration of independence from Serbia. We argued consistently that it would be impossible, after that, to tell the Abkhazians and Ossetians (and dozens of other groups around the world)

¹ Artur Lebedev. "Countries that recognized South Ossetia's and Abkhazia's Independence." TASS. 29.05.2018. <<http://tass.com/world/1007058>>.

that what was good for the Kosovo Albanians was not good for them. In international relations, you cannot have one rule for some and another rule for others.”²

The fact that the European Union, NATO, the OSCE, and the United States immediately voiced displeasure with Russia’s decision, did not make any effect and the breakaway regions were happy with what happened and strengthened their stance on separatism. Below are some facts how it developed and started.

In an emergency session of the UN Security Council Serbian President Boris Tadić asked the Council, “are we all aware of the precedent that is being set and are we aware of the catastrophic consequences that it may lead to?” Of course, many countries including United States, United Kingdom and France called the Kosovo case *sui generis* in nature and expressed their views that it could not be perceived as a precedent.³

However then-Russian President Vladimir Putin described the recognition by Western powers of Kosovo independence as

“a terrible precedent, which will de facto blow apart the whole system of international relations, developed not over decades, but over centuries. They have not thought through the results of what they are doing. At the end of the day it is a two-ended stick and the second end will come back and hit them in the face.”⁴

Today that a two-ended stick hits Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine with its second end. In the example of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, I must say that Azerbaijan and Armenia were then close to a resolution of their dispute. At the same time Russia was more inclined not to put obstacles in their way. Now past is past and future is ahead. There should be new steps and initiatives without gross mistakes. Besides, the past mistakes’ impact on the resolution of the regional conflicts must be reduced by new actions.

² Vladimir V. Putin. “Why I had to recognize Georgia’s Breakaway Regions.” *Financial Times*. <<http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/9c7ad792-7395-11dd-8a66-0000779fd18c.html>>.

³ Timothy Garton Ash. “The Kosovo Precedent.” *Los Angeles Times*. 22.02.2008.

⁴ AFP. “Putin calls Kosovo Independence “Terrible Precedent.” *Sydney Morning Herald*. 23.02.2008. <<https://www.smh.com.au/world/putin-calls-kosovo-independence-terrible-precedent-20080223-gds2d5.html>>.

NATO members do not recognize the so-called treaty on alliance and integration signed between the South Ossetia and Abkhazia region of Georgia and Russia on 18 March, it has not gone beyond that statement. NATO says it will not get involved in the regional conflicts, but it did so in Serbia. NATO says it should play a role in the conflicts and be part of the negotiations. Yet, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) is somehow being set aside with its leadership several times voicing that in case of an Armenia-Azerbaijan war over Nagorno-Karabakh, the organization would defend Armenia.

These recognitions hamper ongoing efforts by the international community to strengthen security and stability in the region. They violate Georgia's, Azerbaijan's, Moldova's and Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity and blatantly contradict the principles of international law, OSCE principles and international commitments of those countries that recognized the breakaway regimes. Unless recognition is not reversed, a peaceful and lasting settlement of the situation in the region cannot be achieved. Almost all the states and international organizations fully support Georgia's, Azerbaijan's, Moldova's and Ukraine's sovereignty, and territorial integrity within its internationally recognized borders.

To my mind, Russia should be a negotiator and the Western countries must find ways to persuade Russia to withdraw its decision of recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. The Russian withdrawal may subsequently influence the others to act in the same way. In 2011, the Georgia's breakaway republics' independence was also recognized by Tuvalu and Vanuatu. However, they subsequently withdrew their decision as they signed documents on establishing diplomatic and consular relations with Georgia.⁵

Following Russia's recognition, the self-proclaimed Republic of Abkhazia was recognized only by Russia, Syria, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, and three separate Republics themselves lacking international recognition. They are Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Transnistria. South Ossetia is also recognized by all above-mentioned states and separate regimes apart of

⁵ Artur Lebedev. "Countries that recognized..."

Syria. As regard to Nagorno-Karabakh, it is not recognized by any United Nations member state, including the Republic of Armenia itself.

I think, Armenia does not officially recognize the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic to be flexible in diplomatic talks. Of course, if they recognize it officially, they could not participate in peace talks because their position would be definite. But informally Armenia supports the regime by all means. Apart from this, Russia is against an official recognition. Nevertheless, Russia keeps a balanced policy on the conflict trying not to hurt either side, at the same time not letting it be resolved outside its interests. For Russia, the tenuous political situation in the South Caucasus has been pushed out of the foreign policy agenda by the crises in Syria and eastern Ukraine. However, this region in general and the Nagorno-Karabakh issue in particular maintain strategic importance for Moscow.⁶

Today, Azerbaijan also pays utmost importance to its relations with Russia and does recognize that if it hurts Russia, it could easily recognize Nagorno-Karabakh and its satellite friends would follow its steps. The recognition of separate regimes by UN member states crucially hinders resolution. Azerbaijan realizes that Nagorno-Karabakh is stimulated by the others' recognition and they have become self-confident thanks to the Russian Federation.

As long as Russia has its hand and interests in, no solution can be found without its involvement with its geopolitical interests fully met. Azerbaijan chose the European way of development in the late 80s to early 90s and received a separate regime in the face of Nagorno-Karabakh, the same fate occurred in Moldova with Transnistria. Georgia talked of NATO integration and made steps for EU integration, and lost Abkhazia and South Ossetia. Ukraine overthrew the Kremlin man and made a radical turn from Russia to Europe, and as a result received two self-proclaimed separate

⁶ Sergei Markedonov. "Russia and the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: A Careful Balancing." *Istituto di Studie Politiche Italiano (ISPI)*. 12.03.2018. <<https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione/russia-and-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-careful-balancing-19832>>.

regimes in its territory and lost Crimea. These are realities we are facing every day and shall face until unknown times.

So, what comes out from what I say is that all kind of negotiations and peace talks should also be held with Russia. All the above-said countries paid a high cost for their aspirations to be a part of civilized world. Unfortunately, that civilized world failed to protect them and left them wounded in the battle field.

Recommendation

The EU and the USA should consider and recognize Russia's global role, treat Russia as one of the authentic global players, consider truthfully discussing the world matters and ways out of it. By treating Russia well and recognizing its global role, they can easily persuade Russia to reverse its recognition of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia regions of Georgia as independent states in exchange for rescinding the sanctions. The second step would be a roadmap incorporating all the regional conflicts, including the Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine's breakaway regions. Russia, seeing a threat from other global players, will keep using the regional conflicts as a safety belt. Otherwise, Russia would easily agree to bring a lasting peace to the region should it not see a threat coming elsewhere.

There are cases where countries withdrew their recognition decision. In 2011, Georgia's breakaway republics' independence was also recognized by Tuvalu and Vanuatu. However, they subsequently withdrew their decision as they signed documents on establishing diplomatic and consular relations with Georgia.

It is good news that

“the European Parliament has passed a resolution demanding that Russia reverses its «decision to recognize the so-called independence of the Georgian territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia.»

The June 14 resolution, which comes nearly ten years after the Russia-Georgia of August 2008 that resulted in Russia's recognition of the two territories, also «condemns the decision by Venezuela, Nicaragua, Syria, and Nauru to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and calls for this recognition to be withdrawn.»

The resolution, which was backed by the vast majority in the European Parliament, also calls on Russia to «cease its occupation» of the two breakaway regions and «fully respect the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia, as well as the inviolability of its internationally recognized borders, and that it stops the de facto integration of both regions into the Russian administration.»⁷

Second thesis: protracted Nagorno-Karabakh conflict keeps taking away Azerbaijan from Europe closer to Russia

Now there are serious calls in Azerbaijani society that our country should join the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Customs Union and Eurasian Union.

The chairman of the Azerbaijani parliamentary commission on legal policy and state-building, Ali Huseynli, stated about the possibility of considering the issue of Azerbaijan's membership in CSTO within the framework of new geopolitical conditions. This statement of the chairman of the commission was ambiguously received by the society.⁸

There is no doubt that Azerbaijan's consideration of joining the CSTO should be considered directly in connection with the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. It seems there is a great pressure from the bottoms on the government to find any solution that could lead to solution of the conflict within the territorial integrity. On the one hand, Azerbaijan cannot lead a war to fight back the territories, on the other hand the existing diplomatic efforts are not in place and also are not conducted with the right people, right organizations and countries. The key to the conflict is in the hands of Russia. Russia has its own conditions for Azerbaijan joining the CSTO, and Eurasian Economic Union. So, behind-the-scenes political agreements can be achieved aiming at resolving the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.

⁷ "EU Lawmakers Urge Russia to Reverse Recognition of Abkhazia, South Ossetia Independence." *Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty*. 14.06.2018. <<https://www.rferl.org/a/eu-lawmakers-urge-russia-to-reverse-recognition-of-abkhazia-south-ossetia-independence/29290370.html>>.

⁸ "Azerbaijan: Balancing on the Verge of NATO-CSTO." *TURAN*. 20.08.2018. <<http://www.contact.az/ext/news/2018/8/free/Interview/en/74431.htm>>.

Actually, these kinds of talks started after the April 2016 armed clashes, in which the Azerbaijani army prevailed over the Armenian Armed Forces. At that time the President of Azerbaijan spoke about the possibility of the country's joining the Eurasian Economic Union within the framework of certain conditions and interests. The logic was that Azerbaijan may do it just for the conflict settlement. And the current statement of the chairman of the parliamentary commission should be regarded as a continuation of this topic. This is a message for Azerbaijani public opinion.

The public opinion today is positive. If the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict can be resolved by Azerbaijan's joining the CSTO, Eurasia Economic Union, then the public approves and gives green light to continue with the talks. I am sure that Azerbaijan's political establishment received that message from the public and we can expect new developments in the region.

These new developments may involve a new flare up in the conflict zone. Firstly, Azerbaijan did realize that Russia became softer and yielding after the 2016 April clashes. A new escalation and another victory of Azerbaijan's army over Armenia would provide Azerbaijan additional advantage and urge Russia to facilitate a solution. Russia itself may trigger Azerbaijan to start advances in the contact line in order to make Armenia obey to long-established Russian rules in the region in the background of Pashinyan's government's risky moves with the West.

Russia, on the other hand, tries to match the interests with the new political powers in Yerevan. Now, the Armenia-Russia relationship is in a turbulent phase, as the Kremlin mistrusts the new leadership in Yerevan, which is populated by many pro-Western liberals. Russian concerns started emerging with criminal charges against Yuri Khachaturov, the forced out general secretary of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, a Russia-led military bloc, for his role in the violent crackdown against protesters in Yerevan in 2008.

It is still unknown how Pashinyan is going to make moves between Russia and the West, while keeping his loyalty to Russia. Therefore, Russia may trigger different scenarios, in which Azerbaijan could also be one of the players.

Recommendation

Western powers should accelerate their efforts to find a solution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. To do this they need to get involved on the level of heads of states. The OSCE Minsk Group is moderating the peace talks, but mostly they maneuver between the two countries – Azerbaijan and Armenia. The two country leaders never sat together to negotiate. When there is a third person overlooking, there are always many thoughts concealed. The heads of the Minks Group states – the USA, France, Russia and any country wishing to participate should come together with heads of states of the belligerent sides and discuss. Afterwards the two country leaders directly come together in two and discuss. In this case there would be no concealed plans from any stakeholder country to hamper with the resolution.

Third thesis: Nikol Pashinyan’s arrival in office exceeded all the expectations from both regional stakeholders and others involved as mediators.

I believe, with him coming in office, the negotiation process has almost stopped, and he seems to wish to start from scratch, which cannot be acceptable for Azerbaijan. With Nikol Pashinyan, all the expectations for the peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict disappeared. Pashinyan did everything in his power to bury the positive expectations that emerged after 2016.

“As I have said before, I see Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) as part of Armenia, and the path toward this status may consist of more steps than one. It may consist of two or three steps, but our vision of the future is definitely this. And there can be no doubt about that.”⁹

As seen from this media statement Armenia’s new political leadership made backward steps for the peaceful resolution of the conflict. I must say that his stance is not either approved by Russia or Western powers. Just because they think that it is necessary to sustain a climate of trust for intensive negotiations on the settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, but which

⁹ “Pashinyan Sees Future of Artsakh as Part of Armenia.” ASBAREZ. 10.09.2018. <<http://asbarez.com/174878/pashinyan-sees-future-of-artsakh-as-part-of-armenia>>.

is crucially damaged by statements and acts of the new leadership in Armenia.

Fortunately, the Western world started speaking openly only now. The outgoing US Ambassador to Armenia Richard Mills in his interview to EVN Report in mid-October 2018 said that “the harsh reality is that any settlement of the Karabakh conflict is going to require the return of some portion “of the occupied territories.”¹⁰ Adding;

“what I (heard) was a little disturbing because it appeared to be a step back from where we were. I was surprised when I first got here and found out that most Armenians I met were adamantly opposed to the return of the occupied territories as part of a negotiation settlement.”¹¹

It is really a pity that Armenia’s political leaderships starting from Kocharyan to acting PM Pashinyan convinced the Armenians that territories would not be returned. The question is, why on earth all the peace negotiations take place? It seems Armenia does not wish to return the occupied areas beyond Nagorno-Karabakh. Many Western diplomats really are as shocked as the outgoing US ambassador when they see ignorance of the Madrid Principles. The return of land was one of the core principles of the Madrid Principles. The ambassador says, “It has long been my government’s understanding of why the occupied territories were originally seized; they would be land for a peace option. So, I was very surprised that there was no support for that anymore.”¹²

The acting Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan’s response to the outgoing ambassadors’ statement was rough: “We can treat the departing ambassador’s statement as a departing message.”¹³

¹⁰ Maria Titizian. “US Ambassador Mills: ‘I leave inspired and hopeful.’” *EVN Report*. 15.10.2018. <<https://www.evnreport.com/politics/u-s-ambassador-mills-i-leave-inspired-and-hopeful>>.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Maria Titizian. “US Ambassador Mills...”

¹³ “Nikol Pashinyan on US Ambassador Statement.” *Lragir*. 18.10.2018. <<https://www.lragir.am/en/2018/10/18/69719>>.

US National Security Advisor John Bolton in his visit to the region in October noted that if the forecasts of public opinion in Armenia are confirmed, after the elections, the Prime Minister will have a very strong mandate to implement a series of decisive steps and efforts to resolve the Karabakh issue.¹⁴ If there is readiness, then we must work so that there is a similar reaction from the Azerbaijani side.

Azerbaijan welcomed this statement and it is actually ready to any outcome within its territorial integrity and internationally recognized borders. To Bolton's suggestion on taking "decisive action" toward a resolution to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, PM Pashinyan emphasized,

"John Bolton, or anyone for that matter, cannot speak on my behalf...there cannot be a resolution if it is not acceptable to the people of Armenia, Artsakh and the government of Artsakh...They are moving forward with the logic that they have some kind of ownership of the Karabakh issue. They are attempting to sell it to me without asking my opinion."¹⁵

This statement creates mistrust and frustration not only among the people of Azerbaijan, negotiators, but also Western envoys. Therefore, the OSCE Minsk Group should also speak frankly and openly, make calls for decisive actions from Armenia. Azerbaijan has always reiterated that it was ready for any outcome within agreed principles.

Recommendation

Armenia should return the occupied territories of Azerbaijan. Mostly, Armenians do not think that Nagorno-Karabakh is occupied, they say it is "liberated." What about those seven regions surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh?

¹⁴ Abdul Kerimkhanov. "Nagorno-Karabakh: High Time for Decisive Steps from Armenia." *AzerNews*. 30.10.2018. <<https://www.azernews.az/aggression/139961.html>>.

¹⁵ "John Bolton's Trip to Armenia draws Strong Reactions." *Armenia Weekly*. 01.11.2018. <<https://armenianweekly.com/2018/11/01/john-boltons-trip-to-armenia-draws-strong-reactions>>.

Member of the Armenian National Congress Zoya Tadevosyan also called for Armenia to free the occupied seven regions around Nagorno-Karabakh. “In fact, you are well aware, and everyone understands in this audience that those are occupied territories,” she said.¹⁶ The Armenian politician stated that the territories occupied during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict are not the territories of “Karabakh.”

To advance in peace talks, Armenia needs to liberate seven regions and this should be unquestionable. If Armenia does not liberate the occupied lands, it is not a sincere country and plays a game, in which it cannot win.

If Armenia liberates those regions outside the Nagorno-Karabakh, Azerbaijan would open the borders and peacefully step to next round of negotiations. I must say that, Azerbaijan, after this move of Armenia would never speak of war rhetoric and bilaterally start a war. This is obvious and Azerbaijan, to my understanding, is ready to meet international obligations and commitments.

Fourth thesis: Azerbaijan did not seek to take advantage of Armenia’s domestic troubles. The reason is that Azerbaijan’s policy and standing on Nagorno-Karabakh has become wiser and this advantage should be used immediately.

It is true that the Nagorno-Karabakh Line of Contact remained peaceful while the Armenian government wrestled with opposition figures in Yerevan. The Azerbaijani government and media supported the street protests against Armenian Prime Minister Serzh Sargsyan, who was blamed in protracting the conflict solution and being one of the so-called Karabakh clan. The Azerbaijani expectation was that the Armenian society, ousting Karabakh clan headed by Sargsyan, would be humbler towards the conflict solution. Unfortunately, it turned out to be the opposite, which is an additional signal for the negotiators that Armenian society was not ready for the peaceful settlement.

¹⁶ Naila Huseynli. “Armenian Politician Calls for Return of Occupied Lands to Azerbaijan.” AzerNews. 03.08.2018. <<https://www.azernews.az/karabakh/135719.html>>.

Peaceful settlement at least implies liberation of some occupied territories outside the Nagorno-Karabakh region. Azerbaijan lost its last hope that any change in Armenia may bring the long-wished peace to the region. Proceeding from this point of view, the next time may not be so peaceful. This risk will always be there from now on. However, Azerbaijani politics has become wiser, therefore spontaneous and unthoughtful military actions are less likely.

It is an interesting fact that almost all the people from grassroots to the high-level supported Pashinyan in his struggle. He might have received more support from Azerbaijani media than that of Armenia. Members of Parliament in Azerbaijan expressed their concerns that people had been detained and injured in the protests, and they sympathized with the Armenians protesters.

One Member even said

“People in Armenia think that as long as Armenia continues the occupation of Azerbaijani lands, they will not have future and their situation will aggravate. This way of thinking is gradually spreading in Armenia and the culprit of this situation is Serzh Sargsyan.”¹⁷

Almost everybody saw the ousted Serzh Sargsyan as the source of the problem. Now, everybody can witness that it was an illusion. The problem for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict lies not in the individuals and politicians; it is rather the core of Armenian deep politics.¹⁸

This situation also visually showed the wisdom of Azerbaijani politics. Protesters have expressed concerns that Azerbaijan, possibly in concert with Russia, will contrive an escalation of tensions on the Line of Contact with Armenian military forces in order to take advantage of the political crisis in Yerevan. Azerbaijan did not, although it could. And this was not only linked to Azerbaijan’s expectations from the new leadership, which turned into an illusion.

¹⁷ Joshua Kucera. “Azerbaijan Comes Out in Favor of Yerevan Protests.” EurasiaNet. 23.04.2018. <<https://eurasianet.org/azerbaijan-comes-out-in-favor-of-yerevan-protests>>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

Recommendation

Armenia's new leadership urges talks between the breakaway region and Azerbaijan. On the other hand, Pashinyan states that he sees Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) as part of Armenia. Azerbaijan can agree to this only in the context of Azerbaijan's territorial integrity and wider autonomy. Moreover, one cannot forget that the Nagorno-Karabakh region was a place where not only Armenians lived, but Azerbaijanis as well. Any solution and negotiation cannot be realistic if one side remains out. The Azerbaijani leadership could sit and discuss the future of Nagorno-Karabakh with both communities and decide positively for many issues within the internationally-recognized borders.

**PART III:
THE PERSPECTIVE OF GREAT POWERS AND
THE PROSPECT FOR PEACE**

Armenian “Velvet Revolution”: Why has Russia’s Reaction been Tame?

Giorgi Davidian

Introduction

The aim of the paper is to provide the reader with several explanations of why Russia has maintained a soft touch with the Armenian “Velvet Revolution”. Firstly, the paper describes the events of April-May 2018, emphasizing the potential reasons behind the people’s will to get rid of the old guard.

Secondly, Armenian-Russian relations will be discussed with particular emphasis on the importance of Russia for Armenia from the economic and military perspectives. Lastly, taking into account different political, geographical, military and other aspects, Russia’s position and reasons for its “calmness” will be presented.

For gathering data three methods were used. Firstly, a desk research based on secondary literature was conducted. Additionally, representatives of different organizations and experts in the field of South Caucasus were interviewed. Last but not least, statistical data (including public opinion polls and indexes) was used for the purpose of mapping out the main causes of the civil unrest.

Based on the conducted research, the paper argues that Armenia faces a particularly complicated geopolitical reality, which, in fact, determines the country’s foreign policy, and in particular, its close partnership with Russia. Russian decision-makers understand this very well. Therefore, their tame reaction wasn’t unexpected.

What Were the Causes Behind these Protests?

On 23 April 2018, Prime Minister and ex-President of Armenia Serzh Sargsyan bowed to popular pressure and stepped aside as a result of two-

weeks mass protests directed not only against his rule, but also against the rule of the whole Republican Party of Armenia (RPA), where Sargsyan held the position of the Chairperson. The protests were led by Nikol Pashinyan, former journalist and head of the National Assembly's Yelk parliamentary faction.¹ On 31 March 2018, Pashinyan initiated the "My Step" movement from the northern city of Gyumri, which resulted in Serzh Sargsyan's resignation.

Serzh Sargsyan had been ruling Armenia from 2008 until 2018, first as a President and then, for an extremely limited period of time, as a Prime Minister. In 2014, he started pushing for an amendment of the Armenian constitution, which would significantly limit the powers vested into the President by transferring them to the Prime Minister and the Parliament.

This move was assessed by some analysts as a maneuver by Sargsyan directed at cementing the post of the leader of the country for an unlimited period of time. In response to this kind of rhetoric, then-President Sargsyan made a promise that he will not run for the post of Prime Minister once second presidential term was over. However, as it turned out, Sargsyan lied: he ran for office and became Prime Minister on 17 April 2018. It is noteworthy, that during the demonstrations the protesters were displaying parts of Sargsyan's speeches, in which he was stating that he was not going to run for the position of Prime Minister. According to the representative of the Caucasus Institute, it is "legitimate" for "Caucasian political culture" to buy or sell the votes, but it is never legitimate to lie.² It should be mentioned that no first rank politician in Armenia was in power for more than ten years. According to the representative of the Centre for Caucasus Studies, Sargsyan overestimated the readiness of the Armenian people to tolerate his power.

¹ Pashinyan became acting Prime Minister of Armenia on the 8th of May 2018, however he resigned on the 16th of October in order to trigger snap parliamentary elections.

² Frankena, William K. (1973): *Ethics*. 2nd ed. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, ch. 1.

To sum up, the lie served as a trigger for mass demonstrations, but, of course, the roots of the civil unrest lie much deeper.³

In addition to the systemic illness like corruption, the events unfolded in April-May 2018 are seen by the interviewed Russian and Armenian experts in the field of South Caucasus as caused by the following reasons: nepotism, the population's negative attitude towards the government (lack of trust and sympathy), the events of April 2016 in Karabakh, the perception of injustice amongst citizens, the increased external debt (which amounted USD 5.4 billion as of September 2017⁴), migration, unemployment and poverty. According to a representative of the Centre for Post-Soviet Studies, all the domestic flaws which were also present earlier became intolerable during Sargsyan's government.

Corruption, lack of trust and sympathy for the government, unemployment and poverty were the main motives for the protest, and are emphasized below. The population of Armenia perceives corruption as one of the most important issues facing the country. According to the data provided by the Caucasus Research Resource Centre's (CRRC) Caucasus Barometer of 2017, the population named corruption as the third most striking issue together with "lack of peace in the country" in a survey.⁵ According to the Corruption Perception Index of 2017, Armenia scored 35 out of 100, ranking 107th out of 180 countries under consideration.⁶ Interesting data is also provided by the Global Corruption Barometer (GCB) survey of 2016: as reported by the GCB, 45 percent of the respondents think that all or most of the governmental representatives are involved in corruption. It is equally

³ Schiffers, Sonja. (2018, April). Why Armenians Call for a Velvet Revolution. Retrieved from <<https://ge.boell.org/en/2018/04/20/why-armenians-call-velvet-revolution>>.

⁴ Armbanks. (2017, September). Finance minister: Armenia's foreign debt amounts to \$5.4 billion now. Retrieved from <<http://www.armbanks.am/en/2017/09/26/110037/>>.

⁵ The Caucasus Research Resource Centres. (2017). *Caucasus Barometer of 2017* [Data file]. Retrieved from <<http://caucasusbarometer.org/en/cb2017am/IMP1SS1/>>.

⁶ Transparency International Anti-Corruption Centre. (2018). *Corruption Perceptions Index 2017* [Data file and code book]. Retrieved from <[https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIkoDEoe2w3gIVyqQYCh3NqQqMEAAAYASAAEgIOj_D_BwE](https://www.transparency.org/news/feature/corruption_perceptions_index_2017?gclid=EAIaIQobChMIkoDEoe2w3gIVyqQYCh3NqQqMEAAAYASAAEgIOj_D_BwE>)>; 0 means that country is highly corrupt, while 100 that it is very clean.

important to mention the following fact: 44 percent of the respondents indicated, that the President and his staff are also involved in corruption. As stated by the same survey, 65 percent of the respondents rated the steps undertaken by their government to solve the problem of corruption as very insufficient or fairly insufficient.⁷ At the same time, the International Republican Institute (IRI) survey of July-August 2018 showed, that 42 percent of the respondents mentioned corruption as the biggest failure of the previous government.⁸ It is important to mention that according to the interviewees, people believe that elections were falsified on several occasions and perceive constitutional referendum of 2015 as falsified as well.

As for the lack of trust and sympathy, firstly it should be mentioned that based on the data provided by the CRRC, in 2017 (when Serzh Sargsyan was President) 42 percent of Armenians believed that domestic politics was going in the wrong direction, while only 8 percent stated that it was going in the right direction.⁹ According to the sociological survey conducted by “Glas Naroda” in July-August 2018, only 3 percent of the surveyed mentioned the RPA while answering the question about the work of which parliamentary party they like.¹⁰ The same survey shows that only 4 percent of the survey said, that they would vote for the RPA if the elections were held “tomorrow”. The CRRC 2017 data reveal that 64 percent of the respondents distrust the President, while 18 percent claimed the opposite.¹¹

⁷ Transparency International Anti-Corruption Centre. (2016). *Global Corruption Barometer 2016 Survey in Armenia* [Data file and code book]. Retrieved from <<https://transparency.am/en/gcb>>.

⁸ International Republican Institute. (2018). *Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018.10.9_armenia_poll_presentation.pdf>.

⁹ The Caucasus Research Resource Centres. (2017). *Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in the South Caucasus Countries* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <http://www.crrc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/barometer/2017/CB2017_ENG_presentation_final.pdf>.

¹⁰ Areshev, Andrey. (2018, August). 100 дней правительства Никола Пашиняна [100 days of Pashinyan's rule]. Retrieved from <<https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2018/08/19/100-dnej-pravitelstva-nikola-pashinjana-46635.html>>.

¹¹ The Caucasus Research Resource Centres. (2017). *Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in the South Caucasus Countries* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from

At the same time, 66 percent of the respondents said that distrust the National Assembly (Parliament), while only 12 percent stated that they do trust this institution.

Yet another important reason is unemployment, the rate of which was about 16-19 percent as for April 2018, according to the economist Vahagn Khachatryan.¹² Importance the population attaches to the issue of unemployment is vivid in the data provided by the CRRC in 2017: many of the respondents (36 percent) stated that unemployment was the number one issue facing the country.¹³ At the same time, according to the IRI's 2018 survey, unemployment is the third most-mentioned answer to the question about the biggest failures of the previous government.¹⁴

Last but not least reason for civil unrest was poverty. According to the Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia, its rate in Armenia was equal to 29.4 percent in 2016.¹⁵ This number can be divided into three parts: extremely poor (1.8 percent), very poor (8 percent) and just poor (19.6 percent). Based on the same database, the following can be concluded: 29.4 percent of the Armenians lived on up to USD 2.84 a day. As provided by the CRRC's 2017 data, 17 percent of respondents (which was the second highest number) named poverty as the most important issue facing

<http://www.crrc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/barometer/2017/CB2017_ENG_presentation_final.pdf>.

¹² Panorama. (2018, April). Armenia's unemployment rate remains unchanged since 2008, economist says. Retrieved from <<https://www.panorama.am/en/news/2018/04/04/Armenia-unemployment-rate/1928914>>.

¹³ The Caucasus Research Resource Centres. (2017). *Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in the South Caucasus Countries* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <http://www.crrc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/barometer/2017/CB2017_ENG_presentation_final.pdf>.

¹⁴ International Republican Institute. (2018). *Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018.10.9_armenia_poll_presentation.pdf>.

¹⁵ Statistical Committee of the Republic of Armenia. (2017). *Armenia: Poverty Profile In 2008-2016*. Retrieved from <https://www.armstat.am/file/article/poverty_2017_english_2.pdf>.

Armenia.¹⁶ As for the IRI's 2018 poll, poverty was among top ten mentions by the respondents, who were asked about the biggest failures of the previous government.¹⁷

Armenian-Russian Relations

The National Security Strategy (NSS) of Armenia highlights Russia's role as a mediator in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, trade and economic relations with Russia, Russia's role for the security of Armenia, and Armenian diaspora living in Russia as the factors contributing to the strategic partnership between the two countries.¹⁸

As Robert Nalbandov puts it, Russia represents a political, military and economic "surrogate state" for Armenia.¹⁹ Nalbandov claims, that the majority of Armenians sees Russia as a country to which they "owe" their nationhood and independence.²⁰ According to the NSS, one of the main goals of Armenia is to build a reliable security construction around Armenia. At the same time, it is stated in the NSS that strategic partnership with Russia and membership of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) are the basis of the Armenian security system. Thus, Russia is Armenia's main military partner, providing critical military assistance in Armenia's complicated geopolitical setting of literally being blockaded by Turkey and Azerbaijan. As is well-known, Azerbaijan and Armenia remain in dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh, the conflict in which Azerbaijan is

¹⁶ The Caucasus Research Resource Centres. (2017). *Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in the South Caucasus Countries* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <http://www.crrc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/barometer/2017/CB2017_ENG_presentation_final_.pdf>.

¹⁷ International Republican Institute. (2018). *Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018.10.9_armenia_poll_presentation.pdf>.

¹⁸ National Security Strategy National Security Strategy. (2007) <<https://www.mfa.am/filemanager/Statics/Doctrineeng.pdf>>.

¹⁹ Nalbandov, Robert. (2013). Uncertain Old Friends: Georgian-Armenian Relations. In Kakachia Korneli, and Cecire Michael (Eds.), *Georgian foreign policy – the quest for sustainable security*, Tbilisi: Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, pp. 175-189.

²⁰ Ibid., pp. 175-189.

supported by Turkey.²¹ This was once again made clear on 15 September 2018, when Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated that the solution to the Karabakh issue is an indispensable precondition for mending relations with Armenia, claiming that "those who occupy 20 percent of Azerbaijani lands and prevent over 1 million Azerbaijanis to return to their land should not expect Turkey to open its borders."²² As stated by the representative of the Centre for Post-Soviet Studies, Azerbaijan and Turkey are not only neighbours, but, judging by the number of agreements signed between Baku and Ankara, there is a military-political alliance between them as well.

Russia's status as key military ally is cemented both in bilateral format and through membership in CSTO, Article 4²³ of which states that an attack against one of the member states means an attack against all. It should be mentioned here that Russia maintains its 3624th Air Base at Erebuni. At the same time, Russia has its 102nd military base in Armenia (Gyumri), near Armenia's border with Turkey, where it stations about 5000 troops. The interviewed experts (with whom Robert Nalbandov agrees²⁴) believe that Gyumri base serves as a guarantee that there will be no attacks against Armenia from Azerbaijan and Turkey.

Given Azerbaijan's much stronger economy (e.g. Azerbaijan's GDP totaled USD 40.67 billion in 2017, while Armenia's GDP was USD 11.54 billion²⁵)

²¹ The relationship between these two states is often described as based on the maxim "Two States, One Nation."

²² Daily News. (2018, September). Turkey will not open Armenia border amid Karabakh occupation: Erdoğan. Retrieved from <<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/turkey-will-not-open-armenia-border-amid-karabakh-occupation-erdogan-136892>>.

²³ Agreement on Collective Security. Collective Security Treaty Organisation (1992). <http://www.odkb-csto.org/documents/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=126>.

²⁴ Nalbandov, Robert. (2013). Uncertain Old Friends: Georgian-Armenian Relations. In Kakachia Korneli, and Cecire Michael (Eds.), *Georgian foreign policy – the quest for sustainable security*, Tbilisi: Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, pp. 175-189.

²⁵ Areshev, Andrey. (2018, September). Визит Путина в Баку – региональный контекст [Putin's visit to Moscow – regional context]. Retrieved from: <<https://www.fondsk.ru/news/2018/09/27/vizit-putina-v-baku-regionalnyj-kontekst-46857.html>>.

and a much higher military expenditure than that of Armenia²⁶, and the importance of Karabakh for Armenia, partnership with Russia is of utmost importance for Armenia. As for the importance of the Karabakh issue, as it is stated in the NSS, the settlement of this conflict is the key priority for the National Security of Armenia. According to the IRI poll of July-August 2018, people regard Nagorno-Karabakh issue as the second most striking problem facing Armenia.²⁷ For Armenians, Nagorno-Karabakh is a matter of national pride.²⁸ Many Armenians associate Karabakh with the massacres of 1915 (central theme of self-identity) and see it as a front-line against Turks, where loss means danger for the very nation itself.²⁹

Russia's substantial military aid to Armenia is also notable. For example, Russia delivered USD 200 million worth military arms to Armenia in July 2018.³⁰ It has to be highlighted, that according to the report by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), all of the arms imported by Armenia in 2016-2017 came from Russia.³¹

²⁶ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. (2016). *Military expenditure by country, in constant (2016) US\$ m., 1998-2017* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/1_Data%20for%20all%20countries%20from%201988%E2%80%932017%20in%20constant%20%282016%29%20USD.pdf>.

²⁷ International Republican Institute. (2018). *Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018.10.9_armenia_poll_presentation.pdf>.

²⁸ Gelovani, Shota. (2018, May). 3 reasons why the Armenian revolution means nothing for the foreign policy of the country and 3 reasons why we thought it would. Retrieved from Georgian Institute of Politics website <<http://gip.ge/3-reasons-why-the-armenian-revolution-means-nothing-for-the-foreign-policy-of-the-country-and-three-reasons-why-we-thought-it-would/>>.

²⁹ Carley, Patricia. (1998). *Nagorno-Karabakh: Searching for a Solution* [Report]. Tertieved from A United States Institute of Peace <<https://www.usip.org/publications/1998/12/nagorno-karabakh-searching-solution-0>>.

³⁰ The Moscow Times. (2018, July). Russia Ships \$200M in Military Arms to Ally Armenia. Retrieved from <<https://themoscowtimes.com/news/russia-ships-200-million-military-arms-ally-armenia-62318>>.

³¹ Jamnews. (2018, March). Armenia doubtful that Russia will halt arms sales to Azerbaijan. Retrieved from <<https://jam-news.net/?p=93749>>.

Armenia is a member of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), the bloc that some regard to be Putin's answer to the EU³², which offers Armenia low prices for gas and an opportunity of labour migration of quite a significant number of people. Analyst Sergey Minasyan believes that Armenia was forced to join this organisation because of the Russian pressure.³³ Agnia Grigas provides more specific manifestation of the pressure, stating that Yerevan joined the Eurasian Economic Union because Moscow threatened to increase gas tariffs.³⁴

Russia is the leading trade partner of Armenia. According to the United Nations Comtrade database, Russia was the main export destination for Armenia in 2017: Russia's share in the export equaled 27 percent, respective value of which was some USD 540 million.³⁵ At the same time, Russia was also leading in terms of imports in 2017: it accounted for 29 percent of Armenian imports, valued at USD 1.17 billion.³⁶

Moreover, Russia is also Armenia's main source of remittances. The data provided by the Central Bank of Armenia (CBA) shows that remittances from Armenians working abroad totaled USD 1.56 billion in January-November 2017, out of which 60 percent of the total amount of money was sent by Armenians working in Russia.³⁷

³² Riegg, Stephen. (2018, May). Why Russia Won't Interfere in Armenia's Velvet Revolution. Retrieved from <https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2018/05/08/why_russia_wont_interfere_in_armenias_velvet_revolution_112792.html>.

³³ Minasyan, Sergey. (2015). New challenges and opportunities for Armenia and Georgia in the context of Regional security. In Kalandarishvili Nino and Iskanderyan Alexander (Eds.) *Armenia and Georgia in the Context of Current Political Developments. New Challenges and Opportunities in the Realm of Regional Security*, Tbilisi: Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, pp:4-10.

³⁴ Grigas, Angina. (2015, May). Armenian-Russian relations in light of 'Electric Yerevan' protests. Retrieved from <<https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/246901-armenian-russian-relations-in-light-of-electric-yerevan>>.

³⁵ Trading Economics. (2018). Armenia Exports by Country. Retrieved from <<https://tradingeconomics.com/armenia/exports-by-country>>.

³⁶ Trading Economics. (2018). Armenia Imports by Country. Retrieved from <<https://tradingeconomics.com/armenia/imports-by-country>>.

³⁷ Danielyan, Emil. (2018, January). Migrant Remittances to Armenia Soar. Retrieved from <<https://www.azatutyun.am/a/28954720.html>>.

Russia has been the main investor in Armenia.³⁸ What also has to be emphasized is that assets-for-debt agreements in 2003-2006 gave Russians green light to take control over power plants and the gas distribution network of Armenia.³⁹ According to the economist Artur Kochnakian, 80 percent of the natural gas used by Armenia is supplied by Russia. Moreover, the same source claims that Russia is the only one who delivers fuel to the Metsamor nuclear plant.⁴⁰

Russia's Restrained Position

When the demonstrations broke out, they immediately invited comparisons with Euromaidan, where Russia was actively involved. However, unlike the Ukrainian scenario, in the case of Armenia Russia chose to have a muted response (the fact confirmed by all interviewees).

Moscow was cautious and pragmatic. During the events, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov said that what was going on in Armenia was its domestic affair.⁴¹ He also added that events in Armenia can't be compared to the ones that took place in Ukraine in 2014. "For now, we see that the situation is not unfolding in a destabilizing way which is a cause for satisfaction," Peskov said.⁴² At the same time, Russian Foreign Ministry Spokeswoman Maria Zakharova also supported the demonstrators, writing "Ar-

³⁸ Grigas, Angina. (2015, May). Armenian-Russian relations in light of 'Electric Yerevan' protests. Retrieved from <<https://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/international/246901-armenian-russian-relations-in-light-of-electric-yerevan>>.

³⁹ Danielyan, Emil. (2016, May). Russian State Presence in Armenian Energy Sector Declining. Retrieved from <<https://eurasianet.org/russian-state-presence-armenian-energy-sector-declining>>.

⁴⁰ Danielyan, Emil. (2016, May). Russian State Presence in Armenian Energy Sector Declining. Retrieved from <<https://eurasianet.org/russian-state-presence-armenian-energy-sector-declining>>.

⁴¹ TASS. (2018, April). Kremlin calls events in Armenia domestic affair, says Russia won't meddle. Retrieved from <<http://tass.com/politics/1001252>>.

⁴² Auyezov, Olzhas. (2018, April). Kremlin: We don't regard tumult in Armenia as Ukraine-style revolution. Retrieved from <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-politics-kremlin/kremlin-we-dont-regard-tumult-in-armenia-as-ukraine-style-revolution-idUSKBN1HV0ZC>>.

menia, Russia is always with you!”⁴³ Moreover, the Russian President was among the first to congratulate Nikol Pashinyan.⁴⁴

But what were the reasons behind Russian calmness?

First of all, when referring to the governmental change of 2018, all the interviewed experts noted that it was purely “home-grown revolution”, with only Armenian flags being on display. The interviewees claim that what happened in Armenia was without any foreign interference, and that the protests were not directed at changing the country’s foreign policy vector. Pashinyan’s associate Armen Grigoryan claims that the revolution was only related to domestic concerns and no geopolitical themes, like the ones that dominated Ukraine’s “Euromaidan”, were touched upon.⁴⁵ He said that Euromaidan served as a lesson to Armenians that a revolution should not have an international agenda. Nikol Pashinyan himself emphasized on numerous occasions the internal genesis of the events and avoided voicing any international agenda, which, as claimed by Stepan Grigoryan, was the correct move.⁴⁶ In his book, Grigoryan cited Nikol Pashinyan saying that if he comes to power, there will be no significant changes in the foreign policy of Armenia, that the country will remain the member of the EAEU and CSTO, and that the movement directed against the ruling elite represents no danger for Russia, because Armenia regards Russia as a strategic partner.⁴⁷ Similar messages were conveyed by already acting Prime Minister Pashinyan in his interview to Euronews, where he also underlined that Ar-

⁴³ Shakarian, Pietro. (2018, May). Russia–Armenia Relations and the April Revolution. Retrieved from <<https://modern diplomacy.eu/2018/05/23/russia-armenia-relations-and-the-april-revolution/>>.

⁴⁴ Way, Ahmad. (2018, May). Why Didn’t Putin Interfere in Armenia’s Velvet Revolution? In *Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/armenia/2018-05-17/why-didnt-putin-interfere-armenias-velvet-revolution>>.

⁴⁵ Antidze, Margarita (2018, May). How Russia played silent kingmaker in Armenia's revolution. Retrieved from <<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-politics-russia-insight/how-russia-played-silent-kingmaker-in-armenias-revolution-idUSKBN1I92TE>>.

⁴⁶ Grigoryan, Stepan. (2018). *Armenian “Velvet Revolution”*. Erevan: Edit Print Publishing House.

⁴⁷ Grigoryan, Stepan. (2018). *Armenian “Velvet Revolution”*. Erevan: Edit Print Publishing House.

menia was not going to make a U-turn in its foreign policy.⁴⁸ Moreover, the new government program, introduced after Pashinyan came to power, also confirms that close partnership with Russia is a priority for the newcomers.⁴⁹ In a word, as Emil A. Souleimanov and Anton Barbashin put it, Pashinyan's messages concerning Russia were clear and timely communicated to both internal and external audiences, pacifying the skeptics in Kremlin.⁵⁰

Here it should be mentioned that Pashinyan's rhetoric changed a bit already during the demonstrations. For example, according to the experts, Pashinyan used to be critical of the EAEU. However, the interviewees believe that Russian diplomats clearly understood that from the governmental position, things look differently and that the structural constraints (to be discussed below) do not allow for drastic changes. Thus, it was not a surprise that his rhetoric changed. They continued by stating that Pashinyan understood well, that taking into account the situation (geopolitical, economic) in which Armenia finds itself, he had to change his rhetoric and act according to the interests of the country, which means continuation of the close partnership with Russia. Additionally, some experts interpreted Pashinyan's criticism of the EAEU not as a criticism of the organization *per se*, but as the inability of Armenian government to bargain well and to get the maximum from the EAEU.

However, according to the interviewed experts, it is clear that the Russian side would not just rely on the rhetoric of the Armenian side and thus, more well-grounded reasons, explaining Russia's restrained position, exist.

⁴⁸ Beketov, Andrei. (2018, July). Armenian PM urges NATO to send message to Azerbaijan: Exclusive. Retrieved from <<https://www.euronews.com/2018/07/12/watch-full-interview-with-armenia-s-prime-minister>>.

⁴⁹ SNG.Today. (2018, June). Парламент поддержал программу Правительства Пашиняна [the parliament supported Pashinyan's government program]. Retrieved from <https://sng.today/yerevan/7426-parlament-podderzhal-programmu-pravitelstva-pashinyana.html?fbclid=IwAR1PbZH1rAQaHj20SPrJEa_f6SreN7E92UxuEcoJtiYiBmt0yclBrPuOZFc>.

⁵⁰ Suleimanov Emil, Barbashin, Anton. (2018, May). Moscow's Role in Armenia's Revolution. Retrieved from <<https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13522-moscows-role-in-armenias-revolution.html>>.

Looking from the geopolitical prism, it is obvious that Armenia faces a particularly complicated geopolitical reality, which, in fact, according to the interviewees, determines the country's foreign policy, and in particular, its close partnership with Russia. As it was mentioned above, two out of four borders are closed and there is an on-going conflict with Azerbaijan, while relations with Turkey are strained. The Centre for Caucasus Studies emphasized that the CSTO, Russian military bases and border guards in Armenia represent an important element of Armenia's security.⁵¹ He added, that NATO cannot offer anything similar, and claimed that in case of Armenia's hypothetical withdrawal from the CSTO and U-turn to NATO, Armenia will lose all the advantages it has now (like weapons for cheap prices, military trainings, security guarantees). By losing all these, Armenia's stance in terms of the Nagorno-Karabakh issue will be weakened. The West cannot offer anything comparable to what Russia offers from the economic perspective. Thus if Armenia "abandons" Russia, it will also become economically weaker (which in turn will have negative impact on its position in Nagorno-Karabakh).

Armen Grigoryan basically agrees with the opinion of the above-mentioned expert, claiming that turning to the West (particularly to NATO) will be costly for Armenia. More specifically, he notes that the price for a U-turn will be Karabakh. Grigoryan doubts that NATO can offer Armenia the same security guarantees as Russia does. He says that all the "Western" documents concerning Karabakh claim that conflict should be settled based on the principles of territorial integrity and self-determination, meaning self-determination of the people living in Karabakh in the framework of territorial integrity of Azerbaijan. Grigoryan continues by stating that the West does not have the same type of pro-Armenian position in case of Nagorno-Karabakh, like Russians do.⁵²

⁵¹ On October 2013, the commander of Russia's 102nd military base (at Gyumri) Andrey Ruzinsky stated that in case of Azerbaijan's offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh, the Gyumri base may be involved in the confrontation. <<http://gip.ge/3-reasons-why-the-armenian-revolution-means-nothing-for-the-foreign-policy-of-the-country-and-three-reasons-why-we-thought-it-would/>>.

⁵² Grigoryan, Arman. (2016, July). Interview by Sirunyan Anush. ЕСЛИ МЫ ПОСЛЕДУЕМ ПРИМЕРУ СААКАШВИЛИ, ЦЕНОЙ ТОМУ БУДЕТ КАРАБАХ [If we follow Saakashvili's example, the price for it will be Karabakh].

Thus, having all these structural conditions, Armenia's foreign policy is to some extent predetermined, meaning that Armenia will retain close relations with Russia. According to scholarly consensus, actions of small states depend on either the international distribution of power or balance of threat.⁵³ Shifts in the foreign policy vectors of small states highly depend on the composition and arrangement of the international system as well as on the degree of threats coming from great powers.⁵⁴ Similarly, as the representatives of the Caucasus Institute and of the Centre for Caucasus Studies put it, the foreign policy of Armenia is built upon the following pillars; conflict in Karabakh, territorial blockade of Armenia, need for security, economic (in particular labor) and military relations with Russia. The experts added that these pillars are constant, no matter who comes to power. Consequently, the expert from the Caucasus Institute thinks that for now there is no possibility of drastic changes. It is also worth mentioning here that the same expert and the representative of the Centre for Regional Studies underlined the role of geographical proximity, which, just like military bases and military aid, represents a factor making Russia a provider of security for Armenia. Stephen Walt once said that small states will choose bandwagoning when a great power is geographically proximate and has a strong offensive capacity as well as when alternative great power allies are unavailable or too far.⁵⁵

In a word, based on all above-mentioned, no U-turn should be expected in case of Armenia. Russian side understands it and that's why it keeps "calm." It is interesting to mention here that while commenting on Armenia's less probable U-turn, the expert from the Centre for Post-Soviet Studies asked a rhetorical question: why would they [newcomers] destroy the construction, which helped Armenia to live for at least the last decades? Here comes the theory of "modular political phenomena", according to

Retrieved from <<http://www.kavkazoved.info/news/2016/07/22/esli-my-posleduem-primeru-saakashvili-cennoj-tomu-budet-karabah.html>>.

⁵³ Elman, Mirian. (1995, April). The Foreign Policies of Small States: Challenging Neorealism in Its Own Backyard. In *British Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 171-217.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-217.

⁵⁵ Walt, Stephen. (1987). *The Origins of Alliances*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

which actions of leaders to some extent are based on the prior successful example of previous leaders.⁵⁶ Since all events happen in a particular historical context, the history itself has huge importance. History, therefore the past, creates expectations for the future.⁵⁷ According to Steinmo “history is not a chain of independent events”, but it is the past events that shape the future ones.⁵⁸ Therefore, as the representative of the Centre for Regional Studies puts it, no matter who will come to power everyone will try to retain the same relations with Russia, as it is involved in many aspects of Armenia’s performance. He continued by saying that these relations with Moscow are profitable for Armenia and there will be no change unless status quo in the region changes. Experts also added here that as the population of Armenia regards Russia as a friend and appreciates close ties with this country,⁵⁹ Pashinyan would not antagonize constituents by not keeping friendly relations with Russia.

Furthermore, some interviewees claimed that the Kremlin did not support Sargsyan because he is not that much interested in domestic politics of Armenia. They believe that for Russia it is important to be sure that the person who is in power is ready to cooperate. According to Ahmad Way, Moscow is more concerned with geopolitical balance of power, rather than

⁵⁶ Beissinger, Mark. (2007). Structure and example in modular political phenomena: the diffusion of Bulldozer, Rose, Orange and Tulip Revolutions. *Perspectives on Politics*, American Political Science Association, *Perspectives on Politics*, Vol. 5, No. 2, pp. 259-276.

⁵⁷ Steinmo, Sven. (2008). What is Historical Institutionalism? In Porta , Donatella Della and Keating Michael (Eds.), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 150-178.

⁵⁸ Steinmo, Sven. (2008). What is Historical Institutionalism? In Porta , Donatella Della and Keating Michael (Eds.), *Approaches and Methodologies in the Social Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 150-178.

⁵⁹ According to the CRRC 2017, 64percent of the surveyed mentioned Russia as the main friend of Armenia. The Caucasus Research Resource Centers.(2017). *Public Perceptions on Political, Social, and Economic issues in the South Caucasus Countries* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <http://www.crrc.am/hosting/file/_static_content/barometer/2017/CB2017_ENG_presentation_final.pdf>; at the same time, according IRI Poll 2018, 79percent of the respondents believe that Russia is a trustworthy ally of Armenia. International Republican Institute.(2018). *Public Opinion Survey: Residents of Armenia* [Data File and Code book]. Retrieved from <https://www.iri.org/sites/default/files/2018.10.9_armenia_poll_presentation.pdf>.

with domestic politics of partner countries.⁶⁰ Thus, as long as Pashinyan will not (or is not able to) change Armenia's pro-Russian course, the balance of power endorsed by the Kremlin will remain unchanged and there will be no necessity for Russia to intervene.

There are some other suppositions explaining Russia's muted response to the events unfolded in Armenia; 1) Russia's "fear" of additional sanctions from the West in case of interference; 2) Moscow's perception of demonstrations as a chance to improve international reputation; and 3) Sargsyan's unpopularity.

Russian and Armenian experts tend not to agree with the first supposition, claiming that Armenia is not of such an importance for Europe to introduce new sanctions against Russia because of it.

Stephen Riegg claims that after making sure that the protests in Armenia did not have international agenda and were directed solely against an ineffective government, the Kremlin may have had a restrained reaction in order to a bit improve its international reputation. According to Riegg, by showing that it does not limit the sovereignty of its allies, Russia tried to weaken the "Russophobes."⁶¹

One of the experts provided yet another supposition explaining Russia's restrained position. According to him, the fact that Russia's reaction was going to be quite tame was expected in a way because Kremlin was aware of the degree of Sargsyan's unpopularity. Russia may have decided that instead of propping up a man, who is not popular in the country, it is better not to lose Armenians' hearts and minds.⁶² Lucan Ahmad Way agrees with

⁶⁰ Way, Ahmad. (2018, May). Why Didn't Putin Interfere in Armenia's Velvet Revolution? *In Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/armenia/2018-05-17/why-didnt-putin-interfere-armenias-velvet-revolution>>.

⁶¹ Riegg, Stephen. (2018, May). Why Russia Won't Interfere in Armenia's Velvet Revolution. Retrieved from <https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2018/05/08/why_russia_wont_interfere_in_armenias_velvet_revolution_112792.html>.

⁶² Sargsyan's and his party's unpopularity is revealed through the polls provided in the first part of the paper.

this point of view. Way claims that after the popular backlash caused by supporting unpopular regime in Ukraine, Putin acted carefully in order to avoid a similar scenario in Armenia.⁶³ In addition, according to one of the interviewees, Russia's attitude towards Sargsyan was not that positive. Stephen Riegg supports this claim by stating that Sargsyan and Putin were not especially warm.⁶⁴ For example, Riegg says that the Presidents of Armenia and Russia disagreed about the degree of strategic assistance provided by Moscow to Yerevan and also about Kremlin's arms sales to Azerbaijan (in 2013-2017, 65 percent of the arms imported by Azerbaijan came from Russia).⁶⁵

Conclusion

Analyses of the interviews and statistical data revealed that alongside corruption (the so-called systemic illness of Armenia) the main reasons of the governmental change were unemployment, population's negative attitude towards the government (lack of trust and sympathy) and diminished standards of living (unemployment and poverty). Meanwhile, Sargsyan's failed attempt to remain in power played the role of a trigger for the civil unrest as he overestimated readiness of the Armenian people to tolerate his "reign" for any longer.

Secondly, based on the official documents and assessments of the experts, the paper presented importance of Russia for Armenia from economic and military points of view.

The aim of the paper was to explain Russia's restrained position during the 2018 governmental change in Armenia. The research showed that as long

⁶³ Way, Ahmad. (2018, May). Why Didn't Putin Interfere in Armenia's Velvet Revolution? *In Foreign Affairs*. Retrieved from <<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/armenia/2018-05-17/why-didnt-putin-interfere-armenias-velvet-revolution>>.

⁶⁴ Riegg, Stephen. (2018, May). Why Russia Won't Interfere in Armenia's Velvet Revolution. Retrieved from <https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2018/05/08/why_russia_wont_interfere_in_armenias_velvet_revolution_112792.html>.

⁶⁵ Wezeman, Pieter, Fleurant, Aude, Kuimova, Alexandra, Tian, Nan and Wezeman, Siemon. (2018). Trends In International Arms Transfers, 2017. Retrieved from <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri_at2017_0.pdf>.

as the new government continues to cooperate and maintain friendly relations with Kremlin, internal turbulence in Armenia is not of huge importance for Russian political elite. Therefore, Russia remained calm as several key aspects assured Moscow that there will be no U-turns in the foreign policy strategy of the new leader: 1) the protests were directed against Sargsyan's and his team's flawed domestic politics, without targeting country's foreign policy; 2) Armenia's geopolitical conditions determine its politics, therefore they do not allow for drastic changes in foreign policy; 3) Armenia is a member of CSTO and EAEU and has lucrative economic and military cooperation with Russia, which the West is not able to offer; and 4) Armenia perceives Russia as guarantor of security and as a supporter in case of Nagorno-Karabakh.

Finally, the paper outlined various suppositions, possibly explaining the reasons of Russia's restrained reaction: 1) Sargsyan's unpopularity within and outside the country; 2) Russia's "fear" of additional sanctions from the West; and 3) Russia's desire to improve international reputation. Part of the experts agreed with the first and third statements, while no one agreed with the second one.

The Export of Hate: Radicalism Seeps Through the Borders

Anton Chablin

Institutional instability in the states of the South Caucasus leads not only to the aggravation of existing threats, but also to the formation of new security threats, among which international terrorism is the main one.

A breeding ground for the spread of radical views (primarily among young people) is the socio-political protest, which in the South Caucasus states is associated with various factors. In particular, in Armenia it is mostly formed on the basis of socio-economic requirements, in Georgia around foreign policy claims, and in Azerbaijan it often acquires a pronounced religious connotation associated with the specifics of ethno-political relations in society (including the aggravation of Sunni-Shiite and Sunni-Salafi polemics).

One of the most pronounced points of tension is the Pankisi Gorge, which poses a potential threat to regional security not only in Georgia, but also in Russia. Centres of local resistance in Pankisi, inhabited mainly by ethnic Chechens (Kists), have been formed since the late 1990s.

In these years Pankisi Gorge was visited by Movladi Udugov (who in late 1999 – early 2000 had contact with the personal representatives of Osama bin Laden), Achemez Gochiyayev, one of the organizers of bombings of residential houses in Moscow and Vladikavkaz, and Rappani Khalilov, one of the leaders of the Dagestani Wahhabis, suspected of organizing the terrorist act in Kaspiysk.

In 2004, the special forces of the FSB together with the Georgian special units held a special operation in the Pankisi Gorge in order to eliminate the rebel field commander Ruslan Gelayev and the Akhmadov brothers (they were hiding in the villages of Jokela, the Bottom of Duisi and Omalo).

In February 2014 the militant Ruslan Machalikashvili, a native of the Pankisi Gorge (known by the Arabic name Seifullah al-Shishani) was killed in Syria. He served under the command of the brothers Tamaz and Tarkhan Batirashvili.

Both come from the Pankisi Gorge, their father was a Christian and their mother a Muslim. Tarkhan Batiashvili served in the Georgian army, but, in 2010, was arrested on charges of illegal possession of weapons and sentenced to three years imprisonment. In 2012, after being released from prison, Batirashvili, led by a large detachment of Chechens and Kists, went to war in Syria, taking the Arab name of Abu Umar al-Shishani and leading the “Jaysh al-Muhajirin Val-Ansar” gang.

Ruslan Machalikashvili also first created his own group and then joined “Jabhat al-Nusra”. He was killed during the fighting in Syrian Aleppo. His funeral was attended by Murat Ozer, the head of the Turkish charity organization Imkander, which was founded in 2009 to provide assistance to widows and orphans of victims of the armed conflict in the North Caucasus.

Representatives of Imkander held conferences on human rights, provided legal assistance, raised funds for the treatment of Chechens and Kists and their families. For several years, starting in 2011, Imkander volunteers have carried out incentive campaigns in the Pankisi Gorge.

The charitable work of the organization is supported by effective propaganda. In May 2012, Imkander held a conference in Istanbul, where calls were made to celebrate the day of the victims of the Circassian genocide. In 2014 Imkander organized a protest against the visit to Turkey of Vladimir Putin, and last year held a protest march of “Chechen refugees, victim of Russian occupation of Caucasus” in Istanbul.

The Russian foreign Ministry appealed to the UN in March 2013 to ban the activities of Imkander as a terrorist organization, but several countries spoke out against this decision at the September session, including Azerbaijan and the United States.

“We believe this approach of our partners is not constructive and does not meet our common interests in the fight against international terrorism”, the Russian Foreign Ministry said in an official comment.

In January 2016, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov announced at a press conference that ISIS militant training camps operate with impunity in the Pankisi Gorge, and then can move to fight in Syria, Iraq and Afghanistan. In January 2017, two Pankisi Gorge natives were killed, Ramzan Paraulidze and Mihad Turkoshvili, who also served under Tamaz and Tarkhan Batirashvili (currently both dead). Among the natives of the Pankisi Gorge was also one of the commanders of Adam (Guram) Guramashvili (Faizulla al-Shishani). In November 2017, during a special operation in Tbilisi, another native of the Pankisi Gorge, Ahmed Chatayev, nicknamed One-Armed, was killed. He is considered to be the organizer of a number of terrorist attacks in Istanbul; the bombing of the police station in the Sultanahmet and Beyoglu district (Istiklal street), as well as attacks on the airport.

In ISIS, Chatayev was engaged in recruitment of Russian-speaking militants, including in Georgia. Chairman of the national security Committee of US House of representatives Michael McCall said that among the personal control of Ahmed Chatayev were not less than 130 militants of the ISIS recruited by him, who are scattered throughout the various countries of the European Union. According to McCall, this is a kind of “sleeper agents”, which at the request of the ISIS allegedly can organize terrorist attacks and sabotage at any time.

Georgian authorities were warned of terrorist attacks during the trial of the former Imam of the village of Jokolo in the Pankisi Gorge Ayub Borchashvili, accused of recruiting Chechen and Kists fighters for ISIS. In March 2016, the Imam was sentenced to 14 years in prison by the Tbilisi city court.

Merab Tsatiashvili, Tarkhan Batirashvili’s cousin, was also arrested in this criminal case. Among those recruited by Borchashvili were not only residents of Pankisi, but also ethnic Georgians from Tbilisi, who a few years ago had nothing to do with Islam and, especially, Salafism.

In December 2017, during the fighting in the province of Hama in Syria, another field commander, a native of the Pankisi Gorge, Georgi Margoshvili, who took the nickname Salahuddin al-Shishani, was killed. He led the “Jaysh al-Muhajirin Wal-Ansar” gang.

These examples demonstrate that the Pankisi Gorge, bordering the Chechen Republic, was in fact an exclave in which Salafism became the dominant form of Islam. At the same time, it should be noted that democratization has been taking place here recently. In September 2015, for the first time in the history of Pankisi, a woman, Tamara Margoshvili, was elected head of the administration of the Akhmet municipality.

On the one hand democratization and on the other traditionalization, are both breeding grounds for radicalization. Thanks to modern communications, radical Islamic propaganda can be effective not only among “ethnic Muslims”, but also among representatives of non-Islamic peoples in Georgia. This is a factor in destabilizing the situation not only in Georgia itself, but also in the neighbouring territories of Russia.

In November 2017, a special operation was carried out in the Tbilisi residential area of Isani, during which several militants who swore allegiance to the ISIS were eliminated. They had a significant arsenal of small arms, ammunition and an improvised explosive device (IED).

Fighters allegedly prepared for going to Iraq and Syria and then received military training against “Russian occupants” both in Chechnya, and, probably, in Ukraine.

With the support of NGOs, they can also be used to destabilize the situation in Azerbaijan, bordering on Iran (in 2015, among the top military leadership of the ISIS, there was even talk of creating a separate Azerbaijani battalion in Syria).

In December 2017, after the events in Tbilisi, the Georgian Special Forces conducted an operation in the Pankisi Gorge, during which four people were detained. Also a teenage boy, Temirlan Machalikashvili, was seriously wounded and died two weeks later.

The death of the teenager caused sharp criticism from international human rights organizations: they accused the Georgian authorities of excessive use of police force. The state security service of Georgia claims that Machalishvili was associated with Chatayev and participated in the preparation of terrorist attacks. At the same time, in August 2018, the militants of the Islamic State distributed a video in which they threaten the Georgian government with terrorist attacks.

The existence of a cross-border network of recruitment of Russian-speaking fighters is revealing. In particular, the mentioned Ahmed Chataev on the eve of the European football Championship 2012 was detained by the authorities of Ukraine; on his mobile phone instructions for the production of IEDs were found. He was extradited to Georgia, where he again joined a terrorist group.

In addition to the Kistin from Pankisi (Kakheti), also Muslim residents of Adjara as well as Azerbaijanis from the Kvemo-Kartli region fought among the militants of ISIS.

Faced with such an unprecedented terrorist threat, the Georgian authorities made some attempts to limit the infiltration of militants into the Middle East. In order to combat the problem of the transit of terrorists, Georgia announced the tightening of the regime of entry into the country for citizens of North Africa, the Middle East and Central Asia. Since 2015, the Georgian security services have been actively working to identify the facts of financing terrorist NGOs and their interests under the cover of business and charitable organizations (such as Turkish Öncü Nesil, or “Advanced generation”, and İnsan Hak ve Hürriyetleri, or “Human Rights and Freedoms”).

In May 2015, amendments to the criminal code of Georgia were adopted, expanding the range of crimes related to illegal armed groups. According to the draft law, “joining or/and participation in illegal formations, training organized by such formations, recruitment or training of persons, gathering of persons for the purpose of joining, participating or contributing to such illegal formations in another form” will be punished by imprisonment from three to seven years.

Imprisonment from six to nine years will be imposed for crossing or attempting to cross the state border of Georgia for the purpose of carrying out, training or participating in terrorist activities, or for the purpose of passing terrorist training. The recruitment of persons for the purpose of joining a terrorist organization or for carrying out terrorist activities will be punishable by five to ten years imprisonment. In addition, it is punishable to call for terrorism or to publicly support terrorism if these actions give rise to “an obvious, direct and substantial threat of terrorist activity.”

Although Georgia has adopted a number of legislative acts that create obstacles to the departure of potential militants to foreign military formations, it is not possible to block all channels. Former defense minister of Georgia, leader of the Free Democrats Party Irakli Alasania believes that Tbilisi needs to pursue a comprehensive policy to reduce the attractiveness of the ideology of the Islamic state by, first of all, solving the social problems of young people.

Alasania also believes that law enforcement and counter-terrorism agencies lack coordination, and “more trustful cooperation with Turkish security services” is necessary for effective monitoring of crossing the Georgian-Turkish border.

It is obvious that the authorities and special services of the South Caucasus states could use the practical experience of the Russian authorities and NGOs (including our “Center for social and scientific innovations”) to counter the spread of extremist ideology among young people.

**PART IV:
RE-ENERGIZING CRISIS
INTERNATIONALIZATION**

Frozen Conflicts and De Facto States in Post-Soviet Space

Alexander Dubony

The breakup of the Soviet Union did not follow the borders formed during the Soviet period in all cases. In the 1990ies a number of newly independent states, including the Russian Federation, have faced severe challenges in the form of separatist movements and even ethno-political conflicts; as a result “de facto entities emerged that have received only partial international recognition or no recognition at all”¹.

The so-called *frozen conflicts* in the post-Soviet space differ strongly from each other and should not be put in one basket. The term *frozen conflicts* came into use in the 1990ies to refer to conflicts which occurred on the periphery of the former Soviet Union following its collapse and were difficult or even impossible to settle. According to William Hill these conflicts were “never really frozen, as their nature, dynamics, and prospects changed over time”².

Due to William Hill it is almost impossible to speak of a clear Russian or Western position or even a strategy at any point in time for all of the frozen conflicts and de facto entities.³ If at all the central element of the Western approach to these conflicts has been the recognition of the constituent republics of the Soviet Union within their official borders as independent

¹ Markedonov Sergei, *Goodbye Post-Soviet Space?*, in: Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 343-350, p. 343.

² Hill William H., *The Thawing of Russia's Frozen Conflicts*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 10-13, p. 10, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019.

³ cp.: Hill William H., *The Thawing of Russia's Frozen Conflicts*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 10-13, p. 10, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019.

states and to support the principle of territorial integrity.⁴ Moscow in comparison as Alexander Gushchin rightly notes did never have a single approach to conflicts.⁵ Russian policy toward de facto states is rather pragmatic, realistic and quite cynical, and is not guided by doctrinal guidelines. Moreover, the dynamics of relations between Moscow and the de facto states are not linear, and Moscow's ability to influence de facto states is often limited.⁶

Russia is and will remain, at least in the next decade, the main stakeholder, the dominant strategic actor in the post-Soviet space. According to Nikolay Silaev this is not due to a deliberate policy, but is simply the result of "overall economic, political and military power"⁷. According to Sergey Markedonov Russia will play the key role in determining the configuration of the post-Soviet space "regardless of whether its position grows stronger or weaker"⁸. Because of that none of the post-Soviet conflicts can be resolved peacefully and sustainably without Russian engagement. It should be also mentioned that the mother states are quite rightly criticizing Moscow's post-imperial ambitions in the post-Soviet space but for their part some of these states often lead an openly imperial policy towards ethnic minorities and de facto states.

⁴ cp.: Hill William H., *The Thawing of Russia's Frozen Conflicts*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 10-13, p. 10, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019.

⁵ cp.: Gushin Aleksandr, Dankov Artem, Markedonov Sergei, Rekada Sergei, *Konflikty na postsovet'skom prostranstve: perspektivy uregulirovaniya i rol' Rossii*, Working Paper, Russian International Affairs Council, 36, 2016.

⁶ cp.: Gushin Aleksandr, Dankov Artem, Markedonov Sergei, Rekada Sergei, *Konflikty na postsovet'skom prostranstve: perspektivy uregulirovaniya i rol' Rossii*, Working Paper, Russian International Affairs Council, 36, 2016.

⁷ Silaev Nikolay, *Resolving the conflicts in the post-Soviet space*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 4-9, p. 6, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019.

⁸ Markedonov Sergei, *Goodbye Post-Soviet Space?*, in: Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 343-349, p. 348.

Despite the annexation of Crimea and Russian military involvement in Donbass conflict Moscow experience since mid 1990ies has shown that “its tasks in the post-Soviet space can be implemented more effectively in a stable environment”⁹. Lastly as Nikolay Silaev states

“Russia is well aware that overall it is weaker than the collective West, and only in exceptional cases can it resort to unilateral action, while hoping at the same time for a swift return to multilateral talks on dispute settlement thereafter”¹⁰.

The conflicts in the post-Soviet space are the result of the Soviet legacy in the first row. They evolved due to protracted territorial disputes, identity problems, metropolitan narratives, complex historical narratives and conflicts of historical memories. Because of that, it would be limiting to reduce the formation of de facto states exclusively to the desire of Russia to secure for itself a geopolitical influence in the post-Soviet space or Western wishes to contain Moscow. According to Sergey Markedonov the question of frozen conflicts and de facto statehood is in the first row about “the inability of the new state elites to pursue national construction without conflicts and in the interests of various ethnic groups and regions”¹¹ and not about the interference of Washington, Brussels or Moscow.

In all cases, there were objective reasons for the conflicts and the formation of the de facto statehood. Most of these reasons are dating back to the Soviet, and even to the pre-Soviet period. Already in Soviet times, some of these conflicts were in a sort of a sleeping state, periodically manifesting themselves in various forms.¹² This sleeping state quickly transferred into an active phase with the growth of nationalism in the years of Perestroika.

⁹ Silaev Nikolay, *Resolving the conflicts in the post-Soviet space*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 4-9, p. 6, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019.

¹⁰ Silaev Nikolay, *Resolving the conflicts in the post-Soviet space*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 4-9, p. 7, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019.

¹¹ Markedonov Sergei, *Goodbye Post-Soviet Space?*, in: Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 343-350, p. 349.

¹² Markedonov Sergei, *Goodbye Post-Soviet Space?*, in: Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 343-350, p. 344.

In the words of Yuri Slezkine, a Russian-born American ethnologist, the USSR was created by nationalists, and it was destroyed by nationalists.¹³

As Sergey Markedonov aptly put it:

“The main subjects in the USSR were not citizens, but rather socialist nations. In fact, the Soviet state identified ethnic groups as the key subjects of politics and state law. The priorities were the rights of nations and not of individuals. [...] In practice, this created the perception of collective (ethnic) property of this or that ethnic entity (in its highest phase, national entity) of a territory designated as a national republic, an autonomy within a national republic and even ethnically constructed areas. Renunciation of individual rights in favour of collective rights created the prerequisites for the emergence of ethno-national movements for self-determination of future independent states and the emergence of hotbeds of conflict and unrecognized republics.”¹⁴

As it is for today the statehood of the de facto states is in most cases fully-fledged and their interests cannot be ignored in the conflict resolution process. Over the last years de facto states developed themselves to functioning institutions, although in some cases these institutions seem to be quite peculiar.¹⁵ The positions and interests of the societies of de facto states must be taken into account. Without the acceptance of this facts conflict resolution is hardly possible.

It should also be remembered that for some de facto states the issue of full reintegration is actually not on their agenda. The societies and the elites of these countries are not seriously considering the possibility of reintegration and do not want to lose their de facto statehood, despite all the difficulties of the unrecognized status. So in some cases of conflict resolution a guided final separation would probably be the only viable option. Thomas de Waal

¹³ cp.: Slezkine Yuri, *The USSR as a Communal Apartment, or How a Socialist State Promoted Ethnic Particularism*; Slavic Review. 1994. Vol. 53. No. 2. pp. 414–452. p. 416.

¹⁴ Markedonov Sergei, *Goodbye Post-Soviet Space?*, in: *Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology*. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 343-349, p. 345.

¹⁵ cp.: Gushin Aleksandr, Dankov Artem, Markedonov Sergei, Rekada Sergei, *Konflikty na postsovetском prostranstve: perspektivy uregulirovaniya i rol' Rossii*, Working Paper, Russian International Affairs Council, 36, 2016; *Zemelnye spory, opasnoe delo*, <<https://zonakz.net/2018/11/27/zemelnye-spory-opasnoe-delo/>>, 18.02.2019.

rightly notes that this final separation process should be managed by international community taking humanitarian factors into account.¹⁶

The conflict resolution should be based on the principles of inclusiveness and reintegration of people, not just territories. That's why one of the priorities should be the establishment of dialogue formats between civil societies of de facto states and civil societies of their mother countries. The involvement of civil societies brings more legitimacy to the process and the hope for a more durable peace. But, in this context we should consider the following problem: In societies with an incomplete process of nation-building, in societies with split identities, civil society is not always part of the solution of problems, but often part of the problem itself. A civil society, which in theory should confront nationalist manifestations and be interested in a dialogue, is often itself a carrier of ethnic nationalism and prevents dialogue attempts. The solution to this problem, however, requires a sustainable generational shift.

Today, none of the conflicts associated with the formation of the de facto states in the post-Soviet space has a quick solution. Even the probably least problematic conflict, the conflict in Transnistria, is far from being resolved. Although since 1992 there have been no relapses into violence and the parties to the conflict cooperate on a wide range of issues.¹⁷

According to Sergey Markedonov and Aleksandr Gushchin the most likely scenario for the next years is a dynamic status quo, in which conflicts are

¹⁶ de Waal Thomas, *Uncertain territory. The strange life and curious sustainability of de facto states* <<http://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/04/26/uncertain-territory-strange-life-curious-sustainability-de-facto-states/>>, 18.02.2019.

¹⁷ cp.: Silaev Nikolay, *Resolving the conflicts in the post-Soviet space*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 4-9, p. 8, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019; Markedonov Sergey, Gushchin Aleksandr, *Transnistria: Dilemmas of Peaceful Settlement*, Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), July 14, 2016, <<http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/pridnestrovo-dilemma-mirno-uregulirovaniya/>>, 18.02.2019.

neither resolved nor completely frozen.¹⁸ The main danger of the dynamic status quo is that the increasing number of incidents may sooner or later lead to an escalation.¹⁹ Nevertheless, a sharp change in the regional status quo is unlikely, especially for those conflicts which have a very significant degree of freezing. From today's point of view maintaining the dynamic status quo while strengthening the peace process is probably the best option.

Last but not least, the most problematic point is the geopolitical context of the post-Soviet conflicts. The resolution of conflicts and the future status of de facto states are closely linked to the geopolitical and geo-economic problems between Russia and the West. Different mutually exclusive narratives and self-perceptions are pushing Russia and the West into a vicious circle if talking about interaction in the post-Soviet area. Quite too often Russia sees itself only as a neutral arbiter, while the West sees Russia as part of the problem and vice versa.²⁰ But after the outbreak of the Ukrainian crisis Russia seems to regard the Western involvement in the post-Soviet space as a zero-sum game, turning towards "traditional territorial imperative"²¹; although historically this was not always the case.²²

¹⁸ cp.: Gushin Aleksandr, Dankov Artem, Markedonov Sergei, Rekada Sergei, *Konflikty na postsovet'skom prostranstve: perspektivy uregulirovaniya i rol' Rossii*, Working Paper, Russian International Affairs Council, 36, 2016, p. 42.

¹⁹ cp.: Gushin Aleksandr, Dankov Artem, Markedonov Sergei, Rekada Sergei, *Konflikty na postsovet'skom prostranstve: perspektivy uregulirovaniya i rol' Rossii*, Working Paper, Russian International Affairs Council, 36, 2016, p. 42.

²⁰ cp.: Silaev Nikolay, *Resolving the conflicts in the post-Soviet space*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 4-9, p. 9, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019.

²¹ Trenin Dmitri, *Russia and CIS Countries: the Relations Getting Mature*, in: Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 9-17, p. 17.

²² cp.: Silaev Nikolay, *Resolving the conflicts in the post-Soviet space*, in: Frozen Conflicts in the post-Soviet Space, Russia Direct Brief | 23 | August 2015, pp. 4-9, p. 6, <<https://russia-direct.org/catalog/product/russia-direct-brief-frozen-conflicts-post-soviet-space>>, 18.02.2019; Trenin Dmitri, *Russia and CIS Countries: the Relations Getting Mature*, in: Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 9-17, p. 13.

Despite the fact that all conflicts are primarily a consequence of the collapse of imperial space, the impossibility of resolving them is a symptom of a deep crisis of the European security system. We should not hope for substantial progress in resolving conflicts without a significant rapprochement between Russia and the West and profound changes in the European security architecture. Today, such a prospect seems rather distant, especially in a situation where the existing world order is crumbling, and the world is moving towards a period of confrontational disorder. As for now, all we can seriously expect is a period of a new world disorder, confrontational multipolarity and “Great Disharmony of New Regional Powers”.²³

None of the conflicts in the post-Soviet space has a rapid solution. Even more, the annexation of Crimea and the Donbass crisis demonstrated that the disintegration process of the former Soviet Union has been fully completed in formal legal terms. But, from the historical point of view, the legal dissolution triggered “the formation of new state entities and political nations, a process that still continues”²⁴. In the next decade, we will rather face the appearance of new conflicts in the post-imperial space of the post-Soviet area than a resolution of existing ones; since the “process of exiting from the imperial status is always long and painful”.²⁵

Against this background the first step towards conflict resolution in the post-Soviet space would be for both the West and Russia the acceptance of political realities, the admission of mutual and in some cases divergent geopolitical and geo-economic interests and of the simple fact that there is no and cannot be total neutrality in resolving conflicts in the post-Soviet space. As for the mother states and de facto entities there is a great need of working out flexible approaches involving OSCE and UNO, encouraging public diplomacy as well as putting the population and its rights above the territorial claims.

²³ Dubowy Alexander, *The New World Disorder. A Long Way Back From the End of History*, <<https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/book/The-New-World-Disorder-19715>>, 18.02.2019.

²⁴ Markedonov Sergei, *Goodbye Post-Soviet Space?*, in: *Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology*. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 343-349, p. 345.

²⁵ Trenin Dmitri, *Russia and CIS Countires: the Relations Getting Mature*, in: *Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology*. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 9-17, p. 9.

However, the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union will be protracted if the national elites of the newly independent states do not become independent political actors pursuing the interests of their peoples and stop exploiting the contradictions between the West and Russia to suit their interests.²⁶ So hoping for the things getting better, one still should not forget an old Radio Yerevan joke. Once Radio Yerevan was asked: When will it be better? And the answer was: It has already been better.

²⁶ cp.: Markedonov Sergei, *Goodbye Post-Soviet Space?*, in: *Evolution of Post-Soviet Space: Past, Present and Future: An Anthology*. Moscow: NPMP RIAC, 2017 pp. 343-349, p. 349.

Armenia’s “Velvet Revolution”, Karabakh Conflict Internationalization and Recasting Western Regional Strategies

George Vlad Niculescu

Background

The protracted conflicts from Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh are undermining efforts to build up effective regional cooperation, and are generating regional instability, as well as asymmetric security risks in the South Caucasus. The existing conflict management mechanisms have not yielded the expected outcomes, which might be due to missing regional strategic leadership.

In an article published in 2015, I suggested that

“conflict resolution in the South Caucasus might actually become a test-case for developing new European security rules and mechanisms, which could integrate regional powers (including Russia, Turkey, and the EU) in a different way than since the end of the Cold War.”¹

This assumption has become even more relevant today.

We have discussed this at our previous workshop in Minsk, in April 2018. On that occasion, we agreed that the current contested European order endangers regional stability across the continent. And that the South Caucasus region is significantly affected by the current confrontation between Russia and the West. The current crisis in Western-Russian relations could only come to an end by agreeing upon a new European security model, hopefully reflecting a “new European security deal.”² Such a model should re-balance the international system at both global and European levels and

¹ Niculescu, 2015.

² See Frederic Labarre and George Niculescu, eds. *What a New European Security Deal Could Mean for the South Caucasus*. Vienna: Landesverteidigungsakademie, August 2018.

should reintroduce predictability in international relations by means of new international law or other political, economic, security or military tools.

Unfortunately, we are far away from such an outcome, mainly due to the diverging visions among relevant international actors on the nature, scope, and rules of the new European security model. Building upon this perspective, and considering the theme and purpose of the current workshop, I will focus my paper on the following questions: How are the current political changes in the South Caucasus linked to the ongoing confrontation between Russia and the West? What are the likely changing circumstances of the EU-Russia and US-Russia relations? To that end, I will be looking in somewhat more detail at the links among the Armenian “Velvet Revolution”, the Karabakh conflict resolution, the US changing European power play, and the EU’s dilemmas in relations with Russia over the Eastern Neighbourhood.

The “Velvet Revolution” Might Have Not yet Significantly Changed Positions on Karabakh

According to local sources quoted by the *New York Times*, the demonstrations in Yerevan in April 2018 were fuelled by a new generation of Armenians disenchanted with the small elite of politicians and their oligarch allies who have long controlled the government and much of the economy. However, the protesters dismissed the standard argument that Armenia needed unvarying leadership to negotiate an end to the conflict on Nagorno-Karabakh with neighbouring Azerbaijan, and to deal with the ensuing tense relations with Turkey.

As a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Armenia has been a close regional ally of Russia. Moreover, large swaths of the Armenian economy, including the key energy, banking, telecommunications, and transports sectors, have been tightly controlled by the Russian economic elite. This overwhelming alignment of Armenia’s economic and security interests with those of Russia evolved over the last 25-plus years. It has been mainly induced by the Azerbaijani-Turkish economic blockade against Armenia, as well as by a growing economic and military disbalance between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

However, aware of the weaknesses entailed in its overdependence on Moscow, Yerevan has continuously struggled to balance its relations with Russia by strengthening ties with the West, including with NATO, the EU, and the US. The signing by Armenia in November 2017 of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with the EU has been hailed as the harbinger of a new Armenian multi-vector policy. As seen from Yerevan, this balancing of relations with Russia and the West might help Armenia to preserve the territorial status quo in Karabakh, despite Azerbaijan's persistent political, diplomatic, economic, and military strides to reverse its territorial losses from the Nagorno-Karabakh war in early 1990's.

At the same time, this multi-vector foreign policy combined with relentless multi-layered pressure from Azerbaijan has resulted into a hardening of the Armenian position on Karabakh:

“As for Armenia, the 2016 April War has significantly diminished the readiness of Armenian society to accept solutions based on the idea of immediately withdrawing from parts of the security zone, simultaneously postponing the referendum on the final status of Karabakh.[...] the absolute majority of Armenian society strongly believes that in the current situation any changes to the status quo, which will not lead to the immediate recognition of Nagorno Karabakh independence by both Azerbaijan and the international community, will only usher in a new war.”³

This hardening of the Armenian position on Karabakh could be equated with bringing the conflict management efforts by the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs (Russia, France, and the US) to a crushing deadlock, hence dramatically raising the risk of resuming the war with Azerbaijan.

The hard-line Armenian position on Karabakh might have disturbed not only Baku, but also Moscow, Washington, Brussels, and a few leading Western capitals, who might have felt their conflict management efforts were seriously undermined, and their leverage over Yerevan, as far as Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution was concerned, significantly curtailed.

In his address to the UN General Assembly in New York, on 25 September 2018, Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan summarized the position of his

³ Benyamin Poghosyan, commonspace.eu, 2018.

government on Karabakh (asbarez.com), which did not appear significantly different from the previous government:

- The peaceful resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict continues to prevail on the foreign policy agenda. The status and security of the Republic of Artsakh is an absolute priority in the negotiation process.
- Any attempt to resolve the conflict through military means represents a direct threat to the regional security, democracy and human rights in Armenia.
- Armenia will continue its constructive engagement in the peaceful resolution of the conflict within the format of the OSCE Minsk Group.
- If Azerbaijan is truly committed to the peace process it should start talking to the main subject of this conflict – Nagorno-Karabakh. If it does not, it might be since the Azerbaijani government wants the territory and not the people. This would entitle Nagorno-Karabakh to make the argument that being part of Azerbaijan entailed the risk of ethnical cleansing.
- The conflict can and should be settled only through mutual compromises by all sides, in an atmosphere conducive to peace.

Mirroring the Armenian multi-vector policy, Baku has also sought to strengthen ties with both Russia and the West, including by building new energy infrastructure, and selling Caspian oil and gas to the West, while purchasing modern weapons systems from Russia and others. However, Baku preferred so far to stop short of joining the Russia-led CSTO and EAEU (despite rumours to the contrary that emerged in summer 2018), most likely due to its alternative strategic partnership with Turkey.

Will the US Change Its European Power Play?

When at the NATO summit in Brussels, on 25 May 2017, President Donald Trump did not say that one “traditional” sentence committing America to continue standing by Article 5 of the NATO Charter, he caused raised eyebrows across Europe. At that time, everyone remembered that candidate Donald Trump raised serious suspicions that his presidency might lead to the end of the West, as we knew it. Nevertheless, everyone who has ever believed in the strength of the Trans-Atlantic link and in the soft power of the Euro-Atlantic values secretly hoped that the end of Pax Americana in Europe was not that close.

Earlier this year, a plethora of articles speculating over “The Post-War Order is Over”, “America’s Pivot from the West”, “The United States and Russia Target Germany”, “Trump’s America Does Not Care” or “Trump, Kissinger, and the Search for a New World Order” have fed suspicions that Washington is about to change its global and European power play. The overall narrative of those articles included the foregone conclusion that “the 75-year-old post-war order crafted by the United States after World War II was falling apart”⁴ and with it the East vs. West geopolitical competition in Europe.

What could we make of an unpredictable most recent American foreign and security policy? In theory, US policy suggested a new containment jointly with its allies and partners against Russia and China. Meanwhile, president Trump’s practice has hardly reflected the rhetoric.

In terms of European security policy, the way forward for the US might consist in applying *indirect warfare strategy*. This strategy had been first applied in the Middle East by President Obama, in fall 2015, when he had tacitly acquiesced to Russian military involvement in Syria. It was meant to give up America’s traditional post-Cold War role as the regional hegemon in the Middle East, in exchange for a perpetual balancing role against competing regional powers. This implied for the US to share the task of counterbal-

⁴ Hanson, 2018

ancing the growing Iranian influence in the Middle East with its key regional allies: Saudi Arabia, Turkey and Israel.

The *indirect warfare strategy* in Europe might build upon Halford Mackinder's "Theory of Heartland". According to Mackinder, the land surface of the Earth was divisible into: World-Island, comprising the interlinked continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa; Offshore Islands, including the British islands and Japan; the Outlying Islands, including the American continents and Australia. The Heartland lay at the centre of the World Island, stretching from the Volga to the Yangtze and from the Himalayas to the Arctic. He summarised his theory as, "who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; who rules the World-Island commands the world."⁵ By East Europe Mackinder understood the vast space separating Germany from Russia of his times (beginning of the 20th century), that is what we would call today the area from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea or the *Intermarium*.

Along Mackinder's line of thinking, George Friedman suggested a few years ago a US strategy of indirect engagement in Eastern Europe, which would combine economy of force and finance, and would limit the development of Russia and Germany as regional hegemonic powers, while exposing the US to limited and controlled risk. The key element of that strategy would consist of an *Intermarium Alliance*, consisting of countries on the Estonia-Azerbaijan-line, which shared the primary interest of retaining their sovereignty, and the danger that the eventual fate of Ukraine could spread and directly affect their national security interests, including their internal stability. He saw this alliance not as an offensive force but rather as a force designed to deter Russian expansion. By supplying those countries with modern military equipment Washington might strengthen pro-US political forces in each country and create a wall behind which foreign investment could take place.⁶ Probably, US National Security Advisor John Bolton's recent offer to sell weapons to Armenia and Azerbaijan has drawn upon such a strategy (even if, for now, it has been directed against Iran).

⁵ Mackinder, 1919.

⁶ Friedman, 2014.

Whether or not this dramatic shift in the US policy is likely or not, it is still to be confirmed by president Trump's European power play. Eventually, this is a process that may take some time to complete, and it may start with signs of meltdown at NATO, followed by deepening cracks within the EU, and fresh efforts to reach out to Russia from both sides of the Atlantic.

The EU Struggles with Conflicting Economic and Geopolitical Interests in the Eastern Neighbourhood

How should the EU deal with a revisionist Russia, which challenges the post-Cold War European security order? Two strategic options for shaping EU policies in its Eastern Neighbourhood might be considered:

- 1) finding a compromise solution with Moscow on how to fix the broken order, and roll back, to the greatest extent possible, the outcomes of Russian military intrusions in Ukraine and in Georgia;?
- 2) defending by all available means the shared values in the Eastern Neighbourhood to mitigate, and eventually annihilate the Russian regional power and influence.

Apparently, the former option might be prevailing as the debate on whether, and if so how, to restore the EU-Russia dialogue to meet the interests of both parties and to reconcile respect for international law with “principled pragmatism, which implies in practice a prioritisation of stability over a clear projection of the EU's norms and values”⁷ is reshaping Western European economic and strategic thinking.

The geopolitical changes in Eastern Europe throughout the 2000s, which culminated with the war in Ukraine, have turned Russia from a “strategic partner” into a “strategic challenge” for the EU. The EU's current policy towards Russia highlights the conditionality in restoring a comprehensive dialogue with Russia *inter alia* upon progress in implementation of the Minsk II Agreements. However, at present, neither party to that war favours the implementation of Minsk II Agreements over the current state of

⁷ Van der Togt, 2018.

“no peace, no war”. Furthermore, the resolution of the Ukrainian conflict is hardly conceivable absent a new regional order settling a jointly agreed status of the “in-between” states – Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus, Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan – and their relations with Russia and the West.

To achieve a new European order, the 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.⁸ 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 EAEU.

Although several European and Russian researchers have concluded that both the EU and Russia/EAEU would benefit from opening new trade/economic cooperation avenues with each other,⁹ 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 “third powers”, like China, Turkey, the Arab monarchies, and Iran. For example,

“...states like Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan clearly want to further diversify their foreign policy and economic engagements. They reach out to third powers for different reasons. Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine pivot toward such third powers in order to offset the losses they have incurred in the last decade of on-and-off trade embargoes from Russia. Their attempts to replace the Russian market with the Chinese, Turkish, or some Arab markets have been quite successful. Russia’s allies in the region, Armenia and Belarus, do not

⁸ Charap et al., 2018.

⁹ Ademmer, 2018.

need to replace the Russian market, but they still want relations with other powers in order to lessen their dependence on Russia.”¹⁰

Although the challenges posed by “third powers” are different for Russia/EAEU and the EU, they are affecting the interests in the common neighbourhood of both. That is why the EU and the EAEU might need to look at best ways to enhance their access to, and influence over, the Eastern European markets of goods and capitals by facilitating bilateral arrangements with all regional actors, irrespective of the nature and level of economic integration, and by promoting transparent and inclusive economic dialogue and cooperation between themselves.

Conclusions

In the post “Velvet Revolution” context, Armenia might need to keep counter-balancing its economic, and security overdependence on Russia with loose, Moscow-controlled links, with NATO, US and the EU. However, to achieve that goal, the new government in Yerevan needs to enable efforts by both Moscow and the West for the Karabakh conflict settlement.

To facilitate a softening of Armenian positions on Karabakh, Baku should strictly abstain from any provocative actions across the whole border with Armenia and the Line of Contact with Karabakh until the political crisis in Yerevan has been solved and engage in broad confidence building. Otherwise, hard liners would have a point in maintaining Armenia’s current policy on Karabakh that might be subsequently reversed only by warfare.

If a new “East European security deal” eventually translates into practice, the South Caucasus might become an integral part of a wider regional integration process agreed by Russia and the West (instead of the two competing European and Eurasian integration processes existent today). Obviously, the continuation of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus would be counterproductive to achieving regional integration, and their resolution should become a central part of the new agenda. However, in the new geopolitical context, the onus for conflict resolution might move from the local to regional actors, such as Russia, the EU, the US, and Tur-

¹⁰ Popescu, Secieru, 2018.

key, who might need to get much more involved in the conflict resolution processes than they have done so far.

Conversely, in case the Russia-West confrontation would prevail and increasingly turn towards a broader European conflict, the South Caucasus' conflicts are likely to increasingly transform into proxies for the broader Russia-West conflict, potentially slipping towards significantly larger scales than at present.

On the other hand, the South Caucasus' close neighbourhood with the Middle East would increasingly test the viability of the multi-vector policies of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. For example, as it has been recently seen during the visit to Yerevan of President Trump's national security advisor, John Bolton, the demand from Washington to help "squeezing Iran" would conflict with critical Armenian economic and political interests. Joining the US efforts to isolate Iran would not only deprive Yerevan from one of its own outlets to relieve its economic isolation due to the ongoing Turkish-Azerbaijani blockade, but it might also negatively impact Russia's and EU's broader regional interests in the Middle East. In such a situation, Armenia might have a hard time in choosing its priorities between maintaining a hard-line Karabakh policy, and pursuing a flexible and, ultimately, a viable multi-vector foreign and security policy to preserve its own independence and sovereignty.

The same conclusion might also go for Azerbaijan, not only because of Baku's economic interests for maintaining open its border and energy and transport projects with Iran, but mostly because of the damaging effect of joining Washington's demands for its relations with Moscow, and the related prospects of Karabakh conflict resolution.

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Details of the Georgian Peace Deal with Abkhazia

Maia Sberazadishvili

As is known to everyone, various disruptions, resulted from the collapse of the Soviet Union, provoked conflicts in the Caucasus. Conflicts in Abkhazia and in South Ossetia grew into armed clashes. Since the ceasefire, relations between Abkhazia and the rest of Georgia remain frozen.¹ Over the course of time, the negotiations were often deadlocked and sometimes even terminated because of escalation of tension, for example, in May 1998, in October 2001 and in July 2004, when the confrontation almost grew to all-out war. It should be noted that all political and international organizations, interested in settling this conflict, as well as practically every expert agree that the situation is deadlocked and it is difficult to talk about its solution.

The legal basis for the settlement of the conflict with Abkhazia is the statement on “the measures for political settlement of the conflict of Georgians and Abkhazians” (Moscow, April 4, 1994), as well as the Agreement on Voluntary Return of Refugees and Displaced Persons (Moscow, 4 April, 1994) and the Agreement on Ceasefire and Separation of Forces (Moscow, May 14, 1994). None of the above-mentioned agreements have been fulfilled except the agreement on ceasefire.

On the basis of the request of the Abkhazian side of 15 May, 1994 and the request of the Georgian side of 16 May, 1994, the Council of Heads of the States of Commonwealth of Independent States in Moscow adopted a decision on the deployment of collective peacekeeping forces in the Abkhazia conflict zone on 22 August, 1994. This resulted in the voluntary return of 311 internally displaced persons in the city of Gali under the auspices of the United Nations. However, it should be emphasized that none of them were able to get established due to lack of security. The parties could not

¹ Abushov K.: Policing the Near Abroad: Russian Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus. Australian Journal of International Affairs (2009), p.187-212.

agree on the legal issues existing in the document, which resulted in the process being stopped.²

Despite the long-term processes and numerous agreements, the parties participating in the conflict still remain at radical positions. Abkhazians seek independence and autonomy, which obviously is not acceptable for the Georgian side. The Georgian side demanded the safe return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) to the Autonomous Republic of Abkhazia, and the separatist authorities feared that in case of the large-scale return of IDPs, they would be in the minority again, that is why they demanded to resolve the issue of political and legal status before settling the problems of IDPs.

Nowadays, the operation of Georgian schools is formally prohibited in Abkhazia, moreover, children are not allowed to speak in Georgian language, not even in kindergartens. The history and geography of Georgia is completely removed from the school programme. Against this, I should mention that I do not consider it justified that the whole attention of peaceful settlement of issues of the Abkhazia conflict has been entirely internationalized. Of course, this is essentially important but it is not enough, because the settlement of this conflict should start from the local level and civil society. The Georgian side has repeatedly tried to facilitate the restoration of friendly relations between ethnic Abkhaz and ethnic Georgian population, but under current political influence it is almost impossible.

In this regard we should recall the proposals elaborated on the settlement of the Georgian-Abkhazian conflict by the Abkhaz side in May 2006, which was formulated in the document entitled “The Key to the Future”. It is clear that in this document positions were brought which were unacceptable for Georgian side, but one point should be noted; the document actually did not consider the role of Russia at all. Furthermore, it was noted numerous times that Abkhazia seeks integration in the Black Sea area and

² Salvatore J. Freni: Causes of Violent Conflict in the Caucasus Since the Collapse of Communism. <<http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/articles/722/2/causes-of-violent-conflict-in-the-caucasus-since-the-collapse-of-communism>>, accessed on 03.04.2019.

European space. Analyzing this document, we can consider, that Abkhazia wanted to keep distance from Russia and sought European integration.

On the one hand, Russia has presented itself as the only protector of Abkhazia from Georgian aggression, and on the other hand tried to convince Western countries that Georgia is not ready for a peaceful and civilized way of resolving the conflict. The fact that unresolved conflicts of Georgia with Abkhazia hindered the determination of the country's administrative-territorial arrangement model adding water to the Russian mill. The key to the settlement of the conflict was the agreement between the Georgian and Abkhaz side, which was not possible unless the central government was established. This was what the Georgian side was offering to the separatist-minded society. As you see, the ongoing events were contradictory, and this has led to a frozen conflict. But in reality, it is the peace-making process of resolving this problem that is in a frozen condition but not the progression of the conflicts in Abkhazia as well as in so-called South Ossetia. The war of 2008 exacerbated the already tense situation.

When Russia recognized Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states with the Decree of August 26, 2008, it violated agreements signed in the early 1990s on the determination of relationship with the conflict zones existing in Georgia. The process of restoration of territorial integrity has become more ritualistic rather than the real goal for Georgia. Moscow has tried to establish the image of Georgia being a country that violates international norms and agreements, which continually utilizes forceful methods against the regions separated from it. Thus, Abkhazians and Ossetians consider any proposal coming from Georgia to be harmful for them and consider that Georgia is interested only in restoration of territorial integrity and not in restoration of cultural and human ties with the Abkhaz and South Ossetian communities. The same attitude remains today.

On April 4, 2018, the Government sent a new peace initiative to the Parliament. This is a document aimed at improving the social conditions of people living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and strengthening contacts between citizens on both sides of the occupation line. The package of legislative amendments for these peace initiatives implies three main directions; 1) encourage, expand and simplify trade across dividing lines by creating new opportunities; 2) create additional opportunities for quality education

and simplify access to all levels of education both inside the country and abroad; and 3) simplify access to various benefits for citizens living in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region.

Unlike the existing regulations and practices until now, persons registered with a personal number, without needing to demonstrate citizenship or origin documents, neutral certificate or other documents, will have the opportunity to use a number of services in a simplified way, such as; registration as entrepreneurial entity and conducting commercial activity; payer registration (tax privileges); grant application; banking services; registration of motor vehicles; pre-school and general education; higher education; participation in professional re-training programmes; and participation in certain internship programmes.

A special economic zone represents a geographical area, which would cover the controlled territory of Georgia along the dividing lines, including the village of Rukhi in the direction of Abkhazia, where the Enguri Bridge is actually the only effective crossing point. It is possible to organize similar zones on other sections along the dividing lines (e.g. Village Khurcha) and in Tskhinvali direction, and also Ergneti.³

Representations of various public services of state agencies will be located on this territory, including the Revenue Service of the Ministry of Finance, the Development Agency of the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Internal Affairs. The representations of Georgian commercial banks will be located there, along with currency exchange kiosks, postal and notary services, as well as information, consultation, innovation and training centres.

With registering as an entrepreneurial entity, interested persons will be able to indicate the legal address of the registration at a legal address in the special economic zone mentioned above (Village Rukhi), which will allow to be engaged into export operations and other various economic activities of

³ OC Media: Georgia unveils ‘unprecedented’ peace initiative for Abkhazia, South Ossetia (April 2018). <<https://oc-media.org/georgia-unveils-unprecedented-peace-initiative-for-abkhazia-south-ossetia/?fbclid=IwAR2qgkJR5dKSx1qB7cvLV9iRbXLQJZQDVL9I41SafAyb2qofYrWwSSDVeoM>>, accessed on 21.11.2018.

between Georgia and Abkhazia. In Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the existing operating enterprise which will have the desire to export their own products to the EU or any other country, within this initiative might get assistance in the implementation of European standards and in ensuring compliance with the required standards for product within this peace initiative.

The agrarian market might be placed along the dividing lines; its main purpose will be to simplify the access to the market for the people living in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region and to increase benefits. This market will be a small-scale trade area, where a well-organized special trading infrastructure will be arranged (warehouse for wholesale trade, dry and refrigeration warehouse). Establishing such a market will enable residents of both sides of the dividing line to generate income-oriented business, including the direction of auto-import activities that will influence the growth of the economic activity of the local population.

Persons residing in Abkhazia and South Ossetia will be able to bring products produced on the place to the controlled territory of Georgia on the basis of presenting accompanying documents of origin in case of need for inspection and export certification purposes.

Production from Abkhazia and South Ossetia may be sold in the rest of Georgia, using status-neutral labeling. Specifically, it is enough to put the name of the producer, the town or the area of production (e.g. Sokhumi, Gagra, etc.) or a complete address. Product name and other information posted on it may be written in Abkhazian language.

Exports of goods originated in Abkhazia and South Ossetia could be possible via the controlled territory of Georgia, equipped with the certificate of origin of Georgia and the appropriate marking of the product. Declaration of goods shall be carried out by the holder of status of special or ordinary taxpayers registered in the controlled territory of Georgia. The Revenue Service in accordance with the Georgian legislation will implement the issuance of the certificate of origin, declaration, inspection and export-related procedures.

By the initiative of the Government of Georgia, persons living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, who do not have citizenship of Georgia and also persons who do not have neutral documents will be able to get involved in the pre-school, general, higher and professional education on the basis of individual numbers.⁴ In particular, with the purpose of expanding access to public services for the persons residing in Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, a new “individual number” status-neutral mechanism will come into effect. The identification of a person will be achieved biometrically. Thereafter, the person will be given a personal number which will be protected in the relevant electronic system and, together with the biometric data, will form the basis for the identification of the person when providing services.

For any high school graduate person from these regions, who is willing to continue studies, it will be simplified to enroll in academic institutions. Any person who has the desire and willingness to pass the unified national exams will be able to continue studies in the four-year Bachelor’s degree or at the relevant vocational college and to enjoy the state grant as before (under the quota for 150 students per year).

In the frameworks of unified national exams entrants from these regions will have the opportunity to take the native language examination in Abkhazian or Ossetian, while the remaining subjects are in Russian language.

In addition, it will be simplified to be enrolled via the 1 + 4 system for the Abkhaz and Ossetian language entrants. Namely, corresponding amendments are implemented in the Law of Georgia “On Higher Education”, as a result of which in the unified national exams of 2018 instead of the General Skills Exams in the Abkhazian and Ossetian language, which represents a significant difficulty due to specific terminology, it will be possible to pass the Abkhaz and Ossetian language exam.⁵

⁴ Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality of Georgia, “A Step to a Better Future” (Tbilisi, 2018). <http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/Education_9dd0e9dc.pdf>, accessed on 22.11.2018, p. 12-13.

⁵ Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality of Georgia, “A Step to a Better Future” (Tbilisi, 2018). <http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/Education_9dd0e9dc.pdf>, accessed on 22.11.2018, p. 10-14.

A preparatory centre for after-school education will be created for any applicant and a preparatory centre graduate will be able to continue studying in higher education institutions. In Abkhazia and the Tskhinvali region, those entrants who fail to gain the scores necessary for admission in higher educational institution or those whose test results of the course of the preparatory centre do not meet the criteria for enrollment in higher educational institution will be able to enroll at vocational education institutions instead.

The Government of Georgia will pay the tuition fee for residents of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as accommodation expenditure to some extent. In addition, the Government of Georgia works in the direction of building dormitories for students. It is also planned to engage in international educational programmes and simplify relevant mechanisms and procedures for continuous learning.⁶

The Abkhaz side responded to the initiative of the Government of Georgia on the creation of the State Program for Protection of Abkhaz Language. According to them, the attitude of the Georgian authorities towards Abkhazia and Abkhazian people has a cynical and populist character. The agency tasked with foreign relations of Abkhazia issued the following statement:

“We would like to remind the Prime Minister of Georgia who was suddenly disturbed with the problems of maintaining the Abkhaz language that on October 22, 1992 Georgian armed formations in Sokhumi set fire to the building of the Institute of Language, the State Archive of Abkhazia. As a result, unique documents and materials about the history and culture of Abkhazia were destroyed. Every time, these facts witness that for many years the efforts of the Georgian political elite have been directed towards total destruction of the Abkhaz people and genocide, towards destroying its historical monuments and cultural identity.

Against this background, the attempts of the current leadership of Georgia to make an illusion as if it cares about the culture of the Abkhaz people and the territories against which it made an act of armed aggression and attempted to completely destroy, look like absolutely cynical.

⁶ Office of the State Minister for Reconciliation and Civil Equality of Georgia, “A Step to a Better Future” (Tbilisi, 2018). <http://smr.gov.ge/Uploads/Education__9dd0e9dc.pdf> accessed on 22.11.2018, p. 18.

We assess the Prime Minister's statement as another populist attempt to demonstrate Georgia's peace initiatives, which aim to reconcile the Abkhazian people. Unfortunately, the experience shows that Georgia's real policy keeps aggressive and hostile character towards the Republic of Abkhazia and its people.⁷

The Government of Georgia is making an important effort to reduce the international isolation of Abkhazia and its citizens on the one hand, and on the other hand it is trying to show that it is interested in preserving Abkhaz language and culture.

Yet, the initiative of the Government of Georgia is written in details and is fully adapted to the welfare of Abkhazian and Ossetian people. These issues are very important not only for improving relations but also for strengthening the economics of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. As for education, we all agree that this is one of the most important and necessary issues and conditions written in the document are completely acceptable and comprehensive.

It was not the first such kind of peace initiative from the Georgian side. For example, in response to the document "The Key to the Future" submitted by Abkhaz side in 2006, the Georgian side presented the basic principles of the full-scale political settlement plan of the conflict in Abkhazia. The above-mentioned document consisted of five main principles and the very first paragraph included the following:

"The culture, language and historic heritage of Abkhazians as autochthonous people of Georgia, represents a special subject of care for Georgia. One of the guarantees of this will be the dignified representation of Abkhazia in all branches of the Georgian government."⁸

As we know, annually several millions of GEL have been spent on the medical treatment of citizens living in Abkhazia from the state budget of Georgia. Accordingly, the number of patients from Abkhazia who are ar-

⁷ <<https://reginfo.ge/politics/item/3404-apxazetis-shepasebit-saqartvelos-mtavrobis-iniziativa-populisturi-da-zinikuria>> [original text translated by the author of this paper], accessed on 03.04.2019.

⁸ Georgian authorities towards Abkhazia and Abkhazian people has a populist character and is cynical (October, 2017). <<https://reginfo.ge/politics/item/3404-apxazetis-shepasebit-saqartvelos-mtavrobis-iniziativa-populisturi-da-zinikuria>> [original text translated by the author of this paper], accessed on 03.04.2019.

riving in Tbilisi for medical treatment increases. This programme is successfully implemented by the initiative of the Government of Georgia.

There are some problems and contradictions regarding this issue as well, however, treatment in Georgian clinics is a personal issue of each patient, and not a political project. It is no longer necessary to get citizenship for it, but Abkhazians are still treated free of charge in the best clinics. It should be noted that there is no PR campaign around this topic and the Georgian government will continue implementing new initiatives with similar enthusiasm and good will.

The reconciliation and engagement policy of the Government of Georgia serves to improve the conditions of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, to achieve their welfare and to promote reconciliation of the population divided by the conflict.

As I already mentioned, education is one of the most important dimensions of the care of the population living in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In this respect, the positive obligations of these initiatives include the establishment of these mechanisms and capacities, including the establishment of humanitarian and de-politicized institutions that will facilitate access for the population living in these regions to all levels of education.

That is why the document “Step Towards a New Future” includes global initiatives for the development of the population of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, in order to gain education, to improve the economic situation and to strengthen the reconciliation and engagement policy that will focus on human welfare and common interest-based cooperation.

Changes in Global and Regional Order: Implications for the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Benyamin Poghosyan

Global Context

Today's international relations can be best characterized by one word – transition. The Post-cold war order is rapidly disappearing creating strategic ambiguity for all actors. The US hegemony is over or close to over despite the fact that militarily Washington will be far from the reach for several decades to come. Meanwhile, no nation, be it China, Russia, India or Brazil have the necessary resources and will to compete for the new world hegemony.

The absence of a world hegemon means that no state has the power to fully enforce the implementation of key international rules and norms. We are increasingly facing an international security architecture in which key actors may easily break the norms and rules and eventually this will bring us to the situation when no rules can be relied upon.

One pattern is obvious – states are putting more emphasis on coercion, force and hybrid warfare as a key element of their foreign policy. Meanwhile, the absence of global hegemon triggers the tough and often violent struggle for dominance among regional powers. The key illustration of this pattern is the Middle East. The fight for regional dominance between Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and to a lesser extent Qatar and Egypt is forming the regional geopolitics. Meanwhile, external powers such as the US and Russia are actively using this struggle to advance their national interests supporting a different set of actors and further complicating the battlefield.¹

¹ “Emerging Global Order: Implications for the Regional Geopolitics.” 4.10.2018. <<https://www.indrastra.com/2018/10/Emerging-Global-Order-Implications-for-Regional-Geopolitics-004-10-2018-0020.html>>.

The Syrian conflict is the best illustration of this new pattern in geopolitics of powers' willingness to break the international rules and norms and increasingly resort to force and hybrid warfare methods in pursuing their ambitions. The regional actors are all involved in the conflict creating and supporting nonstate actors within Syria, directly invading some territories like Turkey in the northwestern part of the country, or, as in the case of Israel, militarily attacking targets within Syria, and all this without UN Security Council authorization.

Regional Context

The transformation of global order has its impact on the security dynamics of the post-Soviet space. The rivalry for regional influence is growing. The key players here are Russia, China and the US/EU.

Russia since the 2000s has significantly increased its role in the region. Effectively thwarting any new enlargement of EU and NATO besides Baltic States, Russia has combined its use of traditional and hybrid powers to reinstate itself as a key player in the post-Soviet space. The 2008 Russia-Georgia war was a harbinger of tougher Russian policy while the promotion of Customs Union and later the establishment of Eurasian Economic Union were Russian moves to foster its economic influence.

The 2014 Euromaidan revolution in Kiev and Western sanctions against Russia added tensions in the region. In last four years Russia has been struggling to keep its economy working while seeking ways to normalize its relations with Euro-Atlantic institutions. However, Moscow has a clear vision of post-Soviet space as its legitimate zone of special interests where all other players should implement restraint.

In the South Caucasus Russia's key strategic goals continues to be the prevention of Georgia's membership into the EU or NATO and increasing the influence of pro-Russian forces there. The Moscow top priority in Armenia is to keep the current level of Russia-Armenia strategic alliance including Armenia's membership into Eurasian Economic Union and Collective Security Treaty Organization, as well as the continued deployment of Russian military bases and border troops in Armenia. Azerbaijan continues to be perceived in Russia as a key route to connect Russia with Iran

through the launch of “North-South” international corridor starting from India and entering Northern Europe via Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia. Russia is keen to prevent the growth of Western influence in Azerbaijan as well as is interested to prevent spreading of radical Sunni Islam in the country given the geographical proximity to the Russian restive North Caucasus.

China will eventually enter the post-Soviet region. Currently Beijing is more active in Central Asian republics where it has already overwhelmed Russia in economic terms. Given China’s growing demand in energy, especially oil and gas, made it explore the possibilities of importing gas from Central Asian republics, in particular from Turkmenistan. To import the projected amount of gas, China has invested in one of the longest gas pipeline networks in the world. The Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline has three lines running in parallel for 1,830 kilometres from Turkmenistan through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan to China. Construction of Lines A and B began in July 2008 and they started operating in December 2009 and October 2010, respectively. Line C was completed in 2015. Lines A and B are designed to transport 30 BCM of gas and Line C has the capacity to deliver 25 BCM. Turkmenistan was initially obliged to export annually 30 BCM of gas to China according to the agreement signed in 2006. During the Shanghai Cooperation Organization’s Summit in Beijing in June 2012, China’s then-President Hu Jintao and Turkmenistan’s President Berdimuhamedov agreed to increase the amount of gas exports to 65 BCM annually by 2020. China will be receiving an additional 10 BCM per year from Uzbekistan according to the agreement signed in 2010, and up to 5 BCM from Kazakhstan.²

The Chinese involvement in the South Caucasus has a relatively modest scope. Georgia is a leader in this race, signing a free trade agreement with China on May 13, 2017 according to which 94 percent of Georgian goods exported to China, including wine, nuts, honey, mineral water, vegetables, fruits, fish, and other sea products, will be free from any import taxes.³ One

² Aminjonov, Farkhod. (2018). “Central Asian Gas Exports Dependency.” *RUSI Journal*, DOI: 10.1080/03071847.2018.1470392.

³ “Georgia-China free trade deal comes into play from January 2018.” *Agenda*, <<http://agenda.ge/en/news/2018/29>>.

of the biggest Chinese companies – Hualing – has invested more than 500 million USD in Georgia since 2007 and Chinese conglomerate CEFC China Energy Co Ltd bought 75 percent of Poti Free Industrial Zone. China led Asian Infrastructure and Investment bank provided a 114 million USD loan for road construction near Batumi in 2017.

AIIB provided a 600 million USD loan to Azerbaijan for the TANAP gas pipeline construction in 2017. Since the launching of Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway in October 2017 Azerbaijan positions itself as a key route of the Belt and Road initiative (BRI) within Trans Caspian International Transport route, which starts from China and passes through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia and further to Europe either by the Black Sea or Turkey.

Armenia also makes efforts to be included in BRI. The southern route of B&R will pass from China through Iran to Europe and one of the possibilities here is to use Iran-Armenia-Georgia-Black Sea route. Separate from the Belt and Road initiative, since 2016, negotiations have been ongoing between Iran, Armenia, Georgia, Bulgaria and Greece to launch a new Persian Gulf-Black Sea multimodal transportation corridor, which will connect the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas with Georgian Black sea ports via Armenia, and then through Bulgaria and Greece to European markets. It envisages the transportation of goods via railway in Iran, highways in Armenia and railways/highways in Georgia towards the Black Sea.⁴

The construction of a new North-South highway was launched in Armenia in 2012, and it will connect the Armenian-Georgian and the Armenian-Iranian borders, and will facilitate the transportation of goods via trucks. The North-South highway will play a key role in launching the Persian Gulf-Black Sea multimodal transportation corridor. If Armenia in cooperation with Iran and Georgia can succeed to connect this corridor with China-Iran sea transit, the new BRI route passing from China to Europe via Iran, Armenia and Georgia may emerge. In this case Armenia may attract Chinese investments in the construction of the North- South highway, and

⁴ “China’s “belt and road” initiatives are game-changers for the region.” <http://commonsplace.eu/index.php?m=23&news_id=4234>.

importantly, will transform Armenia into one of transit countries for China-EU trade.

In order to estimate the chances of Armenia's participation in this program it is important to take into consideration the enhancement of Iran's and China's strategic cooperation. US President Donald Trump's decision to leave the Iranian nuclear deal and impose new sanctions against Iran essentially limits Iran's chances in the sphere of international economic cooperation. In overcoming those obstacles Iran attaches a great importance to enhancing its cooperation with China. The latter in its turn regards the cooperation with Iran in the context of enhancing its positions in the Near East and diversifying the import sources of energy carriers.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought the South Caucasus into the realm of Western institutions. In the 1990s and during the first decade of the 21st century, the US, EU, and to a lesser degree NATO were actively involved in the region. They supported the transition from a totalitarian past to a democratic future by assisting regional states in their efforts to implement political, judicial, and economic reforms. Energy was also another key factor in influencing Western policy in the region. The South Caucasus was perceived as both a source of, and a transit route for, Caspian gas and oil flow into Europe.

However, in recent years Western enthusiasm has declined significantly. The reforms, with some exception in Georgia, did not bring about anticipated results. Neither the EU nor NATO will be able, or willing, to offer membership perspectives to the South Caucasus states in the foreseeable future. Thus, an Association Agreement signature with the EU is the highest possible result for Georgia's decades-long Euro-Atlantic aspirations, as the country is facing tough Russian pressure with no clear vision forward.

Hopes of Caspian energy resources breaking the EU's dependence on Russian gas have also disappeared. Starting in late 2019, Azerbaijan will only be able to pump 10 BCM of gas per year to Southern Europe, which will not

make a strategic shift in the EU's energy balance.⁵ The idea of the Trans-Caspian pipeline bringing Turkmenistan gas to the EU via Azerbaijan has little chance of implementation due to Iranian and Russian objections even after signing the Convention on the Use of the Caspian Sea Floor.

Additionally, Donald Trump's election as the US President in November 2016 and an "America First" foreign policy concept put forward by the new US Administration makes the South Caucasus less relevant for Washington. The region currently has very little economic might to trigger attention. The Principled Realism approach embedded in the 2017 US National Security Strategy (NSS) has significantly decreased the "democracy and reform promotion" agenda in US foreign policy, which was one of the factors driving Washington's involvement in the region.⁶ Though the new US NSS speaks about the necessity to counter Russian actions in its neighbourhood, the main hot spot in US-Russia relations within the post-Soviet space is and will remain Ukraine.

The US supports the "Southern Gas Corridor" project to bring Azerbaijani gas to Europe and it welcomes the "Velvet Revolution" in Armenia, but however, the region now is not among the top items of Washington's foreign priority list. Even the recent visit of US National Security advisor John Bolton to the South Caucasus cannot be perceived as a strategic change in US attitude.

The 2009 Eastern Partnership (EaP) program initiated by the EU was a step to increase European involvement in the South Caucasus. However, almost 9 years after the implementation, the EaP has not brought about significant changes. Only Georgia has signed the Association Agreement and there are no visible options for eventual EU membership. Meanwhile Armenia, after successfully finishing negotiations, opted instead to join the Eurasian Economic Union. The signing of the Armenia-EU Comprehen-

⁵ "Barroso hails final decision to bring Azeri gas to Europe." *Euractiv*. <<https://www.euractiv.com/section/energy/news/barroso-hails-final-decision-to-bring-azeri-gas-to-europe/>>.

⁶ White House. *US National Security Strategy*. 18.12.2017. <<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>.

sive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement in November 2017 is an interesting case proving that both EU and Russia are ready for experimentation.⁷ However, the CEPA will not bring any substantial geopolitical changes.

Azerbaijan has been skeptical about the Association Agreement from the beginning. Both sides launched negotiations to sign a new agreement in February 2017, but Azerbaijan's human rights and rule of law situation, as well as international scandals of money laundering,⁸ effectively restricted any strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and the EU. The inability of Azerbaijan to play a critical role in EU energy diversification policies has also decreased EU interests in Baku.

Given the EU's internal problems and challenges with Brexit, the growing threat of terrorism, no clear solution to the migrant crisis and the rise of populist movements, the upcoming years most likely will see diminishing EU involvement in the region.

Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: Possible Way Forward

The settlement of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is the number one national security priority for Armenia. Armenia guarantees the security of the people of the Nagorno-Karabakh Republic, having supported Karabakh during the 1992–1994 war with Azerbaijan and through the years of cease-fire.

Since 2007 Karabakh talks have been focused on the Madrid Principles prepared by international mediators. Armenia accepted these principles as a basis for settlement and expressed willingness to sign a framework agreement during the summit in Kazan, Russia in June 2011. If implemented, this agreement would see Armenian forces withdrawn from most of the security zone in exchange for an international guaranteed interim status

⁷ "Everyone is happy with the new Armenia-Russia-EU threesome." <http://commonsense.eu/index.php?m=23&news_id=4437>.

⁸ "The Azerbaijani laundromat." *OCCRP*. <<https://www.occrp.org/en/azerbajjanilaundromat/>>.

being granted to Karabakh backed by peacekeeping forces. The final status of Nagorno-Karabakh would be decided via a “legally-binding expression of will,” i.e. a referendum with details and timing undefined and subject to further negotiations without any clear time table. Nevertheless, Azerbaijan refused to sign that agreement, opposing any approach that could even theoretically lead to Nagorno-Karabakh’s independence.⁹

Since 2011 two key developments have fundamentally changed the equilibrium in the Karabakh conflict. The increased military spending made Azerbaijani leadership confident that the balance of power would shift in its favour thus making the strategic goal of returning Karabakh under Azerbaijani control more realistic.

Since 2014, Azerbaijan has pursued a new strategy in the Karabakh conflict. More emphasis has been put on escalation along the Line of Contact (LoC) with sporadic military activities along the Armenia-Azerbaijan international border. The culmination of that strategy was the April 2016 “Four-Day War,” which resulted in minor changes on the ground. The 2014-2016 Azerbaijani strategy to challenge the status quo was intended to press the international mediators to be more active in their efforts to move forward the negotiations, as well as to put additional pressure on Karabakh and Armenia. Another motive may well have been domestic: the desire of the Azerbaijani leadership to focus attention on Karabakh and Armenia, thus, diverting its attention from the worsening socio-economic conditions.¹⁰

Despite minor territorial gains, Azerbaijan failed to achieve a strategic shift in the negotiations process. Nagorno-Karabakh proved that despite the gap of military spending with Azerbaijan it is capable of countering large-scale offensives and is not going to change its negotiating positions under the threat of a new war. Moreover, the society both in Armenia and Karabakh

⁹ “Analysis: Armenia’s Karabakh Strategy, from Status Quo to Preemption.” <<https://armenian.usc.edu/focus-on-karabakh/highlight/analysis-armenias-karabakh-strategy-status-quo-preemption/>>.

¹⁰ “Analysis: Azerbaijan’s War of Attrition Against Armenia Will Be Long-Term.” <<https://armenian.usc.edu/focus-on-karabakh/highlight/azerbajans-war-attrition-armenia-will-long-term/>>.

is galvanized around the idea of self-defence, thus, rejecting the notion that in the case of a new war only few would be ready for sacrifice.

The second development which has been underway with implications for the Karabakh conflict is the unraveling of the international order and the growing rivalry among regional powers for more influence within their neighbourhood as I described in the first two parts of my paper. These new developments significantly decrease the viability of any international guarantees which may be provided regarding the security of Karabakh after withdrawing from the security zone.

Thus, eleven years after they have been introduced, the Madrid Principles have not produced any tangible positive results. Quite the opposite has occurred: Nagorno-Karabakh has faced the highest level of violence since 1994.

The “Velvet Revolution” in Armenia has triggered a vigorous debate in expert community regarding the possible new dynamics of conflict settlement. Some are arguing for the new “Kazan style” settlement. The Madrid Principles continue to be the base for negotiations, and we see the several meetings between Armenia and Azerbaijan Ministers of Foreign Affairs and visits of Minsk Group co-chairs. The Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders had a brief conversation in Dushanbe during the CIS summit in September 2018 and agreed on establishing a communication hotline and reducing the tensions along line of contact.¹¹

However, especially after the 2016 April war the paradigm of conflict resolution based on the Madrid Principles was rejected by the majority of the Armenian population and virtually by everyone in Nagorno Karabakh. According to some estimates, they are not welcomed also by the majority of Azerbaijani society.

Definitely, negotiations should be continued and, as far as nothing new is suggested, the Madrid Principles should remain the base for them. Howev-

¹¹ See Elkhan Nuriyev’s paper in this booklet, and the web release of the PFP Consortium on this subject.

er, the time is ripe to start to think, at least on expert level, about possible elaboration of new paradigm of conflict settlement. In this context, we may think about the creation of a new platform for discussions, which may include experts from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Nagorno-Karabakh, Russia, the US and Europe. This new platform could trigger a dialogue on new paradigm of conflict settlement which will bring a sustainable stability to the South Caucasus and allow the region to realize its whole potential.

Re-energizing the Peace Process in the South Caucasus

Elkhan Nuriyev

Introduction

Today, after more than two decades, the South Caucasus remains one of the most fragmented regions in the world. The regional situation as a whole is still characterized by instability and uncertainty. All conflicts in this region are intractable because they are the prolonged territorial disputes which cannot be solved in simple ways. These conflicts touch on sensitive issues existential to each conflict party: national identity, mentality, justice, and historical truth. This explains why it is so difficult to find a speedy solution to the conflict.

Diplomatic efforts of the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) have so far failed to successfully address and cope with the most pressing security challenges Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia are currently facing. Despite the involvement of these international organizations, pro-war sentiments still linger in the region, making the situation all the more complicated, and arms races and weapons proliferation continue unabated, and a number of territories remain outside the control of central governments. Refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) have been unable to return to their homes and the security situation in the conflict zones remains fragile.

From the very beginning, the protracted conflicts indeed constituted a test case for the capacity of the UN and OSCE to act as mediators and peacekeepers. The lack of conflict resolution has shown the necessity to improve cooperation between these two organizations in crisis situations, yet the wider public in the Western world is not familiar well with the history of the conflicts in the South Caucasus. For that reason, this limited interest of Western democracies in the existing conflicts gives rise to a contradiction between, on the one hand, the desire of the Western powers to prevent Russian and Iranian unilateral actions in the region and, on the other, their

inability to provide the UN and the OSCE with adequate resources for the international management of the territorial conflicts.

Focusing on peacemaking efforts, the OSCE is obviously of key importance in formulating multilateral mechanisms, as this international organization is concerned with both conflict resolution and democratic governance. Due to the number and intensity of the clashes, the potential for spillover, and its geo-strategic location, the South Caucasus poses vexing problems for the architects of European security.¹ The OSCE has taken the responsibility for coordinating regional peacebuilding processes, while local elites have repeatedly criticized international intermediaries for not working properly in the field of conflict resolution.² Yet despite some weaknesses and inconsistency from time to time, the OSCE is evidently one of the most important international security institutions, which anticipates much work ahead, as the record in terms of conflict resolution and peacebuilding is still very disappointing.

What Matters Most Today

Clearly, the protracted nature of the peace process impacts domestic developments in the South Caucasus states which are under increased influence of major regional and external actors. For the West, the region in recent years has become ever more important due to economic and geostrategic considerations. Russia, in turn, remains the dominant player and is acting even more assertively in pursuing its own interests in this post-Soviet area. The geopolitical roles the Western powers and Russia are now playing in this dynamic part of the world actually carry different challenges and opportunities for the South Caucasus. A key question that arises is therefore whether the triangular relationship between Russia, the West and the South Caucasus will develop in a more cooperative or competitive mode in the coming years.

¹ For more information, see Asmus, Ronald, De Waal, Thomas, Hale, Jacqueline and Semneby, Peter. (2010). *Europe and the South Caucasus: The Best Approach?* Brussels: Carnegie Europe, <www.carnegieEAEurope.eu/2010/11/04/europe-and-south-caucasus-best-approach-event-3054>, accessed on 9.11.2018.

² Nuriyev, Elkhan. (2007). *The South Caucasus at the Crossroads: Conflicts, Caspian Oil and Great Power Politics*. Berlin/London: LIT, p. 162.

To date, the international community has expressed little sympathy for the plight of the South Caucasus nations. The prolonged conflict has brought untold pain and suffering on the people living in the region. The urgency of a rapid and sustainable solution cannot be overstated. In practice, neither the UN nor the OSCE has so far been able to prevent an escalation of hostilities or to resolve conflicts in this troubled area. International organizations often call upon all the parties to reinvigorate the peace process but despite their repeated diplomatic efforts and frequent assurances of quick success, the conditions related to the lingering conflicts remain unchanged.

Could it be that mediators and political leaders disregard the fact that territorial integrity and the right of self-determination are two mutually contradictory principles? Could this hence be the reason why both international organizations and great powers have so far been unable to bridge the gap?

There are no easy answers. And in the South Caucasus countries, there is no kind of healthy public debate about alternatives. One thing, however, looks quite obvious: there needs to be a systematic transformation of policies on all sides to break the current stalemate and achieve peace. As seen in recent years, compromise is impossible – therefore, only transformation can help to make a breakthrough and resolve the conflicts. International mediators should try to find new options for meaningful conflict resolution and stabilization by widening the scope and variety of their diplomatic activities to discover fresh angles and innovative ideas.

New Challenges Ahead

In 2018 the chances to find and secure sustainable peace settlements in the South Caucasus did not improve considerably. Each conflict is still going through different phases. These range from small-scale military clashes along the frontline and attempts to initiate basic confidence-building measures (the so-called situation of “no peace, no war”) to more sustainable peace and the promotion of complex measures to foster trust and reconciliation, which could lead to conflict resolution.

In principle, the South Caucasus faces a number of important security challenges in its wider regional context. Even though a new operative communication line has recently been established between Armenia and Azerbai-

jan,³ the escalation of minor incidents into a full-scale war in Nagorno-Karabakh cannot be ruled out. Diplomatic efforts led by the OSCE Minsk Group to agree on the Madrid Principles are still in deep freeze. But yet the big question now is whether protest leader Nikol Pashinyan's rise to power in Armenia⁴ will promote domestic political stability in the economically impoverished country and most importantly whether regime change in Yerevan represents a window of opportunity for peaceful resolution of conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh.

Also worthy of note is Georgia's attempts at peace overtures towards Abkhazia and South Ossetia in the middle of 2018. Although peace initiative has been perceived by the Western powers as a significant change in Georgia's attitude, it has attracted little interest from the two breakaway republics. Nonetheless, owing to the presence of the European Union Monitoring Mission in Georgia, the chances of resumption of violence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia have been significantly reduced. The probability of new military tension between Georgia and Russia, despite attempts to exacerbate an already fragile geopolitical situation in the Black Sea region is also extremely low. Even so, the Geneva International Discussions – the multi-lateral mediation forum to address security and humanitarian consequences of the August 2008 conflict in Georgia – have repeatedly ended without serious results. The current situation in which core issues being put on the Georgian-Russian political agenda need to be resolved seems as deadlocked as ever. Whether Georgia's new president Salome Zurbishvili⁵ will deepen economic ties with Russia and also cooperate with the Kremlin in the political and security realms remains to be seen. But perhaps the most important question is whether Georgia and Russia will be able to break the

³ For details on this issue, see First Conversation between Aliyev and Pashinyan; *Caucasus Watch*, 1.10.2018, <www.caucasuswatch.de/news/1054.html>, accessed on 9.11.2018. See also Benyamin Poghosyan's paper in this booklet, as well as the PFP web release on the matter.

⁴ "Nikol Pashinyan Wins Armenia Election by Landslide in 'Revolutionary' Vote." *Telegraph*. 10.12.2018, <www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/12/10/nikol-pashinyan-wins-armenia-election-landslide-revolutionary/>, accessed on 11.12.2018.

⁵ Górecki, Wojciech. (2018). "Salome Zurbishvili, Georgia's New President." Warsaw: Center for Eastern Studies (OSW), <www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2018-11-29/salome-zurbishvili-georgias-new-president>, accessed on 28.11.2018.

stalemate in the bilateral relations to adopt a forward-looking and more constructive approach that can allow to provide sustainable security in the region.

Nevertheless, each conflict in the South Caucasus poses diverse challenges, requiring different types of actions from the international mediators and observers. In some cases, they must focus on preventing war; in other cases, they have to maintain a fragile peace or invest in confidence-building measures aimed at fostering links that were previously suspended by war and preparing the ground for a negotiated settlement of the conflicts. But it is also true that efforts of international mediators cannot substitute for the lack of political will of the sides involved in the conflicts. Thus, the heaviest burden to find and implement durable solutions lies with the conflicting parties and their societies. There is, however, something that is important to point out about international mediation. It is reluctance on the part of intermediaries to devise a new joint strategic concept on how to fulfil their mandate more effectively. And this is why international mediators cannot turn their weakness into strength to refresh the peace process in the South Caucasus.

Strategic Deficit in Peace Building

It is well known that collaboration between mediators and civil society is an important element in dealing with intractable conflicts as it can help to change the mainstream belligerent narratives on the conflict, and prepare the public for a comprehensive, compromise-based solution. Active participation of civil society organizations in a potential peace agreement brings more legitimacy to the process and increases chances that the peace accord will last longer.

Furthermore, it is well known that in most cases where civil society did not participate in the peace process or its engagement was low, the conflict rapidly fell back into violence. It is believed that some form of active engagement of civil society, for example, in the peace process over Nagorno-Karabakh could help elevate the negotiations from a zero-sum game up to a win-win approach. One related weakness of the OSCE-led mediation process is, however, the fact that the Minsk Group works in relative isolation from civil society in both Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Over the last several years some Azerbaijani and Armenian peace scholars and civil society activists, including me, have desperately tried to urge the Minsk Group co-chairs to establish an official track-two dialogue process, arguing that it would help not only to improve the communication between the parties but also allow to build more mutual trust. However, we have achieved little success so far. In fact, what is meant here is that international mediators would occasionally meet with local nongovernmental leaders, academics, and civil society representatives to listen to insiders' perspectives, expert views, reviews and opinions. But there has been no systematic effort to incorporate any kind of track-two diplomacy or non-state-level peacebuilding under the umbrella of the Minsk Group.

Some colleagues say this is because severe pressure from the national governments continues to hinder efforts to recognize civil society as a significant contributor to peacebuilding.⁶ Others strongly believe that international mediators should adopt a clearer policy stance that could change the overall regional situation, mainly indicating that the UN and the OSCE could place greater emphasis on track-two dialogue by supporting civil society organizations interested in heading public diplomacy activities and directing them toward achieving profound mutual understanding and eventual reconciliation.⁷ But perhaps the Minsk Group co-chairs do not want to irk the governments in both Armenia and Azerbaijan, as intermediaries are well aware of somewhat ambiguous positions taken by Yerevan and Baku towards civil society's current role in the peace process. As a result, Armenia and Azerbaijan well illustrate the plight of two hostile states with strategic deficit in peace building.

An Exit Strategy from the Nagorno-Karabakh Crisis

Evidently, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is now considered the most volatile and unpredictable given that Armenia and Azerbaijan are prepared militarily and have an entire arsenal to engage in serious, armed confronta-

⁶ Private conversation with some Armenian political analysts who requested anonymity, Vienna, November 2016 and London, December 2014.

⁷ Comments made by the author of this article during his speech at the Eastern Partnership Reflection Forum in Vienna, 30 October 2018.

tion. As the prolonged deadlock persists and inevitably nourishes the psychology of war, conditions worsen and the Minsk Group co-chairs experience serious difficulties to return the conflicting parties to the negotiating table. Such a form of deadlock, rather than leading to de-escalation, actually results not only in delayed benefits of the conflict settlement but also political disengagement and public apathy. These in turn can further significantly reduce the likelihood of a peace agreement and eventually undermine the credibility of the mediators. This is why the Minsk Group needs to craft a clear and viable exit strategy for removing the current deadlock in the peace process between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

More to the point, the Minsk Group co-chairs should take an assertive mediation approach to promote a genuine compromise peace solution. Russia, the United States and France should pay greater high-level attention to developments currently underway in and around Nagorno-Karabakh to act jointly and effectively so as to deter the conflicting parties from military action. Minimizing warfare and advancing a settlement process require effective peacebuilding activities that can help achieve a breakthrough on controversial issues, lay the foundation for reconciliation and address the special needs of conflict-affected states. A united front from political leaders of the three co-chairing nations could hence help significantly enhance prospects for a more serious dialogue toward conflict's peaceful resolution.

More precisely, Armenian-Azerbaijani peace process in the geopolitical context will remain frozen unless key actors, local and international, decide to rethink their strategic priorities. A deep freeze in the peace talks can bring about a violent conflagration in the conflict zone. And so in effect, there are two options before Armenia and Azerbaijan. The first is to try to find a way out in more gradual steps with exchanges by moving forward in search for common ground, making concessions and getting dividends in return. The second is the continuing of the status quo and the rising tide of further military escalation that goes unchecked. It is, however, believed that there are grounds for at least some cautious optimism because intensive consultations that took place between the Foreign Ministers of Armenia and Azerbaijan in Milan, Italy on December 5, 2018 demonstrated the con-

structive nature of the negotiating round.⁸ Perhaps today the most important thing for the Minsk Group co-chairs is to re-energize the peace process and help both sides reach a compromise solution based on mutually accepted principles.

Last but not least, there is also a strong need to redouble efforts at confidence and security building measures (CSBMs) by increasing the number of monitors on the contact line. Although incidents still occur along the cease-fire line and Armenian-Azerbaijani border, tension in recent months has significantly decreased. But yet implementing the agreed-upon CSBMs and more significant steps should thoroughly be considered in order to reduce the chances of renewed fighting over Nagorno-Karabakh. An increase in the level of confidence and a gradual reduction of confrontation will allow both sides to attain a desired constructive outcome and create a good opportunity for working towards reconciliation through inclusive dialogue and consensus-building.

Overall, the success of the Nagorno-Karabakh peace process depends not only on determination of the conflicting parties to really move peace talks forward but also hinges upon how well the Minsk Group co-chairs are prepared to formulate an exit strategy from an increasingly deadlocked situation. International mediators should consider it important to ensure a positive dynamic of the settlement process. This is because many sensitive problems that now seem intricate can find a mutually acceptable compromise solution in an atmosphere of growing confidence and trust. A serious breakthrough in Armenian-Azerbaijani negotiations should sometime occur, since alternative to peace settlement is not the mere preservation of the perpetual status quo, but full-scale war that neither Azerbaijan nor Armenia, nor their regional neighbors ever need.

⁸ For details, see Joint Statement by the Heads of Delegation of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chair Countries, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Press Release, 6.12.2018, <www.osce.org/minsk-group/405479>, accessed on 7.12.2018.

A New Regional Security Initiative Within the European Union's Eastern Partnership

Quite obviously, dividing lines running across the South Caucasus targeted by competing regional integration projects have not helped to strengthen European security. Negative-sum games set the scene of a new regional order benefiting none of the players, while the South Caucasus nations remain to varying degrees unstable, unreformed, and rife with conflict. As circumstances around the prolonged conflicts do not inspire much optimism for rapid resolution, the question therefore arises what can be done to prepare the ground for settlement and what can be done to re-energize the peace process, mitigate the risks and prevent a renewed outbreak in hostilities. What follows below are some specific recommendations⁹ for the European Union (EU) that aims to forge closer ties with six countries in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus.

Given current American-Russian tensions, it is high time for the EU to put forward concrete new ideas and fresh, realistic concepts for the Eastern Partnership (EaP) countries to ease tense relations and stabilize situation, as well as reduce frictions and conduct effective peacebuilding activities for the citizens of the region. It is widely believed that the potential of the track-two diplomacy remains not sufficiently used. No internationalization of the conflicts is possible without the inclusion of civil society actors in the stabilization process. It is owing to the active participation and involvement of a responsive civil society that substantial progress toward a more positive relationship can be made and the isolation of the region can be successfully broken. Within the framework of the EaP, the EU should now work more actively to show that a peace dialogue is possible to resolve the present deadlock. The EU should also bolster its support for people-to-people diplomacy with establishing multiple working groups on various topics to alleviate the negative impact of the protracted conflicts for all

⁹ The policy recommendations developed by the author in this article were first presented to the participants of the Eastern Partnership Reflection Forum, convened in Vienna, 30 October 2018 in the framework of the Austrian Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

people in the South Caucasus. In doing so, the EU should shape a more strategic policy in its rapidly changing neighborhood.

In the wider geopolitical context, the EU should ensure a greater consistency between the advancement of the EaP as policy framework at the service of European security and the interwoven variety of political interests underpinning the EaP. The key question then hinges upon how to do that. If protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus pose problems to the European security, perhaps the time is ripe for the EU, most probably through engaging in closer cooperation with the OSCE and the UN, to launch a new regional security initiative, focusing only on conflict resolution in the Eastern neighborhood generally and the South Caucasus particularly. The main goal would be to convene a Strategic Peacebuilding Group under the EaP where regional experts (peace scholars) and EU-based conflict resolution professionals could enhance the exchanges of views, share innovative ideas, provide sound political advice, develop creative proposals and well-thought-out recommendations dealing with solution models, conflict resolution prospects and post-conflict regional security cooperation scenarios.

In reality, a Strategic Peacebuilding Group initiative could become an expert panel accompanying the EU's Eastern Partnership. Through its activities, it can connect experts, scholars and civil society representatives from EU member states and Eastern neighbors, and promote an informed dialogue, cooperation, peace and stability in the entire region. Perhaps most importantly, a Strategic Peacebuilding Group could play five basic roles: (1) as a pan-European network of scholars; (2) as a bridge between the EU and the regional academic and research community; (3) as a premier think tank for the EU's Eastern Partnership; (4) as an instrument for capacity development; and finally (5) as a solid intellectual platform for peace dialogue.

In Lieu of a Conclusion

A crisis is the turning point of any emergency. Effective crisis management permits the mediators to maximize their opportunities and minimize the dangers and challenges they confront. In recent years, the UN and the OSCE have been hampered in their attempts to tackle the security problems by the limitations of their mandates, their lack of adequate resources,

internal disagreements among member states and the absence of strong political desire of these organizations to play deeply assertive role in the South Caucasus.

Still, the lack of progress in finding a long-term political solution to the territorial conflicts is a worrying and destabilizing factor which continues to influence the region's security landscape. The secessionist regimes in Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia have no discernible desire to respectively incorporate into Azerbaijan and Georgia which, however, are determined to restore their territorial integrity and regain control of these territories. The existing status quo carries its own dangers which may breed a new escalation of military tension in the conflict zones and a new wave of domestic instability in the South Caucasus societies. Re-energizing the peace process is hence a prerequisite for transforming the confrontational environment to atmosphere of confidence, trust and cooperation. The resolution of the territorial conflicts will depend on how successfully the world community absorbs lessons from the war in the former Yugoslavia and the crisis in the Middle East and creates the external conditions for conflict settlement in the South Caucasus.

**PART V:
SUPPLEMENT TO THE STUDY GROUP IN-
FORMATION OF THE 17TH WORKSHOP ON
“WHAT A ‘NEW EUROPEAN
SECURITY DEAL’ COULD MEAN
FOR THE SOUTH CAUCASUS”**

The European Security System: Prospects and Hopes

Hrachya Arzumanyan

Introduction

At the end of World War II, the USA became a long-term actor in European security. During the Cold War a complex security system was developed in Europe, and it continued to function even after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s as the USA, seeking to maintain its once-again-acquired status of the only superpower, preserved its special role in the system. The system formed after the end of Cold War was not, in fact, created on the basis of a new world order, as it was publicly declared. The policy of the USA was not aiming to create a wholly new European security system as it missed on clearly defining the place of Russia in Europe and was efficient at blocking alternative visions of the future of European security.

The situation began to change at the beginning of the 21st century when EU member states found it necessary to develop a new strategic vision of European security, and in 2003 the *European Security Strategy* was developed. The document noted that the collapse of the USSR and the socialist camp considerably changed the European security environment. Broad cooperation of EU member states allowed to remove the problem of military threats inside the alliance. Within the ideology of globalism, it was proclaimed that interdependence of states and regions is becoming not only an economic, but also a political and cultural factor, thus promoting the formation of a more secure world.

However, by 2008 the credibility of these assessments was called into question, first of all, by Russia dissatisfied with the post-Cold war agenda and the European security system. In 2016, the *Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* was accepted as it focused on achieving pragmatic purposes. Nonetheless, the West's hope that Russia would reconcile with the status ascribed to it is to be evaluated as groundless and as one falling short of taking the political history of Europe into account. Based upon the dominating role of the EU and the NATO, the European

security system was unstable, and the optimism about the strategy proved unjustified. In the intense relations between the West and Russia, there is a strong pattern of *déjà vu* when familiar threats lead to well-familiar strategic recommendations, forming a framework for a second Cold War.

In the 21st century, what kind of global order could be in place and have the new European security system as its element? It is possible to allocate several images of the future developed in the West. The process of developing the new security system demands re-structuring the European space and build on the basis of three poles (the EU, Russia and the USA), institutions of various nature and *Intermarium* (or between-in lands). Its actors have different sensitivity to security problems, needs and priorities and, as a result, pursue different agendas.

The multi-polar nature of the European security system makes intense relations between its actors inevitable. Moreover, it contains gaps which are most apparent in such regions as the Balkans, in *Intermarium* and Crimea where historical tensions and centuries-old conflicts are still present. And the ways to decrease the risk of destabilization in the system turn out to be tied not to a reduction of the quantity of its poles, but to strengthening the interaction between them, thus creating necessary conditions for restraining the congenital instability of the system. In the medium run, an evolution of the European security system towards creating a uniform security space would allow to create necessary conditions for controlling the tension between the system's poles and reducing the gaps in *Intermarium* and the wide European neighbourhood.

The multi-polar nature of the European security system creates conditions both for achieving stability and causing destabilization at the same time, which can trigger crises and conflicts in *Intermarium*. And it is necessary to understand that in the medium run, considering the growing rivalry between the poles and the aspiration of regional elites to exploit this rivalry for advantages, there is no hope for a full settlement of the conflicts and the creation of a stable uniform European security space. Efforts to strengthen European security have to be based on clear long-term strategic objectives. Reactive and short-term efforts can only provide limited results, without touching upon the prime causes of crises and conflicts. For this

purpose, a general political will and awareness of shared European responsibility and destiny is required.

1. History of the Formation of the European Security System After the End of the Cold War

At the end of World War II the USA realized that in order to prevent a major war in Europe they have to become a long-term actor of the European security system. During the Cold War the complex European security system has evolved in Europe through NATO, the Warsaw Pact and the evolving EU and OSCE multilateral frameworks.

The system continued to function after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, as well, when the USA, seeking to keep its newly acquired status of the only superpower, conserved its special status in the European security system. The situation began to change at the beginning of the 21st century when the USA initiated a process of adapting the American security system to the changes in the international security environment where irregular threats and actors began to prevail. As a result, the USA was forced to pay less attention to the European security system. The expansion of the EU and NATO, it seemed, had finished the process of stabilizing Europe as its status was reduced to a “success story” or a point in the list of “the works done.”¹

In these evolving conditions, EU member states saw it fit to develop a new strategic vision of European security, and in 2003 the European Security Strategy was issued.² The document stated that the collapse of the USSR and the socialist camp followed by the formation of a multi-polar world considerably changed the European security environment. Cooperation of the EU member states transferred some functions of sovereignty to Brus-

¹ Alcaro, Riccardo. (2011). “Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe.” in Alcaro, Riccardo and Erik Jones *European Security and the Future of Transatlantic Relations*. Istituto Affari Internazionali (IAI)-SAIS Bologna Centre: Edizioni Nuova Cultura, p.17. Access 09 April 2018 <http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/iairp_01.pdf>.

² European Security Strategy. (2003). *A Secure Europe in a Better World*. European Council, 12-13 December 2003. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/european-security-strategy-secure-europe-better-world>>.

sels qualitatively simplifying interaction and removing the problem of military threats in the system. On a substantial part of the European continent a system of comprehensive mutual openness was developed which in theory was to replace the traditional balance of power. Following the ideology of globalism, it was proclaimed that this interdependence of states and regions is becoming not only an economic, but also a political and cultural factor, promoting the formation of a more secure world.³

However, by 2008 the validity of such an assessment was called into question, first of all, by Russia dissatisfied with the post-Cold War political agenda and European security system. Based upon a dominate role of the EU and NATO, the system proved unstable, and the optimism about the European security strategy of 2003 proved unreasonable.⁴ For example, the strategy stated that “the best protection for our security is a world of well-governed democratic states.”⁵ But the spread of democracy and deployment of good governance were difficult and, sometimes, unrealizable in some countries owing to the lack of the required cultural, social and economic contexts.⁶

On June 28, 2016 at the NATO summit in Warsaw, the Chief of EU foreign policy and the vice-president of the European Commission Federica Mogherini presented *A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and*

³ Egmont Papers 1. (2004). *A European Security Concept for the 21st Century*. Royal Institute for International Relations (IRRI-KIIB), Brussels, Belgium, p. 5. Access 09 April 2018 <https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Rik_Coolsaet/publication/29998581_A-European_Security_Concept_for_the_21st_Century_Egmont_Paper_No_1_April_2004/links/5510380c0cf2ba84483d2a27/A-European-Security-Concept-for-the-21st-Century-Egmont-Paper-No-1-April-2004.pdf>.

⁴ Alcaro, *Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe*, p. 17.

⁵ European Security Strategy. *A Secure Europe in a Better World*, p. 10.

⁶ Biscop, Sven. (2017). “The EU Global Strategy and the Great Powers or Realpolitik Revisited.” In: *The EU Global Strategy: Implications for Russia*, Institute of Europe. Moscow and Egmont: Russian Academy of Sciences and the Royal Institute for International Relations, pp. 7-15. Access 09 April 2018 <<http://www.egmontinstitute.be/content/uploads/2017/11/EU-Global-Strategy-IE-RAS-Egmont.pdf? type=pdf>>.

*Security Policy*⁷ which was an improved version of 2003's European Security Strategy. The choice of time of the document's publication was not propitious since after the British referendum-initiated Brexit on June 23, 2016 no one could pay proper attention to the document. The Global Strategy (2016) appeared at a moment of high uncertainty and radical changes in the international security environment when traditional military-political alliances were called into question, and national and regional political and economic interests were formed along old and new fault lines.⁸

The new strategy was born not from ambitions and an abstract belief in the idea of integration, but from an understanding of the gravity of the geopolitical situation in Europe.⁹ The advantage of the document is its aspiration to establish a balance between isolationism and interventionism, "dreamy idealism and unprincipled pragmatism"¹⁰ which the strategy calls is derived from realism's "principled pragmatism."¹¹

Thus, the Global Strategy of 2016 focused on achieving pragmatic purposes through actions, not intentions. It is the first document of the EU which defines the following vital interests which are important for member states:

- security of EU citizens and territory;
- prosperity;
- democracy; and

⁷ A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy. *Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe*, Brussels: EEAS, June 2016. <https://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/top_stories/pdf/eugs_review_web.pdf>.

⁸ Giannessi, Alessandra. (2017). *Europe in a Changing Global Order: Militarization and the New EU Global Strategy for Security and Defence*. Transform! European Network for Alternative Thinking and Political Dialogue Epaper, Brussels, Belgium, November 2017, p. 3. Access 09 April 2018 <https://www.transform-network.net/fileadmin/user_upload/epaper_gianessi_global_strategy4_final.pdf>.

⁹ Techau, Jan. "The EU's New Global Strategy: Useful or Pointless?" *The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Europe*. Brussels, July 01, 2016. Access 09 April 2018<<http://carnegieEAEurope.eu/strategieurope/?fa=63994>>.

¹⁰ Biscop, Sven. "EU Foreign Policy Between the Revolution and the Status Quo." *Policy Brief*, No. 9. Brussels: Institute for European Studies, November 2014. <http://www.ies.be/files/2014_9_PB.pdf>.

¹¹ A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, *Shared Vision, Common Action*, p. 16.

- promotion of a rules-based world order for adopting policy from the position of power.

This allocation of vital interests allowed defining five priorities:

- EU security;
- resilience of the neighbourhood;
- behaviour in war and crisis;
- worldwide stable regional orders; and
- effective global governance.¹²

The Global Strategy of 2016 soberly estimated the ability of the EU to transform its security environment and recognized that the alliance practically had likely no influence processes in the wide neighbourhood. As Sven Biscop notes, the rhetoric on an advance of democracy was absent in this renewed document. This somewhat overdue step is not about underestimating democratic values. What it does is emphasize the need of a calm advance of democracy rather than a missionary zeal which often brings about the reversed results.¹³

Mogherini's Global Strategy intends to build a strong and independent EU which would be able to perform functions of a global security provider. As she said "...our partners all over the world view Europe as a global security provider, an indispensable power for peace and human development."¹⁴ And at the same time

"European security does not depend solely on our military might. This is one of the central ideas underpinning the Global Strategy; multilateralism, sustainable development, human rights and resilience are just as important as defence, if we want to make Europe more secure."¹⁵

¹² Biscop, *The EU Global Strategy and the Great Powers or Realpolitik Revisited*.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Mogherini, Federica. (2017). "Preface." In EUISS Yearbook of European Security (YES) 2017, *European Union Institute for Security Studies, Paris, France, 2017*, p. 5. Access 09 April 2018 <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/YES_Book_2017.pdf>.

¹⁵ Mogherini, *Preface*, p. 6.

The document also has shortcomings. One can note its indecisive approach to what Mogherini calls “strategic autonomy” for the EU. Understanding the desire of the EU to develop a foreign policy and defence institutions capable of ensuring Europe’s own security without relying on the USA, the document could have been more realistic about the feasibility of this option.¹⁶ In the short and medium run any EU security policy will still have to depend on Washington, and the USA will remain the key actor of the European security system.

2. The Revival of the Russian Challenge and the Problems of the European Security System

The Strategic Context of the European Security System

The European security system includes a set of power centres and institutions of various nature. One important element of the system is the EU itself; the most integrated organization in the world covering intergovernmental and supranational governance elements, but not, yet, in the sphere of defence. Nonetheless, even by seeking to develop autonomous military opportunities, the EU would still solve the problem of providing for European security mainly by non-military means. The EU is a unique example of the ability of states divided through many centuries by competition and conflict to create space for peace and stability through economic and political integration relying on shared values and norms.¹⁷

NATO remains the most important element of European security as the majority of the continent’s states – including the most economically and technologically developed ones – are EU members. The peculiarity of NATO is the USA being its most influential member. And for the European NATO member states it is this role that makes the Alliance so valuable. It is due to the USA that, in many respects, NATO in the 21st century has not only a regional, but also a global role and is involved in military missions outside Europe, solving problems which are not connected directly with territorial protection of its member states.

¹⁶ Techau, *The EU’s New Global Strategy*.

¹⁷ Alcaro, *Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe*, p. 22.

Another important influencing factor for the European security system is Russia and its view on the problems of European security which differs starkly from that of the West. This concerns, first of all, the role of NATO. Moscow understands that distinctions are acceptable if Russia's security interests are considered properly. But after the end of the Cold War, the declared process of transforming such elements as NATO or the OSCE was not deep enough to convince Russia of an absence of threats. The creation of the CSTO by Russia became a response to this and providing Russian influence upon the most part of the former Soviet Union than any other function. Russia has a clear understanding that the CSTO cannot replace the Warsaw Pact and is rather Eurasian, than European by nature.¹⁸

Acknowledging the “strategic solitude”¹⁹ of Russia allows to comprehend its fluctuating approach to the West. On the one hand, NATO movement to the Russian borders is perceived as open threat, with another, cooperation, even with opponents, on global and European security problems promotes saving of the status of the great power by Russia.²⁰

Thus, the actors of the European security system have different sensitivity, needs and priorities when it comes to security problems and, as a result, they often pursue different agendas. Besides, the existing European security landscape has gaps when uniting into a joint system has a compelled character. Gaps and inconsistencies are most notable in such regions as the Balkans, Moldova, the Caucasus and Crimea where historical tensions and centuries-old conflicts exist. The events of recent times in the relations between the West and Russia led to a revival of military security threats in Europe that are, as appears, already being conceived as historical ones. The management of such threats will become one of the most complex challenges of the new European security system.

¹⁸ Alcaro, *Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe*, p. 30.

¹⁹ Gomart, Thomas. “Russia Alone Forever? The Kremlin’s Strategic Solitude “, *Politique étrangère special issue*, World Policy Conference, 2008, p. 23-33. Access 09 April 2018 <https://www.cairn.info/article.php?ID_ARTICLE=PE_HS02_0023>.

²⁰ Alcaro, *Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe*, p. 28.

Ordering Moment

In order to understand the dynamics of the transition to a post-Cold War era, the concept of the “ordering moment” that appears in the works of the political scientist John Ikenberry is useful.²¹ An ordering moment can be defined as a period that is decisive, but limited in time, when the power, identity, norms and structures of the previous eras lose their dominating influence and many scenarios of the future become possible. Though Ikenberry uses this concept in relation to the period following major wars, it can be applied to understanding the types of transitions which the political theorist William Sewell defined as “moments of accelerated change” even if they are not followed by bloodshed.²² Processes taking place during “ordering moments” are studied by complexity science and the complex adaptive systems theory.²³ For example, one can mention the state of “punctuated equilibrium”²⁴ initiated by self-organizing criticality.²⁵

It is possible to claim that many problems in West-Russia relations are a result of decisions that took place during the ordering moment after the end of Cold War. The grand strategy of the USA and the West in general was eventually reduced to merely spreading the Cold War institutions – first of all, the NATO and the EU – further to the East and into the future and not creating a truly new global order and the new European security system, as it was publicly declared. The use of such concepts as post-Cold

²¹ John Ikenberry defined such moments as times when “the rules and institutions of the international order are on the table for negotiation and change” See: Ikenberry, John G. (2011). *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis and Transformation of the American World Order*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 12.

²² Sewell, W. H. Jr. (1996). “Historical Events as Transformations of Structures: Inventing Revolution at the Bastille,” *Theory and Society*, Vol. 25, Issue 6, pp. 841-881.

²³ Арзуманян Р.В. (2012). *Кромка хаоса. Парадигма нелинейности и среда безопасности 21 века*. Издательский дом “Регнум”, Серия SelectaXIX, Москва.

²⁴ The evolutionary concept which cornerstone is postulate of alternation of stages of rapid development of forms and almost full conservatism (in the absence of smooth transitions between stages), offered by Gould Stephen and Niles Eldredge in 1972. See Gould, Stephen Jay and Niles Eldredge. (1977). “Punctuated equilibria: tempo and mode of evolution reconsidered.” *Paleobiology 1977, Vol. III, No. 2*, pp. 115-151.

²⁵ Prigogine, Пиа and Isabelle Stengers. (1984). *Order out of Chaos*. New York: Bantam Books, 1984; Bak, Per. *How Nature Works: The Science of Self-Organized Criticality*.

War, post-Soviet space and states, etc. emphasized the new era's dependence on the previous one. The post-Cold War framework kept the security institutions of Cold War almost unchanged, thereby transferring its problem and conflicts into the new era. The chronic and smoldering conflicts throughout the post-soviet space, including the Artsakh (Nagorno-Karabakh) problem, are in many respects a consequence of this decision.

As Mary Sarotte puts it, the American "prefabrication policy" allowed to achieve rapid success and block alternative visions of the future of European security.²⁶ The forming European security system was not created on the basis of a new world order, and it was not trying to create a truly new European security system.²⁷ Moreover, the system did not even define clearly the place and role of Russia in Europe; "the entire post-Cold War European political and security architecture was built on the foundation of two institutions – the EU and NATO – which did not include Russia."²⁸ The West judged from that "Russia would eventually accept these institutions; that was clearly a bad wager."²⁹ The year 2004 in this sense was decisive when major expansion of the EU and NATO took place and now included the Baltic States formerly part of the USSR. By then, "the best opportunity to forge a new, inclusive order for Europe and Eurasia had passed."³⁰ What caused such a decision and why the American and Western establishment came to the conclusion that Russia would not be revived are interesting subjects for political history researchers to study.

²⁶ Sarotte, Mary Elise. (2017). "The Renewal of the Russian Challenge in European Security: History as a Guide to Policy," *Transatlantic Academy Paper Series*, No 9, Transatlantic Academy, p. 2. Access 09 April 2018 <<http://www.transatlanticacademy.org/sites/default/files/publications/Sarottepercent20percent20RenewalRussianpercent20final.pdf>>.

²⁷ Sarotte, M. E. (2014). *1989: The Struggle to Create Post-Cold War Europe*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

²⁸ Menon, R. and E. Rumer. (2015). *Conflict in Ukraine: The Unwinding of the Post-Cold War Order*. Boston: MIT Press, p. 162.

²⁹ Charap, S. and T. J. Colton. "Everyone Loses: The Ukraine Crisis and the Ruinous Contest for Post-Soviet Eurasia." *Adelphi*, London: IISS, 12 January, 2017, p. 26. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://www.iiss.org/en/publications/adelphi/bypercent20year/2017-cd3c/everyone-loses-21b7>>.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

Taking a look into political history of the Cold War allows to offer some recommendations on how to react to the evolving situation. First of all, an active dialogue with Russia – instead of attempts to isolate it – is necessary.³¹ The realization of this necessity is extremely important as risks are huge, especially for the young post-Soviet states. Moreover, unlike the first Cold War, the second one is happening in a global multi-polar world. To develop is important to both Europe and the world. And the challenges in this are tied not to individuals or policies of certain countries, but the existent changes in world order when the modern version of Palmerston’s and Bismarck’s balance-of-forces policy comes back to the international arena and renders volatile the balance of friendship and hostility.³²

From this point of view, Russia’s strategy in the post-Soviet space, including violent changes of state borders which break one of the norms of the post-Cold War framework, can be considered not only an element of war, but also an offer to begin a political dialogue and form and a new ordering moment. This message can be read practically in an open form in the latest interviews of the Russian president.³³

The West’s hope that Russia will reconcile with the status ascribed to it is to be evaluated as groundless and as one falling short of taking the political history of Europe into account.³⁴ The possibility of a major war between nuclear rivals in Europe turns out to be a consequence of incorrect assessments of the strategic context of their relations.

3. Projects of Global Order and the Civilizational Context of the Formation of the New European Security System

In the 21st century, what kind of global order could be in place and have the new European security system as its element? It is possible to allocate some visions of the future developed in the West.

³¹ Sarotte, *The Renewal of the Russian Challenge in European Security*, p. 9.

³² Biscop, *The EU Global Strategy and the Great Powers or Realpolitik Revisited*, p. 9.

³³ See, for example, movie Putin V. V. and V. Solovyov. “*World order2018*”, March, 2018. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://youtu.be/MHvRsrxFhAY>>.

³⁴ Sarotte, *The Renewal of the Russian Challenge in European Security*, p. 8.

Kissinger's Vision

One of the best-known projects of global order is the Kissingerian one³⁵, where the author claims that the world's political system is facing a historic turning point. First, the very nature of states, as the basic constructing elements of the global political system, is in many aspects being pressured. Secondly, the collision between the global economy and the still-necessary traditional political institutions founded on the basis of nation states is another serious problem. The third problem is the lack of effective mechanism for great-power-interaction on a wide range of problems. According to Kissinger, the only way to avoid repeating negative scenarios is to establish a new type of relations between great powers based on the Westphalian system and balance of power applied globally and not only regionally. The world needs a governing committee of the leading world powers, one similar to the concert of great powers in the 19th century's Europe. This approach to establishing regional and international order on the basis of the differing civilizational values will demand serious re-organization of the global political system.

However, a Westphalia-based world order is doubtful for the 21st century. Kissinger's ideas are viewed as unrealizable in a world of non-state actors, irregular threats, global terrorism and connectivity. The global order of Kissinger's model suggests the existence of great powers operating in vast time-periods. The latter is impossible in the turbulence era when states and international organizations have extremely low horizons of strategic forecasting.³⁶ Time-proven tools of geopolitics and diplomacy based on the deterrence strategy, balance of power, the art of concluding alliances, etc. seem to be inadequate in the context of rapid qualitative changes in the global political system.³⁷

³⁵ Kissinger, Henry. (2014). *World Order*. New York: Penguin.

³⁶ Арзуманян, *Кромка хаоса*.

³⁷ Leonard, Mark. (2017). "The era of Mutually Assured Disruption," in Ulrike Esther Franke, Manuel Lafont Rapnouil & Susi Dennison (Eds.). *The New European Security Initiative*. London: European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), p. 7. Access 09 April 2018 <http://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR222_-_THE_NEW_EUROPEAN_SECURITY_INITIATIVE.pdf>.

Bauman's Vision

The world order vision built on a metaphor “liquid modernity” put forward by a Polish-British sociologist Zygmunt Bauman is noteworthy, as well. In Bauman’s “liquid world”, many previously “solid” actors and objects have become liquid, and society no longer unites around collective projects offering the individual ideas, a sense of community and direction for development.³⁸ The metaphor of “the liquid modernity” well correlates with the vision of global political order and security environment in complexity science and in the complex adaptive systems theory.³⁹ Bauman mainly inquired into the “liquid” modern individual and their role in society. This individual gives form to a type of modernity in which security is defined by fluidity and not by order. Bauman notes five factors that result in “liquid security.”⁴⁰

1. Threats such as terrorism, cyber wars, migration flows, etc. erase the borders between foreign and domestic policy. As a result, the notion of law and order is changed as foreign policy is no longer a prerogative of the state only, and the central spheres of domestic policy – i.e. preservation of law and order – have to be ready to operate through external forces as well.
2. Borders between war and peace are being erased, and the number of domains of war is increasing.
3. The connectivity and globalization processes which united the world begin to break off when Internet and the cyberspace begin to be used for conducting military operations. The key idea of the liberal world order that partners connected by commercial and other ties are not inclined to war with each other proved incorrect.

³⁸ Ibid., p. 7.

³⁹ Арзуманян, *Кромка хаоса*.

⁴⁰ Leonard, *The era of Mutually Assured Disruption*, pp. 7-9.

4. The era of stable alliances has ended. In the modern security environment, alliances are based not on values, long-term agreements and institutions, but on short-term interests and *ad-hoc* strategy.
5. The world is no longer defined by a balance of great powers only, as the activity of non-state actors of various nature play a major role as well.

The Club of Rome Vision

According to the Club of Rome, the world is facing a deep crisis which is not cyclic but rising by nature as it covers both the environment, and the social, political, cultural and all other domains of public life while billions of people no longer trust their governments, democracy, political ideologies and global capitalism.⁴¹ Global capitalism has led to movements of capital from the sectors of production and trade into the financial one.⁴² Bruce Bartlett – a senior policy advisor to both the Reagan and Bush administrations – claims that the “financialization” of the economy is taking place and it is the reason of the increased inequality of income, drops of salaries and unsatisfactory labour productivity. David Stockman – Reagan’s director of the Office of Management and Budget – agrees on this, describing the current situation as “corrosive financialization that has turned the economy into a giant casino since the 1970s.”⁴³

How could the global community cope with the approaching crisis? The Club of Rome brings attention to Kenneth Boulding’s *The Meaning of the*

⁴¹ Weizsäcker, Ernst Ulrich von and Anders Wijkman (2018). *Come On! Capitalism, Short-termism, Population and the Destruction of the Planet*. A Report to the Club of Rome, New York, NY: Springer, p. 2.

⁴² Greenwood, R. and Scharfstein D. “The growth of finance,” in *Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 27, No 3, Spring 2013, pp. 3-28. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://www.aeaweb.org/articles?id=10.1257/jep.27.2.3>>.

⁴³ Bartlett, Bruce. “Financialization as a source of economic malaise,” in NY Times, 11 June 2013. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://economix.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/06/11/financialization-as-a-cause-of-economic-malaise/>>; Stockman, David. “We’re blind to the debt bubble,” interview with Paul Solman. PBS Newshour, 30 May 2013. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/economy/david-stockman-were-blind-to-t>>.

*Twentieth Century*⁴⁴ where the author gives a metaphor of *Spaceship Earth* where mankind is the steward of this new Earth.⁴⁵ However people cannot be successful stewards with ideals and models of development which were created during the era of the “*empty world*” when the population of Earth was small, and natural resources seemed inexhaustible. Since the second half of the 20th century, many thinkers have realized that the situation has changed qualitatively, and mankind now needs to get used to living in the conditions of a “*full world*” which has such features as a big population, degrading environment and limited natural resources.⁴⁶ The proximity of the turning point when the limits of extensive growth have been reached was one of the main messages of the Club of Rome ever since the earliest years of its activity in the 1970s as reflected in the report *The Limits to Growth*⁴⁷ and further developed in the new report *Come on, Capitalism*.⁴⁸

Nevertheless, the world economy and the world in general continue to develop within the model of the *empty world* even though practically everything indicates the need of a paradigm shift.⁴⁹ However, the required paradigm shift demands serious efforts, including making changes of our ways of thinking. The world needs a *coherent policy* which will be ready to comprehend the world as a whole, pursuing social, economic, ecological and various other purposes – something that mankind is not yet ready to do.⁵⁰

⁴⁴ Boulding, Kenneth E. *The Meaning of the Twentieth Century*. New York, NY: Harper & Row Publishers, 1964.

⁴⁵ Rome, Adam. “Sustainability: the launch of spaceship earth,” *Nature*, Vol. 527, Issue 7579, 2015, pp. 443-445. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://www.nature.com/articles/527443a>>.

⁴⁶ Daly, Herman E. “Economics in a full world,” *Scientific American*, September 2005, pp. 100-107. Access 09 April 2018 <[http://www.steadystate.org/wp-content/uploads/Daly_SciAmerican_FullWorldEconomics\(1\).pdf](http://www.steadystate.org/wp-content/uploads/Daly_SciAmerican_FullWorldEconomics(1).pdf)>.

⁴⁷ Meadows Donella H, Dennis L. Meadows, Jürgen Randers J, William W. Behrens III. *The limits to growth*. New York, NY: Universe Books, 1972. Access 09 April 2018 <<http://www.donellameadows.org/wp-content/userfiles/Limits-to-Growth-digital-scan-version.pdf>>.

⁴⁸ Weizsäcker and Wijkman, *Come On!*

⁴⁹ Turner, G. and Alexander, C. “Limits to growth was right. New research shows we’re nearing collapse,” *The Guardian*, 2 September 2014. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2014/sep/02/limits-to-growth-was-right-new-research-shows-we-re-nearing-collapse>>.

⁵⁰ Weizsäcker and Wijkman, *Come On*, p. 50.

Making sense of the ways of mankind's escape from these deadlocks proposed by the philosophy of the empty world demands creating a new narrative which has to succeed neo-liberalism and push mankind to the edge of a crash. The new narrative has to emphasize respect for human dignity, justice thus reminding, once again, that people survive only when they are able to get organized around public benefits.⁵¹ The new narrative could provide ways to live a worthwhile life under conditions of ecological restrictions, to satisfy the main needs of people and provide equality sufficient for maintaining social stability and security.⁵²

In 1991, Alexander King and Bertrán Schneider introduced the notions *problématique* and *résolutive* in *The First Global Revolution*⁵³ to define ways of responding to the threats and challenges of the full world. Authors saw an opportunity for mankind to change its course of development and to unite due to the identification of a new “general enemy” at the end of the Cold War. As such, there was the *problématique* of ecological degradation and global warming, poverty, excessive military expenses and deficiency of resources. *Good governance* – another key notion of the book – is, according to the authors, the main *résolutive* component opposing the common enemy.⁵⁴

Forming a new balance between national and global governance is one of the most important elements of transition to the full world philosophy. Achieving such a balance will demand specification of the notion of national sovereignty in relation to the realities of the world as a whole since the existing comprehension of state sovereignty is a product of the empty world. The European Union can be an example of such changes when there is a transfer of some share of national sovereign rights to the alliance and to the mutual benefits of all its member states.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Eisler, Riane. (2008). *The real wealth of nations. Creating a caring economics*, 2nd ed. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler Publishers.

⁵² Weizsäckerand Wijkman, *Come On*, p. 108.

⁵³ King, Alexander and Bertrand Schneider. (1991). *The first global revolution. A report by the Council of the Club of Rome*. New York, NY: Pantheon Books. Access 09 April 2018 <http://www.geoengineeringwatch.org/documents/TheFirstGlobalRevolution_text.pdf>.

⁵⁴ Weizsäckerand Wijkman, *Come On*, p. 68.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

Thus, the philosophy of nation states as a product of the empty world needs revision and legal instruments of *global governance* need to be added to it.⁵⁶ Here Paul Raskin's approach presented in *Great Transition*⁵⁷ is worth mentioning. Raskin allocates three possible routes of further development of humanity; conventional, barbarization and Great Transition. Each of these trends, in turn, offers two possible scenarios of the future.

According to Raskin, the mechanisms of pure market economy and reforms that invite weak intervention carried out for the best intentions but by weak politicians will lead to barbarization or extremely disturbing consequences. Great Transition gives a chance to pass to a planetary phase – *One World and Many Places* – with governance based on the “principle of restrained pluralism.”⁵⁸ According to this principle, wasteful consumption and population density have to be limited, international trade has to be stabilized while education, spiritual life and social justice are to become our priorities. At present, the Great Transition is undoubtedly merely a dream, but – keeping the alternative of barbarization in mind – it is a necessary one.⁵⁹

4. Outlines of the New Uniform European Security System

The most important function of any government is ensuring the safety of citizens and creating an environment promoting confidence in the future. These duties are most often reflected in the concept of security where values and interests, as well as main objectives and means through which to achieve these goals are formulated. This is correct not only for certain states, but also for Europe in general. At the same time, it is necessary to realize that the reasons of instability of the modern security environment are complex, and, as a result, they demand forming multidimensional responses focused on achieving the objectives of security policy and not on

⁵⁶ Ibid., p. 204.

⁵⁷ Raskin, Paul. (2016). *Journey to Earthland. The great transition to planetary civilization*. Boston, MA: Tellus Institute. Access 09 April 2018 <<http://greattransition.org/documents/Journey-to-Earthland.pdf>>.

⁵⁸ Paul Raskin. *Journey to Earthland...*, pp. 84-67.

⁵⁹ Weizsäcker and Wijkman, *Come On*, p. 207.

eliminating the already emerging threats.⁶⁰ Action must be preventive and proactive, and not merely reflexive.

The creation of a common space of security in Europe and a new European security system requires specifying a set of questions. What is understood as European security in the 21st century and what is the contribution of Europe to global security? What are the threats to Europe? How does the perception of security by Europeans have to change? How are ties between internal and external security understood and structured? How are Europe's efforts in the sphere of defence interfaced to strengthening the role of the NATO? What can be the forms of cooperation between Europe and the regions forming its security environment?

The process of developing a new concept of European security demands re-structuring of the European space. It is possible to urgently allocate the following poles and loci of a uniform European space for security processes.

The European Union

The concept of European security assumes a transformation of the EU into a power center realizing its specific features. Long-term European security has to be comprehensive and complete as military-political means and power are to be applied within wide frameworks covering all elements of national power and the sphere of public life at the level of both goals and tools. Thus, one can state that the EU has a wide range of tools the effective usage of which “would make the European Union a formidable actor in the international community.”⁶¹

We can talk of consensus when it comes to the idea that European values lay at the corner stone of the concept of European security as they “stand for the respect for human dignity, liberty, democracy, equality, the rule of

⁶⁰ Egmont Papers 1. *A European Security Concept for the 21st Century*, p. 9.

⁶¹ House of Lords European Union Committee. *Europe in the world: Towards a more effective EU foreign and security strategy*. 8th Report of Session 2015-16, HL Paper 97, London: The Stationery Office Limited, 16 February 2016, p. 38. Access 09 April 2018 <<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201516/ldselect/ldecom/97/97.pdf>>.

law and human rights.” The values of the EU are an element of its power as a global actor, and if the EU is not seen as a power compassionate to common people in other parts of the world, its efficiency would be “drastically reduced.”⁶² However, the new concept of European security must be balanced and pragmatically spread European values outside the EU. On the one hand, to achieve institutional and structural reforms the EU has to work with existing political structures. On the other, any intervention and action – even if driven by the best intentions – can lead to negative consequences, for example, to the strengthening the authoritarian regimes.⁶³

However, the new concept of security has to clearly define its priorities and threats since; despite decades of cooperation, it cannot be assumed that there already is clarity on these issues. Moreover, EU member states are not inclined to adopt difficult decisions in this field. Moreover, geographic projections of the EU member states differ, as well. For example, the states in Central and Eastern Europe consider Russia a priority, Mediterranean ones are more concerned about Africa and the Middle East, while Great Britain, France and Germany have global perspectives. Defining priorities for the EU as a whole will demand a revision of the EU’s role at the global arena and, here, European states have differing diplomatic experience and different ambitions on whether or not to participate in shaping the EU’s foreign policy. Along with France and Germany, one may mention Belgium, the Netherlands, Poland, Sweden and Denmark as the states that are engaged in “active diplomacy” and would like to see “a very active European Union in the field of foreign policy.”⁶⁴

Besides, the EU as a power centre has to have the ability of independent decision-making based on effective mechanisms, first of all, at a state of crises and/or conflicts.⁶⁵ Unanimous decision-making protects the member states and unanimity in foreign policy has been “the ultimate safeguard written into the treaties. Not even the smallest EU member can be overrid-

⁶² House of Lords EU Committee, *Europe in the world...*, p. 30.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁵ Egmont Papers 1. *A European Security Concept for the 21st Century*, p. 7.

den by a majority vote.”⁶⁶ On the other hand, there is a risk that unanimous decision-making will interfere with demonstrating determination in foreign and security policy. Thus, it is possible to talk of institutional conflicts within the EU regarding the decision-making process in foreign and security policy. The existing literature does not yet define how such conflicts manifest in EU institutions and how fault lines between European institutions and national interests of member states are to be drawn.⁶⁷

To perform the role of an actor on the international arena it is not enough to be aware of the developing processes, follow the policy of super powers, etc. The EU will be influential if member states express clear will to become a pole of the multi-polar world.⁶⁸ However, at present there are disagreements concerning whether the EU should be a full-fledged geopolitical actor.⁶⁹

Karen Smith, a professor of International relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science, sees distinctions between being a global actor and pursuing a *global foreign and security policy*. For example, the EU pursues a global trade policy and, in this sense, is a global actor. However, this does not mean that “particularly given the challenges around [the EU], that it should have a global foreign policy.” Dr Alistair Shepherd, Senior Lecturer of European Security, Aberystwyth University considers that the EU is “a global power”, but “not an actor of global security.” In the sphere of security, the EU is more concentrated on regional and not global problems.⁷⁰ As a result, the new concept of security in the medium run has to concentrate on the neighbourhood.

The USA, NATO and Transatlantic Relations

In the architecture of the new European security system the US will retain an important place. The dominating role of the US in the NATO leads to

⁶⁶ House of Lords European Union Committee. *Europe in the world*, p. 43.

⁶⁷ Giannessi, *Europe in a Changing Global Order*, p. 4.

⁶⁸ Egmont Papers 1.A *European Security Concept for the 21st Century*, p. 5.

⁶⁹ House of Lords European Union Committee. *Europe in the world*, p. 19.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

the fact that possibilities to change the institutions of European security depend on preserving, increasing or restraining America's role. Russia considers the role of the US dominating in Europe and argues that it must be decreased. The majority of the European NATO member states considers America's role extremely important for providing continental security and would like to keep it stable and even expand it. On the other hand, the supporters of a more effective EU acknowledge that the dominant position of the US in the NATO interferes with the posture of Europe's own defence system. In other words, American presence in Europe is both a stabilizing factor within the NATO framework and a dividing one in relations with Russia.⁷¹ The functions and role of Russia in the European security system have been discussed in detail above as part of the consideration of the Russian challenge to European security.

Intermarium

A substantial part of security threats in Europe is tied to the space located between the EU and Russia which can be called *Intermarium*⁷² or the "land in-between."⁷³ In this space, there are states united by a metrics, logic and grammar of geopolitics and sharing some common features. For example, structural weaknesses – including political instability, fragility of the rule of law, economic instability, hidden or apparent instability of various nature – are characteristic of all the states of *Intermarium*. Potential or open conflicts and unrecognized states used by geopolitical and regional centres for projecting power and influence are also present here. For example, the contest for influence is waged not only by the West and Russia, but also by Turkey – an important actor both in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region. Iran is another important actor in the South Caucasus as it traditionally has a great share of influence in Azerbaijan and is an important partner of Armenia. The deployment of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative is increas-

⁷¹ Alcaro, *Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe*, p. 32.

⁷² Umland, Andreas and Fedorenko, Konstantyn. "How to solve Ukraine's Security Dilemma? The Idea of an *Intermarium* Coalition in East-Central Europe," *War on the Rocks*, 30 August 2017. Access 12 February 2019. <<https://warontherocks.com/2017/08/how-to-solve-ukraines-security-dilemma-the-idea-of-an-intermarium-coalition-in-east-central-europe/>>.

⁷³ Alcaro, *Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe*, p. 29.

ing China's influence as she envelops communication and cultural projects in the South Caucasus and pursues a free credit policy in Ukraine, Belarus and Moldova.

State elite in *Intermarium* use the geopolitical antagonism of power centres to receive advantages and preserve their power by adapting their policies to the results of power centre clashes.⁷⁴ It means that the countries of the region cannot be considered passive objects. They are, to a certain extent, capable of influencing the strategy and policies of power centres. *Intermarium* states do not regard Europe as the one and only uniform security space.

Acknowledgment of the importance of *Intermarium* and the wide neighbourhood can already be seen in the *Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign and Security Policy* of 2016 as it departs from the concept of "European Neighbourhood Policy." Though the term is mentioned several times in the document, conceptually it is replaced by the concept of resiliency as EU's new guideline principle for the relations between member states and the neighbourhood and emphasizes tailored approaches to certain countries. The new strategy refuses to consider the European external environment a coherent space to which the same tools and approaches can be applied.⁷⁵

This emphasis on resiliency which is defined as "the ability of states and societies to reform, thus withstanding and recovering from internal and external crisis"⁷⁶ is important as it admits that readiness for reforms is necessary for positive changes. The strategy departs from the idealistic approach of the concept of "European Neighbourhood Policy" which is based upon the assumption that a common strategy of transformation for all countries is possible and that governments of the states in the neighbourhood really want reforms.

At present, the resources and capacities of Europe are connected with its ability to assist in carrying out economic reforms, and improving and/or

⁷⁴ Alcaro, *Transatlantic Relations in a Multipolar Europe*, p. 29.

⁷⁵ Techau, *The EU's New Global Strategy*.

⁷⁶ A Global Strategy for the European Union's Foreign And Security Policy, *Shared Vision, Common Action*, p. 23.

deeply reforming political, judicial, as well as security institutions of the *Intermarium* states. And it is necessary to understand that in *Intermarium* and the wide neighbourhood, where authoritarian regimes, wide economic inequality, unrecognized, fragile and failing states, as well as grey and black zones are present, responses to threats of the security environment cannot be formed only on the basis of resources and capacities of the EU/West.⁷⁷

Conclusion

The European security system will be built on the basis of three poles – the EU, Russia, and the USA – and *Intermarium* which in the medium run cannot be considered a pole. Distinctions between the EU and the USA in the system seem insignificant in comparison with the divergences between the West and Russia, however they do exist and can become important as they raise the role and influence of Russia and other actors in *Intermarium*.

The multi-polar nature of the European security system makes the intense relations between its actors inevitable. And the methods to decrease the risk of destabilization in the system are tied not to reducing the quantity of poles but to strengthening the interaction between them thus creating the conditions necessary to restrain the congenital instability of the system. In the medium run, the evolution of the European security system towards the creation of a common security space would allow to create the conditions necessary for managing the tension between the poles, the states of *Intermarium* and the wide neighbourhood.

Moreover, the relations between the poles surpass the European continent. The USA and Russia interact on the global arena, and the relations of the USA and the EU in security issues are institutionalized within the NATO which is also carrying out a global role in the 21st century. As a result, managing the tension and confrontations between the West and Russia in Europe inevitably go beyond the Continent's limits and potentially can get especially sharp in *Intermarium*. Besides, the tensions in North Africa, the Middle East, Turkey and Iran play an important role, as well.

⁷⁷ House of Lords European Union Committee. *Europe in the world*, p. 36.

Thus, efforts to strengthen European security have to be based on clear long-term strategic objectives. Reactive and short-term efforts can only provide limited results, without touching upon the prime causes of crises and conflicts. For this purpose, a general political will and awareness of shared European responsibility and destiny is required.

**PART VI:
EPILOGUE**

Epilogue

Frederic Labarre

The 18th workshop of the Study Group on Regional Stability in the South Caucasus capped an eventful year for the region as well as for the group itself. The workshop presentation and the interactive discussions seemed to suggest that individual countries in the region had overcome significant challenges and tests to their cohesion surprisingly well. How the premiership of Georgia reacted to pressure from the street in the wake of manifestations, and how Armenia remained remarkably steadfast behind Nikol Pashynian are indicators of increasing maturity. One should not discount the nerve and restraint demonstrated by Azerbaijan which wisely perceived that regardless how worrisome change may be across the Line of Contact; it was also pregnant with opportunity.

Russia's self-mastery should also be noted; to see radical change occur in a neighbouring country like Armenia tends to make the Russian leadership nervous. Not that the Kremlin is in any way "against" the new regime; nevertheless, the method of the change is at issue. Russia does not look kindly to change that would appear "unconstitutional" or "street motivated" because it continues fearing contagion that might spread to Russian streets as well. That we did not see a reversal of the Armenian "Velvet Revolution" is perhaps indicative of a new approach at work in the South Caucasus.

This new approach or "feeling" was palpable during our interactive discussions. True, this workshop introduced a rather large number of participants unfamiliar with our proceedings which may have led our presenters to be more cautious, but as the discussions wore on, a certain harmony grew. Clearly, harmony is always greatly facilitated by our Austrian hosts' hospitality and generosity, but this time around, we may account for the synchronicity of views in the permissiveness built into the workshop. As the reader may clearly see, this workshop lacked an overarching theme, allowing presenters more leeway in the treatment of their respective topics. As indicated in the preface, this method was preferred because the co-chairs

felt that a sort of “stock-taking” was necessary owing to the upheavals at work in the region.

They have been noted in the preface as well as in the presentations collated here in this booklet; the Armenian Velvet Revolution, the Azerbaijani, Georgian and Russian elections, the peace offering made to Abkhazia, and the manifestations in the streets of Tbilisi are events that have rocked the South Caucasus, and had the potential acting as a spark on a powder keg. Indeed the South Caucasus remains unpredictable; this is perhaps the reason why so many of our presenters felt ill-at-ease with having their papers published here. We furthermore regret the co-chairs could not secure a speaker from Turkey. Nevertheless, we are left with a feeling of cautious optimism for the future.

Reasons for this optimism have been confirmed by the Georgian elections on the one hand, and by news that Armenia and Azerbaijan had instituted a crisis hotline between the senior leadership to act as high-level crisis management tool on the other. References to this hotline can be found in the texts of Mr. Nuriyev and of Mr. Poghosyan in these pages. Another reason for optimism is the fact that the conflict management ideas of Mr. Nuriyev and Mr. Poghosyan have found common ground. Their idea for a new platform dedicated to the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict is not new (avid readers of RSSC Study Group Information booklets will realize that Mr. Nuriyev frequently makes the plea for the creation of dedicated structures). However, the co-chairs are heartened that other experts are beginning to find merit in the idea. The RSSC SG co-chairs and the Austrian National Defence Academy as well as the Austrian Directorate General for Security Policy would like to take credit for this rapprochement, and chalk it up to one of the more evident measures of effectiveness of the Study Group. There was further evidence of the power and validity of the work of the Study Group in Reichenau; it was manifested by the warm and friendly discussion witnessed between two residents of Nagorno-Karabakh, one Armenian and the other Azerbaijani.

On the subject of measures of effectiveness, we may also return to the crisis hotline established between Armenia and Azerbaijan. News of the creation of this hotline reached the ears of one of the two co-chairs in late October 2018, and after confirmation by the other co-chair and his network in

Armenia-Azerbaijan, it became clear that the Armenian and Azerbaijani belligerents had taken this momentous step. This is a change which the RSSC SG can also take some credit for, having made the recommendation to keep channels of communication open through a formal or informal platform, after having discussed the matter of a crisis hotline in interactive discussions.¹ Such recommendations had been voiced before, but we are among the latest reiteration of them, after the clashes that took place in April 2016. It necessitated the arrival of Mr. Pashinyan to power to see this change occur, but we are confident that the ears of the respective Armenian and Azerbaijani leaders were soothed by our experts whom we know have access, and by the dissemination of our policy recommendations in the wake of our various workshops.

For this is a shared success; one that belongs primarily to the participants of our workshops, but also to the diligence of all those who help make those workshops happen. The co-chairs have released a press statement to celebrate the historic step that Armenia and Azerbaijan had taken, but sadly formatting requirements made it impossible to truly acknowledge those who supported this turn of events.² We do so below, while the co-chairs reiterate their heartfelt congratulations to the leadership of Armenia and Azerbaijan for the courage they have demonstrated and by the example they set for the rest of the South Caucasus.

Text of the initial web release:

CEASEFIRE VIOLATIONS DOWN AS ARMENIA AND AZERBAIJAN IMPLEMENT RSSC SG RECOMMENDATION

George Niculescu, co-chair of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) confirms: Since the end of October 2018, a new operative communication line (crisis hotline) has been established between Armenia and Azerbaijan, two countries that have been at war over the status of Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), a region recognized as Azerbaijani by the International Community, but inhabited by a majority Armenian population.

¹ Ernst M. Felberbauer and Frederic Labarre, eds. *Towards Europe?! Straddling Fault Lines and Choosing Sides in the South Caucasus*. Study Group Information, Band 23/2014, p. 155-156.

² See <www.pfp-consortium.org>.

This information had been initially picked up by Frederic Labarre, the other co-chair of the RSSC SG, at a special roundtable on Crisis Management in the South Caucasus, organized in Vienna by the Institute for Peace Support and Conflict Management (IFK) of the Austrian National Defence Academy 22-23 October 2018.

According to official sources from both sides, the level of military tension on the Line of Contact (LoC) between the conflicting parties has significantly decreased (from about 90 reports of ceasefire breaches/day, to about 20 reports/day). The opening of this new communication channel had been agreed several weeks before by the president of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, and the Prime-Minister of Armenia, Nikol Pashinyan, during an informal meeting held in the margins of the CIS summit in Dushanbe (Tajikistan) on 27-28 September 2018. Although the idea of a crisis hotline had been voiced before, the policy recommendations of the RSSC SG, may have helped bringing this solution to the top of the mind of decision-makers.

Indeed, the first recommendation of the 10th RSSC SG workshop, held in Reichenau in November 2014, urged the following; “keep communication channels – especially informal ones – open.” The RSSC SG participants further urged the parties not to miss “opportunities for dialogue”, and to establish a “formal and informal” conflict resolution platform that would have some “permanence to enable relationships to blossom.” Armenia and Azerbaijan seem to have risen to the challenge of making this “platform a reality and better engage...official actors from the region.”

The co-chairs were unanimous in praising the diligence of the Study Group’s partners in conveying the results of its interactive discussions and policy recommendations to nearly 800 academic and policy agencies in the South Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, and within the Euro-Atlantic region. “Without promoting the work of the RSSC SG, who knows if this particular solution would have been implemented?”

Both co-chairs congratulate the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments for taking this important step forward. This is an example of courage and wisdom that should inspire the rest of the South Caucasus to follow suit. They also credit the participants of the RSSC SG workshops for their enthusiastic participation and openness. It is through their participation that the vibrancy of the RSSC SG workshops, which resumed in November 2012, could be achieved. [...]

Much remains to be done, however, as these successes are naturally fragile. But the co-chairs of the Study Group remain committed to the task of bringing the parties together for as long as it takes and remain grateful to all those who help making these achievements possible. In future workshops, we will wrap-up our geopolitical *tour d’horizon* with the 19th RSSC SG workshop in Berlin, examining the role of external actors in the South Caucasus, with a focus on the Ukraine crisis, and we will resume with the holding of breakout groups to deepen collaboration and discussion on particular top-

ics, bringing us closer to effective stabilization solutions for the South Caucasus.

**PART VII:
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Policy Recommendations¹

Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group

Executive Summary:

The 18th Workshop of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) of the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Consortium, held at Château Rothschild, Reichenau a.d. Rax, Austria, from 08 to 11 November 2018, had two purposes:

1. to provide an opportunity to “stock-take” recent political upheavals in the South Caucasus, and to determine possible connections between events;
2. to identify opportunities for peace building, conflict management and resolution brought about by regional political changes in the region.

The following recommendations were adopted/formulated by the participants:

1. To refresh the mediation process for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which has reached a dead end. The Co-Chairs should review the OSCE Minsk Group’s concept of operations to make the Group more effective in fulfilling its mandate.
2. In connection with (1), to set up an “OSCE Minsk Group Plus (+)” framework for “track-two” discussions and recommendations,

¹ These Policy Recommendations reflect the findings of the 18th RSSC Workshop South Caucasus: Leveraging Political Change in a Context of Strategic Volatility, held in Reichenau/Rax (Austria), 8-11 November 2018, compiled by Frederic Labarre and George Niculescu. Thanks to Raffaella Woller for her great help in managing the publication process and to Armen Grigoryan, Elkhan Nuriyev, Razi Nurullayev, Benyamin Poghosyan for their most appreciated input in, and comments on, the formulation of these Policy Recommendations.

from within which academics, civil society, and media experts might support the work of the Co-Chairs to change the mainstream belligerent narratives regarding the conflict, and prepare the public for a comprehensive, compromise-based solution. This framework might include dedicated discussion platforms for confidence building and peacebuilding measures between the conflicting parties.

3. As in the opinion of most local speakers Russia seemed the independent variable in conflict resolution in the region, to involve Moscow in any effective attempt at breaking the deadlocks, while considering its legitimate regional interests.
4. To further develop the role of European institutions in sustainably stabilising the situation, reducing frictions, and offering improved living conditions for the citizens of the region, the European Union and the Council of Europe could:
 - strengthen support for people-to-people initiatives and civil society dialogue to mitigate the negative impact of the protracted conflicts for all people in the region;
 - convene a Strategic Peacebuilding Group under the Eastern Partnership that would enable regional experts (peace scholars) and EU-based conflict resolution professionals to enhance exchanges of views, share innovative ideas, provide sound political advice, develop creative proposals and well-thought-out recommendations dealing with solution models, conflict resolution prospects and post-conflict regional security cooperation scenarios;
5. To de-link problematic issues and establish strong Confidence and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs) as a prelude to reciprocity in conflict resolution.
6. To redouble Georgia’s efforts at cultural and public diplomacy aimed at the region, as a means of creating a “South Caucasus Strategic Persona”.

Introduction

The 18th Workshop of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group (RSSC SG) was designed to debate a maximum variety of points of view concerning the multitude of political events which took place recently, and which had the potential to alter the course of conflict management in the South Caucasus. A “stock-taking” workshop was necessary to properly assess the impact of the ongoing political changes on regional stability. No thematic workshop could address all the potential consequences of the “Velvet Revolution” in Armenia, the presidential elections in Azerbaijan, the resignation of the Georgian prime minister over police abuse, the peace deal offered Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and the recurring demonstrations in Tbilisi and also in Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) for the region.

Taking Stock of Political Change in the South Caucasus

The first panel saw presentations focusing on the direction of foreign policy in the wake of the re-election of President İlham Heydər oğlu Aliyev. It was revealed that there had been some high-level coordination between Russia and Azerbaijan regarding the response to the situation in Armenia. While the Armenian “Velvet Revolution” was unexpected, it was nevertheless deemed partly the result of Azerbaijani multi-layered pressure on Armenia. It was also stated that Azerbaijan was ready to resume talks on a Nagorno-Karabakh conflict resolution, decrease the military tensions with Armenia, and deal with the rise of religious influencers.

Russia’s lack of involvement in Armenian affairs was explained by the spontaneous and internally driven nature of the “Revolution” and by the missing influence of Western intervention. Furthermore, it was noted that the Yerevan mayoral election results indicated a nation-wide backing of the Pashinyan administration. Therefore, Russians took a pragmatic approach of self-restraint *vis-à-vis* political changes in Armenia, while some Russian media stories had compared the Armenian developments to other “Euro-Maidans”. Also mentioned were the consultations concerning the European Union (EU)-Armenia Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA) implementation launched by the government, with participation of experts and civil society, and suggestions made that following the parliamentary

elections, tougher EU conditions in exchange for additional support might be an important factor in overcoming path dependence.

In the course of this first panel it was argued *inter alia* that the several events Tbilisi had witnessed in 2018 were the result of a more indulgent atmosphere which had replaced the Saakashvili regime. A contrary point of view was that the whole of the South Caucasus remains hostage to the hazards of regional geopolitics in the neighbourhoods, and, especially, of the demand for natural resources. In that regard, domestic liberalisation and democratisation may be premature and unsuited to bringing regional stability.

The Perspectives of Abkhazia, Nagorno-Karabakh, and South Ossetia

The second panel illustrated other points of view from the region. Regarding Syria's recognition of Abkhazia and the peace proposal made by Georgian authorities, the group was briefed on Abkhazia's internal politics. It was claimed that the Syrian recognition of Abkhazia was not only the result of Moscow's lobbying, but also of Abkhaz diplomacy. It was furthermore suggested that the peace proposal made by Tbilisi did not reach the desired audience and had been shelved and that the 2019 Abkhaz elections would probably be dominated by environmental concerns.

This panel also addressed the current attention paid to Ukraine, and the statement was made that, because of this, South Ossetia had, for the moment, dropped off the international radar. The consequence of this is that repeated calls to guarantee and enforce a non-use of force agreement remained unanswered. This situation also implies that Russian troops in the Tskhinvali region are likely to further increase in number, and become permanently established there.

The "Velvet Revolution" is considered a result of a broken social contract between Armenian political elites and their constituents. Already in 2015, fractures had begun to appear, which led to the appearance of Nikol Pashinyan as leader. The panel expected the "Velvet Revolution" in Yerevan to lead to a softer, but more orderly transformation in Artsakh/Karabakh, more likely to be driven by a public political process than a behind-closed-

doors agreement of the ruling elite, and enacted by leaders, accepted by the public, with no criminal records, and able to carry out systemic reforms.

Finally, the “new” Azerbaijan was scrutinised. It was stated that Azerbaijani politics had become “broader” in recent months, and that large parts of the Azerbaijani leadership had moved away from “Euro-centric” structures and poles of influence. The new Armenian leadership was criticised for its unwillingness “to negotiate the return of territories around NK”; the urgent need to resume the conflict resolution process as soon as a new Armenian government is in place was pointed out. It was furthermore stated that the OSCE Minsk Group was having no real effect on the process of stabilisation, suggesting that the time was perhaps ripe for a heads-of-state level meeting between the parties.

The Perspective of Great Powers and the Prospect for Peace

In the third panel, participants discussed the role of great powers in the stabilisation process of the South Caucasus. Corruption, lack of trust in the elites, unemployment and poverty (in Armenia) were described as the factors that led Armenian society to side with Pashinyan, rather than foreign lobbying. Moreover, the opportunities for cooperation in the ongoing Russo-Georgian rapprochement were highlighted. The resumption of trade has meant exchanges worth nearly 1 billion USD in the last few years, turning Georgia into an important commercial corridor for the region.

Another issue which was brought up in the course of this panel was the risk of religious extremism spilling over from the North Caucasus, as well as cases of violent radicalisation erupting in the South Caucasus. One can easily understand the challenge this represents for a country like Azerbaijan.

Armenia’s chairmanship of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) was also a point of discussion. It was hinted that the organisation was not as Moscow-dominated as commonly supposed. In addition, the CSTO focus has recently been on humanitarian operations support, which suggests that the organisation has a different understanding of security than, for example, today’s North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Finally, the audience was reminded that two paradigms perpetually clash in the South Caucasus and prevent meaningful movement towards stabilisation in the region. On the one hand, none of the belligerents – however defined – are willing to start a constructive political dialogue on conflict resolution. On the other hand, each party seems more enthusiastic about regulating relationships with external actors than developing good neighbourly relations. It was stated that the West should not strive to replace Russia's key role in stabilising the region, but it should support the sovereignty and the independence of the three South Caucasian titular states.

Interactive Discussion

The three preceding panels gave ample food for thought for the first interactive discussion of the workshop. At the beginning of this discussion period, Peter Schulze, of the Dialogue of Civilizations' Research Institute (DOC/RI) contributed comprehensive remarks about the "Crisis of the Old West, and the Resurfacing of a New World Order", in which he outlined the strategic volatility increasingly embroiling the South Caucasus region. This changing context was likely to strengthen the role of great powers in the South Caucasus, hinting at a general return of geopolitics as a motivator for international action. His speech looked ahead at the theme which the RSSC SG will explore in its 19th workshop, scheduled to take place in Berlin, concerning the role of "third powers" (large external actors other than Russia and the West) in South Caucasus' regional stability. The subsequent discussion was mainly on the current and prospective roles of the EU, Russia and the United States (US)/NATO in ensuring regional stability in the South Caucasus.

Re-energizing Crisis Management and Conflict Resolution

The fourth and final panel dealt with the re-internationalisation of frozen conflicts in the South Caucasus. It was argued that the "Velvet Revolution" in Armenia did not, so far, have any positive impact on the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh. However, under growing geopolitical pressure from larger regional powers the situation might change significantly. For example, if a new 'East European Security Deal' were to be implemented, the continuation of the protracted conflicts in the South Caucasus would become counterproductive, and their resolution should become a central part

of the new agenda. Conversely, in case the Russia-West confrontation were to prevail and increasingly turn into a broader European conflict, the South Caucasus' conflicts are likely to turn into proxies for the broader Russia-West conflict.

The group was furthermore reminded that the peace proposal made by Georgian authorities to Abkhaz authorities was not the first in the two sides' post-Soviet history. The details of the spring 2018 proposal, however, were that it focused on education and trade. It was stated that the Nagorno-Karabakh *status quo* is expected to be continued, as the alternative – a large scale war between Armenia and Azerbaijan – would lead to a regional disaster. However, it was conceded that negotiations should be resumed and that the time was also ripe to start thinking about a new paradigm for conflict settlement. The creation of a specific platform was proposed, aimed at a track-two dialogue on possible alternatives to the existing conflict settlement principles in parallel with a strengthening of the multilateral dialogue on confidence-building and peace-building measures.

During the last panel it was furthermore stressed that objective conditions, already created in the dying days of the Soviet Union, could not be ignored if any successful re-internationalisation of the conflicts were to be hoped for. Failing this, the “dynamic *status quo*”, which characterised the South Caucasus conflicts during the last several months, would be a factor of risk to belligerents as well as to mediators. Hence, it was argued that secession was the only way forward to escape the conflict cycle.

Finally it was stated that without the inclusion of civil society (local, regional, and international) in the stabilisation process, no internationalisation of the conflicts was possible. If it is prudently included in discussions, then the isolation of the region might be successfully broken. Thus, concerning the desire for a peacekeeping force, it was suggested that efforts at Confidence and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs) be doubled by increasing the number of monitors on the contact line.

Policy Recommendations

The second and final interactive discussion elevated the exchanges to the strategic level and provided fertile ground for a number of important policy

recommendations. Here are the policy recommendations² as they emerged from discussions:

1. The group reached broad agreement about the need to refresh the mediation process for the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In particular, there was near-consensus that after 24 years the negotiations had arrived at a dead end. According to one participant with intimate knowledge of the issues, the OSCE Minsk Group Co-Chairs should come up with a more effective concept on how to fulfil the Group's mandate. Having the Co-Chairs travelling to and within the region, and afterwards delivering fluffy press statements cannot be sufficient anymore.
2. In parallel with recommendation #1, a recommendation was made to set up an "OSCE Minsk Group Plus (+)", a "track-two" framework for discussions and recommendations, from within which, initially on a case-by-case basis, 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 bodes well, given the broadly shared view within the SG regarding the establishment of dedicated discussion platforms for confidence-building and peace-building measures between the conflicting parties.
3. A *sine qua non* condition for effective regional stabilisation in the South Caucasus is the involvement of Russia. In the opinion of most local speakers, Russia seemed the independent variable in conflict resolution in the region. This means that any effective attempt at breaking the deadlock in the region – either by the bellig-

² During the final interactive discussion, the deployment of a peacekeeping force on the internationally recognized border between Armenia and Azerbaijan was also proposed, provided that the troops supplied to maintain the peace do not come from the belligerents', neighboring, or OSCE Minsk Group mediators' countries. However, representatives of one regional country disagreed with any inclusion of such a specific policy recommendation.

events themselves, or by other actors (state and non-state) – should involve Russia, while considering its legitimate regional interests.

4. Given the current tense relationship between Russia and NATO/US, it is high time for the EU and the Council of Europe to come forward with fresh ideas and concrete, realistic concepts to stabilise the situation sustainably, reduce frictions and offer improved living conditions for the citizens of the region. For example, the EU should strengthen its support for people-to-people initiatives and civil society dialogue to mitigate the negative impact of the protracted conflicts for all people in the region. In a later communication with the Co-Chairs, one participant added that:

“The main goal would be to convene a Strategic Peace-building Group under the Eastern Partnership where regional experts (peace scholars) and EU-based conflict resolution professionals could enhance the exchanges of views, share innovative ideas, provide sound political advice, develop creative proposals and well thought-out recommendations dealing with solution models, conflict resolution prospects and post-conflict regional security cooperation scenarios...[as] track II diplomacy remains not sufficiently used... [A] Strategic Peace-building Group initiative could become an expert platform accompanying the EU’s Eastern Partnership. Through its activities, it can connect experts, scholars and civil society representatives from EU member states and Eastern neighbours, and promote an informed dialogue, cooperation, peace and stability in the entire region.”

5. The RSSC SG reiterated the need to de-link issues. This proposal has been made before within the confines of the RSSC SG format. Inherent to this suggestion is the need to establish strong CSBMs as a prelude to reciprocity.
6. Experts focusing on Georgia recommended that this country re-double its effort at cultural and public diplomacy, in particular aimed at the region. This proposal goes a long way in supporting the objectives set by the Austrian National Defence Academy when it re-launched the RSSC SG in 2012, which aimed for the creation of a “South Caucasus Strategic Persona.”

List of Abbreviations

AfD	Alternative for Germany / Alternative für Deutschland
AIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
ARFD	Armenian Revolutionary Federation Dashnaksutyun
B&R	Belt and Road Initiative (<i>alternative abbreviation: BRI; also: One Belt, One Road, see OBOR</i>)
BCM	Billion cubic metres
BP	British Petroleum
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative (<i>alternative abbreviation: B&R; also: One Belt, One Road, see OBOR</i>)
CBA	Central Bank of Armenia
CDU	Christian Democratic Union of Germany / Christlich Demokratische Union Deutschlands
CEPA	Comprehensive and Enhanced Partnership Agreement
CESD	Center for Economic & Social Development
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States (<i>also: Russian Commonwealth</i>)
Co	Company
CRRC	Caucasus Research Resource Center
CSBM	Confidence and Security-Building Measure
CSCE	Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
CSTO	Collective Security Treaty Organisation
CSU	Christian Social Union in Bavaria / Christlich-Soziale Union in Bayern
DOC/RI	Dialogue of Civilizations' Research Institute
EAEU	Eurasian Economic Union
EaP	Eastern Partnership
EEU	Eurasian Economic Union (<i>unofficial abbreviation</i>)
EITI	Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative
EU	European Union
FETÖ	Gülenist Terror Organisation / Fethullahçı Terör Örgütü
FSB	Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation / Federalnaja sluschba besopasnosti Rossijskoi Federazii
FSU	Former Soviet Union
GCB	Global Corruption Barometer
GDP	Gross domestic product

GEL	Georgian Lari
ICRC	International Committee of the Red Cross
ID	Identification
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IED	Improvised explosive device
INSTC	International North-South Transport Corridor
IPRM	Incident Prevent and Response Mechanism
IRI	International Republican Institute
ISAF	International Security Assistance Force
ISIS	Islamic State of/in Iraq and Syria
KFOR	Kosovo Force
LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender
LNG	Liquefied natural gas
LoC	Line of Contact
Ltd	Limited
MAD	Mutually assured destruction
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MP	Member of Parliament
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NIOC	National Iranian Oil Company
NK	Nagorno-Karabakh
NSS	National Security Strategy
OBOR	One Belt, One Road Initiative (<i>also</i> : Belt and Road Initiative, <i>see</i> : BRI <i>or</i> B&R)
OSCE	Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	Partnership for Peace
PM	Prime Minister
PR	Public relations
RAND	Research and Development
RIAC	Russian International Affairs Council
RPA	Republican Party of Armenia
RSSC	Regional Stability in the South Caucasus
SG	Study Group
SGC	Southern Gas Corridor
SIPRI	Stockholm International Peace Research Institute
SOFAZ	State Oil Fund of the Republic of Azerbaijan

SPD	Social Democratic Party of Germany / Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands
SSR	Soviet Socialist Republic
TANAP	Trans Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline
TASS	Telegraph Agency of the Soviet Union / Telegrafnoe Agentstvo Sovetskovo Soyuzu
TRANSKAM	Transcaucasian Highway
TV	Television
US	United States
USA	United States of America
USD	United States Dollar
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WTO	World Trade Organisation

List of Authors and Editors

Ahmad ALILI, Caucasus Policy Analysis Center, Baku

Daut APSANBA, London

Hrachya ARZUMANYAN, Center for Strategic Studies “Ashkhar”,
Stepanakert

Anton CHABLIN, Centre for Social and Scientific Innovation, Stavropol

Giorgi DAVIDIAN, NATO Liaison Office Georgia, Tbilisi

Alexander DUBOWY, University of Vienna

Armen GRIGORYAN, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica

Frederic LABARRE, Security Governance Group, Kitchener

Ia METREVELI, Social Service Agency, Tbilisi

George Vlad NICULESCU, The European Geopolitical Forum,
Dendermonde

Elkhan NURIYEV, Reconnecting Eurasia, Geneva

Razi NURULLAYEV, “Region” International Analytical Centre, Baku

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

Zarina SANAKOEVA, Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty, Tskhinval

Maia SHERAZADISHVILI, Euroregional Teaching University, Tbilisi

Peter W. SCHULZE, Dialogue of Civilizations Research Institute, Berlin

Cyril WIDDERSHOVEN, Verocy, ‘s-Heerenberg

The year 2018 has been a ferment of activity for the South Caucasus. In April the Georgian government submitted a reconciliation initiative to Abkhazia and South Ossetia. At the same time a series of demonstrations and protests related to the appointment of Serzh Sargsyan as Prime Minister took place in Yerevan, referred to as the Armenian “Velvet Revolution”. And Tbilisi became the scene of mass demonstration in late spring after some incidents of police violence in night clubs.

At the 18th Workshop of the Regional Stability in the South Caucasus Study Group experts from the region and beyond discussed the latest political events, taking into consideration the perspectives of the different actors and conflict parties, and tried to identify possibilities for peace building within the region. The speakers’ contributions collected in the related Study Group Information publication analyse the current political situation in the South Caucasus and give an outlook on potential steps towards a peaceful conflict resolution in the region.

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