1.1 Publishable summary

Description of the project context and the main objectives

Security and democratisation processes in the Caucasus are put at risk by diverse, often diverging, but at the same time interrelated dynamics in the individual Caucasus societies. Tensions emerge around secessionist movements, authoritarian governance, societal cleavages along ethnic, religious lines as well as divisions caused by the distribution of public goods and power. Economic prosperity is significantly limited in most Caucasus societies. Political and military relations between the Caucasus states and players from the wider region tend to further fuel or at best contain tensions. The most recent dynamics in the Caucasus are amongst others marked by economic hardship in all countries, substantially intensified repression of civil society in Azerbaijan, tensions between citizens and government over the management of public goods in Armenia, intensified conflicts between the central Russian authorities and the government in Dagestan or increasing tensions between Russia and Georgia regarding the conflict over South Ossetia. These tensions lead to instabilities with both a destructive and constructive impact in all Caucasus societies and the region as a whole. For evaluating the impact of the described tensions on the Caucasus, ISSICEU studies several intra- and inter-societal dimensions that produce, are affected by or may mitigate the described tensions. These are political regimes, their performance at communal level and their support by ordinary citizens; sources of civic participation; the impact of economic (inter)dependencies on domestic and foreign politics; and the impact of societal influences from Turkey and Iran, two core actors in the Caucasus neighbourhood who received little attention in the Caucasus research so far. ISSICEU will analyse sources of instability and stability in the Caucasus societies in these areas and evaluate their implications for military, political, economic and societal security.

The work of ISSICEU builds on the three pillars “basic research”, “forecast”, and “policy oriented output”. The initial phase, basic research, is guided by three objectives. First of all, ISSICEU will provide an on-spot analysis of emerging “hot spots” of challenges to instability in the Caucasus. For doing so, ISSICEU maps emerging (non-violent and violent) conflicts of local, regional, national and international dimension and clusters them according to the social, economic, political, military and cultural roots. Second, ISSICEU will identify crucial actors and mechanisms of conflicts and their potential reconciliation. We, third, study the impact of the emerging conflicts on the dynamics of stability and instability in the whole region and its neighbourhood. This aims at providing an adequate picture of the Caucasus as one region in its diversity and cohesiveness.

The main goal of our forecast ambitions is to translate our findings into scenarios which suggest potential future security developments. The scenarios will highlight potential shifts
in the stability and instability related to political regimes and civil society, economic developments and influences from the neighbourhood.

Our policy oriented work aims at formulating concise policy recommendations on opportunities for the EU to promote prosperity, conflict solution and long-term stability in the individual Caucasus societies and the whole region. The recommendations will consider our research findings and the scenarios developed. We provide insights on how the EU may improve its agency in the Caucasus. In search of an optimal communication with relevant EU actors ISSICEU offers a series of closed-door expert workshops at selected EU agencies. Beyond this ISSICEU is eager to disseminate the findings to the international academia, national policy makers and the wider public. A core product of ISSICEU is a survey on attitudes towards civic participation conducted in the Caucasus in 2015. We will publish the results on our website.

**Work performed since the beginning of the project and the main results achieved**

In the first 18 months four ISSICEU work packages commenced analysing social dynamics in the Caucasus which might become "hot spots". WP1 studied political regimes at the local level. State-society relations in the North Caucasus are highly conflictive. Tensions increase with the ability of the centralized power to penetrate the local level. Local particularities such as geographic conditions and multi-ethnicity may amplify a conflict but are not its main source. Severe conflicts over modernization strategies fueled in some cases civic participation. It remains to be seen if this may positively influence stability. In the South Caucasus dissatisfaction with the living conditions especially in minor towns and villages prevails. Institutions that allow for a smooth communication between people and state authorities are nearly absent. Adopted institutions, which in democracies support good local governance, do not improve the situation. In both the North and the South Caucasus patterns of hybridity, i.e. the interplay of institutions that follow the logics of varying social orders, help mitigating conflicts.

WP 2 explored challenges to civic participation. The core aspect that limits civic participation and causes conflicts is the independence of civil society organisations (CSO). It is noteworthy that CSO in the South Caucasus usually are legal entities, while informal civic performance based on traditional self-regulatory mechanisms is characteristic in the North Caucasus. The independence of CSO faces constraints by state authorities either if they consider CSO as partners or as actors contesting their authority. Recent changes in the CSO legislation of some Caucasus states reveal a tendency to perceive CSO as contesting authority. A study of Iranian societal groups active in Azerbaijan revealed that they receive some freedom to act as the government promotes multiculturalism. At the same time the struggle against “Iranian influence” serves as legitimation of massive intervention in their activities. A quantitative survey completed in June 2015 explores how the observations impact on citizens’ readiness to support CSO.
WP3 researched in country studies how resource dependence shapes political decisions. It considered the role of the Armenian diaspora in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The US-based Armenian diaspora, while politically organised, has little direct involvement in Armenian politics. The Russia-based diaspora, while less organised as a group, has more involvement. Their involvement is driven by individual self-interest rather than broader political goals. With regard to Azerbaijan the research shows that the dependence on oil rents influences Azerbaijan’s action in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict by enhancing uncertainties of the current stand-off while at the same time providing considerable incentives against going to war. For Georgia the research suggests that its Western orientation, in particular the EU Association Agreement, is relatively fragile since it is not aligned with regional interdependencies. A study on dependencies on Turkey revealed that Georgian and Abkhaz/Circassian diaspora in Turkey have contributed to establishing Turkish business in Abkhazia and Adjara. This is not reflected in the public visibility or in ownership structures.

WP4 studied societal linkages between Turkey and the Caucasus with a focus on Turkish state and non-state actors. The inter-societal interactions are complex. A large variety of group strategies relying mainly on historical narratives exists. Some groups try to concentrate their activities to the homelands in the Caucasus. Others orient at advocating cultural rights and become politically active in Turkey. Actions of ethnic Caucasian groups resulted in some spill-over of tensions which makes Turkey an insider to the dynamics in the Caucasus. The Chechen, Georgian-Abkhazian and the Nagorno-Karabakh wars have become part of the domestic Turkish agenda.

**Expected final results and their potential impacts and use**

The collected data and preliminary analysis provide a promising fundament for a comprehensive mapping and evaluation of sources of stability and instability in the whole Caucasus. The final results will go beyond the current analysis of emerging conflicts by highlighting how tensions observed in certain Caucasus entities affect the stability of other. ISSICEU sheds light on the relation between trans-societal flows, economic dependencies, political regime stability, secessionist conflicts and the role of the neighbouring countries on dynamics in the Caucasus. The insights will facilitate a sound evaluation of the developments in the regions and of strategies to efficiently promote stability in the region. The findings will help assessing unintended effects of existing and future policies. They will suggest in which areas and to which end collaboration with actors of the Caucasus neighbourhood like Turkey and Iran may strengthen the agency of the EU in the region.

The envisioned impact can be spelt out in three regards. First, ISSICEU is eager to significantly advance the international Caucasus expertise. In the first project period ISSICEU built the fundament for this by collecting a variety of strong original empirical data. Among these are economic data on inter-societal dependencies which are not covered by statistics;
high-level qualitative elite interviews done in the whole Caucasus including the authoritarian Azerbaijan or the de facto states, which are hard to access for this kind of research; a Caucasus wide public opinion survey; and data bases on legal documents which are hardly accessible for foreign researchers. The data will be published in various academic and policy oriented contributions. Some of them, such as the opinion survey will be made available as raw data for academic purposes beyond ISSICEU.

Second, ISSICEU is committed to contributing to the academic and public debate on the Caucasus. Progress in this regard has been made in a number of publications including conference contributions, journal article, comments and policy briefs available on www.issiceu.eu. Beyond this ISSICEU organised two public panels open to academia and domestic and external policy makers in the Caucasus. In April 2014 an audience of about 100 people attended the panel “The EU-Georgian Association Agreement: Opportunities and Risks” which included Georgian policy-makers, business representatives and local and external Caucasus experts. In April 2015 ISSICEU hosted a discussion of “Turkey and the Caucasus: Inter-Societal Relations, Civil Society Development and Security”. The topic was discussed by Prof. Mitat Celikpala from Kadir Zas University and ISSICEU researchers. The event was conceptualised for a smaller audience, namely representative of the Caucasus diaspora but also Caucasus experts in Turkey. The successfully achieved aim was to build collaboration networks to these two groups.

ISSICEU, third, aims at informing policy debates in the EU, the Caucasus and the other countries represented in ISSICEU, Switzerland, Germany and Turkey. Towards this end the ISSICEU researchers got into touch with national policy-makers in their countries, with the countries’ representations in the Caucasus and with EU officials in the Caucasus and Brussels. The communication served to raise the mutual awareness of both side’s activities. In addition the first policy brief on Circassians in Russia has been published in series “Aktuell” of the German think tank Institute for International and Security Affairs/SWP. In the second project period ISSICEU will disseminate the final findings to relevant EU actors in closed-door meetings in order to maximize its impact on the policy-related debates.
**Scheme of ISSICEU Concept**

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- **Basic Research**
- **Forecast**
- **Policy Oriented**

- **WP 5: The interplay of sources of instability in the Caucasus**
  - Scenario 1: Political Regimes and Civil Society
  - Scenario 2: Economic Developments
  - Scenario 3: Influences from the Neighbourhood

- **EU opportunities in the context of intra- and inter-societal (in)stability**
  - Considering developments in the field of communal governance
  - Opportunities to fuel gradual democratic change
  - Considering other players from the wider region in the EU Caucasus policy
  - Adjusting the focus to emerging threats of regional (in)stabilities
Caucasus Map with Overview of ISSICEU Case Studies
ISSICEU Consortium Participations

University of Fribourg (Switzerland)
www.unifr.ch/sr/fr (French)

SWP – German for International and Security Affairs (Germany)
http://www.swp-berlin.org/

Ankara Policy Center (Turkey)
http://www.apm.org.tr/Home.aspx

Khazar University Baku (Azerbaijan)
http://www.khazar.org/

GeoWel Research (Georgia)
http://www.geowel.org/

Kabardino-Balkarian State University (Russian Federation)
http://www.kbsu.ru/

Russian State University for the Humanities (Russian Federation)
http://rggu.com/