

The impact of the transformation of the European security system on the conflicts in the Caucasus



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The European security system

It seems that Europe which was already bending under the accelerating challenges of the Cold War more than thirty years ago has found the key to the European stability and security. In 1975 the Helsinki Final Act essentially released the extreme tension in the bipolar world, balancing the principles of territorial integrity and self-determination of peoples (of course, only to some extent); securing the territorial achievements of the Soviet Union after the WWII and outlining the spheres of influence of the centers of global powers, and most importantly, ensuring that the possibility of changing state borders is exercised only through peaceful means. The ten commandments agreed upon by thirty five states at the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the "Decalogue", became the anchor of the European security during the tumultuous years of the Cold War, and the OSCE turned into a unique regional harbor for a dialogue, where both the powerful and the modest of the world from Vancouver to Vladivostok cast their anchors next to each other enjoying equal rights.

In January 1992 the newly-independent Armenia became a member to this significant European security system, and in April of the same year signed the Paris Charter for New Europe. In July she became a signatory to the Helsinki 'Decalogue'. Seven years later, in 1999, Armenia signed also the Charter for European Security, thus taking on a part of the burden of responsibility for the European security system.

Check to the old system

Perhaps the current system of the European security would have been able to 'make sense' of the challenges having formed for the past two decades, were those to grow only quantitatively. Alas, it is not only the map of the conflicts and the security challenges that has changed, but also their dynamics. And it has changed significantly. For instance, the conflicts that had solely local significance in 1992-1995, have transferred into European and even global ones. The Russian-Georgian Five-Day War in 2009 comes to prove this statement, exposing the potential of an escalated conflict in a forgotten corner of the world: the danger of turning into a global crisis, if not into a disaster in only couple of days. Also, it is not a secret that regional conflicts can have a so-called 'shutter' function, as regards their impact on the transit infrastructures for energy resources. The Russian-Ukrainian 'gas wars' have revealed the vulnerability of this most important component of European security – energy resources. Indeed, the dynamics of the conflicts has changed, as well as their risks for Europe. Today any minor disturbance is able to destabilize the current system of the European security. The temporary solution to or discharging of any challenge or episode simply proves the unreliability of the existing system of the European security.

New principles on the new map

Everyone realizes the necessity for a new system of the European security. However, the dialogue on forming one is quite a recent event. The 'Corfu Process' launched in June 2009 aims to shape the future of the European security after the transformation of the bipolar model of the world and in the face of new challenges. It seems that the need for an open, visionary, comprehensive and participatory dialogue on the European security is eventually materializing. One thing is already quite clear: yet once again the development of a new system of the European security will definitely require an agreement between the interests of the global powers of influence.

A northern ray

Apparently Russia has already announced about her vision of the principles of developing a new system of the European security. A common Euro-Atlantic security system is being outlined, where the already existing rules for regulating relations between states are being traditionally protected; arms races are being controlled; and the principles of conflict resolution and fight against new security challenges, such as terrorism and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction are ensured. No one actually contends the existing rules of formal relations between states. Moreover, Russia and the US directly cooperate in controlling arms races. However, the new principles of conflict resolution essentially allow for reshaping the map of influence zones in the European region. And not only in here...

Agir?

Knowing about security challenges and perceiving their danger and dynamics, unfortunately does not always lead to an adequate response from the political leadership of the international community. The inevitability of an influenza epidemic and its fatal impact on the world is not contended by any epidemiologist. Actually, the epidemic can break out any day. Still, the states' response to such a

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predictable disaster is not adequate. Unfortunately, likewise, the apocalyptic nature of the dynamics of the conflicts does not mean that the response to the challenges of the European security will be adequate and timely.

Demining vs. delaying

Obviously, all the interested states should be involved in the process of developing a new system of the European security. However, it is not yet clear what format should be used to make the voices of unrecognized (Republic of Nagorno Karabakh, Republic of Transnistria) or partially recognized (Abkhazia, South Ossetia, Northern Cyprus, Kosovo) states heard. And in general, should those be heard at all? Should they participate in the process, or should their fate depend on the resources those representing their interests have? In the latter case it will hardly be possible to 'clear' Europe of mines such as the existing conflicts and their risks. This is confirmed by the last three centuries of the European history. The process should be long-term; otherwise in a decade or two the necessity of reviewing the existing system will again appear on the agenda. The process should be founded on mutual agreement. If this was possible in the turbulent 1975, it certainly should be possible nowadays. Still, the conventional wisdom claims that the devil is in the details.

The Caucasian touchstone

Perhaps for us and our neighbors in the Caucasus the most important aspect of the development of a new European system of security is the formation of the principles of conflict resolution. There are different approaches in this regard: either conflicts in the Caucasus should be resolved after the formation of the new system (these conflicts should in a way be compelled to be resolved within the new system), or it can be implied that the resolution of the conflicts in the Caucasus requires a separate dialogue. One thing is clear though: whatever these principles are, it will be highly unlikely to force those upon the peoples in this region if those have not been developed with their active participation. Moreover, the conflicts in the Caucasus will become a touchstone for the new principles of the security system. This is actually not a surprise for the history. The conflicts in the Caucasus were the touchstone, on which the reforms of the Soviet political system, incapable of conflict resolution, 'slipped and fell' about two decades ago.

Nagorno Karabakh examinations

The process of regulation of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict may involve wider discussions on the European security, including the conflicts in the Caucasus in general. Indeed, the resolution of the conflicts in the Caucasus may even be frozen until the new principles of the European security are agreed on, or even until the compulsory implementation of these principles. However, so far any forced resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict has been doomed. Moreover, the very systems of security that had forced a regulation of the conflict on this territory broke down themselves over time. Moreover, the superpower dictating its principles of security to the Caucasus had slipped and fallen exactly here, thus eventually turning into a history, since it had been unable to pass the examination on conflict resolution.

... "Help oft shall come from the hands of the weak when the Wise falter"

History is often full of surprises. If two centuries ago an Azeri was asked about his biggest enemy, he would have answered without a moment of hesitation: "The Ottoman Turk", against whom he had been fighting shoulder to shoulder with an Armenian. For the last two centuries in the result of a specular reflection of the identity of their ancestors, the descendants of the Ottoman Turks have turned into the best friends of our neighbors, whereas Armenians, the brothers in arms of their ancestors turned into a sworn enemy. History can take such sudden turns. However, the 'metamorphosis' of the Azeri identity still continues. The magnet of the European identity may change the poles of the Azeri identity and perhaps it will not be surprising if in half a century according to Azeris, Armenians will become the best friends and allies against, for instance, the Kurdish threat. Especially, since the European crystal has started to leave traces on the Turkish identity, almost invariable since 1920. Perhaps the most powerful component of the new system of the European security is not the large troops and nuclear weapons, but the interests and the values guiding the ones who control those. The European identity is the sun the warmth of which makes not only the sunflower, but also the powerful oak turn to it. We are certain that the 'inventory' of expansion of the European values and the Europeanization of the identities of the conflicting nations not only has not shrunk, but it has not even been properly studied. Somewhere in its most remote corners one can find the future surprises and warrants of the European security. So, why can't we accelerate the process?

The paper is elaborated based on the opinions passed by the participants of the discussion "European Security and Challenges in the Caucasus", which took place on August 24, 2008. The roundtable discussion was attended by independent analysts, government officials, and representatives of the international organizations.

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