



ISSICEU Public Panel in Istanbul

A public panel entitled "Turkey and the Caucasus: Inter-Societal Relations, Civil Society Development and Security" was held in Istanbul on 17 April 2015, concluding the second internal meeting of the ISSICEU research consortium.

The panel brought together speakers from Turkey and the South Caucasus. It included Professor Mitat Celikpala from Kadir Has University, Dr. Farda Asadov from Khazar University as well as Tigran Matosyan and Ketevan Rcheulishvili, who were representing Russian State University for Humanities. The ISSICEU project coordinator Professor Dirk Lehmkuhl, St Gallen University, and Dr. Burcu Gültekin Punsmann from the Ankara Policy Center moderated the discussion.

Professor Celikpala discussed Turkey's current approach to cooperation in the Caucasus - which is generally oriented towards Georgia and Azerbaijan - the internal and external obstacles for expanding cooperation as well as the role of Russia and Iran in shaping cooperation in the region. Ketevan Rcheulishvili and Tigran Matosyan focused their presentations on the role of non-state actors in Georgia and Armenia, discussing particularly the weakness of the civil society organizations in the two countries. The panelists highlighted the lack of public trust in these organizations, dependency on donor funding, cultural factors and government funding among the limiting factors. Both speakers noted the successes of the civil society organizations as well - the active involvement of the civil society organizations in the Rose Revolution in Georgia and the rise of the civic activism in Armenia. According to Dr. Asadov, civil society organizations in Azerbaijan face similar weakening factors as in Armenia and Georgia. Dr. Asadov also spoke about the political role of the civil society organizations, which are often considered as a threat to the political elite and political stability.

At the end of the question and answer session with the audience, there seemed to be a general agreement that there are opportunities for non-political cooperation, but "it is the realities that divide us."

Text provided by: Arpine Porsughyan, GeoWel Research