

Final Report

ASCN

Preparatory Workshop

The Russian-Georgian Conflict – Implications for the region and social sciences

Yalta, Ukraine

10 October 2009

Jointly organized by:

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1. Background and objectives

The idea of a workshop on the implications of the 2008 Georgia-Russia war for the region and for social sciences emerged as a consequence of the need for a preliminary assessment of the situation of social sciences dealing with the conflict, especially of social science produced in the region.

As a preparatory conference the workshop focused on identifying and selecting possible topics for a general conference to be scheduled in spring 2011 on “Security, Cooperation and Transformations in the Southern Caucasus” (draft title).

The workshop’s presentations and discussions constituted a first step in that direction. The main objectives of the workshop were twofold:

- Gain perception of the regional implications of the Georgia-Russia August 2008 war from the perspective of the participants' countries
- Assess the role of social sciences in analyzing such conflicts and discuss the approaches used until now and ideas for new conceptual tools.

The workshop was also a starting point for the creation of a network of scientists and experts of the Caucasus region within the Academic Swiss Caucasus Net (ASCN; see below). A planning agenda for the 2011 event based on a call for papers was expected to be a further output of the workshop.

2. Context of workshop

The workshop is part of a larger project, namely a research promotion programme in the Southern Caucasus entitled Academic Swiss Caucasus Net – ASCN.

The ASCN is to be considered in a long-term perspective involving the following aspects:

- research projects on transition-related issues
- capacity building involving methodological seminars, summer schools etc.
- conference strategy on issues related to security, conflict resolution, identities, governance, state-building, development etc
- bilateral academic initiatives between Switzerland and the South Caucasus
- publications

It is a 5- year programme supported by the GEBERT RÜF STIFTUNG, a Switzerland-based private foundation active in the promotion of science, with a special focus on individuals. The programme is run by the Interfaculty Institute of Central and Eastern Europe (IICEE) of the University of Fribourg. The IICEE acts as the leading house and coordinates all activities related to the programme. It is based on an annual budget of 1.5 million CHF. The target region is the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan). However, it is planned to also involve other neighbouring states, especially those having access to the Black Sea, namely Russia, Ukraine and Turkey.

The main objectives of the ASCN can be described follows:

- contribute to the development of social sciences and humanities in the South Caucasus
- support a new generation of researchers
- strengthen academic networks in the South Caucasus and the Black Sea region
- strengthen Eastern Europe competence within Switzerland

To achieve the above-mentioned objectives, the following activities will be implemented over the next few years:

- support of research projects in social sciences and humanities fulfilling European scientific standards
- capacity building trainings for young researchers
- grants programme / science visits
- conferences on transition-related topics, doctoral schools etc.

The following ASCN activities are planned for the year 2010:

- building up local organization structure in Georgia
- call for proposals for research projects (Georgia)
- capacity building trainings in methodology for young researchers (Georgia)
- conferences
- summer schools
- research grants in Switzerland

In its initial phase, the programme is focusing on Georgia. However, the objective is to rather quickly expand to Armenia and Azerbaijan and have a regional approach.

3. List of Participants

The following distinguished guests participated in the workshop. The organizers endeavoured to have a panel of specialists from countries in the region as well as from Western Europe. The unfortunate cancellation, due to emergencies, by participants from Ukraine and Azerbaijan was an important and regrettable loss to the panel. However it did not prevent the workshop from being a fruitful and successful event.

ALLISON Roy	UK	LSE, Department of International Relations
BIRSAY Cem	Turkey	Işık University, Department of International Relations
DAFFLON Denis	Switzerland	University of Fribourg, ASCN Programme Coordinator
GRESSEL Gustav	Austria	Austrian Ministry of Defense
HAYOZ Nicolas	Switzerland	University of Fribourg, ASCN Programme Director
KUSTER Stephan	Switzerland	University of Fribourg
NAVASARDIAN Boris	Armenia	Yerevan Press Club, President
NODIA Ghia	Georgia	Chavchavadze University, Georgia
PEROVIC Jeronim	Switzerland	Basel University, Historisches Seminar
RYABOV Andrey	Russia	Moscow Centre of the Carnegie Endowment for Peace
TER-GABRIELIAN Gevorg	Armenia	Eurasia Partnership Foundation
WECHLIN Daniel	Switzerland	Neue Zürcher Zeitung
ZEDANIA Giga	Georgia	Chavchavadze University, Georgia

4. Talking Points

The following points were prepared as focal points for discussion during the workshop and transmitted to participants:

- **Perception of the Georgian-Russian war**

As described above, the workshop aimed at gaining insight on the Georgian-Russian war of August 2008 from different perspectives. The idea was to confront or compare perspectives from researchers coming from the countries involved in the conflict as well as from outsiders. It was expected from the participants to address the following issues: first how do they analyse the meaning of the war?; second how do they perceive the war as a problem of social sciences in terms of approaches, blind spots, (re-) construction of conflict, description of conflict, of political discourses about conflict? Finally it was expected to hear

from the participants whether social scientists have the adequate concepts and tools in order to understand and describe correctly the dynamics of political and social realities in the Southern Caucasus.

- **What are the key issues for whom and why?**

More specifically the analysis of discourses, roles and actions of the involved actors and international community was expected to be stressed. Issues such as the meanings of Europeanization of conflict deserve focusing on, as well as geopolitical issues, power structures (elite behaviour and performance of institutions in a context of war) and ethnicity, identities, nations in relation to war. From a broader perspective, the analysis of the Russian-Georgian conflict in terms of regional perspective (Black Sea region) is worth being made.

- **Social sciences and (or after) the Georgian – Russian War: What kind of approaches and insights can we expect?**

It struck the organisers of the workshop that a large number of reports on the Georgian-Russian war lack conceptual approach and often mainly rely on a description of facts. The idea of the workshop is to go beyond mere facts and see how adequate social sciences approaches and studies are. The following issues for instance need to be discussed:

- EU/European views vs. local views?
- description vs. concepts?
- empirical and theoretical challenges
- relevant disciplinary approaches
- contribution to post-conflict management

- **Possible key distinctions / notions / theories used by social sciences and to be discussed in this context**

Further, the following distinctions and notions were provided to the participants as possible issues to be discussed: international relations - realist approaches (interests) vs other approaches, and the role of agency (states/local political actors) vs structure (the international system); centre vs. periphery; ethnicity vs. nation-state; Europe, Europeanization and conditioning models; autocracy and democratization; strong, weak and failed states approaches; modern and post-modern models of cooperation.

These talking points served as "guidelines" and as central themes for the participants' presentations.

5. Summary of Presentations

Each participant was given 20 minutes to make his presentation. It was followed by a 20 minute discussion.

Ghia Nodia

Key issue: Ethno-territorial conflicts in the Caucasus were the result of the state break-up processes but later became dominated by the agenda of competition between Russia and the West.

Focus: Militarily complete but politically unresolved conflicts as a framework to conceptualize conflicts in Georgia. Cypriotisation or Karabakhisation of the conflicts in Georgia.

Main Message: Fundamental incompatibility of two normative frameworks upheld by the international community: principle of non-violence and principle of territorial integrity in a context of ethno-territorial conflicts. Break-up processes of the Communist multinational state bring with them a season of ethno-territorial conflicts. Nationalism as a powerful mobilization tool in young democracies.

Andrey Ryabov

Key issue: Perception of the Russo-Georgian war in the political and expert communities in Russia. Perception of international norms and power relations.

Focus: In the 1990s Russia used cold war rhetoric and viewed Caucasus countries as "not yet completed actors". New hierarchy of priorities? Shifts from geopolitical paradigms towards "recognition", protection of minorities, etc.

Main Message: Russian elites still frame conflicts in the Caucasus in geopolitical terms: proxy conflicts for Russia vs. USA and protection of ethnic minorities as a way of protecting spheres of influence.

Boris Navasardian

Key issue: Armenia's role in the context of Caucasus conflicts

Focus: Karabakh conflict and the implications of Armenia's location between Russia and Turkey. Armenia was historically "better prepared" for nationalist agenda that emerged in the 1990s given previous periods of nationalist discourse.

Main Message: Key importance of Armenian-Turkish agreement on normalization of relations. Two goals of Armenian political elite regarding Georgia (Javakheti): first, allow people to live as they had but without territorial claims; second, stop "georgianization" policy in Georgia. Problem of Georgia in the South Caucasus: all the international attention is on Georgia; it would help if international attention partly shifted to Karabakh.

Gevorg Ter-Gabrielyan

Key issue: Discourse and norms.

Focus: Social reality as a construction: Norms only work when actors agree to make them work.

Main Message: International context: Europeanization was only positive scenario for Armenia until the Armenian-Turkish rapprochement. National context: Armenia has discourse pluralism but authoritarian government structure; Azerbaijan has authoritarian government structures without discourse pluralism. The two different conditions for discourse make the Karabakh resolution so difficult.

Cem Birsay

Key issue: Turkey's role in the Black Sea Area

Focus: Turkish and regional interests in the creation of a Black Sea Area. Policy analysis and state's behaviour. Three main interests: exclusion of other international actors, soft means of security, preserving status-quo.

Main Message: Turkey's interest in establishing itself as a regional hegemonic actor to contrast Russian and European influence in the region would speak in favour of a Black Sea Area; however interests and realities of other regional actors are too diverse to allow the emergence of a Black Sea Area identity.

Roy Allison

Key issue: Overview of IR paradigms and approaches in the analysis of conflicts

Focus: Usefulness of IR approaches in creating conceptual frameworks for the analysis of conflicts in the Caucasus

Main Message: Focus on geopolitical approaches is reductionist and of little use as conceptual framework. Other approaches such as neo-liberal institutionalism, functionalist or social constructivist paradigms should also be considered.

Gustav Gressel

Key issue: Rethinking assumptions leading up to the war.

Focus: How much did the West know about the imminence of the Russo-Georgian war? How did the war parties misinterpret the West's willingness to "step in" in different degrees?

Main Message: The war was foreseeable; signs of imminent outbreak in the days running before August 8 2008 were evident. Geopolitisation of the debate is unwarranted.

6. Conclusions and results of the workshop

a. Perception of the implications of the conflict from local perspectives

As stated at the outset of the workshop one of its goals was to gain insight into different perceptions and perspectives of the conflicts in the Caucasus.

Through the participants' presentations and the ensuing discussion an initial picture of the different existing perceptions of the implications of the 2008 war began to emerge. Although each presentation had a different focus based on a different perspective on the conflicts and their implications for the region, several common points could be

identified:

- A discrepancy between elite discourse and elite behaviour among the conflict parties (for instance regarding interpretation of norms of international law)
- Clashing belief-systems and cognitive paradigms in the assessment of the situation prior to the outbreak of hostilities on all sides.
- The role of regional and global powers (Russia, EU, USA, NATO)
- Questions of identities and difficulties of defining locus of identification in particular with regard to (imagined or discursive) regions such as "Black Sea Area" or "The South Caucasus" and "European Neighbourhood"
- Linkages between the 2008 war between Russia and Georgia with other conflicts in the region ("frozen" or not), such as Karabakh, Turkish-Armenian relations, among others.

b. Assessment of the role of social sciences

A further goal of the workshop was to assess the role of social sciences in analyzing such conflicts and discuss the approaches used until now and ideas for new conceptual tools.

Despite sharing many elements the different perspectives and perceptions often come to diverging conclusions mainly because the assessments of the implications of conflicts in the region rely heavily on factual description. Factual description in turn relies on availability of factual knowledge and on interpretation of information. Facts can be contradicting and relying solely on factual description as a basis for analysis can therefore lead to inconclusive results. Therefore the need for overreaching agreement on the necessity of combining factual description with conceptual and analytical frameworks as provided by the ensemble of paradigms in social sciences became evident at the end of the workshop. In order to successfully enable social scientific dialog about the conflicts in the Caucasus common standards of social scientific research have to be discussed first. A minimal agreement on what those standards should be is a minimum requirement to go beyond description. The need to discuss ways that will make possible such an agreement is recognized by the participants and should be a strong component of future projects, such as the 2011 conference.

c. Network of social scientists working on related issues

Another goal was to initiate and develop a network of social scientists working on subjects related to the conflicts in the Caucasus. In this regard the Yalta workshop was an important step. In preparation ahead of the workshop an initial list of interested contact persons was established. This list was then enhanced through suggestions of the participants themselves. Through this "snowballing" approach we have initiated the creation of a comprehensive network of specialists that have signalled their interest in the program and its upcoming events. This network is an important asset and efforts will be undertaken to widen and constantly update the list of contacts.

d. Outlook for 2011 Conference

As a conclusion of the workshop, participants were invited to discuss and point out the main issues to be held for an international conference to take place in spring 2011. The following is a tentative list of subject areas that emerged from that discussion. Once a definite list of topics is defined the organizers of the 2011 conference will invite participants through a call for papers to submit proposals on the definite list of topics.

i. Conflict resolution and security

1. Geopolitics and role of great powers
2. Energy security
3. Contested sovereignties: self-determination and border issues
4. Interpretation and instrumentalization of international law in conflict-related regions
5. Conceptual frameworks

ii. Identities

1. Nation-building
2. Minorities protection
3. Role of diasporas
4. Regional identities (Black Sea Area, Caucasus, etc.)

iii. Europeanization, governance and international actors

1. European views on conflicts vs. local views
2. Europeanization, democracy and conflict-resolution
3. Role of international actors: EU, USA, Russia, NATO

iv. Power structures

1. War elites
2. State-building, failed states and conflicts
3. Personalities, personalization, informal politics
4. Formation of political discourses