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INSTITUTE NOTE

“SECURITY AND INSECURITY IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS”

TASK FORCE ON THE CAUCASUS
PARIS, 16 MAY, 2003

This conference brought together over forty European officials and experts to launch the new Task Force on the Caucasus at the EU Institute for Security Studies.

The conference sought to ensure that ‘every-one is singing from the hymn sheet.’ For this reason, the subjects covered were broad. The conference served as a moment of synthesis of trends in security and insecurity across the South Caucasus over the past decade. The conference also provided visibility to the Task Force at a moment when the EU is engaged in discussions about its role in the region. Subsequent activities will follow in the wake of decisions taken by the EU Council. In addition, a Chaillot Paper will be published in the Summer 2003, based on the papers presented at the conference.

Discussion at the conference carried on two main topics. The first concerned the state of affairs in the South Caucasus and reflected broad consensus among participants. The second focused on the potential EU political role and highlighted differences of views.

1. Security/Insecurity Trends:

The main security threats arising in the South Caucasus originate in the states of the region themselves. These states are weak institutionally, politically unstable, economically impoverished, with disenchanting societies. All have experienced processes of de-industrialisation, large-scale emigration (mainly to Russia) and mass poverty. None have developed viable or long-term development projects. Georgia and Azerbaijan face severe separatist threats from Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Nagorno-Karabakh inside their borders.

These internal weaknesses make these states vulnerable to external insecurity developments. The region has become a transit zone, as well as a source, of transnational organised crime. Drugs smuggling is a particularly acute problem.

In addition, the South Caucasus is riddled with regional tensions. Armenia does not have relations with Azerbaijan or Turkey. Russian-Georgian relations remain tense. Russia provides

military support to its Armenian ally, while Turkey is engaged in military terms in Azerbaijan and Georgia.

The South Caucasus cannot be separated the North Caucasus inside the Russian federation. The ongoing conflict in Chechnya has spilled over already into Georgia (cf. Russian bombings in the Pankisi Gorge in August 2002). At the wider level, the radicalisation of Chechen militants in their struggle with Moscow may affect the broader Caucasian region.

Regarding the United States, in the wake of 11 September, the US military presence has changed also in the region, with closer ties to Azerbaijan and the launch of a Train and Equip programme in Georgia.

2. A EU Role:

A consensus emerged at the conference on the EU's security interests in the South Caucasus. These included:

- a) Ensuring energy security;
- b) Preventing the aggravation of a range of soft threats (organised crime, illegal migration, health deterioration) in a region soon to be on the EU's borders;
- c) Promoting environmental safety (especially regarding the Medzamor Plant, and the Black Sea, as a future 'EU lake');
- d) Preventing the rise of international terrorism, using the South Caucasus as a host;
- e) Preventing renewed fighting in the region's conflicts.

There was debate on whether the EU can bring value-added at the political level to conflict resolution in the region.

- a) Some arguments noted that the field is already crowded in the region, with the presence of the UN, the OSCE, NATO, and a number of important states, including member states, deeply engaged. Moreover, there has been little progress towards resolution in the region's conflict, despite extensive engagement by the international community;
- b) On the other hand, it was argued that the EU has little choice but to become more involved politically. The EU's assistance to the region over the last decade has been ineffective because of the absence of coordinating political role. The EU should do what it does best, that is, provide a long-term and holistic approach to the conflicts and offer the prospect of rehabilitation support. Compared to other organisations, the EU is seen also as impartial and more 'benign.' Finally, the three South Caucasus states are demandeurs for a greater EU role.

The debate then fixed on the parameters of a greater EU political role. Consensus emerged quickly that:

- a) The EU should not act alone, but as a complement to the activities of other organisations and states, with the *Quartet* noted as a model to be emulated for international coordination;
- b) The EU should avoid raising expectations about its presence;
- c) The EU should recognise the limits of what it should seek to do;

- d) The EU should exploit the potential role of Turkey in the region and consult widely with regional powers, including Russia and Iran.

Differences arose over the means by which the EU should proceed to become engaged in the region.

- a) A number of officials stressed the need for the EU to develop a strategic policy to the region, which would define EU interests and appropriate tools to advance these. The appointment of a EU Special Representative (SR) was noted as a potentially useful idea if embedded in a wider strategy and if provided with the necessary resources;
- b) Other participants argued that a SR might be appointed before the elaboration of a EU strategy. In fact, the SR could play a role in the determination of such a strategy. The first role of the SR would be seek to facilitate the un-blocking of the negotiations in the South Caucasus. At a wider level, the SR would provide visibility to the EU role in the region and increase the EU's ability to express conditionality in relations with the three states. The three bywords of the SR could be *cohesion, effectiveness* and *visibility*.

Overall, there was a consensus that the EU cannot ignore the South Caucasus and could play a useful political role as a generator of fresh thinking for resolution of the region's conflicts. Through small seminars focusing on specific problems such as visibility projects, federalism, IDP return, and security sector reform, the EU-ISS Task Force will seek to support this process intellectually.

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