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A New Think-Tank for the OSCE and Central Asia

Establishing the OSCE Academy in Bishkek

A Brief History

In early 2002, the Kyrgyz government approached the OSCE Chairmanship with a proposal to establish an educational institution devoted to the promotion of OSCE principles in the Central Asian region. The idea received a positive response on the part of the Chairmanship and a number of participating States. Soon thereafter, the Portuguese Chairman-in-Office tasked his Special Advisor on Central Asia, Ambassador Herbert Salber, with sounding out the attitudes of the various interested parties and considering whether conditions were suitable for the establishment of such an institution.

As a result and within a comparatively short period of time, the decision was made to support the initiative and establish an "OSCE Academy" in Kyrgyzstan. On 1 November 2002, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Ministry of Education and Culture of the Kyrgyz Republic and the OSCE Centre in Bishkek. It established the framework and defined tasks for an initial phase of about six months. On 17 December 2002, the Academy's official opening was celebrated in Bishkek, the capital of the Kyrgyz Republic. The Academy – a think-tank for and on the OSCE – now existed not only on paper but, thanks to initial financing from the OSCE as well as the appointment of a co-ordinator and her staff, also in fact. The Academy was designed to focus on and co-operate with the OSCE, while the quotation marks in its name were meant to specifically indicate that it was legally separate from the OSCE itself. The name was later changed to the *OSCE Academy in Bishkek* in line with the OSCE's policy of maintaining geographic neutrality by not including national designations in titles.

The impetus for the creation of the Academy existed even before the most basic institutional outline had been agreed. Above all, the Academy's establishment has been a politically motivated project. From the very beginning, it was a national initiative embedded in international campaigning, consultancy and financial assistance. At the national level, the Academy received the personal attention of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic, Askar Akaev. It was also supported by the country's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Askar Aitmatov, and the Minister of Education and Culture, Professor Ishengul Boljurova. On the international stage, the governments and academic institutions of Austria, Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland, in particular, promoted the establishment of the Academy. The governments of Germany and Switzerland also donated funds. The OSCE Centre in Bishkek provided

assistance with protocol and managerial issues and oversaw the Academy's finances.

Anara Nasyrova of Kyrgyzstan was appointed Academy Co-ordinator at the start of the inaugural phase. She has experience working for national and international non-governmental organizations, including a spell at UN headquarters, and has also worked in the Kyrgyz public sector. As the wife of the current Kyrgyz foreign minister, Ms Nasyrova maintains excellent personal ties to the Kyrgyz political leadership – something of crucial importance in Central Asia. Professor Alubek Akunov, a senior Kyrgyz historian who represents traditional Kyrgyz academic thinking, was appointed Academic Advisor to the Co-ordinator.

In the first half of 2003, the key elements of the Academy's future structure and activities were defined. During a visit to Europe, the Co-ordinator consulted with the Academy's main partner institutions: OSCE Headquarters in Vienna, the Austrian Study Center for Peace and Conflict Resolution in Stadtschlaining, the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) in Hamburg, the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and the Netherlands Institute for International Relations "Clingendael" in The Hague. During a further trip, she examined options for co-operation with partners in the neighbouring Central Asian capitals.

Prior to these activities, Dr Anna Kreikemeyer from CORE Hamburg had drafted an initial blueprint of the Academy that in significant measure served to determine the institution's future format and direction. In particular, this helped to limit the initial suggestion of establishing an OSCE University to the more manageable task of founding an academy.

Kyrgyz and Central Asian experts, representatives of the four European partner institutions and of the UN Peace University met in Bishkek to further develop the founding documents and a curriculum for the planned masters programme. The European partners assisted, to varying degrees, in lobbying the delegations of OSCE participating States in Vienna on behalf of the Academy. They contributed to the Academy's first seminars, which were conducted in Bishkek. CORE Hamburg, in particular, provided individual consulting and training to the Academy's management in Bishkek and Vienna and via Internet. A high level of personal attentiveness on the part of the Kyrgyz President was assured thanks to the excellent personal connections of Ambassador Gérard Stoudmann, Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy. A team from CORE Hamburg, consisting of CORE's acting head Dr Wolfgang Zellner, Dr Andrea Berg and myself, took a leading role in joint drafting activities. The Study Center in Stadtschlaining organized a summer school in Kyrgyzstan. The Austrian government seconded a junior expert to Bishkek. The Kyrgyz government provided premises at the Kyrgyz Diplomatic Academy, and a first series of lectures was arranged with participants from Kyrgyzstan and other countries.

At the same time, the delegations of the aforementioned four participating States carried out necessary diplomatic conversations in Vienna. These and further collective efforts brought the first phase of establishing the Academy as an institution to a successful close, as was reported by the Co-ordinator at an informal briefing on 6 May 2003 at the Vienna Hofburg. At the time of writing, the Academy was due to commence full operation by 1 September 2004. A first pilot semester for 25 students from Central Asia and Europe is scheduled to start on 1 February 2004.

The Political Motivations behind the Academy

The political motivations for the establishment of the Academy are manifold: *Motivations on the part of the Kyrgyz Republic.* To the government of landlocked Kyrgyzstan with its limited natural resources, the arrangement of new foreign contacts is necessarily of the utmost interest. In this attitude, the Kyrgyz government is somewhat different from those of some of Kyrgyzstan's neighbouring countries. For a nation such as the Kyrgyz, which, despite roots that stretch back over millennia, has yet only recently gained statehood, involvement in high-profile international academic activities may also be seen as a useful means of raising the country's profile on the world stage. In practical terms, the establishment of the Academy represents another channel for maintaining links to one of the leading European security organizations. It promises to attract manpower and funds and may serve to create personal links between the new generation of Kyrgyz academics, politicians and civil servants and the outside world.

The motivations of neighbouring states. To the governments and relevant academic institutions of neighbouring Central Asian states, the Academy should offer a further means of regional academic co-operation on security issues. It should come as no surprise, however, that governments seem to prefer to develop their own national institutions. Nevertheless, the very fact that the leading OSCE participating States insist on increased regional co-operation in Central Asia does encourage them to participate in the Academy's activities. In the meantime, it appears that the majority of states in the region support the institution – even if they are not always consistent in this. The Academy provides non-governmental organizations in the region with an attractive international platform.

OSCE participating States' motivations. To the governments of a number of OSCE participating States, the establishment of the Academy responds to the need to gain expertise on security issues in Central Asia. In their view, the Academy ought to promote understanding about Central Asian security concerns throughout the OSCE area while attracting international attention and expertise towards the region. Providing opportunities for the training and education of young security-studies experts on Central Asian issues is in the

interest of many parties. Some participating States may also see the Academy as a vehicle for “soft policy transfer”. For academic institutions within these countries that are concerned with European security issues, the Academy opens a platform for joint research, training and education.

The motivations of OSCE institutions. For the OSCE, the Academy represents a source of expertise that can be tapped as required. It will serve the OSCE as a think-tank for regional issues and a quick-response academic consulting house. Its basic role will be as the OSCE’s academic service provider, specializing in Central Asian security building. Its structure and activities should enable it to contribute to cross-border co-operation. It may also make a contribution to the development of human resources for OSCE field activities. The Academy may additionally provide an opportunity for the OSCE partners for co-operation to get more closely acquainted with a region that links Asia to Europe.

Central Asia as the Location for and Focus of the Academy’s Activities

The speed with which the Academy was established should come as no surprise. Apart from the aforementioned intense international support that the project found, the key reason is certainly the Academy’s promising geographic location in Central Asia, a region with a wide range of attractions.

In economic terms, Central Asia is above all rich in hydrocarbons and other natural resources. Strategic discussions on their future use are currently underway. Potential beneficiaries have a major interest in integrating efforts related to oil and gas into a wider co-operation network. Scientific and security co-operation play a role in these broader efforts that finally aim at promoting commercial ties.

In political terms, Central Asia has not only undergone long periods of European influence (in modern times, it has even been part of a European state – Russia and then the Soviet Union – and thus belonged politically to the European continent), it is also located at the interface between Europe and Asia and, as such, is in many ways predestined to serve as a link between the two continents. It may therefore act as a channel for bringing OSCE expertise to Asia. On the other hand, the region is also a potential source of or a transit route for security threats. With its inherent potential for instability (and a correspondingly large potential for the creation of stability), it plays a role for European security building that should not be neglected. As events in neighbouring Afghanistan have shown, instability may easily penetrate the OSCE area and adjoining regions. Terrorism, political, religious and other extremism, armed uprisings, illegal migration, trafficking in drugs and small arms and brand and copyright piracy are all cases in point.

All in all, Central Asia’s relevance for European stability justifies the location chosen for the Academy, which is focusing on both the region’s im-

portance as a provider of security capacities and its role as a source of and transit region for security threats.

The Major Goals and Beneficiaries

According to its statutory documents, the Academy's major goal is to train and educate junior professionals in the area of comprehensive security building and co-operation in Central Asia. It will also take part in relevant research in this area. The Academy will contribute to cross-border co-operation on the governmental and non-governmental level. It also aims to encourage a better understanding of OSCE policies in Central Asia while facilitating a more nuanced understanding of the cultural, political and socio-economic peculiarities of Central Asia within the OSCE and its participating States.

The Academy has been established to facilitate the promotion of peace and stability in the region, guided by OSCE principles. The Academy aims to attract experts involved in stability building in all relevant areas: from public administration, local self-government and inter-ethnic relations, via economic affairs, environmental issues and foreign relations to border management and human-rights implementation. The main beneficiaries of the Academy will be young professionals from Central Asian, including academics, civil servants, lawyers, teachers, journalists, diplomats and NGO representatives.

The institutions that stand to gain most from the Academy will be governmental organizations and civil-society institutions, the OSCE and other international organizations dealing with comprehensive security building in Central Asia, the academic community, the media and educational institutions. The Academy also sees itself as having a role to play in developing human resources for OSCE field activities in the region.

As already mentioned, the Academy is committed to the promotion of regional rapprochement. To support this, its facilities are available to trainers and faculty staff from Central Asian and other international partner institutions. The grant money it has available will be provided equally to applicants from Central Asia and elsewhere who fulfil the Academy's admission requirements. The Academy's research and teaching activities will have a regional focus. The openness that has been built into the Academy's structure and activities ensures that it will likewise create new opportunities for co-operation with neighbouring countries such as China and Russia. Finally, OSCE partners for co-operation (Afghanistan, Japan, the Republic of Korea and Thailand) and think-tanks in those countries are also welcome to use the Academy's capacities and contribute to its development.

The Academy's Three Pillars

The three main pillars of the Academy's activities have already been mentioned: (a) professional training, (b) research and (c) postgraduate education. At one time, the possibility of making extensive public-relations work a fourth pillar was evaluated but this was finally rejected for exceeding the remit and the capacities of the Academy and its co-operation partners. It was decided that the Academy's emphasis should be on professional training during its first year of operation. Joint research projects are to be conducted with regional and international partners in the hope of realizing synergies. As already mentioned, the Academy is scheduled to start offering postgraduate education with a pilot course in February 2004. Finally, a complete one-year masters programme, which will enable students to achieve the degree of "Master of Political Science (Central Asia)", will be launched in September 2004. It complies with international standards. Its accreditation is still under discussion. Some 20 to 25 students will graduate each year. As with all the Academy's structures and activities, the programme is open to students and lecturers from the whole OSCE area and other interested countries.

The Three Management Bodies

Lean management is one of the key principles in the Academy's administration. The Academy's three management bodies are (a) the Board of Trustees, (b) the Core Management Team and (c) the Advisory Board. Temporary management arrangements may be made within the scope of specific projects or programmes. An international Technical Steering Committee, consisting of representatives of the various parties involved in the establishment of the Academy, fulfilled the function of an interim management body during 2003. At its Vienna conference, on 22 October 2003, the Steering Committee appointed and handed over power to the Board of Trustees, thereby ceasing to exist.

The Board of Trustees is the Academy's governing body. It consists of senior international and Kyrgyz officials and academics. The OSCE and the governments of major donor countries are also represented. The Board of Trustees initially consists of Arman Baisuanov (from the Kazakh Foreign Ministry), Professor Ishengul Boljurova (the Kyrgyz Education Minister), Syrojiddin Komilov (Director of the Centre for Strategic Studies under the President of Tajikistan), Ambassador Lamberto Zannier (Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre), Ambassador Gérard Stoudmann (Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy), Ambassador Aydin Idil (Head of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek) and a representative of the German delegation to the OSCE. Two seats on the Board were reserved for representatives of

Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. At the time of writing, the Canadian delegation was also considering whether to participate.

The Core Management Team conducts the Academy's day-to-day administration. Its members are appointed by the Board of Trustees. It is generally understood that there will be two co-directors – one Kyrgyz and one international, responsible for administrative and academic matters, respectively. The Core Management Team will be supported by a secretary/translator and an administrative officer, both seconded by the Kyrgyz Republic. Until the definitive appointment of the two co-directors, the Academy is being run, as mentioned above, by the Co-ordinator and her Academic Advisor. During this interim period, the Academy's budget has been entrusted to the OSCE Centre in Bishkek.

The Advisory Board performs planning and consultation activities in support of the Board of Trustees and the Core Management Team. It develops curricula and advises on research and training projects, making recommendations and drafting documents for the other management bodies. The Advisory Board may establish special working groups to carry out specific projects. An example is the Curriculum Development Group (CDG) that is currently elaborating the Academy's masters programme curriculum. Such working groups will consist of representatives of the Academy and its national, regional and international partner institutions. The Advisory Board can currently call upon a pool of some 30 experts.

The Role of the Partners

The Academy's structure and activities are designed to allow donor countries and partner institutions to make use of and contribute to them flexibly according to need or ability. The Academy's management bodies and their activities have been deliberately arranged in a way that requires and provides for international co-operation. As already mentioned, this was one of the key political factors in encouraging many actors to support the establishment of the Academy.

The OSCE, interested participating States and the Academy's international academic partner institutions all contribute to defining the Academy's tasks and supervising its work. They also participate in all aspects of the work of the Academy's governing bodies.

The governments of Kyrgyzstan and the other countries involved as well as the other parties that support the work of the Academy make donations or contributions in kind towards maintaining the infrastructure and supporting the activities of the Academy. In the future, partner institutions may participate in exchanging students, lecturers and researchers. They will be provided with the opportunity of sending members of their academic staff and other experts to the Academy to perform specific projects or for long-

term management duties. They are invited to bring their own projects under the roof of the Academy or to instigate joint activities. OSCE institutions and field operations may commission and finance specific analyses, as well as training and education activities.

Having actively contributed to its establishment, the Academy's main international partner institutions in Hamburg, Geneva, The Hague and Stadtschlaining hope to demonstrate their comparative advantage by carrying out joint projects. They will also contribute resources to the Academy and will have the opportunity to enhance their own regional expertise.

The Inaugural Phase and the Issue of Sustainability

The establishment of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek was primarily the expression of the founders' political will. As a result, the Academy was set up before essential conceptual and organizational issues had been settled. A number of interrelated key questions were, at first, simply left open, among them that of who would constitute the Academy's founding members. Decisions had to be made on the form of the various management bodies, their respective responsibilities, and who would be represented on them. Further issues that had to be decided concerned the Academy's public profile, its legal form and the matter of legal responsibility and the accreditation of qualifications gained by students.

During the whole inaugural phase, the Academy's sole legal basis was the aforementioned Memorandum of Understanding between the Kyrgyz Ministry for Education and Culture and the OSCE Centre in Bishkek. In the meantime, the Academy was already undertaking its first activities. At the same time as these were gradually being built up, efforts had to be made to raise donations and find partners for academic co-operation. Further tasks included drafting statutory documents and outlining the masters programme, shaping the management bodies and recruiting the first staff. In all these areas, the opinions and sensibilities of the enormous number of parties involved and interested had to be considered.

The international co-operation during the Academy's establishment was an instructive experience in intercultural relations for everyone involved. In practical terms, discussions and joint activities revealed that perceptions of the nature of co-operation could vary enormously. It was necessary to learn to pay due attention to local traditions, for instance by paying personal respect to partners and senior officials in order to ensure they were positively predisposed to co-operate in achieving the Academy's purposes. It was also necessary to clarify precisely the degree to which the various parties involved saw working plans as merely expressions of intention or as constituting binding agreements. The partners also had to come to recognize the differing perceptions each had of matters such as time planning, urgency and the importance

of deadlines. In this manner, the inaugural phase already illustrated the benefits that could be derived from the Academy in terms of exploring cultural compatibilities between European and Central Asian partners.

In the meantime, the main concern of those who have supported and continue to support the idea of establishing the OSCE Academy in Bishkek is to ensure its long-term sustainability. Much of the necessary funding for the Academy's proposed starting budget has already been secured, largely through the OSCE's contribution for the year 2003 and money promised by Germany and Switzerland for 2004. Canada is also considering making a financial contribution. Even so, despite the securing of initial funding and the considerable personal and political goodwill mentioned already, the long-term success of the Academy's establishment is by no means guaranteed. Indeed, major obstacles remain to be overcome: First of all, the Kyrgyz founders will have to develop their own initiatives in order to run the Academy in a less dependent way than during the inaugural phase. In particular, they will have to persuade their regional neighbours to commit themselves to playing an active and long-term role in the Academy's activities and those of its international partners. They will also have to make sure that the OSCE remains actively involved. A key to the Academy's success will be its ability to provide high-quality academic services to the OSCE and its participating States. It will have to position itself as a leading provider of consulting, education and training services in the field of Central Asian security. This will mean taking active steps to market itself – something that is probably foreign to the self-understanding of most “knowledge industry” workers involved.