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Security challenges in the Caucasus and Central Asia - A German and European perspective

As 20 minutes are not that long to cover a topic including European actors, a region stretching from the Black Sea to Afghanistan, and potential trans-atlantic implications, please forgive me for getting to the point without further charming remarks other than to thank the chairman for admittance to the floor.

So is there a specific European and/or German perspective based on strategic approaches towards the region of analysis? If so, how would that interact with American approaches, and would these interactions have trans-atlantic implications? First off, there is the need to identify the regional and external dynamics of security challenges. Looking at the Caucasus and Central Asia as one regional complex including Russia, the three South Caucasian and five Central Asian former soviet republics, the main *challenges from within* are:

(1) Regional destabilization by the Chechen war and frozen conflicts in Abkhazia, South Ossetia and Karabakh. The second Chechen war is a litmus test for Putin, has a dangerous spill-over potential, and has been hijacked by international terrorist networks for their cause. At the same time there are the three unrecognised breakaway states adding to the security challenges by keeping low-key daily violence on the spot, creating huge refugee burdens, and undermining the legitimacy and functioning of the metropolitan states.

(2) Growing authoritarianism of ‚state gone mafia‘ Soviet-era power structures governing the countries. The U.S.-led campaign in Afghanistan has encouraged authoritarian tendencies in the countries ruled by Soviet-era networks based on informal contacts and personal networks to obtain goods and services. Political opposition is virtually banned in some countries, while opposition party leaders are subject to intimidation or arrest in others. Finally, state, business and criminal actors have merged irrecognizably and caused a situation that plagues efforts to introduce democratic and economic reform. Despite some success in macroeconomic stabilization, the living standards of the average citizen throughout the region have dramatically decreased over the last 10 years.

(3) Ethnic makeup and unsolved border conflicts as a key element of security dynamics. The population of roughly 80 million in Central Asia, North and South Caucasus can be broken down in more than 100 different ethnic and even more language groups. An intensification of intraethnic discord along regional and tribal lines can be observed, with

economic disparities playing a significant role, as more deprived regions or clans try to challenge their more wealthy counterparts. Arbitrary soviet border demarcation is complicating the situation especially in the densely populated Central Asian Fergana valley belonging to Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

(4) Especially Central Asia is an ecological disaster area. The most obvious symbol is the gradual extinction of the Aral sea. A natural geographic situation is adding with usable agricultural areas as low as 3% of the total area in Turkmenistan. In Tajikistan, the official population density is 41 and the de facto density 488 inhabitants per square cilometer. Adding a natural population increase between 15 per 1000 inhabitants in Kazakhstan and 31 per 1000 inhabitants in Turkmenistan, the regional ecological picture is getting almost irreparably bleak.

(5) The rise of militant and radical Islam. Exclusionary tactics imposed by several of the Central Asian regimes have increased frustration for the newly emerged Islamic groups in the region and affected the legitimacy of the regimes, while government efforts to promote Islamic culture have been perceived as inadequate or insincere. Compared to drug trafficking and ‚state gone mafia‘, islamic fundamentalism is a minor factor after the end of Taleban rule in Afghanistan.

Assessing the *external security dimension*, we have to distinguish between the relevant inside-out as well as the outside-in dynamics. **Afghanistan** will continue to pose a long-term outside-in threat. It's particularly the impact of the ongoing drug traffic that seriously destabilizes the transit countries by strenghtening the ‚state gone mafia‘ cancer and the social impact of drug abuse. Afghan opium production contributed to a 600-fold increase in AIDS cases in Central Asia from 1994 to 2001, of which 88 percent were related to injected drug use. The HIV/AIDS infection rate in Central Asia is currently increasing at the fastest pace in the world.

Both regions are affected by **unconstructive foreign intervention** perpetuating instability and inhibiting the conflict resolution processes. While avoiding regional security through regional cooperation and striving for different, partly antagonistic outside actors, the governing elites in their will to stay in power at times are taken hostages of outside influence. In this regard, Russian interference in managing the frozen conflicts in the region has to be explicitly mentioned. The competitive nature of tapping and transporting the hydrocarbon energy resources of the Caspian region coupled with partly exclusive foreign policy concepts are reproducing and strenghtening perceptions of antagonistic axes dividing the region.

The positive and negative impact of the war on terrorism has already been mentioned.

While diminishing some security threats from outside, it did contribute to an increasing authoritarianism. Supporting these reigns in the name of fighting terrorism and fostering stabilization actually results in fostering terrorism and increasing a creeping destabilization.

Looking at the *inside-out security dynamics*, the Caucasus-Centra Asia area has the potential to destabilize neighboring countries and regions by a mixture of state failure, escalating violent conflicts leading to entanglement of outside actors, and terrorist threats. Both regions are neighbors of Russia among others and thus directly affect the whole European security order. The terrorist threat includes unsecured nuclear materials for a dirty bomb, and the potential of remote areas being used as safehaven for terrorist cells.

So how are European actors responding to these security risks? The *European Union* has yet to come up with a strategic neighborhood concept including the Caucasus as well as an energy policy that would comprise infrastructural concepts and their implementation as well as a political safeguarding in Europe and the Caucasus-Centra Asian area. Only 911 triggered a EU council strategy decision on Central Asia to promote regional cooperation between the five countries regarding trade, fight against terrorism and drug trafficking as well as water management.

Additionally, the EU is promoting an institutional framework for conflict management together with other relevant players. While the EU is lacking a strategy, it has tools like the TACIS programme (Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States), the TRACECA (Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia) project, and INOGATE (aiming at rehabilitation, modernization and rationalisation of Interstate oil and gas Pipelines in the NIS). Moreover, the EU has signed ‚Partnership and Cooperation Agreements‘ (PCA) with all successor states of the Soviet Union.

The main task of the *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)* today is the consolidation of common values, the development of civil societies, the prevention of local conflicts and the restoration of peace and stability in zones of military conflict. One of the most important OSCE tools are the long term field missions acting on the basis of the integrity of states and the simultaneous support for ethnic minorities, democracy and human rights. Since 1995 these missions are complemented by OSCE liaison offices. Thus, an area-wide OSCE mission presence has been achieved in the Caucasus-Central Asia regions. Other OSCE tools are the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the Representative on Freedom of the Media

and the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. The OSCE is the only European political institution where the countries from the region have full membership rights. With a view on Russia, this allows a higher degree of independence and options. However, the limits of the OSCE are clear, as the consensus principle is often used in a restrictive way.

The evolutionary adjustment process of *NATO* takes place on three levels. Inside NATO, the preconditions for the management of the new tasks like crisis management are created. On a second level, NATO has an open door policy, according to President Bush, to „all democracies from the Baltic to the Black Sea“. On a third level NATO is stepping up cooperation with states that are not able or willing to join the alliance in the framework of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) and the „Partnership for Peace initiative“ (PfP) with a view on increasing cooperation with partner countries. As a result of 9/11, the strategic importance of the Caucasus-Central Asia area has increased and simultaneously led to an increased desire to cooperate more closely with the concerned states. This led to an upgraded mechanism of ‚Individual Partnership Action Plans‘ adopted at the Prague summit last year, allowing more individualised and more comprehensive relations between the Alliance and interested Partners.

The centrepiece of the intergovernmental *Council of Europe (CoE)* is the protection of Human Rights by the „Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms“ and the „European Court of Human Rights“ in Strasbourg. Russia joined the Council of Europe in 1996. Georgia joined in 1999, and Armenia together with Azerbaijan in 2001. The CoE has become increasingly involved in conflict prevention and post-conflict rehabilitation in the region. In Chechnya, CoE experts at times were the only international presence. A permanent presence in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia was established. September 11 led to an updating of the „European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism“ in order to remove obstacles to a more effective cooperation. Moreover, guidelines on Human Rights and the fight against terrorism were adopted.

The special relations between *Germany* and Central Asia were the result of roughly one million people of German descent in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in the early nineties. Germany was the only European country that then opened embassies in all five Central Asian countries. This enabled the German ‚Bundesnachrichtendienst‘ (BND) intelligence service to get in a special position, as it already in depth dealt with international drug and arms trafficking in Central Asia well before 9/11. In the South Caucasus, the German presence was also special compared to other European countries due to the gratefulness for

the role of former soviet foreign minister and later Georgian president Shevardnadze in the reunification of Germany. Apart from these particularities, German foreign policy fully corresponds to European foreign policy, and is essentially designed in the European framework. On the basis of bilateral relations, Germany is conducting development cooperation to strengthen the survivability of the states in the regions by promoting regional cooperation, and direct assistance to the solution of humanitarian, social and ecological problems. At the same time, the limits of capacities to act are understood. In order to create stability and cooperation, Germany views the support of the EU and OSCE as well as that of Russia, the US, China, Turkey and Iran as vital.

Getting back to the questions raised in the beginning: yes, there has been a special German perspective, but neither a German nor a European strategic approach towards the Caucasus-Central Asian area; different national papers, perspectives, approaches and interests don't add up to something that could be called a consistent strategy, and basically the same holds true for the U.S. Several potential trans-atlantic points of concern and issues with regard to the regions of Central Asia and the Caucasus can be raised however.

The issue of fighting international terrorism and post-conflict rebuilding in Afghanistan is far from over. Together with Holland, Germany took the lead of the international security assistance force (ISAF) in Kabul. There is a manifest concern in Europe and in Central Asia, that the USA might forget about Afghanistan while focussing on Iraq and thus increasing the security threats for the Central Asian states. The German magazine „Der Spiegel“ claimed on 17 February that the United States "has practically ceased" its efforts to capture Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan and has withdrawn to Iraq all Special Forces units. Along with the U.S. Special Forces, British and Australian special-forces troops have also left the antiterrorism coalition and have left behind "infantry that is less effective in combat." The approximately 100 German special-forces troops who are deployed in Afghanistan reportedly are "rather alone". At the same time, Germany's BND intelligence service has reported that new Chinese-made missiles are being smuggled into the country. The Chinese missiles are reportedly more accurate than the outdated Russian-made missiles currently available in Afghanistan. German authorities in Kabul are taking the dangers posed by this constellation very seriously.

Another potential threat to regional security might stem from **current and future US containment policies**. One of the constant features of US foreign policy in the Caspian region is the containment of Iran. Needless to say that regional security in the Caucasus and in Central Asia will need Iranian inclusion. However, to exclude a regional player will mean to

prevent an effective security system. The same potential danger might develop over time in Central Asia if the US should wish to start containing China there. Having raised the topic of Iran, it remains to be seen what consequences for the Caspian region and regional security the Iranian inclusion into President Bush's „axis of evil“ will have.

The next problematic issue connected with the region is the **future role of NATO** itself. The US seemingly is very interested in extending NATO's reach and role to the Caucasus and Central Asia, while the Europeans fear that such an enlargement could devalue NATO in a kind of second OSCE and thus leading to a security crisis in Europe. The majority of Foreign Minister Fischer's European colleagues are sharing the view that the Bush administration, although not intending to destroy NATO, is actively working towards the goal of devaluing NATO to a "quantité négligeable" by inflating the alliance all the way down to irrelevancy. Officially, Fischer is declining such views, while he internally seems to be convinced that this will be the road ahead.

Getting back to regional security in the Caucasus and in Central Asia, one thing seems very clear: **one can't organize security from outside, if the countries inside the regions are setting the wrong course.** There is no chance for longterm stabilization as long as the short-term destabilizing forces that are setting the wrong course inside these countries are supported in order to achieve another goal. There is a certain danger that due to higher-ranking interests in fighting international terrorism or creating another coalition of the willing, the US - and not only they - might act counterproductive in this regard.

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