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ENC SUMMARY

THREATS TO STABILITY IN WIDER EUROPE – Challenges in the Neighborhood and Beyond

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Research staff at European Neighbourhood Council (ENC).

This publication is a summary and analysis of the academic conference “Threats to Stability in Wider Europe” which took place at the European Institute of Peace (EIP) on the 7th of July 2017, co-organized with the University of St Andrews. The report “Threats to Stability in Wider Europe – Expert and Academic Analysis” is available for downloading at ENC’s website.

The information in this publication includes information from the event as well as input from European Neighbourhood Council’s (ENC) Academic Council Members and research staff.

ABOUT THE EVENT

An academic conference was organized at the European Institute of Peace (EIP) on the 7th of July 2017 to highlight the release of the ENC report “**Threats to Stability in Wider Europe – Expert and Academic Analysis**”. The report includes academic contributions and policy recommendations from eight regional experts and analysts, focusing on EU security interests, threats and cooperative resolution opportunities in the Middle East, the Eastern Partnership (EaP) and Central Asia.

All articles included in the report were presented at the event by four of the authors: **Prof. Dr. Rick Fawn** (University of St Andrews), Managing Director **Samuel Doveri Vesterbye** (ENC), Head Researcher for Eastern Europe and Central Asia **Andreas Marazis** (ENC) and **Dr. Nina Lutterjohann** (University of St Andrews). **Boris Iarochvitch** (European External Action Service, EEAS) presented **Dr. Dominika Krois**’ (EEAS) article. The other authors who could not participate in the panels got their papers presented by the authors who were present¹.

CONTEXT

The European Union (EU) is facing several challenges on its Eastern and Southeastern flanks, which is raising questions about security and stability in its neighborhood.

¹ The authors who could not participate at the event are: Dr. Elena Zhirukhina (University of St Andrews), Shairbek Juraev (University of St Andrews), Karolina Kluczevska (University of St Andrews), Jason Bruder (University of St Andrews) and Dr. Dominika Krois (EEAS).

In addition, there are also internal issues to deal with, as ENC Academic Council member and Associate Professor **Phikria Asanishvili** (Tbilisi State University) points out. This internal instability creates a divergence on a common perception of security threats, which in turn complicates formulating a Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). According to Ms. Asanishvili, the EU does not successfully counterbalance Russia's influence – at least not in Georgia – and it should increase its efficiency in order to become an important security player in the South Caucasus.

To the Southeast of Europe, in the Middle East area, there are also security threats that go beyond the influence of Russia. Turkey's relation to the EU has deteriorated fast during the year, and the European Parliament (EP) recently voted for the suspension of accession talks. Undoubtedly, the conflict in Syria, the refugee crisis, radicalization and violent extremism are contributing to instability in the region as well.

Looking further from the immediate neighborhood to Central Asia, where the EU is less involved in the security aspect. ENC Academic Council member **Dr. Nicola Contessi** (Nazarbayev University) believes the issues of foreign fighters; radicalization and recruitment could be an area to engage in for the EU.

However, Dr. Contessi is suggesting that Central Asian states would be more interested in security packages offering concrete assistance in hard security and asymmetric threats, rather than offers emphasizing human security. "The best way to promote stability is through conflict diffusion", he states.

This argument is strengthened by the articles on Central Asia in the report, "Threats to Stability in Central Asia: What Role for the EU?" by **Shairbek Juraev** and **Karolina Kluczevska** (University of St Andrews) and "Security Concerns for the EU: To What Extent is the Caucasian Emirate Reaching Out?" by **Dr. Elena Zhirukhina** (University of St Andrews).

Independently of region, the report addresses threat issues through a conflict resolution and prevention prism.

WHERE DO WE STAND?

When discussing threats to security and stability in wider Europe, Russia is a centerpiece. Several speakers during the academic conference referred to challenges and threats originating from Russia's direct and indirect actions.

In his keynote speech, **Ambassador Tomasz Chłoń** (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, NATO) suggested that several conflicts in Europe are created and sustained by Russia. 'Russia is perceiving European promotion as a threat', he said.

Examples of Russia's influence in the region are visible in several breakaway territories such as Abkhazia (Georgia), South Ossetia (Georgia) and Transnistria (Moldova).

According to **Prof. Dr. Rick Fawn** (University of St Andrews), Russia sees itself as a 'common good provider', explaining its actions by arguing that they are preventing conflict and providing freedom. 'They are acting like a bully who does not recognize itself as a bully', he claimed and argued that the EU must continue to spread its values to its neighboring area.

Spreading EU values is easier said than done, and the EU is only working through soft power tools. 'There is a challenge to the principles and values, but we continue our support and work in the neighborhood', said Head of Division, Eastern Partnership, Regional Cooperation and OSCE **Boris Iarochevitch** (European External Action Service, EEAS) during the event.

Mr. Iarochevitch mentioned the divergence between different member states as a challenge when practicing a common foreign policy. Another challenge for the EU is to counter disinformation without producing counter-propaganda. 'In particular, it is difficult to counter emotion with facts'; he said and suggested that the EU should have a different narrative in order to address this without falling in the pit of propaganda.

How the EU is handling Russia and its influence, depends on how the US President Trump is addressing the issue as well, according to **Jason Bruder's** (University of St Andrews) article "Consistently Inconsistent: Cognitive Dissonance and Geo-economics in US Policy towards Europe".

To summarize the first panel, Associate Professor **Maria Raquel Freire** (University of Coimbra) made four concluding points: 1) Enlargement has led to insecurity through the developed dynamics; 2) The West socialized with Russia through institutions, which was a mechanism to include them in Europe; 3) Russia feels a need to defend itself by force, and propaganda clearly plays a role; 4) EU sanctions on Russia in combination with dialogue might be a good way forward.

In the second panel, Head Researcher for Eastern Europe and Central Asia **Andreas Marazis** (ENC) highlighted the Ukraine crisis and the need to try another format for the settlement negotiations.

Change was recommended by **Dr. Nina Lutterjohann** as well, in her presentation on the conflicts in Georgia and Moldova: 'EU's encouragement, sanctions or a trade agreement (DCFTA) cannot mitigate the conflict', she claimed.

A customs union with Turkey, however, would be preferred to improve its relation to the EU, according to Managing Director **Samuel Doveri Vesterbye** (ENC). 'If the customs union would be reformed – and that's a big if – the situation might partly turn to the better', he stated during the event. He emphasized that Turkey's stability is imperative for Europe, especially in terms of defense and considering the migration deal.

The conflict in Syria has a spillover effect on security and stability in the region, and Mr. Doveri Vesterbye suggested that Turkey could expand the Barzani model to the Kurdish part of Syria as an attempt to stabilize the situation. Terrorist groups such as Kurdistan Worker's Party (PKK) and People's Protection Units (YPG) raise concerns on stability. 'As soon as the conflict is over, radicalized Kurds must be dealt with', he said.

Prof. Bruno de Cordier (Ghent University) concluded the panel by noting that identity is increasingly important in conflicts. He emphasized the importance of how unrecognized states (e.g. Abkhazia, Transnistria, Nagorno Karabakh) perceive the European values, which may not always be concretely defined.

On the issue of the security situation in Turkey and Syria, Prof. de Cordier was skeptical about implementing the Barzani model in Syria and expressed concerns about misinterpreting ISIS' demise in Iraq: 'They could move

somewhere else, maybe North Caucasus or Libya, where they have a real structure and capitalize on the refugee crisis', he said.

In short, the most prominent challenges to stability in wider Europe concern radicalization, Russia and internal disagreement within the EU.

WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

According to **Ambassador Chłoń**, NATO is prioritizing cyber security and resilience at the moment. They are aiming for long-term cooperation – specifically looking at Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey. The Ambassador also pointed out how invaluable the joint EU-NATO cooperation is.

The EU is now trying to focus on confidence building, interconnectivity, people-to-people contact, financial aid and trade to bring security and stability to its neighborhood, **Mr. Iarochevitch** explained. Recently, the negotiations with Armenia on a new agreement finished, and negotiations with Azerbaijan will proceed.

Despite its internal divisions, the EU still appears to have a rigid interest in its immediate neighborhood.

'EU has a strong potential for trade diplomacy', argued **Mr. Doveri Vesterbye** in relation to the volatile Turkey and its custom union and recommended NATO partners to take into consideration a solution that would satisfy their concern for Turkey but also respect Turkey's interests.

While presenting **Dr. Elena Zhirukhina's** article on the Caucasian Emirate (CE) who wants to establish an Islamist territory in Northern Caucasus, **Prof. Dr. Rick Fawn** emphasized information sharing between states as a requirement to track down individuals who are a potential terrorist threat.

CONCLUSIONS

EU's neighborhood is experiencing turbulence in terms of security and stability. The perception of security threats differs depending on region, as do the priorities. Maintaining the dialogue with Russia is imperative for the EU. In addition, European values must be spread throughout the whole

neighborhood. Changing the dynamics and strategy could be the key to a successful conflict resolution.

Important factors to take into consideration include:

- Building a sustainable and far-reaching framework to efficiently spread European values throughout the neighborhood area and beyond
- Consider working closer with Central Asian states on common interests concerning security such as radicalization and counter-terrorism
- Reforming the customs union agreement with Turkey to mitigate the tense relations
- Keeping sanctions on Russia in place while fostering an open and honest dialogue

Each article in the report contains concrete recommendations for all issues discussed in this summary.

PARTNERS

The academic conference was held in cooperation with the University of St Andrews and the European Institute of Peace (EIP).