

DESCnet

Jean Monnet Network DESCnet
Developing European Studies in the Caucasus
Newsletter 2/2018

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1 – Editorial

Spring is a period when not only nature awakes and flourishes. This spring has been very intensive and full of events for DESCNet and the Caucasus region more broadly. In April, Ilia State University and New Vision University in Tbilisi jointly organised the AESC Second Annual Convention under the topic “Divided over European Values? Normative Cleavages in the South Caucasus and the Impact of the EU – Russia – Turkey Value Discourse”. The two intensive days of the convention were filled with panels by prominent scholar and students, discussions over Georgia in transformation and Armenia’s rapprochement with the EU, issues of secularisation and borderlines, tools for conflict resolution and policy strategies. Special attention was also given to students’ panels as an initiative to give young scholars the chance to introduce their developing, but already clear prospectus of research. As a side goal, students had the chance to experience the research process, stand for an idea, defend his or her point of view, and debate with concise arguments.

Moreover, the AESC is visibly maturing and becoming increasingly active. A General Assembly meeting, which was held during the convention, brought up issues that any young entity usually faces; and gave an important impetus for its development. AESC took an active stand in boosting the number of members with the focus on the younger generation and sustainability actions to assure financial stability. AESC plans to serve as a platform to balance uneasy relations between the EU and Russia today in the Caucasus, where political tensions can eventually be dealt with peacefully as in case with the “velvet revolution” in Yerevan or “dancing protests” in Tbilisi. Balanced resistance and driving forces to proceed with change are crucial for the development of the entire region and the South Caucasus countries.

We have also launched a platform to disseminate our contemplations, be they personal remarks of participants or a strong scholarly position. We have activated our previous discussions through a mini-series of the best contributions which has led us to negotiations with publishers and a possible joint

publications exploring the regional dimensions of European studies in the border regions of the Caucasus. Our academics have taken part in mobility projects by teaching intensively at partner universities.

Our Jean Monnet network funding will come to an end in October 2018, and the last year of funded activity will continue to be proactive. The three summer schools in co-operation with AESC will boost student and scholar exchanges. Before the end of this funding period, the consortium hopes to gather once again to discuss the sustainability of projects with or within the existing measures. Quoting the representative of the EC to Russia, Mr. Markus Ederer’s metaphor for Erasmus+ programme “a sleeping beauty of EU-Russia relations”, we hope that additional funds for joint research and teaching projects, specifically targeting EU-Russia relationships and Eastern Neighbourhoods, announced by EACEA in April at the Jean Monnet conference in Moscow, will help us to strengthen academic links between institutions and universities, help policy-oriented think tanks to apply actively for grants, strengthen academic mobility, establish spinoffs and engage with a fundamental debates to face the emerging challenges. So, as we can see, there is more to strive for.

This current issue of the Newsletter not only gives insight into the spring awakening and happenings inside and outside of the consortium, but also introduces some new initiatives that will take place in the upcoming months of the final year of the DESCnet. Stay tuned!

Olga Bogdanova
DESCnet consortium leader
University of Tartu



2 – Upcoming DESCnet events

DESCnet Summer School "European Integration and Rivalry between Regional Integration Systems in the Caucasus" Yeditepe University, Istanbul (Turkey), 9 – 13 July 2018

The Summer School organized by Yeditepe University will provide comprehensive knowledge on the key challenges for regional co-operation in the Caucasus in the context of comparative regionalism. The School's objective is to enable students to develop ways of putting the politics and economy of the Caucasus into a framework in which they can compare and contrast the Caucasus with other major examples of regional integration existing/emerging in the wider neighbourhood. In addition, there will be study visits to the Permanent International Secretariat (BSEC) and the International Secretariat of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation (PABSEC).

The final programme includes the following key lectures as:

- Andrey Makarychev: "Russia in a Post-Liberal International Order: Geo-, Ethno- and Bio-political Strategies"
- Alexandra Yatsyk: "Illiberal Democracies: from the Baltic to the Black Sea"
- Alexei Kibalnik: "Integrational Processes in International Criminal Law: Where is International Criminal Justice Going?"
- Cengiz Erişen: "European Public Opinion toward the Eastern European States and the Caucasus"
- David Darchiashvili: "Internal and External Vulnerabilities of Georgian statehood: Soviet Path Dependency versus Europeanisation" and "Regional Security Landscape in the Caucasus"
- Selin Türkeş Kılıç: "EU-Turkey Relations in the Context of de-Europeanisation"
- Heidi Erbsen: "EU Normative Power as a Tool for Conflict Resolution in Abkhazia: Establishing Clear Discourse Analyses for Sensitive Topics"
- Elmar Mustafayev: "Europeanisation and Conflict Resolution in the South Caucasus"

DESCnet Summer School "EU Law and European Integration in the South Caucasus" (EULEISC) Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University, Batumi (Georgia), 27 July – 2 August 2018

Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (BSU) in partnership with Kyiv University of Law of National Academy of Science of Ukraine (Ukraine) and the University of Graz (Austria) is organising the 6th annual Summer School "EU Law and European Integration in the South Caucasus" (EULEISC) dedicated to European integration, law and policy. The main focus is enlargement of the EU and pre-accession development in the region followed by the geo-political discussion. In addition, a special focus will be given to the development of the EU as an international actor, specific external policies and the EU's relations with strategic partners and international organisations on the global and regional level, especially the countries of the Southern Caucasus. At the end of the School, students will be able to generalise and theorise on the process of EU enlargement and policymaking, assess the need of reforms in the region and analyse the resources available, and strive to start or continue their academic carrier in the field of European studies.

The School will host 25 undergraduate and graduate students of various disciplines (law, political science, and economics) from the wider Caucasus region and Europe. The academic workload of the school is 5 ECTS. Participants will be given a certificate upon successful completion of the course. The **working language of the school is English**. The academic part will be smoothly balanced with cultural discoveries and social interactions. The detailed programme of the event will be made available soon. Candidates are requested to register until 11 June 2018 by filling in the application form and sending it along with their CV and motivation letter. Late registrations will not be accepted. Candidates will be notified by 14 June 2018 via e-mail. The participation fee is 140 euros (early bird rate), late payer fee is 160 euros.

For more information, please visit the BSU website www.bsu.edu.ge or contact Dean Prof. Adam Makharadze adam.makharadze@bsu.edu.ge.

3 — Disseminating DESCnet

Study trip introduced the workings and policy-making of the OSCE Vienna (Austria), 14 – 16 March 2018

On 14-16 March, 18 students from the MA programmes of International Relations and Regional Studies (IRRS), EU-Russia Studies (EURUS) and Democracy and Governance (DG) of the University of Tartu visited OSCE headquarters in Vienna at a study tour. The trip was led by Prof. Eiki Berg and Dr. Stefano Braghiroli and provided students the opportunity to learn about OSCE structure and activities. As a highlight of the day, the group was also able to observe a meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council.

In addition to visiting the OSCE, the agenda of the study trip included a talk by Prof. Gerhard Hafner at the Law Faculty of the University of Vienna, discussing the conflicting interpretations of international law in light of the annexation of Crimea. During a meeting at the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung's Regional Office for Cooperation and Peace in Europe, Dr. Reinhard Krumm and Dr. Alexandra Dienes gave an overview of the Office's projects, providing insight about the particulars of policy advisory work.

Rounding out the study trip was a visit to the Diplomatic Academy of Vienna, where Ms. Genny Ghiarandon introduced the Academy and its study programmes, while Prof. Markus Kornprobst introduced his framework of elite judgments and decision-making in crisis situations, with a specific focus on the Ukraine crisis.

Overall, the short but intense study trip offered a good overview of how the OSCE operates, as well as enabled the group to explore some of the contentious issues dealt with by the OSCE in a more detailed manner.

Photo: Courtesy of Ilia State University



Summer School "Security Perspectives in Eurasian Regional Context", Stepantsminda (Georgia), 8 - 14 June 2018

The DESCnet is proud to have been invited to support the Summer School on "Security Perspectives in Eurasian Regional Context", organised by Ilia State University (Georgia) in partnership with Coastal Carolina University (USA). The School took place from 8 to 14 June 2018 in Stepantsminda, Kazbegi (Georgia). Georgian and foreign professors discussed with students issues such as theoretical and methodological perspectives of security studies, Eurasian regional security context and policy of regional and global actors towards above mentioned region. Besides this theoretical component, the School also included practical activities such as group work and trainings in the art of negotiations.

Participants were able to visit the occupation line along Samachablo region as well as the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Georgia.



Photo: Karl-Gerhard Lille

3 – Disseminating DESCnet (cont.)

2nd Annual AESC Convention, Ilia State University and New Vision University, Tbilisi (Georgia), 12 – 13 April 2018

AESC took an important step forward by holding its Second Annual Convention in Tbilisi from 12 – 13 April 2018. The event was hosted by Ilia State University and New Vision University and supported by all universities in the DESCnet consortium. Being the second convention altogether, the event helped to sustain AESC's working agenda and to propel the Association towards realizing the many goals that it has set itself.

The Convention was opened by AESC President Thomas Krussmann, Deputy Head of the EU Delegation to Georgia Mr. Carlo Natale, the Vice-Rector of Ilia State University Ms. Nino Doborjginidze, the Rector of New Vision State University, Mr. David Kereselidze, and finally by the Head of the Erasmus+ Office in Georgia, Ms. Lika Glonti. Its general topic was "Divided over European Values? Normative Cleavages in the South Caucasus and the Impact of the EU – Russia – Turkey Value Discourse".

How this topic could be translated into the policy arena was demonstrated by the first substantive event of the Convention, a roundtable entitled "Selling' the EU to Abkhazia: Normative Power Europe as a Tool for Conflict Resolution?" Conceived of and realized by the University of Tartu's Giorgi Davidovi and Heidi Erbsen, the roundtable hosted the First Deputy State Minister for Reconciliation and Civic Equality, Mr. Lasha Darsalia, Mr. Alexander Rusetskii (Director, South Caucasus Institute for Regional Security) and Mr. Giorgi Kanashvili (Executive Director, Caucasian House) to discuss a difficult, even traumatic topic.



Photo: Courtesy of Ilia State University

The working programme of the Convention unfolded by offering a variety of parallel panels and also two junior panels. In fact, while the presentations were in progress, in neighbouring Armenia street protest against the intention of former President Serj Sargsyan to become Prime Minister swelled and we were in the beginning of what within a few days would lead to perhaps the most profound transformations in the Caucasus. This overlap between academic analysis, policy advice and political transformations at often unexpected speed is perhaps one of the hallmarks of the Caucasus region where the backyards of empires can suddenly turn into contested ground for geopolitical ambitions of major regional players.

A second highlight of the Convention were the two junior panels: one offered by Bryusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences (Yerevan, Armenia) and the other by Yeditepe University (Istanbul, Turkey). The idea was to offer advanced B.A. and M.A. students the opportunity, under guidance of their professors, to participate in the Convention under the same conditions as their more senior colleagues. And it is probably fair to say that these junior panels brought back to all participants the excitement of grappling with the societal transformations that are under way. Far from testing the patience of the listeners, the junior panels helped to trigger debate, promote fresh perspectives and engage the entire academic community in respectful dialogue.

In the margins of the Convention, the DESCnet consortium held its AESC Advisory Board meeting. In addition, the General Assembly of AESC members took place and led to the election of a new AESC Management Board.



3 – Disseminating DESCnet (cont.)

Batumi Intensive Seminar explored the usefulness of the German case method in Georgian criminal law, Batumi Shota Rustaveli University, Batumi (Georgia), 27 – 28 April 2018

The Law Faculty of Batumi Shota Rustaveli State University (BSU), in co-operation with AESC and the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA), hosted an intensive seminar "The German case method in criminal law". The seminar gave students a methodological introduction, drawing on comparative materials also from common law jurisdictions, and culminating in dealing with the famous case *Gaefgen vs. Germany*, decided by the European Court of Human Rights in June 2010. Students were asked to develop and video-record pleas in favour and against the German Police Director Daschner, who threatened a suspect with torture to save a kidnapped boy's life.

In general, scholarly exchange and collaboration between German and Georgian lawyers is highly developed, and German doctrine serves as an important source in replenishing doctrinal debates in Georgia. The German-Georgian Journal on Criminal Law (*Deutsch-Georgische Strafrechtszeitschrift*, www.dgstz.de) regularly features scholarly contributions from both sides. Recently, the BSU Law Faculty expressed an interest in institutionalising the teaching of German law under support of DAAD office in Tbilisi. The proposed intensive seminar therefore served as an assessment of the potential of institutionalising



Photo: Courtesy of Shota Rustaveli Batumi State University

a lecturer in European and German criminal law, using the didactics of German legal education, in particular the case method, for the teaching of Georgian law.

So far, the German GIZ and IRZ Foundation, in collaboration with GYLA, have introduced the German case method into the training of judges and other criminal justice professionals in Georgia, but there is no systematic teaching to students. In addition, compared to civil and administrative law, the relevant experience in criminal law is relatively small. Currently, there is only one textbook entitled "Cases in criminal law" (edited by Dvalidze, Tumanishvili and Gvenetadze, Tbilisi 2015) available. Please see the e-library with didactical work developed by German and Georgian partners, at <http://lawlibrary.info/ge/>



Photo: Courtesy of Shota Rustaveli Batumi State University

4 — Related upcoming events

4th EU Summer School "EU and Foreign Policy in Geopolitical Context", ADA University, Baku (Azerbaijan), 25 June – 6 July 2018

This Summer School will be held in co-operation with the German Academic Exchange Service (DAAD) and the University of Bologna (Italy). Participants will gain insight into the main fields of action of the EU and EU Foreign Policy. Special emphasis will be given to the geopolitical aspects of EU relations with neighbouring countries and regional powers such as Turkey, Russia and Iran. The European Union's strategic processes and challenges of both widening and deepening will be reflected by addressing economic, energy, social, political and cultural dimensions and their interlinkages. The programme will foster participants' interactive engagement by offering lectures, workshops and intensive debates.

The course offers detailed knowledge focusing on:

- Understanding EU Foreign Policy on national, regional and global levels
- EU interregional integration and its challenges
- Present and future design of European Neighbourhood and Eastern Partnership
- Internal and external perspectives on EU foreign affairs
- EU strategy in response to global challenges
- EU Foreign Policy instruments in responding to conflicts and crises
- Actual challenges of security, fiscal, economic, social and cultural policies
- Azerbaijan at the crossroads of Europe and Asia

The application deadline was 20 May 2018. For more information, please see <http://www.ada.edu.az/Pages/4th-EU-Summer-School.aspx>.

12th Annual Baku Summer Energy School 2018

8 – 21 July 2018, ADA University, Baku (Azerbaijan)

Baku Summer Energy School (BSES) is an annual two-week certificate programme of the Caspian Center for Energy and Environment (CCEE) of ADA University held in July in partnership with the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and British Petroleum in Azerbaijan. It brings together world-renowned scholars, academicians and policy makers to examine and gain a better understanding of global energy and environment issues and their practical application.

The Baku Summer Energy School studies a wide range of issues: Fundamentals of Energy, Energy Law, Energy Economics, Geopolitics of Energy, Environmental Issues, Strategic Management. A special focus of the programme is on the Caspian Basin, including regional pipeline network development, geopolitics of the Caspian and its legal status, and the strategic outlook of SOCAR. The detailed programme is available at [ADA webpage](#). The programme provides a balanced approach in studying energy and the environment. BSES instructors and speakers are leading national and international experts from academia, public and private sectors:

- World renowned scholars in the field of energy and environment, such as: University of Oxford, Princeton University, Sciences-Po, Russian Academy of Sciences, Total Professors Association, ADA University;
- Ministers and heads of governmental agencies, such as: Minister of Foreign Affairs, Minister of Energy, Minister of Ecology and Natural Resources, Head of the State Oil Fund (SOFAZ).

The application deadline was 15 May 2018. For more information, please contact summerschool@ada.edu.az.

4 — Related upcoming events (cont.)

ISET Summer School "Study Reforms and Development in Georgia" International School of Economics, Tbilisi State University, Tbilisi (Georgia), 16 – 22 July 2018

Jointly organized by ISET and Prague Civil Society Center, the Summer School targets students, journalists, policy researchers and civil society activists, providing them with a unique opportunity to review Georgia's successes (and failures) in reforming its economy, society and politics, and discuss development challenges facing other transition nations in the post-Soviet space.

The Summer School will bring together a group of outstanding reform-minded individuals for a seven-day academic adventure at the crossroads of Asia and Europe. You will be able to listen to interesting speakers, join debates and panel discussions on relevant subjects, visit strategically important public institutions and tour Georgia's cultural, touristic, and industrial landmarks. Directed by ISET's President Eric Livny, the Summer School will engage circa 20 speakers: academics, policy researchers and practitioners, prominent Georgian and international reformers, civil society leaders, and entrepreneurs.

In addition to academic activities, the Summer School's programme includes several visits to strategically important public institutions, government agencies, international organisation, NGOs and businesses. Participants will be invited to tours to outstanding cultural, touristic, and industrial landmarks. The working languages of the program will be English and Russian.

The program will be structured to allow for a critical assessment and discussion of Georgian reform experience across its key dimensions:

- Political change: transition from revolution to orderly democratic governance
- Anti-corruption reforms
- Democracy: the specter of oligarchy, the role of political parties, independent media, judiciary and civil society
- Economic development, DCFTA and trade liberalization
- The geopolitical context and conflict management

The application deadline was 15 June 2018. For more information, please see [ISET page](#).

XVIth International Summer University "Regional and Transnational Cooperation in Central Asia" German-Kazakh University in Almaty (Kazakhstan), 30 July – 11 August 2018

In co-operation with the German Academic Exchange Service and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung Kazakhstan, the German-Kazakh University (GKU), Almaty, invites students from Germany and Central Asia to participate in its XVIth International Summer University 2018. The GKU Summer University will offer two courses:

- Central Asian Integration: Chances and Challenges (Lecturers: Christoph Schuck/Steve Schlegel, Dortmund, Germany)
- Insecurity and Security Co-operation in Central Asia (Lecturers: Rustam Burnashev/Irina Chernik, Almaty)

The application deadline was 15 May 2018. More information on the programme can be found at https://vk.com/doc395176611_462804803 and http://ru.dku.kz/index.php?title=XVI_International_Su

6th European Neighbourhood Policy PhD Summer School, Alpbach (Austria), 16 – 21 August 2018

The PhD Summer School takes place in the framework of the European Forum Alpbach (EFA) in the mountain village of Alpbach as an integral part of EFA which takes place from 15 August until 31 August 2018. Selected participants will attend the PhD Summer School and participate in EFA for at least another six days once the PhD Summer School is over.

The PhD School is open for PhD students working on EUFP, ENP-, and EU neighbourhood-related topics. Students with a background in International Relations, European Studies, Area Studies, and EU External Relations Law are particularly encouraged. The application deadline was 10 May 2018.

Please check the EFA website for more information <https://www.alpbach.org/en/>

4 — Related upcoming events (cont.)

International Conference "Central Asia and the Caucasus in Transition: International Perspectives?" Centre international de formation européenne (CIFE), Institut für Europäische Politik (IEP) and Ilia State University, 30 – 31 August 2018, Tbilisi (Georgia)

The Conference "Central Asia and the Caucasus in Transition: International Perspectives?" is taking place in the framework of the PhD support programme "The EU, Central Asia and the Caucasus in the International System" (EUCACIS) which is organised with significant funding from the Volkswagen Foundation and financially supported by the Erasmus+ Programme.

The Caucasian and Central Asian states are witnessing significant changes in their political landscape at the moment and are still characterised by their historical background and cultural and religious traditions. With regard to the current developments, the conference is devoted to the discussion of the transition processes Central Asian and the Southern Caucasian countries are undergoing: Which opportunities for democratic transition can be expected in the South Caucasian and Central Asian states? How are internal state-building and democracy-building processes executed, and what influence do foreign actors have on local politics, civil society and socio-cultural developments? What role does the historical background of the post-Soviet countries play in their current political situation? How are the Central Asian and South Caucasian states positioning themselves in the international community, especially in regards to the EU? And which new fields of co-operation between the EU, the South Caucasus and the Central Asian states can be developed and strengthened?

These questions will be discussed with high-level speakers from Central Asia, Europe and the Southern Caucasus as well as researchers and PhD candidates from the three regions. The junior researchers have the chance to present their research projects in the international conference and receive feedback from renowned researchers. The conference offers them networking opportunities with other researchers, university professors and lecturers from Europe and the wider Central Asia. It aims at establishing a European-Central Asia-Southern Caucasus research network, including the fellows of the EUCACIS programme and alumni of the Master Programme "The EU and Central Asia in the International System".

Submission of paper proposals: CIFE and IEP invite doctoral researchers and MA students in their last year to submit paper proposals, which are related to one of the following topics:

- The Role of International Organisations in Central Asia and the South Caucasus
- State-building in the South Caucasus and Central Asia
- Peace and Stability in the South Caucasus
- Heritage and Modernity in the Wider Central Asia
- Political, Social and Cultural Transition in the Wider Central Asia

Paper abstracts plus a short CV in English shall be submitted to Ms. Janny Schulz, (janny.schulz@iep-berlin.de) by 30th of June 2018. The abstracts should have a length of 300 words. Participants of the working groups of the international conference will be selected from the submitted paper abstracts by a board of reviewers. Selected participants can present their papers in the international conference and do not have to pay a conference fee; food and drinks will be provided. In case of further questions, please contact Ms. Janny Schulz (janny.schulz@iep-berlin.de)

4 — Related upcoming events (cont.)

Second Caucasus Mountain Forum "The Caucasus Research Agenda – A Key to Sustainable Regional Development" 31 October – 2 November 2018, Ankara University (Turkey).

The second Caucasus Mountain Forum, organised under the title "The Caucasus Research Agenda – a Key to Sustainable Regional Development", will be held from 31 October to 2 November 2018 at Ankara University, Turkey. Proposals for contributions are invited on topics broadly related to sustainable mountain development and the Caucasus Research Agenda.

The target audience consists of scientists and academics, governmental experts and practitioners, donors, international experts, local communities, and interested members of the public, in particular from countries of the wider Caucasus region.

The Forum will be organised as plenary sessions, thematic sessions, workshops and poster presentations. The organisers invite you to choose among the following types of contributions:

- Abstracts for oral presentation in Thematic Sessions (max. 300 words + 5 keywords)
- Abstracts for a practical example in a Workshop (max. 300 words).
- Abstracts for a Poster presentation (max. 200 words).

The deadline for abstract submissions was 30 June 2018. Notifications of abstract acceptance will be sent out by 15 July 2018. Full paper submission deadline is 15 September 2018. Abstracts should be written in English. Please use the submission form and send your proposal using the submission form to CMF2018@caucasus-mt.net. Please note that scholarships are available, primarily for participants from the region.

For more information, please visit <http://caucasus-mt.net/events/event/64>

Eurasia Partnership Foundation in Azerbaijan (EPF) announces a call for applications for the "Conflict School"

Within the framework of the EU-initiated "Peacebuilding through Capacity Enhancement and Civic Engagement" (PeaCE) program, EPF Azerbaijan welcomes applications for the "Conflict School". This intensive, two-week course will be held from 23 July through 3 August 2018 at the premises of Baku Idealab (44, Jafar Jabbarli Street, Caspian Plaza III, 3rd Floor).

The purpose of the "Conflict School" is to build the capacity of Azerbaijani youth in the field of conflict resolution, and thus to contribute to the development of a new generation of youth capable of participating effectively in discussions on the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict across different international platforms.

The "Conflict School" includes training sessions and lectures on different topics related to the primary topic of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The seminars and lectures cover theoretical topics as the sociology of peace, war and social conflicts, collective memory, conflict theory, national state and state borders, as well as pressing topics as the ongoing official negotiations on the Armenian-Azerbaijani Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, the situation of IDPs and refugees, the role of media and security issues, public diplomacy and peace-building initiatives. Independent experts, scholars and representatives of the state institutions will be invited as guest speakers and trainers.

Undergraduate and graduate students as well as young professionals aged 18-28 are eligible to apply. The selection process will be based on the candidate's expressed interest in the field of conflict and educational merits. Preference will be given to students and graduates of Political Sciences, International Relations, Sociology, Journalism and other relevant fields. The language of the program will be Azerbaijani.

Applications must be sent to info@epfound.az. The deadline for applications is 13 July 2018, successful applicants will be invited for interview after 15 July and final results will be announced on 20 July.

5 — News and ongoing

New members to the AESC Management Board elected

This year's AESC General Assembly offered the chance to open up the Management Board and broaden its scope of expertise and professionalism. In addition, and not unimportantly, it was an opportunity to change the all-male Board composition and create almost gender parity.

Ms. Betül Soysal of Yeditepe University who had served as student representative for the past year 2017/18 will be graduating this summer and decided that she will offer her seat to somebody new. The entire AESC General Assembly expressed its gratitude for the time spent serving AESC. In addition, there was a majority of AESC members approving the idea of expanding the Board from five to seven members.

In a very narrow vote in which a candidate from Armenia and one from the U.S. collected significant amounts of votes, the position of student representative finally went to **Ms. Berfin Ezgi Ekinci**. Berfin is a bachelor student of political science and international relations at Yeditepe University in Istanbul (Turkey). She had already been a member of the organising committee of the First Annual Convention at Yeditepe University in 2017. Her background and networks as an Erasmus exchange student to Maastricht University this upcoming autumn, will greatly contribute to our work.

The idea to expand the Management Board by two new members was not an easy one. Not a small minority of members preferred to keep the Board as it is or to add only one position. However, the majority decided in favour of two new members. So, both candidates were accepted.

Dr. Anna Khvorostiankina is Associate Professor at Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, where she holds the UNESCO Chair on Human Rights, Democracy and Political Science. In addition, she is associate professor at the Law School of National University of "Kyiv-Mohyla Academy" (Kyiv, Ukraine). She holds a PhD in Legal Theory from Legislation Institute of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, 2012).

Anna teaches Constitutional Law, EU Law, Legal Theory and Research Methodology. She is a co-author and a co-lecturer of the Jean Monnet Module "European Integration and EU Values: Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law" taught at Yerevan University of Languages and Social Sciences (2016-2019). In addition, Anna is a founder of the Centre for Interdisciplinary Legal Studies and the Law-Making Clinic with the Laboratory of Legal Approximation (established in 2018 at Brusov University). Her research interests include Europeanisation of post-Soviet legal systems, recent developments in theory and practice of judicial argumentation in the post-Soviet countries, and particularities of the Rule of Law in the societies in transition.

Dr. Selin Türkeş-Kiliç is Assistant Professor at the Department of Political Science and International Relations, Yeditepe University, Istanbul where she teaches courses in the fields of European Studies and International Relations. Her research focuses on the argumentative processes in the policy-making of the European Union and Turkey.

Selin received her PhD from Sabancı University in Political Science in July 2012 with a dissertation entitled "Accounting for Variation in Political Party Closures: The EU's Framing in Batasuna and DTP decisions." During her doctoral studies, she has been involved in several EU-funded projects. Between 2008 and 2012, she participated as an active researcher in the RECON project, which was funded by the European Commission's 6th Framework Programme. She spent 3 months at the project's coordinator institution ARENA, University of Oslo, Norway as a visiting researcher. Further, within the SPBuild Network funded under the Marie Curie Actions of the European Union 7th Framework Programme, she worked at the University of Deusto, Bilbao (Spain) as a Marie Curie fellow between May 2011 and May 2012.



5 – News and ongoing



New DESCnet / AESC book series "European Studies in the Caucasus"

The edited volume covers a wide range of issues pertinent to Georgian politics, society and culture. Authors of chapters are experts in Georgian and comparative politics and look at their topics from a variety of disciplinary perspectives grounded in international relations, political sociology, media and communication studies, security analysis, and political economy. This collection unpacks the most important aspects of Georgia's domestic transition and its external relations with Western governments and organisations, as well as Russia, and juxtaposes these experiences with political trajectories of other post-Soviet countries.

DESCnet / AESC Working Paper Series launched

As a result of the Second AESC Convention, DESCnet is now preparing, in collaboration with AESC, a Working Paper Series (WPS) that will be published online on the AESC website. The WPS will be closely aligned to the new book series "European Studies in the Caucasus", using not only the same editorial guidelines, but also offering the possibility of moving suitable manuscripts to a higher level. In general, the WPS is offered with a free peer-review service for AESC members. Depending on the requirements of journals where authors plan to publish subsequently, a *præ*-publication may not stand in the way of the "original and exclusive content" requirement of many journal publishers.

Working papers under preparation include

- Yelda Karadag, "Re-assessing the Multiple Layers of Georgian Europeanness from a Social Constructivist Perspective";
- Yevgenii Romanovskii, "The European Model of Institute- and Democracy Promotion in the South Caucasus. The Case of Georgia";
- Justin Tomczyk, "Looking East: CEPA and the Armenian Digital Economy";
- Tiffany Williams, "The Role of Identity Politics in the Eastern Partnership Process".

In Profile: The Scientific Network for the Caucasus Mountain Region (SNC-mt)

Established in July 2014, the Scientific Network for the Caucasus Mountain Region (SNC-mt) is an open network of researchers and other stakeholders interested in disciplinary, interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary research on the Caucasus region and academic collaboration. SNC-mt seeks to improve research capacity for and within this region (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Islamic Republic of Iran, Russian Federation, Turkey) and to link research to the needs of sustainable development and environmental protection. With their initiative, scientists from the Caucasus and from other countries exploring the Caucasus are following in the tradition of counterparts from mountain regions around the world, where scientific networks have emerged to promote and consolidate knowledge and understanding about a given mountain range and to help confront transnational challenges.

SNC-mt aims at promoting research collaboration that:

- generates knowledge on mountains to support sustainable development;
- co-ordinating the development of a comprehensive research strategy for the Caucasus mountain region;
- strengthening research capacities and making the Caucasus more prominent in European and global contexts;
- exchanging knowledge and sharing best practices within the Caucasus and with other mountain regions;
- and strengthening the nexus between scientists, practitioners and decision-makers.

For more information, please see SNC-mt's website at <<http://caucasus-mt.net/>>.

5 – News and ongoing

Call opened: Regional Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratization in the Caucasus

The Regional Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratization in the Caucasus is established with the financial support of the European Union. It is a part of the Global Campus for Master's Programmes and Diplomas in Human rights and democratisation around the world. The MA is implemented in co-operation with the European Inter-University Center (Venice), and in partnership with leading universities of Armenia, Ukraine, Belarus, and Georgia.

The Regional Master's Programme in Human Rights and Democratization is an interdisciplinary programme (with legal, political and multidisciplinary components), with duration of 1 year (60 ECTS). It is implemented by Yerevan State University (home university), Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (host university), Belarusian State University (host university), and Tbilisi State University (host university). The official languages of the Programme are English and Russian.

The Academic curriculum is split into three parts:

- First Term: September - December 2018, implemented by the Centre for European Studies of Yerevan State University;
- Second Term: February - May 2019, mobility term which can take place at one of the partner universities (students are to choose a partner university based on their educational background, research and/or professional interests);
- Third Term: June -October 2019, internship/thesis term.

For the mobility term, there will be three module specialisations available:

- Political module - Belarusian State University.
- Legal Module - Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv
- Interdisciplinary - Ivane Javakhishvili Tbilisi State University.

During the second semester, students will start working on their thesis and finalise it during June-September; the same period will be also devoted to a 4-week internship at a local, regional or international organisation, which deals with human rights and democratisation.

At the end of the Programme students will be awarded a Yerevan State University Diploma granting Master's Degree in European Studies with specialisation in Human Rights and Democratization. In addition, graduates will be awarded with an Official Certificate signed by all Partner Universities.

The Programme shall start on September 2018 and finish October 2019.

For additional information please consult with Kristine Gevorgyan from Center for European Studies at Yerevan State University (DESCnet consortium partner):
1 A. Manoogian, Yerevan 0025 Armenia
Tel.: +374-10 550810
E-mail: k.gevorgyan@ces.am;
kristine.gevorgyan@ysu.am
or visit website: www.regionalmaster.net



Co-funded by the
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of the European Union

5 — News and ongoing

Call for Applications open: EuroSchool 2018 in Azerbaijan

The EU Delegation announced a call for applications to participate in the EuroSchool from **28-30 August 2018** in one of the regions of Azerbaijan. Participants will have a chance in an **interactive educational environment** to learn more about the EU, its history, fundamental principles and values, the process of alignment and legislative harmonization, issues of energy and environment, European Neighbourhood Policy, the Eastern Partnership initiative, and EU-Azerbaijan relations.

The EuroSchool also aims at **providing the younger generation with a comprehensive understanding of functioning of the EU institutions** in order to promote dialogue, co-operation, and mutual respect among young people, to raise awareness of the EU's role in Azerbaijan, as well as to improve people-to people contacts between the EU and Azerbaijan.

Experienced international trainers in English will conduct the training. Transportation from Baku to the region and back, meals and accommodation will be covered by the EU Delegation. By the end of the EuroSchool, participants should feel more engaged with the EU, gain a better understanding of the EU processes, and have the ability to use the obtained skills for further promotion of the EU and its activities in Azerbaijan. Participants will receive a certificate and will be suggested to become members of the 'Young European Ambassadors' network.

Eligibility criteria:

- Young people between 18 and 25 years old
- Higher education students or graduates
- Fluent in English
- Interest in International Affairs, European Union, Political sciences, International Trade, Education, or Energy
- Full participation and availability for the whole period of the EuroSchool
- Azerbaijani citizens.

How to apply: Interested candidates should submit their CV and Motivation Letter (maximum one page) in English, which will include also an answer to the question "How could the EU benefit from cooperation with Azerbaijan?" with subject

"EuroSchool 2018"
to [Delegation-
Azerbaijan@eeas.eu
ropa.eu](mailto:Azerbaijan@eeas.europa.eu) by **29 July
2018**.

DESCnet publications survey

Below please find an updated list of the journals that are being regularly scrutinised for publications related to European Studies in the Caucasus. New entries are in italics.

If you know of any other journals that you would like to have considered in the future, please contact the Newsletter editor Thomas Kruessmann at kruessmann.thomas@gmail.com.

Armenian Journal of Political Science
Black Sea Security
Caucasus Analytical Digest
Caucasus Edition. Journal of Conflict Transformation
Caucasus International
Caucasus Survey
Central Asian Affairs
East European Politics
Eastern Journal of European Studies
Ethnopolitics (formerly Global Review of Ethnopolitics)
Eurasian Geography and Economics
European Foreign Affairs Review
European Politics and Society
Euxeinos. Governance and Culture in the Black Sea Region
Global Affairs
Identities. Global Studies in Culture and Power
Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies
Journal of Borderland Studies
Journal of Caucasian Studies
Journal of Contemporary European Studies
Journal of European Integration
Journal of Slavic Military Studies
Journal of Soviet and Post-Soviet Politics and Society
Nationalities Papers
Post-Soviet Affairs
Problems of Post-Communism
Romanian Journal of European Affairs
REGION: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia
Russian Politics
South Caucasus Law Journal
Southeast European and Black Sea Studies Journal
The Soviet and Post-Soviet Review

6 — Reports

Prof. Selin Türkeş Kılıç's paper wins prestigious VIADUCT award

Selin Türkeş Kılıç's paper entitled "Applying a Learner-Centred Approach to Teaching Turkey-EU- Relations" was selected to become the first paper of the VIADUCT Teaching Paper Series. "VIADUCT: Enhancing Visibility of the Academic Dialogue on EU-Turkey Cooperation" is a Jean Monnet Network that seeks to foster a substantive academic and policy dialogue as well as to build knowledge on the future of the EU and EU-Turkey relations as a "moving target". The VIADUCT Teaching Paper Series aims to enhance the exchange between lecturers who work on EU-Turkey relations and contribute to the development of teaching curricula. Türkeş-Kılıç's paper was selected on the basis of describing innovative, new and creative ideas for teaching Turkey's relations with the EU. She

was also invited to attend the VIADUCT Annual Conference at Brussels on April 26-27, 2018 where her paper was discussed at the Teaching Working Group. Selin Türkeş Kılıç is an AESC Management Board member and staff of Yeditepe University, the DESCnet consortium partner.

In her paper, Türkeş-Kılıç explains the methods she applies to the PSIR 433 Turkey-EU class that she teaches to fourth year students at Yeditepe University, Political Science and International Relations Department. The course is designed to encourage the students to become active participants of learning through four major learning pillars: pre-lecture discussion sessions, analysis of primary documents, in-class simulation exercise and research paper. In this way, students are equipped with analytical and academic skills to assess Turkey-EU relations.

Selin Türkeş-Kılıç explains: "The success of applying a learner-centred approach depends on the interest and enthusiasm of the students. Sharing the role of being the determinants of the learning process with students can be challenging for the instructor, especially when the students are not willing to do so. Yet, my experience has always been positive. At this point, I would like to thank my students for their eagerness to take on extended responsibilities in learning. In building up the constructive classroom environment for the students' active participations, the voluntary contributions of my graduate students as discussion leaders have been of utmost importance. I want to acknowledge their involvement as an important factor in achieving the objectives of the learner-centered approach. Finally, I would like to thank the Political Science and International Relations Department at Yeditepe University, which has adopted the principle of attaining contemporary standards in education and training, for giving me the courage to apply the student-led learning methods to my class."

For general information on VIADUCT, please see <http://www.tepsa.eu/projects/viaduct/>.

The paper is now available at http://www.viaduct.uni-koeln.de/sites/viaduct/user_upload/VIADUCT_Teaching_Paper_no.1.pdf

Prof. Türkeş-Kılıç with her students of the PSIR 433 class



VIADUCT

Enhancing Visibility of the Academic
Dialogue on EU-Turkey Cooperation



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6 — Reports (cont.)

Jean Monnet Conference “Excellence in EU Studies” Moscow (Russian Federation), 19 – 20 April 2018



The two-days conference brought together grant holders from a variety of Jean Monnet projects in Russia with officials from the EU Commission, the EU Delegation and the Erasmus+ Office in Moscow. It included a student roundtable discussion “What it means to be European” and

a presentation on grant management and dissemination by a representative of the Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. At the heart of the conference were two common challenges that were discussed by grant holders from the EU and Russia: “Teaching and outreach”, on the one hand, and “Migration”, on the other. Representatives of the DESCnet consortium also took part in the conference aiming to find partners among Russian universities for upcoming projects within Jean Monnet measure of Erasmus+ programme.

More information, in particular the presentations given, can be found at

<https://jeanmonnet2018.teamwork.fr>

Conference “Approaches of the EU and Russia to Transnational Security Challenges” at Lobachevsky University, Nizhny Novgorod (Russian Federation), 24 – 26 May 2018

The Conference concluded the implementation of two Jean Monnet projects based at the Faculty of Law, Lobachevsky University: the JM Project “EU Approaches to Transnational Security Challenges: Focus on Policy Learning” (EUSECU-POLE, 2016-2018) and the JM Module “The European Union as a Global Human Rights Actor” (EUGLOBE, 2015-2018), co-funded by the European Commission. Both projects were co-ordinated by Andrey Leonov, Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Law. The conference was organised by Lobachevsky University in co-operation with the University Paris-13 (France).

The conference that gathered more than 50 participants included a post-graduate workshop (24 May 2018), plenary expert sessions and a round table (25 May 2018). The post-graduate workshop brought together PhD students doing research in law, politics and policies of the EU and its Member States. The Programme Committee selected ten participants from leading universities: Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies (Geneva, Switzerland), KIMEP University (Almaty, Kazakhstan), Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Moscow State Linguistic University, Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO University), Kazan Federal University, Irkutsk State University and Lobachevsky University. All participants presented papers based on their PhD research and received detailed feedback from Russian and foreign established scholars invited to the conference.

For more details, see

<http://euglobe.ru/2018/05/31/jean-monnet-project-conference-24-26-may-2018>

Courtesy of <https://jeanmonnet2018.teamwork.fr>



Courtesy of <http://euglobe.ru>



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6 — Reports (cont.)

EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING EUROPEAN STUDIES: **Europeanisation by Alumni Association: the Experience of Georgian Technical University**

After the EU and Georgia have concluded an Association Agreement and a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, there is now an obvious need for developing new study programmes that include EU law and European Studies into the educational process. Teaching experience demonstrates an increased interest of students in these subjects. Georgian Universities are aiming to upgrade, develop and modify study courses and push the process of Europeanisation of Georgia as 'bottom-up' actors. This challenging process is supported by the EU and university administrations. One of these universities is Georgian Technical University (GTU) where at the Faculty of Law and International Relations there are increasing debates on introducing new subjects such as EU competition law, EU external relations, EU commercial law, history and politics of the EU, Europeanisation of Georgia, etc.

Joining an alumni association is a very common practice after graduation from university, college or high school. Alumni associations usually organise social events, conferences, publish newsletters, journals, etc. Mostly, such associations push the process of sharing experience among graduates and students. The formation of relationships, networks and new forms of communication as an instrument for alumni associations demands the support from donors, university faculties and administration. Compared to other types of associations, alumni associations usually aspire to work for University and are willing to contribute time, enthusiasm and motivation.

Alumni associations are mainly organised around universities, and so is the newly established "Alumni Association for Students" at GTU's Faculty of Law and International Relations. The GTU "Alumni Association for Students" is an independent, non-commercial legal entity, established in 2018. It unites graduates of the Faculty through voluntary membership activities and benefits. The objective of the Association is to establish strong networking between graduates and students, to promote educational processes and encourage the employment of students. The Alumni Association is managed by a Board, consisting of elected representatives of graduates of 2009-2010.

We decided to ask the representative of the GTU "Alumni Association for Students", PhD candidate and invited lecturer at GTU, Mr. *Nika Asvanua*, about the specific objectives of the Association. According to him: *"At the Faculty of Law and International Relations, I have experienced the lack of communication between the GTU and its graduates. Very limited number of graduates is employed in teaching and administration of the University. Moreover, there is lack of information about the employment statistics of graduates."*

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6 — Reports (cont.)

I consider that involvement of graduates in teaching, research and management will have a positive impact on the educational process. We started to organise public lectures where all interested and successful graduates are invited to participate and share their experience. It should encourage the process of enthusiasm-based networking between the University and graduates where we suppose that University could officially engage its graduates in the process of teaching and management",- he said.

The Association is supported by the Faculty of Law and International Relations. Its Dean, Prof. Irakli Gabisonia, considers that *"establishment of such an alumni association is crucial to foster the process of engagement of graduates in the educational process because graduates are already practitioners, employed in private, as well as public sector. Thus, their opinion and expertise should be shared and reflected in the process of creation and modification of study programmes at the Faculty of Law and International Relations. Moreover, practice is a good base for research initiatives of our academic staff. It is obvious that practitioners, employed in different governmental branches or the private sectors, know the demand of labour market better and can better advice about contemporary challenges that we can respond to. Moreover, members of the alumni association are educated at a number of European universities, so they give us possibility to internalise our programmes by sharing their experience. We plan to engage our graduates, as members of the Supervisory Council, in order to modify our study programmes according to international standards and contemporary demands of the labour market. All in all, our academic staff, together with alumni association members, creates a bridge between science, research and practice, for better education"*.

Consequently, the goal of GTU "Alumni Association for Students" is to engage in a variety of activities that contribute to sustaining an active experience-sharing, consultancy, research and development, advocacy and promoting community-based initiatives. The main goal of the Association is to build a professional network of educated professionals in law and international relations. In addition, the Association provides a forum for collaboration and social interaction, enhanced employment, consultancy and fund-raising opportunities through joint projects. Obviously, co-operation between the Faculty and its graduates is an important step towards excellence in teaching European Studies. Dedication of graduates and consistent support shall produce positive and innovative developments at the Faculty of Law and International Relations.

Gvantsa Davitashvili
Deputy Head of the Regional Department
Office of the Public Defender of Georgia
(Ombudsman's Office)



7 – Opinions and comments

Armenia in Transition

April 2018 became crucial for Armenia. The constitutional amendments adopted during the widely criticised referendum in December 2015 came into force, transforming the country from a semi-presidential republic into a parliamentary one and giving most of the powers of the President to the Prime Minister. The civil protests were driven by the election of former President Serzh Sargsyan as the new Prime Minister on 17 of April only one week after his last presidential term had expired. This plan forced hundreds of thousands of citizens to the streets to protest for his resignation. However, neither the detention of political activists nor the the arrest of opposition leaders including Members of Parliament Nikol Pashinyan, Ararat Mirzoyan and Sasun Mikayelyan, nor the remarks and comments regarding the March 2008 events when street protests were violently suppressed, helped Sargsyan. Facing unprecedented civil protests against his further rule of the country, Sargsyan had to resign on April 23, a week after being elected as Prime Minister of Armenia.

However, the resignation of the Prime Minister was not the end but only the beginning of the end. The ruling Republican Party hoped to stay in power by replacing Serzh Sargsyan with Karen Karapetyan who was the deputy Prime Minister of Armenia. It is true that Karapetyan who served as Armenia's Prime Minister under Sargsyan since mid-2016 till 2018 April, was more respected by the society and more acceptable for many. But the mass disappointment with the 20 years in power of the ruling Republican Party was stronger, and when the negotiations between the acting government and the opposition over the peaceful transition of the power on April 25 failed, it became a reason for resuming the street protests with a new breath and new demands addressed to the acting government.

Three out of four parliamentary factions - Elk ("Way Out"), "Tsarukyan Alliance" and "Armenian Revolutionary Federation" (former coalition partner of the Republican Party) - announced their intention to support the nomination of Nikol Pashinyan, the leader of the street protests, for the vacant position of Prime Minister.

The ruling Republican Party which still had a parliamentary majority, decided not to nominate their own candidate for the position of the Prime Minister, allegedly trying to avoid the escalation of the political crisis in the country.

During the May 1 elections of the Prime Minister, the opposition leader Nikol Pashinyan was the only candidate, but despite the hopes of the vast majority of Armenians who were following the parliamentary debates in different squares across the country, online and on TV, Pashinyan was not elected, as the opposition mandates were not enough for electing him as a Prime Minister of the country.

On May 13, the new Government of Armenia under Prime Minister Pashinyan was already formed. Only two ministers from the previous Government remained in the new Government: the former Minister of Emergency Situations Davit Tonoyan was appointed as Armenia's new Defense Minister, and the former Minister of Sport and Youth Affairs Hrachya Rostomyan became the Minister of Emergency Situations. In general, the new Armenian government is composed of young reformists, the oldest of which is the Minister of Foreign Affairs Zohrab Mnatsakanyan who is only 52 years old, while, the youngest one is the Minister of Diaspora Mkhitar Hayrapetyan who is just 27 years old. However, despite the change in power, Armenia is not likely to change its foreign political line. Moreover, the new Prime Minister Pashinyan re-affirmed his position during the Sochi summit of the Eurasian Economic Union stating that Armenia will deepen its already close ties with Russia, considering it as the main strategic partner of the country. However, Pashinyan also stated that he will deepen relations between Armenia and EU during his premiership, trying to bring a visa liberalisation agreements into force as soon as possible. Pashinyan has also announced that the development of Armenian relations with Iran, Georgia, and the USA are among his foreign political priorities.

*Karen Tovmasyan
Center for European Studies
Yerevan State University*

7 – Opinions and comments

Three Factors Affecting Iran's Relations with the South Caucasus and their Security Implications

As a country located in the immediate neighbourhood of the South Caucasus, Iran has always had the potential to affect and to be affected by the security situation in this region. Putting aside Iran's long-standing historical ties with the South Caucasus and the fact that for hundreds of years, a great part of the region was part of the Persian Empire, Iran's security ties with the South Caucasus have been taken more seriously into account over the past three decades, i.e. since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

However, in the current situation, in the year 2018, it could be said that factors derived from the three levels of state, region and international system affect the level and nature of the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with the South Caucasus. Given the abovementioned geographical and historical ties between the two sides, this could have important implications for the security situation in the entire region.

State level

Like almost all the other regional and international actors, in the aftermath of the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of the South Caucasian republics Iran did not have an accurate and comprehensive take on the political, economic and security conditions in the South Caucasus. Obviously, this made it difficult to adopt the appropriate policy to develop relations with the countries of the region. Generally speaking, it could be said that in the first years after the Soviet Union, Iran had a mostly passive approach toward the region, based primarily on its concerns over the development of the United States and the US-led structures (like NATO's) influence into the region. On the other hand, the change in the situation in Karabakh, from a frozen conflict to an active one, and Iran's orientation toward taking the Armenian side – which was itself derived from Iran's desire to contain the US influence – effectively limited the space for a comprehensive and balanced development of Iran's relationship with the region. Meanwhile in the economic sphere, given the economic weakness of two countries of the region (Georgia and Armenia)

and the competitive economic structure of Iran and Azerbaijan (as two countries relying on energy revenues), the potential for the development of Iran's ties with the region was further limited.

In the eight years of Seyed Mohammad Khatami's presidency in Iran (1997 – 2005), Iran's focus on rapprochement with the European countries caused the former Soviet territories, including the South Caucasus, to be of a lesser importance for Iran. In other words, in that period the South Caucasus was not among the priorities of Iran's foreign policy. Also for the eight subsequent years after Khatami, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad administration's confrontational foreign policy approach caused a great deal of Iran's positive potential to be wasted in confrontation with the West, while at the same time, given the importance the countries of the region attached to their relations with the West, they adopted a more cautious view toward the development of relations with Iran.

However, since 2013 and the election of Hassan Rouhani as the Iranian President, Iran's foreign policy has shifted toward a more balanced approach, within the framework of which the development of relations with the South Caucasian nations has been considered more seriously. The establishment of visa-free regimes with Georgia and Armenia and facilitating visa regulations with Azerbaijan, various summits and ministerial meetings between Iran and the these countries, etc., have been the most apparent representations of this trend.

Therefore, it could be said that Iran's ties with the South Caucasus which were for many years affected by the third factor (the nature of relationship with the West) and a passive approach (based on containing the Western influence) has for the first time gradually come out from the domination of the third factor, gaining a more independent posture. In this vein, Iran's approach toward the region in the security, political, economic and even cultural spheres has become more balanced and the one-sided, security-based view has been replaced by a more comprehensive view.

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7 – Opinions and comments (cont.)

As a result, Iran now considers the South Caucasus not as a “potential security threat”, but as a “partner for preserving regional security.”

Regional level

At the regional level, Iran’s involvement in a more complex and more comprehensive layer of regional rivalries in the Middle East on the one hand and its involvement in the Syrian crisis in the form of partnering with Russia on the other, could be named as the most important factors affecting Iran’s approach toward the South Caucasus.

The impact of regional rivalries in the Middle East

Since the outbreak of “Arab Spring” events in 2011, the Middle East has been experiencing a situation of widespread instability on the one hand and increased rivalry among the regional powers on the other. Iran, which in the first stages of the Arab Spring movements named them as “Islamic Awakening”, interpreting them as a good opportunity for enhancing its regional influence, after the deterioration of situation in Syria and the suppression of Bahraini people’s revolutionary movement by Bahrain’s government, faced itself with a complicated situation. In this framework, Iran on the one hand and its regional rivals, especially Saudi Arabia on the other, have been attempting to direct the regional equations toward their own benefits; a factor that has increased the volume and scope of regional rivalries. These factors have largely polarised the region, limiting the opportunity for persistent, stable and reliable development of ties with a considerable number of countries in the Middle East and North Africa, not only for Iran, but also for some of the other actors. This whole set of elements, together with the gradual prioritisation of the security factor in Iran’s Middle East policy, has caused the country to pursue the economic aspects of its foreign policy in other neighbouring territories that enjoy more strategic stability and long-term reliability, namely Central Asia and the Caucasus. This fact is clearly visible in the nature of agreements made between Iran and the countries of these two regions over the past several years, which have been mostly focused on economic, energy and transportation issues. Meanwhile, Iran is worried about the possible spillover of regional rivalries in the Middle East

into the South Caucasus, in form of possible attempts by Saudi Arabia, Israel and – at a different layer – Turkey to increase their influence in the region to the detriment of Iran. Therefore, it could be said that instability in the Middle East has become a determining factor in changing Iran’s view toward the South Caucasus.

The impact of the Syrian Crisis

From the very beginning of the crisis in Syria, Iran and Russia have represented themselves as the two main allies of the Syrian president Bashar al-Assad. Especially after the start of Russia’s military campaign in Syria in 2015, a close partnership on this issue has been formed between the two sides, a collateral effect of which has been the start of a meaningful trust-building process between the two and a desire to develop relations in other spheres. In this context, Russia, which especially during the first years after the Soviet Union had a rather negative view toward the expansion of Iran’s ties with its “Near Abroad” in Central Asia and the Caucasus, now has less sensitivities to this issue. This has caused Iran to have a better opportunity to develop its ties with the South Caucasus and at the same time, has resulted in some kind of co-operation between Iran and Russia in the region, such as the recently shaped trilateral format of Iran-Azerbaijan-Russia. Therefore, the Syrian crisis has had an indirect role in changing Iran’s role and activities in the Caucasus.

System level

The two factors of Iran’s nuclear deal with the world powers in 2015 and the United States’ more aggressive approach toward Iran since the start of Donald Trump’s presidency could be considered as the factors arising from the system level.

The nuclear deal

After reaching the nuclear deal in 2015, Iran tried to reap the benefits of sanctions relief and, by the development of its interactions with different countries and regions, maximise its economic benefits. At the same time, the impact of the deal on creating a level of trust-building between Iran and the West and de-securitisation of Iran,

7 – Opinions and comments (cont.)

decreased the other parties' concerns over the development of ties with Iran. Therefore, it could be said that at least before the time Donald Trump came to power in the US, the nuclear deal had turned into a positive factor in Iran's relations with the West. In this context, especially due to Iran's desire to develop ties with Europe, the South Caucasus was considered by Iran as a connecting link to Europe.

However, since the change in the US administration in 2017, the negative viewpoint of the new American administration toward the nuclear deal altered the whole positive atmosphere. Now that the US has withdrawn from the deal, vowing to re-impose nuclear sanctions against Tehran, Iran's relations with the South Caucasus could be affected accordingly, as the countries of the region may once again become cautious toward their interactions with Iran. However, this is related to a great extent to Europe's final position on the deal, meaning that if the European parties of the nuclear deal could find a real mechanism for saving it without the US presence, the vulnerability of Iran's relations with the region would decrease. However, in either case the issue has the potential to affect Iran's ties with the region.

The more aggressive US approach toward Iran

In conjunction with the previous factor, there is a real possibility that as part of its grand strategy against Iran, the United States may start to systematically put pressure on the states co-operating or partnering with Iran in different regions to force them to decrease or cut their ties with Iran. As far as the South Caucasus is concerned, given the close ties between the countries of the region and the Western structures, it is possible that the US may be successful in reaching its desired goal.

Conclusion

Given the abovementioned points, it is clear that Iran's ties with the South Caucasus are affected by factors arising from three distinct, but inter-connected levels. In this vein, while the factors related to the first two levels have mostly had a positive view in Iran's relations with the region over the past several years, the third level is currently playing a mostly negative role in this sphere, appearing as a hurdle in this regard. However, the main problem here is that due to the direct link of the system level with the US approaches – as yet the only world superpower – this factor could nullify the positive effects related to the two other levels.

However, one should be reminded that due to the high level of security ties between Iran and the region, in case that the continuation of American pressures leads to any kind of instability in Iran or hurts its normal regional role (especially in areas such as combating terrorism), this could directly impact the security situation in the South Caucasus. In this vein, it seems that the best strategy for the South Caucasus countries in the current situation is to devise a mechanism for "independent" interactions with Iran (free from the role of third factors, especially the US). Developing a framework for jointly managing the security challenges, instead of seeing each other as security threats, is the most important factor which could preserve mutual interest of Iran and the South Caucasus countries.

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Tehran



8 — New publications

- **Alieva, Leila / Aslanov, Bakhtiyar**
How Autocracy Impedes De-securitization, or Why Democracy Matters. The Case of Nagorno-Karabagh in the Eyes of Azerbaijanis
Caucasus Survey, published online 5 April 2018
- **Axyonova, Vera / Gerasymchuk, Sergiy / Kakachia, Kornely / Rosca, Alla**
The European Union as a Transformative Power, a Donor or a Security Provider? The View from the Eastern Partnership Countries
European Foreign Affairs Review 2018 Vol. 23 No. 1/1 pp. 23-40
- **Butorina Olga V. (ed.)**
Evropeyskie issledovaniya v Rossii 1992 – 2017
Izdatel'stvo Tomskogo Universiteta: Tomsk 2017
Available at <http://www.instituteofeurope.ru/images/uploads/monografii/mon04.09.17.pdf>.
- **Chaban, Natalia / Knodt, Michèle / Headley, James**
Introduction: The EU and its Eastern Neighbours – Perceptions and Strategic Dialogue in the Region
European Foreign Affairs Review 2018 Vol. 23 No. 1/1 pp. 1-22
- **Charap, Samuel / Shapiro, Jeremy / Demus, Alyssa**
Rethinking the Regional Order for Post-Soviet Europe and Eurasia
RAND Corporation 2018, available at <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE297.html>
- **Delcour, Laure / Wolczuk, Kataryna**
Well-Meaning but Ineffective? Perceptions of the EU's Role as a Security Actor in the South Caucasus
European Foreign Affairs Review 2018 Vol. 23 No. 1/1 pp. 41-60
- **Eyvazova, Samira**
European Neighbourhood Policy – Legal Basis of Economic Cooperation with Azerbaijan Republic
Azernashr: Baku 2018 (available also in Russian and Azerbaijani).
- **Eyvazova, Samira**
Legal Basis of Cooperation between the EU and the Republic of Azerbaijan. Textbook
Azernashr: Baku 2018 (available also in Russian and Azerbaijani).
- **Gogolashvili, Kakha**
Developing New Black Sea Partnerships. Shaping the Area for Future EU Enlargement
Strategic Policy Institute (STRATPOL) Policy Paper, Brno 2018
available at http://stratpol.sk/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/webGOGOLASHVILI_Policy-Paper-BS-and-EU.pdf
- **Hoffmann, Thomas / Makarychev, Andrey**
Russia and the EU. Spaces of Interaction
Routledge, forthcoming 2019.
- **International Crisis Group (ed.)**
Iran's Priorities in a Turbulent Middle East
Middle East Report No. 184 of 13 April 2018, available at <https://www.crisisgroup.org/middle-east-north-africa/gulf-and-arabian-peninsula/iran/184-irans-priorities-turbulent-middle-east>
- **Kakhishvili, Levan**
Democratic Consolidation in Georgia: Why Does Consensus Matter?
GIIP Policy Brief April 2018, Issue # 12, available at <http://gip.ge/8399/>
- **Karnaukhova, Oksana / Udovikina, Alexandra / Christiansen, Bryan**
Economic and Geopolitical Perspectives of the Commonwealth of Independent States and Eurasia
IGI Global 2018
- **Khutsishvili, Kristina**
Myself and the Other: Competitive Narratives of Georgians and Abkhazians
REGION: Regional Studies of Russia, Eastern Europe and Central Asia 2018 Vol. 7 No. 1 pp. 69-82.
- **Khvorostiankina, Anna**
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List of new publications relevant for DESCnet and AESC composed by: Thomas Kruessmann

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