POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS
Study Group Regional Stability in the South Caucasus (RSSC SG)

"Today and Tomorrow:
Prospects for Peace and Pitfalls of Emerging Technologies"

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PfP Consortium of Defense
Academies and Security
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Selected Recommendations

- All stakeholders and regional governments should promote a technology agnostic regulatory approach that does not create legislative frameworks for particular technologies but follows principles of good governance.

- The South Caucasus republics should establish a research grant on the topic of "AI for Peacebuilding in South Caucasus" to explore how AI can support peacebuilding through multinational, interdisciplinary, and cross-sectional collaboration.

- Armenia and Azerbaijan should establish joint centres for peace studies, memory research, and social psychology to ensure fairness and transparency.

- EU and member states should adopt a more pragmatic engagement with the Georgian government through maintaining an issue-focused engagement, while preserving the EU accession talks frozen.

Overview of Political and Security Situation in the South Caucasus

The escalating volatility of the South Caucasus region following from Russia's preoccupation with the war in Ukraine, Iran's military setbacks in its conflict with Israel, and Türkiye's deepening involvement in the Middle East (Syria, Iraq), has been a consistent element of strategic continuity. Georgia's ongoing geopolitical shift away from its European and Euro-Atlantic priorities has also continued. However, recent South Caucasus events, including the Abu Dhabi bilateral summit (July 2025) and the Washington summit Joint Declaration (August 2025), have been significant steps towards peace between Armenia and Azerbaijan, while highlighting the importance of connectivity once again. Despite the apparent proximity of a resolution to the Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict, the ongoing peace process remains susceptible to political, socio-economic, and geopolitical disruptions.

Dangers of Persistent Ontological Insecurities

Ontological security, seen as the need for continuity of collective selfhood rather than mere physical survival, is showing how identities are stabilized through routinized narratives — often conflict-centred. In the South Caucasus, post-Soviet identity formation in Armenia and Azerbaijan became anchored in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, producing durable, but toxic routines of enmity. Armenia's heroism–victimhood and Azerbaijan's injustice–resto-ration narratives generated predictability at the cost of reconciliation. The 2020 war disrupted this equilibrium asymmetrically, delivering ontological reassurance through victory for Azerbaijan while precipitating identity shock and uncertainty in Armenia. Post-war discourse indicates that peace itself can be destabilizing when conflict underwrites identity continuity, leaving elites reliant on enemy images and marginalizing alternative societal voices. Therefore, achieving sustainable reconciliation requires new routines that secure identity without perpetuating hostility.

Artificial Intelligence: More than a Tool

In this context, Artificial Intelligence (AI) was presented as a non-neutral force that increasingly mediates ontological security by shaping narrative production, recognition, and legitimacy. While one first thinks about AI as a tool, AI governance itself is a defining act of ontological security. Governments deploy AI-policy vocabularies — such as "trustworthy AI" or "digital sovereignty" — to perform coherent self-images, even as AI-enabled disinformation and deepfakes undermine those same identities. Russia exemplifies this duality through the use of Large Language Models to consolidate domestic narratives while eroding trust abroad, whereas Ukraine's alignment with European AI norms operates as a performance of European identity. In the South Caucasus, AI offers tools for

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narrative mapping, discourse analysis, and hate-speech monitoring that can expose how identities are continually reconstructed and open space for dialogue. However, AI is not a silver bullet: its constructive use depends on governance that prioritizes trust-building, institutional capacity, and AI literacy. The core challenge, therefore, is not only to navigate the governance of technologies but also to foster an open and resilient narrative environment through which societies can sustain their ontological security without defaulting to conflict.

Georgia's Continued Drift Away from European and Euro-Atlantic Integration

Georgia has experienced a protracted, profound and consequential political crisis that has caused a shift in its foreign and security policy towards Türkiye, Azerbaijan, China and, albeit indirectly, Russia. The Georgian Dream (GD) government has sought to expand its economic options through increased trade and investment ties with Türkiye, in addition to the newly established strategic partnership with China. Despite the absence of any substantive progress in the resumption of formal political and diplomatic relations, there has been a gradual resumption of economic cooperation with Russia. The imposition of sanctions against high-level GD officials by EU member states and the US had a negligible impact on Tbilisi's policies. Meanwhile, the political and administrative pressures against the so-called "foreign agents" have intensified.

Western Policy on Georgia: Continuity or Pragmatism?

Some have argued that the West should continue to encourage the Georgian government leaders to return to the democratic path and to resume progress toward EU membership. In this view, the European Union should develop a "security vision on the South Caucasus" and expand its economic and connectivity presence in Georgia and the wider region. The existing "carrot and stick" approach should be applied more effectively by imposing a greater number of sanctions on individuals and businesses associated with the GD.

Others advocated for the EU to adopt a more pragmatic approach in its engagement with the GD government, while maintaining the status quo regarding the frozen EU membership talks. Several regional participants have expressed frustration with the current EU sanctions against GD officials as they risk undermining trilateral cooperation in the South Caucasus. This position did not imply the abandonment of the Georgian opposition, nor did it condone the political and administrative harassment of the pro-European civil society. On the contrary, the EU and the US should explore more effective means and strategies to counter such abuses, while maintaining an issue-focused dialogue with the Georgian government.

TRIPP: Between Opportunities and Uncertainties

The "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity (TRIPP)" initiative has been proposed as a means of facilitating an "unimpeded" passage between mainland Azerbaijan and Nakhichevan via the Syunik region of Armenia through a long-term "exclusive partnership" between Armenia and the United States. For the past few years, the status of this route has constituted one of the principal obstacles to the conclusion and ratification of a peace accord between Armenia and Azerbaijan. It is projected that the TRIPP initiative will accelerate the development of the Middle Corridor, which is a proposed transportation and trade route connecting China to Europe via Central Asia, the South Caucasus, and Türkiye. The implementation of this initiative is expected to enhance Armenia's regional standing and provide economic opportunities, thereby benefiting the Armenian economy. It has also the potential to encourage trilateral cooperation between the South Caucasus countries.

Nevertheless, considerable uncertainties continue to surround TRIPP. Firstly, there is a lack of clarity how the "unimpeded passage" of Azerbaijani goods and people could be accommodated with Armenian sovereignty over its territory. Secondly, Russia, Iran and China have expressed significant reservations regarding the United States' involvement in the regulation of the international transit across TRIPP. These nations may obstruct the initiative or exert pressure on the Armenian government to align its actions with their own interests. Thirdly, considerable Armenian political and societal discontent with TRIPP has been observed, which could potentially result in its collapse if Prime Minister N. Pashinyan were to lose the forthcoming parliamentarian elections scheduled for June 2026.

Recommendations:

To All Stakeholders: governments, civil society, international organizations, academia, and the private sector:

- **To enhance AI-mediated ontological security, first and foremost support capacity-building** on how AI works and its usage. Multilingual AI tools could be applied to detect inflammatory rhetoric online. The findings of this monitoring and analysis could be used to address, assess, and mitigate negative trends. The success of this endeavour depends on feeding fact-checked information to these tools. In addition, train NGOs, teachers, and youth leaders how to use generative AI to co-create visual stories, animations, or stories of coexistence connecting conflict-affected communities on all levels.

- **Promote a technology agnostic regulatory approach** that does not create legislative frameworks for particular technologies but follows principles of good governance. Resist to regulate specific technologies or sectors (e.g. Large Language Models, Social Media or specific companies) as developments in technology are faster than regulatory policies are adopted.

To Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia:

- **Establish a platform for dialogue on regional stability in the South Caucasus** to facilitate regular, high-level dialogue among Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, with key external actors in a SC3+ format. This forum should address pivotal and even controversial regional geopolitical and connectivity issues (energy, transport, trade, digital, environmental, etc.), in order to avert misinterpretation and misunderstandings while fostering confidence-building and promoting mutual economic benefits.

- **Establish national public-private cyber defence platforms** to enable regular joint training, information exchange, and surge capacity during crises. This initiative would enhance national readiness as a significant proportion of the technical expertise is concentrated in the private sector. Public-private cooperation could reduce response times during cyber incidents and foster mutual trust and shared responsibility between the sectors.

- **Establish a South Caucasus Cyber Partnership** by incorporating a cyber security task force and a civil society alliance, involving Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia, with the provision of technical support from the EU and/or NATO (e.g. through the Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence). This partnership would lead to the establishment of mechanisms for joint responses to incidents, serve as a platform for exchange and should be promoting inclusive cyber governance, media literacy, and cross-border peacebuilding.

- **Establish a research grant on the topic of "AI for Peacebuilding in the South Caucasus"** to explore how AI can support peacebuilding through multinational, interdisciplinary, and cross-sectional collaboration. Start by funding and implementing projects at the local/national level to facilitate the establishment of regional teams of experts with the objective of proposing joint regional projects aimed at strengthening stability and promoting peace in the South Caucasus. Potential funding opportunities for such a grant could be found within the framework of the EU or the OSCE.

- **Develop a South Caucasus Charter on AI Ethics for Peacebuilding** to delineate principles for transparency, fairness, and inclusivity in the usage of AI applications. This Charter would provide a framework to promoting AI tools in educational settings that encourage shared understanding and peacebuilding rather than conflict, with the support of international collaborations.

- **Develop a regional initiative on fact-checking and awareness raising** especially in the context of disinformation and cognitive warfare, which targets perceptions, identity, and morale – the human dimension of security. Since 2016, Georgia has engaged wounded veterans in awareness-raising campaigns to counter false narratives. The initiative has been proven to be successful. Its expansion into a regional, volunteer-based programme, engaging veterans, experts and civil society representatives from Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan in factchecking and awareness-raising campaigns, has the potential to enhance cross-border resilience and public confidence.

To Armenia's and Azerbaijan's governments, civil society and academia:

- **Establish a "Joint Armenian-Azerbaijani Economic and Infrastructure Council"** to coordinate infrastructure, energy, and logistics projects in both countries that could potentially include neutral observers such as representa-

tives of the World Bank or other international governmental organisations.

- **Establish Armenian-Azerbaijani joint centres for peace studies, memory research, and social psychology** to ensure fairness and transparency. They could be co-hosted by universities in both countries and supported by neutral international partners (e.g., academic institutions from interested European states).

To Armenia's, Azerbaijan's, and Türkiye's governments, businesses and academia:

- **Establish a cross-border economic development programme** to promote inclusive, sustainable economic growth and regional stability through cross-border cooperation among border communities in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Türkiye (e.g., joint industrial and agricultural zones, common policies for water, land, and biodiversity management, support for women and youth entrepreneurs, harmonizing customs procedures, reduction of tariffs for small traders, border markets).
- **Foster education cooperation for development and reducing prejudices**, e.g. through the establishment of an Erasmus-type programme for cross-border educational exchange programmes, trilateral educational materials that highlight shared histories, adopting online learning networks connecting schools and universities to share resources and promote joint learning projects; exchanges between vocational institutes specialising in agriculture, environmental management, crafts, and small business development.

To Armenia's government, media, civil society and academia:

- **Strengthen national cyber capabilities and legislation** to enhance the operational and analytical capacities of national cyber troops, as well as the legality of their activities in their efforts to effectively counter weaponised information.
- **Establish proper legislation and direct communication channels with social media headquarters** for the enforcement of intermediate liability and transparency. Adopt framework legislation for the identification of weaponised information.
- **Develop mechanisms for timely and accurate information sharing in crises management** for the timely and accurate dissemination of information. Enhance state communication capabilities, particularly during crises, through training and technical assistance to government agencies responsible for disseminating information to the public, with the potential for assistance from European and Transatlantic partners.

- **Facilitate free, age-appropriate education on media literacy for the general public.** Initiatives that are designed to enhance media literacy through targeted training for each affected age group (from pre-school children to the elderly) would contribute to a resilient society and to the strengthening of democratic processes.

To the European Union and the EU Member States:

- **Adopt a more pragmatic engagement with the Georgian government** through maintaining an issue-focused engagement with the government, while preserving the EU accession talks frozen. Keep reevaluating this policy in order to facilitate progress and reforms in Georgia in areas of common interest that will be relevant after a restart of the accession talks.
- **Develop a common European framework to support Georgian experts, academics and civil society representatives**, in particular for those who have been subject to political and administrative abuses from the Government.
- **Ensure the inclusion of Georgian officials in regional cooperation meetings.**