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The OSCE's Dilemma in Central Asia

Introduction

On declaring independence 15 years ago, the five Central Asian republics, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, were insufficiently prepared for the radical political, economic, and social transformation process. The "artificiality" of nation-state identities and borders that were largely the result of Stalinist nationalities policy led observers initially to assume that supranational identity patterns such as Islamism could gain momentum and increase the potential for conflict in Central Asia. However, these nation-state identities proved to possess more stability and sticking power than anticipated, and, where conflicts have arisen during the last 15 years, they have tended to remain in the domestic sphere, focusing on questions such as of the rule of law and the relationship between citizens and the state, social and economic development, and regional disintegration and the dominance of regional solidarity groups. The political disturbances in Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 that led to the overthrow of President Askar Akaev and the suppression of the revolt in Andijan by the Uzbek security forces in May of that year are just the most dramatic (and most visible, from a European perspective) manifestations of a growing crisis in Central Asia.

Although the accession of all five Central Asian states to the CSCE in 1992 was not without controversy, the argument that finally won the day was that an inclusive and integrationist policy with respect to *all* the former Soviet republics was a key means of overcoming the political and economic crises that came in the wake of the Soviet Union's collapse.

A critical look back on 14 years of OSCE dialogue with the five Central Asian states reveals a rather less rosy picture. Although, in the late 1990s, all five states were in favour of intensifying co-operation with the Organization, none of them acted in accordance with basic OSCE principles. This failure of compliance may in part be the result of a lack of resources and capacities; in recent years, however, a lack of political will has also become evident. In particular, all five republics exhibit grave deficits in the area of democratization, specifically with regard to the establishment of a multiparty system and free and fair elections – principles to which all participating States committed themselves at the CSCE's Copenhagen Conference in 1990. Turkmenistan's President-for-Life Saparmurat Niyazov – "Turkmenbashi the Great" – established a totalitarian dictatorship and a bizarre personality cult. In Uzbekistan, the security forces of the autocratic President Islam Karimov were not only heavy handed in suppressing unrest in Andijan in May 2005, killing hundreds of protestors, but have also generally acted to suppress that country's nascent

civil society. Tajikistan's President, Emomali Rakhmonov, consolidated his position against his former allies, damaging democratic development in the process. In December 2005, Kazakhstan's President, Nursultan Nazarbaev, was elected for a further six years with 92 per cent of the vote in a rigged election. In Kyrgyzstan, one year after Akaev's fall, the government of President Kurmanbek Bakiev and Prime Minister Felix Kulov is attempting to re-establish state authority in the face of disintegrative forces, some of which have close links to organized crime.

At the same time, the political parameters for the OSCE in Central Asia have fundamentally changed since 2001 – and not for the better. As a consequence of the 11 September 2001 attacks on the USA, this region, with its proximity to Afghanistan, took on increasing importance in the thinking of NATO and the European Union, and they gradually began to move into areas that were previously the OSCE's domain. In the politico-military dimension, NATO's Partnership for Peace programme was able to mobilize resources that the OSCE could only dream of. The participation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan in this programme from 1994 (Tajikistan was to follow in 2002) was part of a security policy reorientation, which, despite Russia's participation in the programme, promised limited guarantees against any Russian claim to regional hegemony. This realignment was given a further boost by the start of NATO operations in Afghanistan in 2001.

Something similar applies to the economic dimension, where the EU and its many institutions have considerable means at their disposal. For a long time, Central Asia was not a priority on the EU's agenda, but the events of 11 September 2001 as well as a growing interest in economic contacts with Kazakhstan also led to an – at first tentative – expansion of EU activities and institutions.

New strategic partnerships within the scope of the US "War on Terror" gave states such as Uzbekistan expanded room to manoeuvre – though this was only temporary, as we can see now. The dramatic deterioration in Uzbek-US relations following the Andijan crisis in May 2005, which eventually resulted in the closure of the US airbase Karshi-Khanabad ("K2"), led to a reorientation of Uzbek foreign policy, which spread gradually to other countries in the region. This can be seen, for instance, in China's growing political influence and efforts to increase the profile of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. At the same time, the autocratic governing elites in Central Asia are increasingly turning to Russia again, which is positioning itself as a guarantor of the status quo in the CIS area against further Colour Revolutions. Russia's "return" to Central Asia is particularly relevant to the OSCE, as Russia is the spokesperson for a group of CIS states (which also includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan) that has increasingly adopted a confrontational attitude towards the Organization. The

“crisis of the OSCE”¹ is thus also evident in Central Asia, where the Organization no longer provides an inclusive forum for dialogue, but rather a stage for acting out the dispute over alleged “double standards” in the treatment of the states “West” and “East of Vienna”.

Russia's Return to Central Asia and the Crisis of the OSCE

After becoming independent in 1991, the five Central Asian states sought, gradually and to varying degrees, to distance themselves from Russia. The Russian language, the *lingua franca* in Central Asia, was – at least officially and with different rates of success – suppressed in favour of national languages, national history was rewritten to define Russian (and later Soviet) dominance as colonialism. Moreover, the economic and social crises that followed independence, as well as the civil war in Tajikistan led many ethnic Russians to leave the region, a trend that continues to this day. While Moscow was able to maintain its political and military influence in Tajikistan, in particular, the other Central Asian republics disentangled their security policies from Russia to a greater or lesser extent.

The Orange Revolution in Ukraine, the Rose Revolution in Georgia, and the political unrest in Kyrgyzstan led to a significant change of direction, marked, above all, by the “return” of Moscow’s influence in the region. Russia has given strong warnings about further efforts to “export revolution” in the CIS area. Western NGOs, such as Freedom House and the Open Society Institute, but also the OSCE – and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in particular – were charged with supporting opposition movements in Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. The disillusionment and increasing criticism made by Russia and other CIS states over the evolution of the OSCE, and, particularly, its field missions, was made public as early as September 2003, when Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia condemned the asymmetrical distribution of the OSCE missions, the over-emphasis on the human dimension in the Organization’s programmes, and the interference in the domestic affairs of the participating States by OSCE institutions, and ODIHR in particular. As well as these criticisms, the four states made several proposals for reform, which would result in stronger control of missions and recruitment of personnel by the Permanent Council and a reduction in the length of mandates.²

The criticism continued, and, on 15 September 2004, the presidents of Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, and Uzbekistan reiterated key aspects of previous criticisms in what became known as the “Astana Appeal”. It argued that the politico-military dimension

1 Cf. Pál Dunay, *The OSCE in Crisis*, Chaillot Paper No. 88, Paris 2006.

2 Cf. On the Issue of Reform of OSCE Field Activities – A Food-for-Thought Paper, PC.DEL/986/03, 4 September 2003.

was the core element of the OSCE and should be strengthened, while the human dimension should be limited to freedom of movement, promotion of tourism, exchanges in science and technology, and exchanging and disseminating cultural values between participating States. Furthermore, field activities should refrain from monitoring the political situation and concentrate on the implementation of projects (in the economic dimension).³

The statements by Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov made in the *Financial Times* on 29 November 2004 and at the OSCE Ministerial Council in Sofia in December 2004 are evidence of a conditional interpretation of OSCE principles and an abandonment of the principles contained in the 1990 Copenhagen Document.⁴

The OSCE in Central Asia

The outbreak of civil war in Tajikistan in May 1992 led to the establishment of the first CSCE/OSCE mission in Central Asia in 1993, which was to work closely with the United Nations mission to assist Tajikistan in the development of rule of law, democracy, and human rights within the scope of post-conflict rehabilitation.⁵

In the following year, on the initiative of Uzbekistan's President Karimov, the CSCE/OSCE opened a Liaison Office for Central Asia in Tashkent. Regional developments, especially the success of Afghanistan's Taliban and the problems with political and economic reforms in Central Asia, led to a growth in US and European interest in Central Asia, and the OSCE offered itself as a suitable organization for strengthening co-operation. As a result of the security situation in Afghanistan and the emergence of militant groups in Central Asia (such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, IMU), the Central Asian states were also interested in expanding security-related co-operation. During 1998, the OSCE reached agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan to establish OSCE Centres in Almaty, Bishkek, and Ashgabad. The Liaison Office in Tashkent was expanded into a OSCE Centre in 2000 and the OSCE Mission to Tajikistan was renamed the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe in October 2002.

3 Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Information and Press Department, *Appeal of the CIS Member States to the OSCE Partners*, Astana, 15 September 2004 (unofficial translation from the Russian), at: http://www.in.mid.ru/brp_4.nsf/0/70f610ccd5b876ccc3256f100043db72?OpenDocument. The appeal, which was distributed electronically, was signed by eight CIS states, not including Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Turkmenistan. A summary can be found in: Pál Dunay cited above (Note 1), pp. 75f.

4 Cf. MC.DEL/61/04, 7 December 2004.

5 Cf. Johannes Reissner, *Bürgerkrieg in Tadschikistan. Ursachen, Akteure, Verlauf und Friedenschancen* [Civil War in Tajikistan. Causes, Actors, Events, and Chances for Peace], Ebenhausen 1997.

Compared to the OSCE's field presences in South-eastern Europe, the Centres in Central Asia appear modest. Despite the successive establishment of field offices in Kyrgyzstan (Osh) and Tajikistan (Khujand, Garm, Kulyab, Shartuz, and Kurgan-Tyube), the OSCE spent less than five per cent of its total budget (and only some 2.5 per cent of its budget for field activities) on its presences and programme activities in Central Asia. The growing interest, above all on the part of Western participating States, in the region together with the criticisms made by the Central Asian countries of the geographical asymmetry of the OSCE's activities in favour of South-eastern Europe led to an expansion of OSCE activities in Central Asia. The budget for the Centres rose from 4.5 million euros in 2001 to 11.1 million euros in 2005. In percentage terms, this means that the OSCE's activities in Central Asia accounted for 2.1 per cent of its total budget in 2001 and 6.5 per cent in 2005.⁶

Recent years have also seen an increase in both seconded international personnel and local employees. The largest Centre at present is Dushanbe with 17 international experts, followed by Bishkek with ten, Almaty and Ashgabad with six each, and the OSCE Project Co-ordinator's office in Tashkent – which replaced the Centre in Tashkent in July 2006⁷ – with three. However, it should be noted that some projects, such as the police project in Kyrgyzstan, also have additional seconded staff or directly employ other individuals on a contractual basis. The Centres also have a significant number of local employees without whose help it would be impossible to implement the OSCE's many projects.

The activities of the OSCE Centres in Central Asia are governed by mandates agreed between the host countries and the Organization. The mandates of the four Centres in Central Asia are all broadly similar at present, although the mandate of the Centre in Dushanbe contains a special clause on activities in the economic and environmental dimension (EED). Since July 2006, the Project Co-ordinator's office in Tashkent has had a very limited mandate restricting the OSCE's activities in Uzbekistan to project implementation. In general, the mandates sanction the promotion of the OSCE's principles in the host country, regional co-operation, activities in the three dimensions, co-operation with the various OSCE institutions, and the maintenance of contacts with local administrative structures, universities, research institutions, and NGOs. In addition, each mandate includes a paragraph stating that the OSCE Chairmanship may agree upon further tasks together with the host country.⁸ The human dimension, i.e. supporting the states in establishing democratic institutions and strengthening civil society structures, was

6 Cf. OSCE, Permanent Council, Decision No. 463, Year 2001 Budget Revision, PC.DEC/463, 21 December 2001, and OSCE, Permanent Council, Decision No. 715, OSCE 2005 Unified Budget Revision, PC.DEC/715, 19 January 2006.

7 Cf. OSCE, Permanent Council, Decision No. 734, OSCE Project Co-ordination in Uzbekistan, PC.DEC/734, 30 June 2006.

8 The texts of the mandates may be read at the websites of the various Centres, at: <http://www.osce.org>.

an early priority. In this field, the Central Asian countries had made little progress since independence – e.g. compared to Eastern Europe.

In theory, the loosely worded and open-ended mandate arrangements create an opportunity for interpretation and the flexible reaction to regional and country-specific problems. However, this has led, and continues to lead, to an apparently arbitrary expansion of the portfolio, which has caused problems for the consistent presentation of OSCE activities to the outside world, leading to problems regarding the way the Organization is perceived by the governments and civil societies of host countries. Moreover, politically motivated expansions of programme activities did not necessarily entail that the OSCE and its field operations are in possession of the necessary expertise or personnel. Local project implementation capacities were also often overestimated, resulting in overstretch of the resources of both host governments and civil society infrastructures in Central Asia.

In Central Asia today, the OSCE performs a wide variety of activities in all three dimensions, ranging from police projects (Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan), strengthening the media (all Central Asian states apart from Turkmenistan), mine clearance (Tajikistan, in co-operation with the UN), an Islamic-secular dialogue project (Tajikistan), the regional OSCE Academy in Bishkek, and support for land reform in Tajikistan, via the promotion of medium-sized enterprises (in all Central Asian states), to monitoring threats to the environment (also in all republics). In addition, ODIHR observes elections and referendums in four of the five Central Asian states (there is no election monitoring in Turkmenistan). The OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) has visited Kyrgyzstan several times in recent years, as well as Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.

The scope of activities and the successful implementation of projects depend upon the nature of the problems in each country and the willingness of the host state to co-operate. Clear differences can be observed among the Central Asian countries. Overall, as already indicated, the conditions for the OSCE in Central Asia have deteriorated considerably. In parallel to the existential discussion on the future of the OSCE – which is not always being carried out in a constructive way by Russia in particular – the five Central Asian states have progressively reduced the OSCE's scope for action. Some states demand that projects be submitted to the relevant ministry by the Centres before implementation; foreign ministries have attempted to monitor all of an OSCE Centre's contacts with political actors; and, occasionally – most recently in relation to the extension of the mandate of the Centre in Tashkent – Uzbekistan successfully demanded that the OSCE Centre be downsized into a project co-ordination office with a limited portfolio.⁹

In Kyrgyzstan, during the events of March, the OSCE was able to play a positive and stabilizing role. This was particularly true with regard to the preparations and implementation of the presidential elections in July 2005.

9 Cf. PC.DEC/734, cited above (Note 7).

Nonetheless, this did not mean that the Organization became a central political actor in the course of the crisis. Russia showed no interest in involving the OSCE in working to settle the conflict and stabilize the situation, while the key donor organizations, known as the “Donor Group”, were able to exert far more influence on the government. The revolution in Kyrgyzstan and the unstable political situation that has prevailed since March 2005, in which the government has only been able to assert its central authority in the most rudimentary fashion against regional groups, provides the OSCE with a relatively large amount of freedom and enables a broad range of activities. The promotion of civil society structures and independent media are integral and vital aspects of its activities, while the police project, in particular, aims at strengthening state structures within a democratic framework. However, it is questionable whether providing training and technical equipment to police officers is incentive enough to limit the endemic corruption and establish a relationship of trust between citizens and police as long as the recruitment process lacks transparency and pay is too low.

The Kyrgyz government is currently discussing a fundamental constitutional reform that would adjust the role of the president, the prime minister, and the parliament. The OSCE could bring its indisputable expertise to bear on this, but the opportunity for it to make a constructive contribution is called into question by the government’s tight schedule.

Fuelled by its considerable oil and gas reserves, Kazakhstan has experienced largely positive social and economic development. Nonetheless, the results have fallen short of expectations and have not been translated into political change.¹⁰ The opposition is still subject to suppression by the security forces, the media is regulated by the state, and the presidential election won by Nazarbaev in December 2005 with nearly 92 per cent of the vote failed to fulfil a number of OSCE commitments.¹¹

Although Kazakhstan has aligned itself with the OSCE’s critics, it is also the first Central Asian country to apply for the OSCE Chairmanship for 2009. The success or failure of this candidacy will be decisive in determining the OSCE’s future role in Central Asia. If Kazakhstan is granted the Chairmanship, it could strengthen the integration of Central Asia within the OSCE and even lead to improvements in terms of compliance with OSCE principles. Nonetheless, given the deficit in the area of democratic reforms, there is a danger that Kazakhstan could misuse the OSCE Chairmanship as a “democratic fig leaf”, further damaging the Organization’s already tattered reputation. A rejection of Kazakhstan’s application, however, might have considerably more dramatic repercussions, by fuelling the fires of the already

10 Cf. Martha Brill Olcott, *Central Asia’s Second Chance*, Washington 2005.

11 Cf. OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Republic of Kazakhstan, Presidential Election, 4 December 2005, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report*, Warsaw, 21 February 2006.

heated debate over the OSCE's alleged "double standards". It remains to be seen how the participating States will solve this dilemma.

Of the five Central Asian states, Tajikistan was the least well prepared for independence in 1991, and, within a year, regional conflicts over resources, political ideologies, and power had developed into a brutal civil war, devastating the country between 1992 and 1997. The OSCE worked closely with the UN in the area of post-conflict rehabilitation, which contributed a great deal to the stabilization of a country whose closeness to Afghanistan and Uzbekistan continues to cause problems. The Organization carries out a wide variety of activities in Tajikistan, ranging from mine clearance to strengthening civil society structures, although it should be noted that the Tajik government has also increasingly restricted the OSCE's scope of operations and is not complying with its commitments with respect to democratic development. This is directly linked to the consolidation of the political position of President Rakhmonov, who has achieved pre-eminence over his former allies and regional rivals during the past three years. In 2003-2004, he put an end to the tentative development of civil society and the media sector, and eliminated his political rivals – with the more or less active involvement of Russia – while presidential associates brought the country's limited resources under their control.

The reaction of the security forces to alleged Islamic extremists, above all, to adherents of the "Party of Islamic Liberation" (*Hizb ut-Tahrir al-Islami*), is alarming, and is becoming increasingly reminiscent of the disproportionate action taken by Uzbek security forces against similar groups. The OSCE reacted to the growing tension between state power and religiously motivated groups by initiating a project, *23 Seminars on Law and Religion*, that encouraged local representatives of both camps to come to the table. This was an innovation for the region.

The OSCE/ODIHR did not monitor the 2003 referendum, as the preparations had already revealed fundamental failures to comply with standards. The assessment of the parliamentary elections in February 2005 revealed marginal improvements compared to the 2000 elections. Nonetheless, it came to the conclusion that the "parliamentary elections in Tajikistan failed to meet many of the key OSCE commitments for democratic elections contained in the 1990 Copenhagen Document, and they were also not conducted fully in accordance with domestic law".¹² Given the repression of potential opposition candidates, many observers expect no major improvement for the presidential elections due in November 2006.

In the last instance, the political will and willingness of each host country to co-operate with the OSCE are decisive in determining the activities of each Centre. Since the freedom of the OSCE Centre in Turkmenistan was

12 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Republic of Tajikistan, Parliamentary Elections, 27 February and 13 March 2005, OSCE/ODIHR Election Observation Mission Final Report*, Warsaw, 31 May 2005, p. 1.

significantly restricted in recent years and the OSCE's mandate in Uzbekistan was reduced dramatically with its transformation into a mere project co-ordination office, the question should be raised of whether it is worth maintaining OSCE presences in Ashgabad and Tashkent. The desire to maintain a willingness to engage in dialogue and to observe political and social developments are certainly powerful arguments for the OSCE's presence in both states, in which many participating States have no diplomatic presence of their own. Given the blatant violation of fundamental OSCE principles, and the ongoing refusal to co-operate with the OSCE and its institutions (such as followed the Andijan events in Uzbekistan or the invocation of the "Moscow mechanism" after the attempted assassination of Turkmenistan's President Niyazov), those participating States that remain committed to OSCE principles should reconsider the extent to which the Organization's activities in these states damage its reputation and credibility, while drawing attention to its powerlessness.

The OSCE has only very limited means of applying sanctions to participating States for non-compliance or violation of OSCE principles. One of the few instruments in the human dimension is the Moscow mechanism, which was agreed upon by the participating States in 1991.¹³

The Moscow mechanism was activated by ten OSCE participating States on 20 December 2002 when, following an alleged assassination attempt on Turkmenistan's President Niyazov, Turkmen security forces unleashed a massive wave of repression. Turkmenistan refused categorically to co-operate with OSCE Rapporteur Emmanuel Decaux, blocked his entry into the country, and was unwilling to nominate a second expert. The report of February 2003 pulls no punches in documenting massive violations of OSCE principles by Turkmenistan, at the same time, however, it records the OSCE's lack of a means to impose sanctions, as the report remained without consequences.¹⁴ The several visits of the HCNM to Turkmenistan were likewise ineffective, and the situation for the Uzbek and Russian minorities in Turkmenistan continues to deteriorate.

Following the suppression of the revolt in Andijan by Uzbek security forces on 13 May 2005, the Western participating States, in particular, were vociferous in calling for an independent OSCE inquiry into the events, something that was rejected by Tashkent. Although ODIHR released a report based on interviews with Uzbek refugees in Kara-Suu, Kyrgyzstan,¹⁵ and re-

13 Cf. Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension of the CSCE, Moscow, 3 October 1991, in: Arie Bloed (ed.), *The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Analysis and Basic Documents, 1972-1993*, Dordrecht 1993, pp. 605-629.

14 Cf. OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE Rapporteur's Report on Turkmenistan. By Prof. Emmanuel Decaux, ODIHR.GAL/15/03, 12 March 2003.

15 Cf. OSCE, Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Preliminary Findings on the Events in Andijan, Uzbekistan, 13 May 2005*, Warsaw, 20 June 2005.

ported on the subsequent trial of the alleged leaders of the rebellion,¹⁶ the participating States – probably remembering the debacle of Turkmenistan in 2002 – refrained from activating the Moscow mechanism.

In recent months, the Uzbek government has imprisoned the remaining opposition politicians, while closing the offices of many international NGOs as well as the Office of the UNHCR in Tashkent. Following the events in Andijan, the OSCE pressed for an independent inquiry, which put it on a collision course with the government. While the Centre's mandate was extended for six months in December 2005 until June 2006, the Uzbek government finally demanded successfully that the Centre be transformed into a project co-ordination office as of July 2006.¹⁷

What Strategy for Central Asia?

For a long time, no consistent strategy for Central Asia could be detected on the part of the OSCE. Only during the Portuguese Chairmanship in 2002 was a – still rather vague – formulation of general strategic guidelines for the OSCE presences in Central Asia developed by the Conflict Prevention Centre in the OSCE Secretariat. This covered balancing the dimensions, combating terrorism, assistance in developing political and administrative structures, promoting regional co-operation, and improving co-ordination with donor states.¹⁸

Discussion of the OSCE's aims and strategy in Central Asia has been encouraged by the broad scope of the Organization's activities in the region, the ongoing criticisms brought by several participating States, and the events in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan during 2005. As part of the OSCE regional ambassadors' conference held in Bishkek in April 2006, the Conflict Prevention Centre of the OSCE Secretariat produced a strategy paper that proposed a return to core competencies, namely the identification of a region's conflict potential and the work of conflict prevention, and outlined four priorities for the OSCE's work in Central Asia:

- Promoting and supporting political pluralism, the development of democracy with citizen participation, the implementation of human rights standards, civil society, and media freedom.
- Promoting and supporting the rule of law and good governance.
- Promoting just framework conditions for social and economic development, especially via strengthened regional economic co-operation.

16 Cf. Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Report from the OSCE/ODIHR Trial Monitoring in Uzbekistan – September/October 2005*, Warsaw, 21 April 2006.

17 Cf. OSCE, Permanent Council, Decision No. 714, Extension of the Mandate of the OSCE Centre in Tashkent, PC.DEC/714, 22 December 2005, and PC.DEC/734, cited above (Note 7).

18 Cf. CIO.GAL/15/02, 14 March 2002.

- Promoting regional co-operation aimed at meeting common challenges in the field of regional security (trafficking in human beings, terrorism, border disputes, and environmental dangers).¹⁹

Given the current institutional crisis and the declining willingness to cooperate of the Central Asian states, we must wait and see whether the OSCE will be able to pursue its strategy and its return to core elements of comprehensive security proactively or will be forced to act merely in reaction to events.

The accusation that the OSCE concentrates above all on the human dimension and the strengthening of civil society structures in Central Asia is largely inaccurate, as strictly separating the three dimensions is not possible with regard to many activities and many projects rely on dialogue between state and civil society actors. The police project in Kyrgyzstan, for instance, comprises elements of both the politico-military and human dimensions, while support for the media is also given to pro-government publications and news agencies.

It is not only in Central Asia that the OSCE's economic dimension is underrepresented, and the Organization has not yet succeeded in developing a coherent strategy for this side of its activities. In view of current developments, it cannot be expected that the OSCE participating States will provide adequate financial and human resources to expand its profile in this area. The Organization has, however, failed to identify complementary niches that were not occupied by other multilateral (World Bank, European Bank for Reconstruction and Development) and bilateral donors. For instance, the World Bank has no power to make political evaluations of individual host countries. This is an area where the OSCE – assuming the appropriate reforms in national legislation – could make a contribution. The relative success of the transformation process in Eastern Europe has above all been determined by the fact that OSCE activities in Eastern Europe and the Balkans have been accompanied by a variety of economic (especially via the European Union) and security-related (via NATO) incentives, which were offered as “rewards” for implementing OSCE commitments. These incentives were (and still are) not present in Central Asia.

The Central Asian states' frequent calls for the OSCE's politico-military dimension to be strengthened are justified in terms of the troublesome security situation in Afghanistan. The Central Asian governments regularly refer to the threat of “Islamic terrorism” and have legitimized the sometimes disproportionate reaction of their security forces to putative extremist groups with reference to the “War on Terrorism”. Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, in particular, have adopted a highly problematic strategy that relies exclusively on the security forces and ultimately generates more conflict potential than it

19 Cf. *The OSCE in Central Asia: A Framework for Action*, a working paper prepared as part of the OSCE regional ambassadors' conference in Central Asia, Bishkek, April 2006.

removes. The reaction of the Uzbek delegation to the events in Andijan clearly shows the problems with the use of the concept of “terrorism”.²⁰ Of course, it should be noted that this is also a controversial topic among participating States “West of Vienna”.

As an inclusive organization, the OSCE has already reacted to the criticism of the Central Asian participating States and has rethought its involvement in Central Asia. The core of the Central Asia strategy of the Conflict Prevention Centre in the OSCE Secretariat, i.e. the return to early warning, conflict prevention, and crisis management, attests to an effort to strengthen the OSCE’s profile in Central Asia. Developments in the region in recent years have shown that the security of the population of the five Central Asian states is threatened less by external conflicts than by internal struggles relating to rule of law, democratization, relations between state and citizen, and social development. Against this background, the discussion of “double standards” and the adaptation of OSCE principles – especially those contained in the Copenhagen Document – to different cultural milieus is a troublesome development.

Last but not least, the Organization’s readiness to maintain its presence in Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan with mandates that make a mockery of OSCE principles is further undermining its credibility among major parts of Central Asian civil society.

20 Cf. Statement by the Delegation of the Republic of Uzbekistan at the Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, 19 May 2005, PC.DEL/402/05, 20 May 2005.