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A Sustainable Stabilization Policy in and for Central Asia

The OSCE Central Asian States

In January 1992, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan became "participating States" in the CSCE, which was renamed the OSCE in 1995. Whether you give a detailed evaluation of their participation in the OSCE from the view of these five states themselves or from the perspective of the OSCE as a whole, one thing is clear: The Central Asian states and the OSCE have made continual progress in their efforts towards comprehensive integration. Central Asian OSCE States' interest in dynamic improvement of their co-operation with the OSCE is the driving force behind this process. However, one thing should be made plain from the start, the five OSCE States in Central Asia each have their own individual history with and within the OSCE.

It all began in January 1992, four weeks after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. There was no clear consensus among CSCE "participating States" on whether to allow "admission" to the newly independent states. However two arguments gained acceptance against the objections that these states were not geographically a part of Europe and therefore could not be part of the CSCE: Since they had belonged to the Soviet Union, the territories of these states were part of the CSCE area from the start; thus it followed that these states should be *integrated* into the CSCE and not segregated (inclusion versus exclusion) in order to assist them in solving foreseeable problems after the fall of the Soviet Union. With this view towards co-operative security, the participants of the Prague CSCE Council of Ministers (January 1992) made the decision to admit all Soviet Union successor states to the Conference. Simultaneously they worked out a programme "of co-ordinated support to such States, through which appropriate diplomatic, academic, legal and administrative expertise and advice on CSCE matters could be made available".¹

This was the starting point of a dual-track process of increasing integration and co-operation. Step-by-step the Central Asian states developed their active collaboration in the CSCE, in particular by assigning Permanent Representatives to the OSCE bodies in Vienna. The OSCE Chairmen-in-Office established a tradition of making regular visits to the five capitals of the Central Asian partners. The increasingly intensive work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the Office for Democratic Institutions and

1 Prague Meeting of the CSCE Council, 30-31 January 1992, in: Arie Bloed (Ed.), *The Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe. Analysis and Basic Documents, 1972-1993*, Dordrecht/Boston/London 1993, pp. 821-839, here: p. 826.

Human Rights (ODIHR) and later that of the Representative on Freedom of the Media strengthened the dialogue and made co-operation with the Central Asian states in each area of their performance more concrete.

Clear evidence of an intensification of the co-operation between the OSCE and the Central Asian OSCE States became visible through various forms of OSCE on-the-spot presence.

In Tajikistan, it was primarily the United Nations that were responsible for efforts to arrive at a solution to the bloody civil war, which broke out in 1992 (approximately 30.000 dead). However the OSCE has had a Mission in Dushanbe since 1993, which, in co-ordination with the UN Mission, concentrates predominantly on the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. In Uzbekistan the OSCE Liaison Office in Central Asia was set up in Tashkent in mid-1994 at the suggestion of President Islam Karimov. The continual increase in personnel in this Liaison Office is a reflection of the growing interest of all states in Central Asia in more intensive co-operation with the OSCE. The next move towards developing these co-operative efforts came from the United States. In a speech he held in Berlin in January 1998, President Bill Clinton tried to enlist support for an OSCE Central Asia (and Caucasus) initiative. Because this also reflected the desire of the OSCE States in Central Asia, "OSCE Centres" were established in Almaty, Ashgabad and Bishkek during 1998. Since then the OSCE has been represented in all Central Asian states on a continual basis. These "offices" are relatively small with a total of less than 30 international mission members. However despite limited personnel, the OSCE representations in Central Asia have shown once again that a field presence is an indispensable prerequisite for comprehensive and dynamic co-operation. At the beginning of 2000 the OSCE Mission in Dushanbe opened an additional branch office in Khujand (in northern Tajikistan) and the OSCE Office in Bishkek acquired a branch office in Osh (in southern Kyrgyzstan).

The OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna plays a vital role in building closer relations between the OSCE and the OSCE States in Central Asia. All OSCE institutions report regularly to this body on their co-operation with the Central Asian states. This is where all OSCE States hold necessary political consultations and where a consensus is built setting the course for the OSCE in Central Asia. In particular the visits to Vienna by the Presidents of Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan as well as the foreign ministers of Central Asian states have led to more in-depth political consultations within the Permanent Council.

A considerable increase in opportunities for co-operation particularly in the years 1998/99 made clear however that common considerations on the part of both the Central Asian states and the OSCE were necessary to be able to develop a strategy for further co-operation. In preparation for this, during the summer of 1999, in my position as Personal Representative of the Norwegian OSCE Chairmanship, I drafted a report to be submitted to the OSCE Perma-

ment Council.² When in November 1999 the Presidents of the Central Asian states (Turkmenistan, however, represented by its foreign minister) met for the first time with the OSCE Chairman-in-Office on the periphery of the OSCE Summit Meeting in Istanbul, they conferred on the results of strategy discussions held up to that point. The main components for further co-operation were then established in the Istanbul Summit Declaration.³

The Austrian Chair has made increasing co-operation with the OSCE partners in Central Asia one of the focal points of its programme for the year 2000. The OSCE Secretary General, Ambassador Ján Kubiš, who has had many years of wide-ranging experience in Central Asia, was appointed Personal Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office for Central Asia. His appointment is especially welcome because it will bring new impulses to co-operation with Central Asian OSCE participating States without having to create added OSCE structures with new co-ordination requirements and additional costs.

Challenges

All states in Central Asia and their populations are faced with special challenges. One must remember that the term "Central Asia", which specifically defines the area comprising the current states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, first came into use after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. From a (Western) European view, these states seem to have barely any differences between them. However if you travel from country to country, you will find the distinctive features of each of the five countries in this region are almost more prominent than their common features. At a first glance this is all the more surprising given the numerous common problems and challenges confronting all five states. Nonetheless these problems do take on different forms in each state. And to underline each individual state's identity, single states deliberately describe these problems in a very differentiated manner. The most important challenges are as follows:

- lack of predecessor states which could bequeath a state identity to the current states;
- numerous minorities and in some states numerically large minorities;
- imprecise demarcation of boundaries and in critical zones no demarcation whatsoever;
- unsolved distribution issues, especially in the management of water resources;

2 CIO.GAL/58/99.

3 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Istanbul Summit Declaration, Istanbul, November 1999, reprinted in this volume, pp. 413-424, here: p. 416.

- growing economic and ecological problems and the social concerns related to them;
- costly and politically difficult entry into world markets for natural gas and crude oil, the most important resources for economic development;
- the lack of traditions in democracy and the rule of law;
- calling the secular state into question;
- international terrorism, violent extremism, organized crime, trafficking in drugs and weapons;
- geopolitical position - point of intersection for the strategic interests of the Russian Federation, the USA, Turkey, China and Iran.

A particular challenge is the proximity of all Central Asian states to the conflict in Afghanistan which is yet unresolved. In most of the capitals of the region this is considered the biggest and most pressing security risk. It is common knowledge that drug trafficking is cultivated by Afghanistan. But also active international terrorism in the region and initiatives promoting Islamic fundamentalism have roots in Afghanistan. This was again made clear in January 1999 with the assassination attempt on President Karimov in Tashkent and during the autumn of 1999 when a group of terrorists poured into southern Kyrgyzstan. If, in addition, one takes into consideration the civil war in Tajikistan, which caused the country immeasurable damages, as well as the developments in Chechnya, the apprehension in the region is justified. Central Asian states have been disappointed that those states with global influence as well as the large international organizations in view of the complex situation in Afghanistan have hesitated to commit themselves persistently to a solution. Moreover, for political and socio-economic reasons, terrorists and fundamentalists in Central Asia find themselves in an environment, which is favourable to their objectives. Instituting firm measures against terrorists is a special challenge during this phase, in which the preparation for lasting stability is mainly dependent on the development of human rights and the rule of law. As the US Secretary of State, Madeleine Albright, pointed out on her visit to the region in April 2000, one of the most dangerous temptations for a government fighting terrorism is to react with "heavy-handed" measures which result in violating the rights of innocent citizens. However looking at the situation from a distance one must admit that it is easier to explain terrorism than to bring terrorists under control. It is part of terrorist strategy to press a state founded on the rule of law to its limits. There are a sufficient number of examples of this in Western Europe as proof.

The Fergana Valley, where the most difficult problems of the region are aggravated by extreme overpopulation, deserves a special remark. In this most fertile as well as highly industrialized region in Central Asia, the common features and the rivalries of a long and turbulent history have become intertwined with the socio-economic problems of the present day. Even the centralism and repression of the Soviet epoch were not able to quell ever-recur-

ring confrontations between ethnic groups despite brutal intervention in these conflicts.

Some of the aforementioned challenges imply a risk spectrum, which must be confronted with policies directed towards prevention. The willingness of the OSCE and OSCE States with particular influence to commit themselves to meeting these challenges can only be mobilized if the risks involved are made apparent. On the other hand, the Central Asian states understandably do not have any interest in being labelled as a "crisis region"; unquestionably (private) investors tend to keep wide berth of a crisis area. In an effort to discourage a crisis image, it has been pointed out in Central Asia that after independence it was a widely spread opinion that minority issues would tear the new Central Asian states apart, but that this warning was justified only for Tajikistan, which had been shaped by a specific clan structure. In all the other Central Asian states minorities and governments were able to avoid uncontrollable developments.

Avenues to Comprehensive Security

Given these challenges in their totality as well as their interdependency a view of the situation emerges that is marked by astonishing complexity. The understandable desire to create convincing and fast-working strategies can hardly be fulfilled even at the drawing-board level. It is all the more important that all OSCE States orient policies in and for the states of the region towards common and comprehensive security. Even in view of tremendous challenges, the OSCE Heads of State or Government explicitly endorsed this ambitious goal at the Summit Meeting in Istanbul (November 1999) in the Charter for European Security.⁴ Thus it is right to ask the question in the capitals of Central Asian states how the OSCE can contribute to progress towards comprehensive security also in Central Asia. OSCE representatives are being reminded with growing emphasis that in their efforts to achieve comprehensive security they are to "address the human, economic, political and military dimensions of security as an integral whole".⁵

Strengthening the Human Dimension

For the OSCE, human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy, and the rule of law are the core of comprehensive security. This corresponds with the institutional experience of the CSCE and the OSCE since the inception of the

4 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Charter for European Security, Istanbul, November 1999, reprinted in this volume, pp. 425-443, here: pp. 427-428.

5 Ibid., p. 428.

CSCE process in the Helsinki Final Act (1 August 1975).⁶ The "power of the ideas of the Helsinki Final Act" as is stated in the Paris Charter (21 November 1990)⁷ has put an end to the confrontation between East and West. And since the Charter of Paris the human dimension has proved to be the indispensable basis for effective efforts to prevent conflicts and manage crises in the OSCE area.

The operative institutions of the OSCE in the area of human security have continually expanded their co-operation with the Central Asian states. The *High Commissioner on National Minorities* has in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, and especially in Kyrgyzstan had discussions with political leaders and with representatives of numerous minorities. During these he made use of his extensive experience in the development of pragmatic solutions for minority issues and contributed to their implementation through seminars and co-operation also with non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The *Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights* has accompanied the transition processes in the Central Asian states with a wealth of activities covering a whole range of tasks. With Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan further co-operation with the ODIHR has been established in extensive Memoranda of Understanding. During the last twelve months ODIHR has engaged in particularly important activities. They have followed elections while giving advice on and supporting the development of democratic electoral laws and electoral procedures and they have taken part in intensive election monitoring or offered the presence of experts. In view of the limited developments in the freedom of the press, the *OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media* has made visits to all the countries of Central Asia, some more than once. Moreover the *OSCE Mission to Tajikistan* and the *OSCE Offices and Centres* in the other Central Asian states have made the human dimension a focal point of their work. Their continued presence in the region facilitates a realistic differentiated evaluation of problems in the area of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Based on this concrete foundation, they hold a continual dialogue with government and parliament as well as with NGOs and individual citizens.

In 1999, the Central Asian states approved the establishment of several OSCE Offices. This as well as the Memoranda of Understanding with ODIHR again made clear that the OSCE States in this region are interested in more intense co-operation with the OSCE in the human dimension area. The Central Asian states are in fundamental agreement with the OSCE that there are connections between the development of this area and increasing stability. During the good eight years since their independence, the Central Asian states have achieved a certain degree of progress different in each country.

6 Final Act of Helsinki. Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Helsinki, 1 August 1975, in: Bloed (Ed.), cited above (Note 1), pp. 141-217.

7 Charter of Paris for a New Europe, Paris, 21 November 1990, in: Bloed (Ed.), cited above (Note 1), pp. 537-566, here: p. 537.

However on the whole this progress has been modest and coincides increasingly with retrograde steps and setbacks. The OSCE works in an environment where serious and to some extent systematic violations of human rights occur. However this can only lead to the conclusion that efforts towards dialogue and co-operation should be further intensified.

As has been the case in all the successor states to the Soviet Union which came into being after a long period under an authoritarian regime, it has been a balancing act for the international organizations to further the dialogue on human rights and to develop and implement their projects. The right amount of understanding for the specific problems of the "transitional phase" must be combined with differentiated but unambiguous critique when countries do not conform to the OSCE standards accepted by all Central Asian states, or when countries violate human rights and fundamental freedoms, and do not follow or deliberately deviate from the fundamental rules of democracy and the rule of law. OSCE partners in Central Asia do not as a rule cast doubts on OSCE standards. However emphatic questions have been raised on issues like whether, in light of the historical realities in Central Asia, democratization can be implemented according to the "Westminster model". And often the widely spread opinion held in other regions of Asia is referred to: i.e. it is impossible to implement "good governance" commensurate with human rights standards as long as citizens have not yet grasped its meaning. Then usually attention is drawn to the fact that it is of utmost importance that the outbreak of chaos "similar to that of other CIS countries" be prevented. One aspect of the balancing act would be responding to these arguments decisively by promoting lasting stability through more and farther-reaching reforms and not by postponing reforms.

Behind the arguments of Central Asian states, eager to increase understanding for their difficult situation, is clearly also a keen interest in avoiding a reputation of not moving closer to OSCE standards. Particularly these "young" states are seeking international reputation; it would certainly be damaged if they were to be caught in the role of being the OSCE outsiders. But this also involves more tangible interests. For the European Union (particularly within the framework of the partnership and co-operation agreements), for the international financial institutions and for the United Nations, the resolve and the determination towards "good governance" are important criteria when these organizations make their decisions on whether to offer financial support. The same is true for the majority of individual donors involved in bilateral transactions - although one does hear from reliable sources in Central Asia that the OSCE places a stronger emphasis on maintaining human rights and fundamental freedoms than some of its leading participating States do in their bilateral relations.

Individual OSCE States in Central Asia are showing varying degrees of preparedness to implement perceptible improvements in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. However, the intensity of the dialogue

and the broad spectrum of assistance in creating rule-of-law and democratic institutions, especially the numerous and differentiated activities in the area of elections, show that there is potential for progress in all Central Asian states. Where in specific areas new approaches are being fostered in a professional and sensitive manner a new trend in the right direction is emerging. Promoting the work of NGOs plays an important role here. Specifically NGOs working on environmental protection demonstrate that there are citizens ready to engage themselves and who cautiously extend their activities in such a way that these cannot be easily categorized as "anti-government" hence running the risk of repression.

For a *sustainable* stabilization policy in Central Asia, the OSCE not only must continue the existing dialogue and co-operation in the human dimension, but also extend them according to the willingness on the part of single Central Asian states to participate in this process. The political leaders of Central Asia must be encouraged, despite all existing problems, to initiate dynamic reform processes and they should not be left alone in doing it.

Taking Other Dimensions into Account

The further intensification of co-operation achieved in the human dimension cannot be separated from the necessity that the OSCE objective of *comprehensive* security be taken seriously. Especially because the human dimension must remain the key area in OSCE contributions to lasting stability, the OSCE must at all costs avoid taking "one-dimensional" actions, i.e. direct its interests *exclusively* towards human rights, democracy and the rule of law. However especially since the Charter of Paris, the OSCE has had difficulties in finding its role in other areas of comprehensive security (economic, environmental, political and military). The Organization cannot simply look for the largest number of possible OSCE fields of action to enable it to raise the OSCE flag and then not be in a position to make a significant contribution in these fields. The OSCE does not have the resources available to finance large economic or environmental projects. Rather it must recall its strengths as a predominantly political organization. From this perspective the OSCE could become actively involved in a number of critical areas engaging as a catalyst to attract attention and gain support.

The selection of these areas should be based on the priorities of the Central Asian states, the utilization of the comparative OSCE strengths and the proximity to central OSCE goals. In view of this, certain areas deserve special attention.

To be able to solve the urgent economic and social problems in the Central Asian states, the development and realization of a market economy fitting for the Central Asian countries is of decisive importance. The OSCE can help to create the rule-of-law institutions necessary for a market economy. These in-

clude democratically legitimized parliaments acting with transparency, independent and effective courts as well as fair administrative bodies not riddled with corruption. The more highly developed a civil society becomes, the more attractive a country becomes for investors whether domestic or foreign. Issues surrounding the utilization of water resources are playing an ever-greater role in Central Asia. The ecological catastrophe in and around the Aral Sea is just one element of an extraordinarily complex challenge with a considerable potential for conflict. Before the Central Asian states became independent, water utilization issues were the responsibility of the Soviet central government and were decided in Moscow - or not decided at all. After their independence the five Central Asian states had to develop methods towards common solutions through international co-operation. In the interim a number of national, regional as well as bilateral and multilateral international platforms, plans and projects have emerged to solve the problem of water utilization. One thing that is certainly not needed is yet one more international organization wanting to have a say in this subject. However support of the efforts to link *already existing* approaches and strengthening them through additional political impulses by consciously focusing on "conflict prevention" could contribute to a solution of the problems. Approaches to this type of an integrating function for the OSCE require careful preparation. Essential interests of Central Asian states being affected, any promising approach has to take into account the varying interests trying to balance them from the very beginning.

Another field where the OSCE could make a contribution would be finding solutions in fighting drug trafficking. The leading organization in this area is the UNODCCP (United Nations Office for Drug Control and Crime Prevention). This organization as well as the Central Asian states would very much welcome the support of the OSCE on this critical issue. The main point would be to give additional political impulses. The OSCE Offices in Central Asia could give practical support on a case-by-case basis.

Thus water management and drug trafficking are good examples of an opportunity for more extensive OSCE involvement because solutions to these problems must be achieved through intensive regional co-operation. The interest in regional co-operation varies from state to state in Central Asia and is not yet particularly pronounced. Although there is no lack of regional meetings and wordy declarations, many initiatives have gotten bogged down before they could be implemented. In some Central Asian capitals the development of a national identity and the demonstration of one's own relative strength are prioritized to the extent that regional co-operation is not completely excluded, but rather regarded as an exception to the rule. Because of the potential regional co-operation has for the development of common security, it is important that the OSCE encourage it and demonstrate its effectivity in the implementation of concrete projects.

The military aspects of security are another interesting field for co-operation with the OSCE States in Central Asia. There are several plans for confidence-building measures originating from initiatives in the region. The OSCE should continue to give its support for these measures with political advice and expertise.

Using Limited Resources more Effectively

It would be unrealistic to draft a stabilization policy in and for Central Asia based on a massive increase of the funds earmarked for this purpose by the international community. However one could achieve more active involvement on the part of states and international organizations especially when it is made clear that existing opportunities are used effectively.

Moreover the OSCE could make more effective use of its own instruments and the very limited resources it does have at its disposal. The OSCE structures and instruments created for operational measures, as is the case in other international organizations, were not developed systematically. New institutions sprouted in a kind of "rank growth" as reactions to concrete challenges or specific suggestions from individual participating States in response to those issues on which a consensus could be reached. Organizational and structural weaknesses have now become visible in the implementation of the more important and long-term tasks, like those in Central Asia; however these tasks also offer a chance to introduce the necessary corrections.

The main thing in Central Asia will be to achieve clearer coherency of all activities "under the OSCE umbrella". Thus the OSCE Chair is in the process of planning a very flexible yearly framework programme based on contributions from all OSCE institutions. This framework could make it easier for individual OSCE institutions to co-ordinate their activities more effectively with other OSCE actors. This is particularly true of the co-operation between the Central Asian OSCE Offices and OSCE institutions in Vienna, The Hague and Warsaw.

It will also lead to a higher degree of continuity in the co-operation between the OSCE and the Central Asian OSCE States. Isolated events, which interest sponsors more or less accidentally, seminars which have not been fully prepared and do not have any perspective for the implementation of results, damage the respectability of OSCE work. In particular the OSCE Chair must set great store in continuity. Despite the endeavours of the OSCE Troika, composed of the Chair, his predecessor and his successor, to maintain continuity, there has been the feeling in Central Asian capitals that they have had to "explain everything anew every year".

Common Security

Central Asia is an area with good prospects for the future if its human resources are allowed to flourish and its natural resources can be developed. This necessitates an environment tending towards sustainable stability. Currently all states in Central Asia are procrastinating on problems to a great extent unresolved and partially highly explosive. The political leaderships in the five states do not view this point any differently. However there is very little agreement on the roots of these problems, their risk priority and solutions. These are issues that will have to be discussed and where necessary argued out within the OSCE framework. Because of the experiences made in the past few years the OSCE in general has good chances of conducting this necessary dialogue in a spirit of solidarity with the people and the leaders in Central Asia with the goal of intensified, constructive co-operation.

However this does have a price and not alone for the OSCE budget. A culture of prevention cannot emerge based solely on high enthusiasm for non-violent conflict settlement. There must be a willingness to make the necessary commitment before violent solutions to the problem are put into operation and then escalate. The OSCE is now faced with new challenges as the admission of the Central Asian states to the Organization has established *reciprocal* obligations and responsibilities. The OSCE must continue to make sure that its participating States in Central Asia, with all their strengths and weaknesses, with their challenges and problems are taken seriously. In the past few years, structures have been created, which allow the OSCE to make major contributions to policies oriented towards sustainable stability. Now the political will of all OSCE States must be mobilized so that these structures are utilized and common security also for the OSCE Central Asian States becomes an obtainable goal.