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New Threats in Central Asia and the Caucasus and European Security

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        "Europe has never been so prosperous, so secure nor so free," reads *European Security Strategy* (ESS), a principal embodiment of European Union's Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). Drafted by Javier Solana in the wake of United States' invasion of Iraq and passed by Brussels' European Council session in December 2003, the document downplays the risk of conventional warfare in Europe in near future, it however provides a sophisticated, if perhaps somewhat concise, analysis of new security threats to international community in general and European Union and its member states in particular.[1] Listing terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), regional conflicts, state failure and organized crime as the principal threats and pointing to their mutual interconnectedness, it asserts that "in an era of globalization, distant threats may be as much a concern as those that are near at hand" and that "with the new threats, the first line of defence will often be abroad."[2] Adhering to the key principles contained in ESS, this policy paper argues that both in EU's policy planning and implementation in the field of security – in the broad definition of the term – there has been a serious neglect of one region where many of these threats have since 1990s been growing to reach levels at which they pose a considerable threat to not only European, but also to global security. This region encompasses the republics of Central Asia and the South Caucasus,[3] which, despite numerous pecularities, share manifold characteristics – the geographical location in the midst of Eurasian land mass, political legacy of the Soviet rule and problematic transition to democracy, or geoeconomic significance of the Caspian Basin. In the first section, the nature of the new threats in this region is outlined, followed by a brief account of EU's past record an argument for increased involvement therein. In conclusion, specific recommendations are made to the agencies and bodies responsible for CFSP policy planning and implementation.

Tangle of Threats in Eurasian *Heartland*

        Ever since USSR was found on the verge of disintergration in late 1980s, Central Asia and the Caucasus have been giving rise to numerous threats to international security. Instability and weakness of indigenous authoritarian regimes coupled by ethnopolitical conflicts and poor performance of local state economies created in this region a fertile ground for empowerment of organized crime structures and emergence of radical Islamism. Interconnectedness of these threats is not merely explanatory of their genesis – instead, it can be turned into positive statement that alleviation of one security threat may simultaneously diminish destructive potential of other epicentres of instability.

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[1] <u>A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy</u>. Brussels, 2003.

[2] Ibid. 6-7.

[3] Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Ethnopolitical Conflicts

Whereas the conflicts in North Caucasus, South Caucasus' Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia or Central Asia's Tajikistan show numerous peculiarities – e.g. North Caucasus conflict sweeping several local republics under the flag of *ghazawat*, religious war, Nagorno Karabakh conflict involving two independent regional states of Armenia and Azerbaijan as prime actors and Tajikistan's war (1992-1997) featuring four regional factions, thus assuming a character rather of civil conflict – they share one organizing idea, that of ethnopolitics, i.e. a demand of political representation / autonomy for a collectivity defined by common ethnicity. This driving force has to significant extent – albeit not solely – been attributable to a general rise of ethnic nationalism as an ideology and means of social mobilization by political elites in late 1980s, and to the ethnofederal structure of the former USSR.[4] All these conflicts – with the exception of Tajikistan, they presently remain unresolved and frozen (South Caucasus) or are categorized as an open war (North Caucasus) – have moreover, besides innumerable material and human losses estimated to tens thousands of deaths and hundreds thousands of IDPs, significantly contributed to the internal sovereignty deficit and lack of government control, emergence of war economies and spread of organized crime structures in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Lack of governance

If the ethnopolitical conflicts mentioned above receive the most attention of the international media – albeit limited in comparison with other regions of the world – the single most important security threat in Central Asia and the Caucasus is the internal sovereignty deficit of state governments. Whereas these are often described as more (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan) or less (South Caucasus' states, Kazakhstan) authoritarian regimes, in some cases with strong sultanistic elements, they make an excellent case for Barry Buzan's assertion that repressive governments tend to indicate weak states, i.e. states which are internally contested and chronically insecure.[5] The lack of internal consensus among the local states is primarily due to ethnopolitical conflicts in consequence of which the governments lack control over part of their territories, ethnopolitical tensions – e.g. in Ferghana Valley or Georgia's Alkhalkalaki and Dzhavakheti – traditional kinship structures as forms of substate loayalties and organized crime networks funded by drug traffic and informal economies. Since there exists a relationship of mutual constitution between undergovernment of Central Asia and the Caucasus' states and all other security threats discussed in this section, this ailment to sound security environment in the region deserves particular attention of international community. Even more so when it is noted that two region's countries, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, have recently neared the category of "failed state" due to severe lack of internal sovereignty, absence of internal consensus caused by regional factionalism, and erosive effect of organized crime networks on state institutions. In Kyrgyzstan, these tendencies have been strengthened in the wake of Tulip Revolution in 2005, which in fact resembled more of a palace revolt, backed by organized crime masterminds.

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[4] This argument is pursued in more detail e.g. in Svante E. Cornell, „Autonomy as a Source of Conflict," World Politics 54/2 (2002).

[5] Cf. H.E. Chelabi and Juan Linz (Eds.), Sultanistic Regimes (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998); Barry Buzan, People, States and Fear (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991) 100-104.

Drug Traffic

Central Asia and the Caucasus have traditionally been a key link in transport of opium and heroin harvested and produced in Afghanistan, which presently accounts for 87 % of world opium *per annum* production, to Russia and Western markets. Importance of Northern Route via Tajikistani autonomous province of Kuhistoni Badakshon and Ferghana Valley (Osh, Batken, Soghd) increased particularly after Iran increased its efforts to combat narcotics trade – today it is estimated that 65 % of opiates produced in Afghanistan flow Central Asia's transport corridor.[6] Nonetheless, the role of Caucasus' route, albeit somewhat diminished in significance, is not to be underestimated either.[7]

Effect of drug traffic – perhaps the most tangible security threat from the European perspective as it generates direct and manifest risks to European states' societal security – on the security of Central Asia and the Caucasus is multidimensional. By providing funds for organized crime networks, it furthers corrosion of state structures and undergovernment of the local countries; it also debilitates governments by providing resources for informal economies to flourish – it has been estimated that e.g. in Tajikistan, informal, and thus untaxed, economy sector accounts for as much as 30 % country GDP;[8] finally, addictions and diseases related to consumption of narcotics present a serious threat to societal security.

Organized Crime

Detrimental effects of organized crime, particularly as related to the internal sovereignty deficit of Central Asia and the Caucasus' governments, have already been mentioned. Rampant corruption of state institutions even threatens to turn weak states in Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan) into failed states in which the criminal networks would control informal economies and provide for political goods such as protection. Islands of this postmodern version of Hobbesian *state of nature* may already be found in the political map of the region – namely in North Caucasus, conflict zones of South Caucasus and e.g. some enclave territories in Ferghana Valley. Existing ethnopolitical conflicts provide for a splendid environment for organized crime networks to flourish; however, the concept of "crime-terror nexus" which explains shifts in motivations of terrorist groups from original ideological struggle to predominantly criminal activities should also be mentioned in this respect. In Central Asia and the Caucasus, this has been the case particularly of now-dispersed Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), whose incursions into Ferghana Valley in 1999-2000 seem to have been initiated to retain control of drug traffic routes rather than by desire to overthrow Uzbekistan's existing secular regime and lay foundation of a theocratic government modelled on the basis of Qu'ran.[9]

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[6] See World Drug Report 2006, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, <http://www.unodc.org/unodc/world_drug_report.html> for more details.

[7] Afghanistan Opium Survey 2005, UN Office on Drugs and Crime, < http://www.unodc.org/pdf/afg/afg_survey_2005_exsum.pdf>, executive summary; Tamara Makarenko, "Crime, Terror, and the Central Asian Drug Trade", Harvard Asia Quarterly (Spring 2002).

[8] Kamoludin Abdullaev and Sabine Freizer, What Peace Five Years after the Signing of the Tajik Peace Agreement? Strategic Conflict Assessment and Peace Building Network, UK Government Global Conflict Prevention Pool, March 2003, 20.
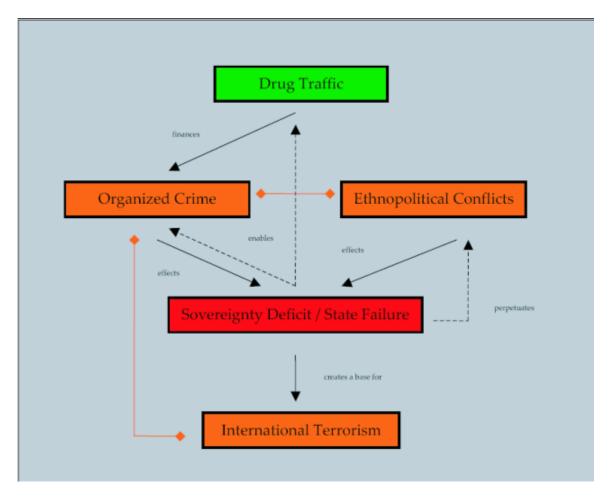
[9] Cf. Svante E. Cornell, „Interaction of Narcotics and Conflict," Journal of Peace Research 42/6 (2005).

International Terrorism

After 9/11, international terrorism based on fundamentalist ideas of Islamic political order has come to dominate international security discourse. The war against terror was for a time waged in near vicinity of Central Asia's countries and received considerable support of their regimes, whereas Russia's government did not hesitate to present North Caucasus' campaign against insurgencies as an anti-terrorist operation. Radical Islamic movements contesting the existing secular regimes have been noted particularly in North Caucasus, where the insurgency attained a more religious character during 1990s – Shamil Basayev, now deceased, being the most notorious warlord to acquire the teaching of political Islam – and Central Asia's Ferghana Valley, where movements such as IMU – once supported by Taliban and al-Qaᶜeda – and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (and Hizb-ut-Tahrir's offshoots such as Akramiya) have been most active. In South Caucasus, Islamist movement activity has been less visible and territorially limited to areas such as Pankisi in Georgia and Lenkoran in Azerbaijan. Explanations of increasing support for political Islam in Central Asia and the Caucasus are manifold. The most cited causes include poor socioeconomic conditions of local societies resulting from inability of political regimes to provide for societal services, lack of political representation for most citizens, repressive policies of governments and their corruption, organizing idea for resistance against perceived occupation in North Caucasus, and last but not least the import of radical ideas from Arab world countries such as Saudi Arabia accompanied by their generous sponsoring of clandestine radical networks.

That said, several other circumstances should be considered. First, the region's societies remain in majority either secular or dominated by moderate and indigenous forms of Islam, which differ in many ways from radical doctrines originating in Arab world. Thus majority society is unlikely to join or come under influence of radical Islamic movements. Second, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and many North Caucasus *jamaats* (Islamic communities) have become involved with organized crime and their motivational structure are thus changed. Third, albeit existence of radical movements contesting current political regimes is beyond doubt, it is sometimes deliberate policy of these regimes to overstate security risk related to radical Islamism, particularly *vis-a-vis* international community, and present crackdowns against political opposition as legitimate action against Islamists and terrorists. These circumstances considered, it is unlikely that radical Islamic movements would attain power in any Central Asia and the Caucasus' country and make it a safe haven of international terrorism anytime in near future. However, particularly should erosion of weak local states continue, these movements could significantly contribute to local political insecurity.

The above account aimed at revealing extensive interconnectedness of major security threats in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Their relationship of mutual constitution may be portrayed by the following scheme:

The relationship is indeed intricate and complex (arrows indicate various effects, orange lines the *crime-terror* and *crime-conflict* nexi). However, as suggested in introduction to this section, such complexity may be turned into positive factor, for when centrality of internal sovereignty deficit, manifest in the scheme, is realized and effective instruments leading to security sector reform, increased liberalization utilizing reform-minded forces within the governments and political inclusion – not necessarily a straightforward democratization – and rule of law are implemented, alleviation of other major security risks would likely follow. Strong states moreover represent founding stones of regional political, economic and security cooperation network, which may prove indispensable for the regional threats management. European Union's support and experience are essential for successful completion of these processes, some of which have already been launched. However, if it is to be effective, EU involvement's nature and extent must be modified.

EU's Involvement: Past and Present

European Union and individual Member States have not been blind to development in Central Asia and the Caucasus, a region that whose own proper history started only in early 1990s. However, as indicated in the introduction, Central Asia and the Caucasus have remained at the periphery of CFSP's interests. Many European states have been involved in OSCE Minsk Conference aimed at resolution of Nagorno Karabakh conflict and France is currently a member of

Troika (alongside with Russia and the United States) mandated to mediate the peace talks. UK, Germany and France are similarly members of Group of Friends of UN Secretary General interested in building of enduring peace in Abkhazia. Neither body has yet been able to bring the frozen conflicts to resolution. In 1990s, EU launched TRACECA, a transport corridor project which should connect brinks of Eurasian continent via Central Asia and the Caucasus. However, despite a common understanding that all parties would benefit from the project, it remains far from completion. In the aftermath of Georgia's Rose Revolution (2003), EU Rule of Law Mission was established in Tbilisi and in the same year, EU set an office of Special Representative to the South Caucasus, yet without any significant competencies. Moreover, Central Asia and the Caucasus was not included in European Neighbourhood Policy enacted at the time – although some local countries had participated in other looser assistance frameworks such as Partnership and Cooperation Process or particular instruments, e.g. TACIS – and it was only in 2004 that South Caucasus was included in this framework of European assistance programmes and individual Action Plans were developed for Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. Europe has also displayed lack of interest in development of transport routes for Caspian oil and gas riches. Notwithstanding initiation of INOGATE project (together with TRACECA under the umbrella of TACIS) aiming at improvement of European energetic security by diversification of supplies in 1990s, the construction of recently launched BTC (*Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan*) and SCP (*South Caucasus Pipeline*) pipelines transporting hydrocarbonates from Azerbaijan to Turkey, despite owned by consortia with majority share of British Petroleum, was promoted mainly by the United States. Most Central Eurasia's countries are members of NATO Partnership for Peace programme, but they are clearly considered beyond the sphere of EU's immediate political, economic and security interests.

EU's Involvement: Future

This section aims at providing a case for increased EU's involvement in Central Asia and the Caucasus sia drawing upon the above presented security analysis. Particular measures to change the nature and extent of EU's policies will then be presented in the conclusion. An argument set forth here comprises considerations of 1) potential for spillover of instability and 2) geopolitical variables. Several Central Asia and the Caucasus' development scenarios are outlined in the end of the section.

The prime CFSP's interest in the region should be based on consideration of potential extension of security risks nurtured here to EU Member States due to their geographical proximity and their peculiar character. Despite the fact that international security discourse is centered on the international terrosism threat, the most immediate of security risks listed above is the drug traffic, as it directly impacts European societal security. However, other security threats, particularly considering the 2007 Romania and Bulgaria's accession which will bring the EU borders yet closer to the countries of South Caucasus, should not be underestimated either. Should the region's security deficit increase in future years, as one of the scenarios below suggests, EU Member States would face consequences due to their geographical proximity – in terms e.g. of energetic insecurity effected by disruption of supplies, increased inflow of IDPs or rising levels of activity by organized crime networks and proliferation of WMD; they would also be likely more impacted by asymmetrical threats such as international terrorism, for whose perpetrators countries with security deficit provide the ideal conditions to dwell; last but not least, considering EU's increased assumed responsibility for global security, manifested e.g. in CFSP's peacebuilding and police operations and post-conflict reconstruction programmes, more extensive structural preventive policy would likely make conflict management and resolution initiatives more effective and decrease the amount

of cost covered by European funds should violent conflicts along existing faultlines in Central Asia and the Caucasus re-escalate or new conflicts arise.

Furthermore, more extensive EU's involvement is desired as in Central Asia and the Caucasus, intense geopolitical competition has taken place ever since 1990s, effectively preventing emergence of stable security regime. The United States, Russia, China, Turkey and Iran have become more or less involved in a revived "Great Game" over what in geopolitical theory is traditionally termed Eurasian *Heartland*, motivated both by Caspian Basin riches' control and mere presence in this strategically eminent area. Particularly Russia and Iran's policy in South Caucasus and involvement in local ethnopolitical conflicts has then had a considerable detrimental effects on regional security. European Union is in the unique position by not having been entangled in this struggle, and thus the organization's role in providing assistance to build effective security instruments in the region has a considerable chance of being tolerated by the competitive geopolitical players.

Several scenarios of future development may be envisioned:

A)   *Status Quo.* In this version, Central Asia and the Caucasus' international security will not significantly deteriorate, as Russia retains – albeit limited – sovereignty in North Caucasus, South Caucasus conflicts' remain frozen and organized crime structures' penetration into Central Asia's state institutions does restrict regimes' governance capabilities but does not cause their collapse. However this scenario is very likely, in near future at least, it may be presumed that the security regime would not remain entirely still, and some deterioration would instead occur – resolution of existing ethnopolitical conflicts or effective tackling of drug traffic and organized crime being unlikely under current conditions. Particularly new escalation of South Caucasus conflict or further expansion of violence in North Caucasus remain a very real possibility which may have a critical impact on the governments' political security.

B)   *Grave Deterioration.* In current Central Asia and the Caucasus' security environment, a spark may launch a chain reaction to ultimate explosion and collapse as many security risks listed in the previous sections are closely interrelated. Particularly if the ethnopolitical conflicts or organized crime severely impair region's governments effectiveness, considerable portion of the region might fall prey to international terrorism networks or other substate power structures and turn into mayhem of anarchy and instability. This is an "ideal type" scenario, but some parts of North Caucasus, South Caucasus and Central Asia already approximate this situation and under unfortunate circumstances, these zones may be expanded.

C)   *Gradual Alleviation.* Central Asia and the Caucasus' situation is not desperate. If effective instruments to tackle the security threats are implemented, the nations of the region may live in continuous peace and prosperity. What is required is the will of indigenous governments to reform and structural framework for combating the forces that restrict their capabilities. European Union, not stained by the above mentioned geopolitical competition, with numerous financial and other instruments of assistance and extensive experience with regional cooperation – since many of

regional security risks are of transnational nature and there currently exists a serious deficit of international cooperation among the region's governments, this experience is most desired – can play a key role in bringing this security framework about, thus increasing its own security and prosperity for many years to come.

Policy Recommendations

To respond to Central Asia and the Caucasus' acute security threats which bear considerable
potential to negatively influence European security, European Union and EU Member States should:

1. Recognize Central Asia and the Caucasus as an area of focus of CFSP's policy planning and implementation in such bodies as European Council Secretariat or High Representative for CFSP's office.
2. Recognize importance of this region's front in combating new security threats – such as state failure, regional conflicts, or organized crime – to which EU committed itself in *European Security Strategy*.
3. Realize interconnectedness of these threats and centrality of governance deficit in the risk analysis, as undergovernment of local countries intensifies security risks stemming from drug traffic, organized crime and existing ethnopolitical conflicts and tensions, let alone radical Islamic movements.
4. Focus on building strong states, which are a necessary requisite for stable and secure international regime in Central Asia and the Caucasus, emphasizing:
    a) *security sector reform*, including militaries, police and interior ministries, and tackle corruption of state institutions;
    b) *liberalization*, political inclusion and development of civic principles rather than traditional kinship loyalties;
    c) *rule of law* – rather than rule of people – as the fundamental liberal premise.
5. Consider that democratization unchecked by constitutional liberalism may empower radical and fundamentalist elements of society and that many a "democratic" opposition seeks to receive support of Europe by merely assuming democratic rhetoric in quest for power. EU should therefore primarily seek forces friendly to reform primarily *within*, rather than *without* governments.
6. Assume a more active role in resolution of South Caucasus' conflicts (Nagorno Karabakh, Abkhazia and South Ossetia) as they directly contribute to the internal sovereignty deficit and international insecurity of Central Asia and the Caucasus as such. EU is likely to find that Russia may oppose the resolution of these conflicts. However, it should
7. Not be persuaded to regard Central Asia and the Caucasus as a sphere of Russia's predominant geopolitical influence, while recognizing her legitimate interests in the region; subject the key security issues to discussions within the EU-Russia Dialogue, but assume a firm and resolute position in these.
8. Tackle drug traffic issue at the root, i.e. in Central Asia, and regard combating this security threat as a possible departure point for wider regional cooperation as

a considerable degree of consensus in this matter is likely to be found among local countries and key geopolitical players active in the region.

9. **Enhance support to the development of infrastructure** e.g. via TRACECA and INOGATE projects to create an energy, freight and information transport corridor between Europe and Central Asia and the Caucasus. This would bring local countries closer to Europe whilst increasing EU's energetic security by diversification of supply.

10. **Harmonize the above listed measures into a single framework and address imminent security and development issues** to build mechanisms for direct and structural prevention; realize that presently EU's initiatives may achieve best results in South Caucasus – as local countries are the most disposed to closer relationship with EU and NATO – and then in Central Asia. North Caucasus, on the other hand, remains today Russia's locked backyard and thus closed to activities by external actors.[10]

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[10] It should not be forgotten, however, that North Caucasus is the theater of the only currently open war in Europe. Cf. Lotta Harbom a Peter Walensteen, „Patterns of Major Armed Conflicts 1990-2004," Ed. Allison Bayles, <u>SIPRI Yearbook 2005</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005) 125.