



TOPICAL DIALOGUES

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CHALLENGES TO THE SECURITY OF SOUTH CAUCASUS COUNTRIES AND NATO - 2016



“Challenges to the Security of South Caucasus Countries and NATO - 2016” conference was held on the internet discussion platform of “Region” Research Center on July 20-22.

The conference was organized within the frameworks the homonymous “Region” Research Center project supported by the NATO Public Diplomacy Division.

The following experts participated in the conference:

HAYK MARTIROSYAN (Armenia) – political scientist, PhD in Political Science

HANNA SHELEST (Ukraine) – Editor-in-chief at UA:Ukraine Analytica, PhD in Political Science,

VAKHTANG MAISAIA (Georgia) – Chairman of the Georgian Institute for Geostrategic and Euro-Atlantic Integration, counselor at the Mission of Georgia to NATO, PhD in Political Science,

SERGEY MARKEDONOV (Russia) – Associate Professor at Russian State University for the Humanities, PhD in Political Science.

The conference was moderated by LAURA BAGHDASARYAN, Director of “Region” Research Center (Armenia).

- What are the security challenges for South Caucasus countries in 2016, and what is the role of NATO and Russia in overcoming those?

What is the difference of Warsaw NATO Summit in terms of the decisions made and the issues on which consensus has been reached?

- What priority is given to Russia in NATO's agenda at this moment?

- What are the regions of “special responsibility” of Russia and NATO?

- Can the fight against international terrorism become a sphere of interaction between rival power centers?

- Is there a need for revision of the European security system?

- What alliances are now being formed in the post-soviet space with participation of South Caucasus countries and what are their functions?

- Is Turkey (with its current foreign and domestic policy) perceived as NATO member by the neighboring countries and by Russia?

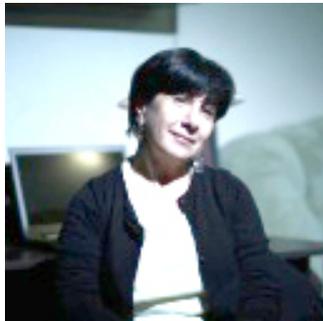
This is not the complete list of the questions and the aspects that were discussed during the three-day internet discussion.

“CHALLENGES TO THE SECURITY OF SOUTH CAUCASUS COUNTRIES AND NATO - 2016” (20-22 JULY)

From the materials of the internet conference

(The full text of the materials is here: <http://www.regioncenter.info/node/1433>)

FOLLOWING THE RESULTS OF WARSAW NATO SUMMIT



LAURA BAGHDASARYAN - I do not mean to seem over pessimistic, but from my point of view, the only stability we can talk about is the stably deepening global crisis for the past few year. I mean global not only in terms of the common challenges like international terrorism and migration from South and East to the North, i.e. Europe, that can actually break the overall international civilization structure. I mean global also in sense of abscesses of different countries bursting one after the other and impairing significantly the feeling of security of the populations of those countries.

Here is the list of the three of the most recent events of these series: another terrorist attack in Europe (France, Nice, July 14), the military coup attempt in Turkey (July 15), capture of the police station in Yerevan by a group consisted mainly of Karabakh war combatants (July 16) and Armenia's immediate incisive immersion into internal political crisis. NATO summit held on July 8-9 identified the most critical security challenges for its members, as well as for the so-called cross-border regions, also referred to as regions of special interest for NATO. The high interest in this summit in different countries was due to the nature of expectations, which could correlate directly or indirectly with the issues figuring on the first places.



VAKHTANG MAISAIA - Up to ten documents were adopted, including the final communique, which for the first time in the history of summits was quite "thick" and more specific compared to previously adopted documents (about 139 items)... For the first time during the recent decades, European Union and NATO came to a consensus and adopted a common declaration, where they expressed their common position on common problems within the frameworks of transatlantic security and agreed on plans for further strategic cooperation between the organizations. Most importantly, the representatives of both organizations expressed common approach towards the threats emanating from the East and South (i.e. from Russia and DAISH). The Alliance identified three geostrategically special regions at this stage for more active actions in the context of strategic defense and deterrence (defense and deterrence). Those became the basic questions of this summit: the Baltic Sea, the Black Sea and the Aegean Sea. In general, NATO returned to collective security strategy.



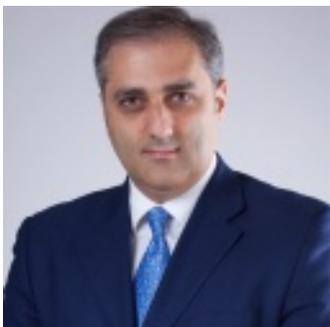
SERGEY MARKEDONOV - I do not think that Warsaw NATO Summit has opened any new tendencies or was a turning point, both in the context of the Transcaucasia (or more broadly the Black Sea), and in the context of the relations between Russia and the West. NATO and individual Allies are not prepared to consider the territory of the former USSR as a region where Russia dominates. And this standpoint has not changed. Concerning NATO enlargement, I do not think that Georgia and Ukraine are cases with nearest prospects.



HANNA SHELEST - This is an especially important moment for our region. For the past two years, we could mostly hear about the security of NATO and EU members that was fully focused on strengthening the capacity within the Alliance borders. In this document, for the first time, it was clearly stated that the organizations will work together on resistance to the threats to their partners, recognizing that in the context of current threats, the security of the partners and the member states are inextricably connected.



SERGEY MARKEDONOV- And yet, declarations and statements cannot be regarded as the only arguments. It is important that they be verified by the life itself. Only practice will show the extent to which NATO and EU members are ready to consider the security of the partners as their own.



HAYK MARTIROSYAN - Interestingly, there was no decision to invite those two states (Ukraine and Georgia) to join the Alliance, which can be explained by some caution in terms of this very important for Russia issue. Considering all this, we can say that NATO is attempting to isolate and deter Russia, in whom it sees its main enemy, but at the same time considers it premature to provoke a new international political crisis, which will necessarily arise if these two states join the alliance. As for Armenia – the country was mentioned with a number of former Soviet republics, territorial integrity and sovereignty of which NATO urges to respect in its final communiqué. This is certainly good for Armenia, if to dismiss one very important thing. Azerbaijan appears in the same list, which means that NATO chooses one of the conflicting parties, and it is Azerbaijan. Of course, the wording seems harmless, but the proposal holds the orientation of the organization.



VAKHTANG MAISALA - What the summit participants failed to achieve-is an interesting aspect for analysis. Here are the points summarized:

1) The so called "Black Sea Synergy" on forming Allied Fleet in the Black Sea by type of Soviet 5th Squadron, which operated in the Mediterranean Sea during the "Cold War" was not adopted. The Romanian side spoke about this initiative prior to the Summit and was immediately supported by the Americans and the British. However, suddenly Bulgaria spoke against the realization of the initiative. Though later it changed its position, but just then, during the summit Turkey suddenly spoke against the initiative as well, putting forward Montreux Convention of 1936 as an argument. Although prior to this Turkey remained silent and did not oppose the initiative. This happened just after Erdogan's apology to Mr. Putin for the downed plane. The geopolitical context is clear here. Moreover, after the coup in Turkey there was a message that Turkish pilots that shot down a Russian plane were arrested and even tortured.

Anyway, NATO officials defined Black Sea as a special responsibility zone in the final document.

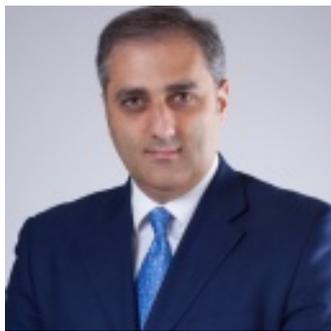
2) The concept for fight against terrorism was not adopted during the summit, though prior to the summit, the experts were working on the text of the concept and the working draft of the document was developed. The document was not adopted due to unknown reasons.

3) The parties were undecided on NATO's further expansion and the acceptance of the new members on the example of Macedonia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, and could not come to a consensus on the issues of Georgia and Ukraine, despite of the attempts to include this issue in the agenda.

4) The participants of the summit could not formulate the vision of the new Strategic concept of the Alliance and formulate new

updated strategic approaches after the Lisbon summit of 2010, when the version of the Concept was adopted. There were discussions on how to update the document considering the new realities of the international politics. However, this issue was laid off until the next summit, which as you know, will be held in Brussels next year and will be timed to the opening of NATO new headquarters.

IN RELATION TO TURKEY – AS A NATO MEMBER



HAYK MARTIROSYAN - Turkey is a very sensitive issue for NATO member states. If not for the friendly relations and the US Air Force base in Incirlik, Turkey might have not stayed long in the Alliance. It has been more than a year that in Beltway lobbies they are demanding to start a process of Turkey's removal from NATO, mainly due to Turkey's destructive position towards Syrian issue and because of the open support to ISIS and other Salafists in the region. These appeals are already heard at high levels, after the failed coup d'état attempt in Turkey, when the public extrajudicial executions of the rebels and the terrible repression of those against the current authorities started. There were calls for Turkey to respect its obligations to NATO, to respect human rights and democratic standards. These rights and standards of course were never observed in Turkey, but judging by how the American national channels covered the events of the coup, we can say that the power centers in Washington are not ready to really and seriously consider the removal of Turkey from NATO, and this are just reproaches and threats yet.



LAURA BAGHDASARYAN - I think that the comparison of Turkey's current actions related to ISIS with Turkey's 1974 military operation in Cyprus is not appropriate in terms of perception both in NATO and in member states. By the way, the actions were criticized not only by Russia but also by a number of Western countries and representatives in the recent past. Cyprus 1974 and cooperation with ISIS in different matters are multifarious challenges. Cyprus was a local action, the consequences of which affected itself and only, While ISIS and generally international terrorism- are not very clear substances, without clear borders of and unpredictable geography of actions that are taking place as well within the territories of member states of NATO- an Organization, designed to primarily address security issues of its members. Victims and explosions are no longer pictures on TV, where they tell you about inhuman crimes of some terrorists somewhere far from NATO borders. This are now quite tangible non virtual images for the ordinary Europeans.

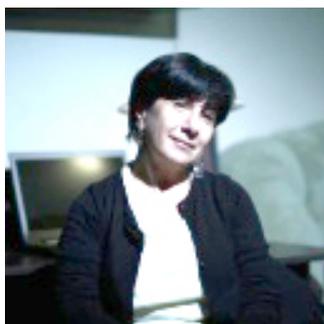
I think that this is a strong irritant for Turkey's ratings. Another aspect related to Turkey is the remaining possibility of its islamization, which is also an irritant for the ordinary Europeans, at least due to the same terrorist threats.

Another thing is that yes, Turkey was and probably will remain an important member for NATO, and largely due to NATO's strategic interests in this basin. As Ukraine was important for Russia due to Russia's interests in the Black Sea basin. Although after Abkhazia and Crimea, Russia managed to solve this problem.



HANNA SHELEST - We have already raised the question of NATO enlargement and of deployment of forces on the eastern flanks, paying no attention to the fact that Turkey is actively expanding its military and advisory presence on its own (not representing NATO's interests). Participation of Turkish military in Georgian army reform was well known as far back as in the mid-2000s. In March 2016, the construction of Turkish modern military school was announced in Kyrgyzstan. The project cost made about 30 million USD. Today (21 July) Aliyev confirmed allocation of two military facilities in the territory of Azerbaijan that will be at the disposal of Turkish military. In addition, in recent months a number of serious agreements in military and military-technical spheres was signed between Ukraine and Russia. An interesting thing is that Russia has always sort of perceived Turkey apart from its NATO membership. Anyway, I have never heard any sharp statements from the Russian side against such extension of Turkey's military presence, while it always displays quiet sharp reaction to the actions of any other member states of the Alliance.

ABOUT RUSSIA AND NATO PRIORITIES IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS



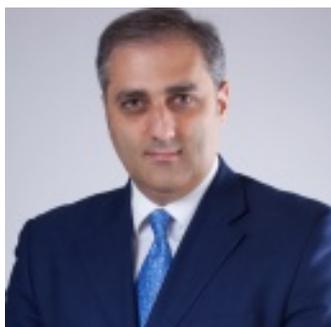
LAURA BAGHDASARYAN - What is now happening in Yerevan is the direct consequence first of all of April events, and second of those phenomena, processes in the country and situations that were talked about a lot, but are faced in such a grotesquely enlarged form only now.

Three major trends are now observed in the Armenian society.

-Sobering towards the expectations from Russia (including CSTO), as a strategic partner and military-political partner. Hence, formation of new slogans and fracture of deep-rooted stereotypes on Russia in the society.

- Demand for deep democratic reforms in the country, not as a condition for integration into various European organizations or NATO, but as a well-recognized necessity of effective use of the existing small resources including for the Army (which with honor handled the short April war unleashed by Azerbaijan). By the way, this is the most amazing paradox for me, as according to classic theory of the conflicts- the liberation of the society is always subordinate and inferior to the priorities of external security. I did not invent this- there is an ocean of examples of this.

-The immersed internal crisis, the utter bankruptcy of the entire political field in Armenia. The situation is manifested for only a half a year before the parliamentary elections, before the introduction of the new form of government in the country (from presidential to parliamentary). Under these conditions, it will be enough to trust the fate of the state in any political force was. In fact, there is nobody to choose from. These days, the people who take to the streets and are left one on one against the police cordon, become the mirror of the cruel reality in which everybody has to look.



HAYK MARTIROSYAN - Oddly enough this situation opens new opportunities for the West and for NATO member states in particular, except for Turkey, to be more active in Armenia. Even the lobbies of the State Department, where Yerevan was considered a "lost case" are most likely to come into play, then in all likelihood, they are already beginning to act, especially in the sense that the placement of "peacekeepers" in Karabakh region is not exactly beneficial to the Alliance.

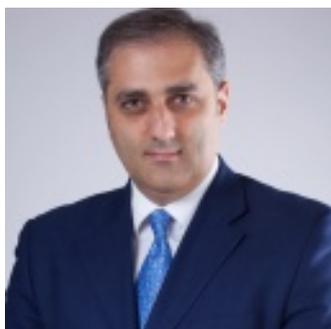
On the other hand, rapprochement of NATO and Georgia will lead to a situation, where Russia will try to further strengthen its military positions in Armenia, and that is fraught with even greater problems for the northern ally of Armenia. The bare fact that under the agreement on joint Armenian-Russian air defense system the Armenian air defense was taken over by General Shamanov - the non-official military hero of Azerbaijan, who fought against the Armenian forces at the beginning of the war, caused even more discontent in the Armenian society, and the further military integration will only further alienate the Armenian society from its centuries-old ally.



VAKHTANG MARISALA – It seems to me that the priorities of NATO and Russia in the region are evolving within the frameworks of the so-called "security dilemma", where the parties are trying to build their military capabilities and the tools of political pressure on the countries of the region, compete with each other in geostrategic dimensions. On the one hand the intensive NATO military exercises in Georgia and implementation of the Comprehensive Assistance Package, and on the other hand strengthening of its military potential in the territories of occupied Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as the establishment of joint air defense system with Armenia and strengthening of Caspian flotilla by Russia.



SERGEY MARKEDONOV - Here we have a complex knot of issues. First, I would not talk about the experience of balancing between the important for the country players as about some Russian know-how. The US are known as an ally of Israel, but it does not prevent them from having their own line of cooperation with Palestine as well and with Turkey (while the relations of Israel with this country were in a state of "cold peace"). You cannot consider Russian military-technical cooperation with Azerbaijan from the "post-April" standpoint. That is a hindsight bias. No one in 2010 and 2011 could predict with absolute accuracy how Russian weapons would be used. There were risks, but again no guarantees would be given. Moreover, Azerbaijan has four suppliers (in addition to Russian Federation there is Ukraine, Israel and Turkey. From the latter NATO samples are obtained). And the primary factor here is not Russian weapons but the desire of Baku to take revenge for 1994 defeat. With or without Russia, that desire would not disappear. However, today we have an example, when the weapon sold to the partner country at the market price is actually used against the ally. It is necessary to draw conclusions, make adjustments, but in my opinion, it is shortsighted to talk about necessity of a break or a radical revision of Russian-Armenian bilateral relations. NATO is not an alternative for Armenia today. If tomorrow it is, then we will discuss it.



HAYK MARTIROSYAN - I think that the comparison with the US-Turkey-Palestine-Israel is inappropriate. Turkey has never announced its desire to devastate Israel, and nobody sells Palestine last generation weapons. In fact, no one sells weapons to Palestine at all. The situation would be comparable, if for example the US would sell strongest weapons to Iran, even with a guarantee that Iran will not use it against Israel.

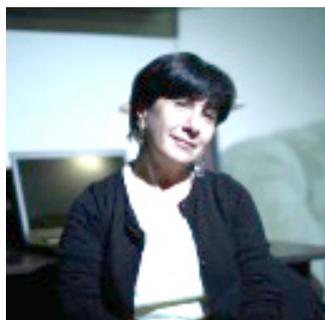
Azerbaijan started talking about its desire to devastate Armenia nor in April neither just before April. It never actually ceased the murder of Armenian soldiers by the snipers on the contact line. Mentioning the examples of Ukraine, Israel and Turkey is also not relevant, because none of these countries except for USA produces analogues to C-300, TOC-1 and Smerch. The USA produces, but does not sell to Azerbaijan or Armenia. Sale of such weapons to Azerbaijan does not stand up to criticism and is poorly thought out, shortsighted and immoral in terms of allied relations.



SERGEY MARKEDONOV - With the recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Russian Federation and with deepening of cooperation between Georgia, USA and NATO, the status quo marked eight years ago is strengthening. And the strengthening is happening from the both sides. It will change only if there will be some changes in South Ossetia status, but I do not think that Moscow will accelerate this process if Georgia does not get NATO MAP or full Alliance membership.

Status quo in Karabakh is the best option for Russia. And the reason is obvious. The country that has multiple complex challenges would not want a multiplication of the additional risks and in case of defrosting of the Karabakh conflict that would be inevitable. Yes, Azerbaijan follows another logic. But nobody said that Russia will be playing in pairs with Turkey. There are no grounds for that. As well as there are no grounds for thinking, that Kremlin will spur the negotiation process. The important thing is to keep it from unfolding into war, and then we will see. It is probably a bit cynical, but politics in general assumes cynicism in large scale (this is not my position; I am just describing the kind of reality). At the same time Russia does not want to start open confrontation with

Azerbaijan (I already explained why yesterday and the day before). This is a complicated behavior, I do agree. As for NATO, besides the reluctance to interfere with the mediators I have seen no projects or at least drafts. What prevents the intellectuals working on different research project under the auspices of NATO or EU to present such a draft?



LAURA BAGHDASARYAN -When I wrote about NATO's precise position of noninterference to the affairs of the official mediators, I meant the official level. However, if you mean also the non-official level, than at least this project of our center financed by NATO, within the frameworks of which we discuss Karabakh case and the role of NATO in the security issues of our countries, serves as an evidence that those attempts are made, if not in form of drafts but at least discussions.

... I have never once met at the official level any statement neither from NATO nor the EU on the ineffectiveness of the OSCE Minsk Group. On the contrary, every time there is almost tedious reference to the OSCE Minsk Group, where representatives of NATO and the EU make any comments on Karabakh. Moreover, if I am not mistaken, Azerbaijan and periodically Turkey are the ones to fiddle around with formulations on non-effectiveness of Minsk Group, but not Armenia or any international organization.



SERGEY MARKEDONOV – I did not mean that someone is broadcasting about the ineffectiveness of the OSCE Minsk Group from the NATO stands. In addition to the documents and statements there are closed roundtables, there is the Chatham house rule and so on. And there they have enough of that kind of ideas. I am not so naive to believe that those ideas are not broadcasted to the decision-makers. And speaking about drafts, I meant some alternatives to “basic principles” set out in thesis or in form of “road map”. However, I agree with you on one thing. That is the fact that NATO noninterference in Karabakh process does not create additional tension (though even without it the situation is so far from ideal).



HANNA SHELEST - And why are we talking about any alternative projects? NATO has never been an intermediary. Moreover, from the perspective of theory they have minimal chances to become one (believe the one who did a thesis on mediation). Moreover, NATO has never set for itself a task of mediation in conflicts even on the documentary level. They clearly follow the issue of distribution of powers and possibilities. If there is OSCE, UN and recently more activated EU, who have the strategy and the tactics of mediation, NATO will never interfere. NATO has peacekeeping operations (Bosnia) and trainings (Iraq). It has trust funds and reform programs. All this is also capable of effecting post-conflict transformation or resolution of the conflicts. But all this does not absolutely fit the realities for example of Nagorno-Karabakh and all other conflicts of post-soviet area.

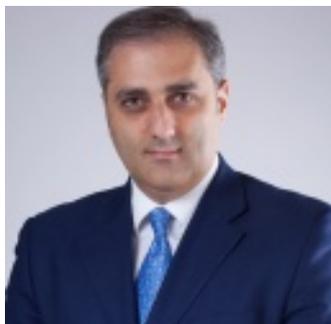


VAKHTANG MAISAIA - About situation in Pankisi Gorge. It is very often mentioned by respected experts. The fact is that now Pankisi Gorge is the most stable and open region in Georgia, where they managed to overcome the stereotype that was created during the last years. I am very often in the region and I can attest that I would want to have this kind of stable picture in the other regions of Georgia. Today's Pankisi is not the same region as it was in 1999-2003. Now the situation there is normalized and all the residents of the region including Salafi Jamaat live a calm and peaceful life. A woman was elected there as a head of local government.



HANNA SHELEST – In the context of small "alliances" I think in future we should pay attention not only to Iran, but also to the central Asia, which has access to the Caspian sea. Today we already witness formation of another configuration of the region in USA, when they say Near Asia, which in fact covers Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, the post-Soviet Central Asia and Afghanistan. Therefore if same Kazakhstan takes a tougher stance (and it already started to disagree with the actions of Russia and articulate more clearly its grievances and disagreements), than only Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia balance on the one side and Russia-Turkey-(Iran) on the other side will no longer be quiet relevant.

THE FIGHT AGAINST TERRORISM AND THE PROBLEM OF REVISIONISM IN EUROPEAN SECURITY



HAYK MARTIROSYAN - The biggest problem of NATO states in fight against terrorism lies within themselves.

First, the approaches to Sunni branch differ in different countries. For instance, in some NATO member states all the Sunni groups showing opposition to Syrian government are considered terrorists. There is a cliché - ISIS, Al-Nusra and a couple of other groups-these are terrorists, while many others are not. Salafism and Wahhabism are not yet a criterion for classification under terroristic and non-terroristic groups, and here arises the problem of fighting against this plague. On the other hand, countries that finance and supply this flows at the highest levels remain allies. In this situation, it is unreal to speak about productive fight against terrorism.

As for Georgia, despite the fact that some time ago an antiterrorist operation was carried out here aimed at identification of facilitators and recruiters of ISIS in Pankisi, the operation was rated mostly as unproductive and superficial. In another region of Georgia-Adjara, the strengthening of the position of Turkey and of the Muslim community boosted activation of extremist groups, who also recruit fighters to serve in Syria. This has not reached notable sizes yet, but the phenomenon is already there.



VAKHTANG MAISAIA - I absolutely agree that the present European security system should be revised, as it already does not meet the realities of the present day international relations. I would like to highlight the factors that radically influenced the modification of the conceptual basis, generated during Yalta and Potsdam conferences in 1945 and modernized within the framework of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (1972-1975, Helsinki). After the "cold war", the OSCE Istanbul Summit developed new European Security formula within the frameworks of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE). This was the basis, on which the foundations of the European security were build. However now this system is actually falling apart.