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Reconciling Europe and Islam in the OSCE's Euro-Asiatic Regions

Summary

Currently prevailing anti-terrorist strategies are counterproductive in two ways: They overemphasize military intervention, and they strain relations with the Islamic world. This latter entails the risk of the much debated "clash of civilizations" becoming reality.

When it comes to Islam, Europe has to reassess its basic political strategy. Avoiding a confrontation between the civilizations of Eurasia is not enough for Europe; it needs to achieve co-operation and co-existence.

Europe must abandon its traditional conception of political Islam as a purely negative factor, a "problematic carrier of conflict", and a source of terrorism. The key to reaching this goal is to cultivate awareness that Eurasian stability can only be guaranteed via a common acceptance of the integrity of different cultures and civilizations. This should by no means be understood to entail the giving-up of principles, but rather as aiming towards forming relationships based on co-operation and co-existence. This is an area where Europe has considerable historical experience that remains valuable today.

In order to achieve co-operation and co-existence, it is necessary to approach Muslim dignitaries and politicians to try to gain them as partners in co-operative efforts to create stability and security in the OSCE region. The best opportunity to reach this objective lies in Central Asia with its unique mixture of a Soviet legacy and a Muslim past, present, and future. The key tasks consist in overcoming traditional stereotypes and a fixation on antagonism when conceptualizing relations between Islam and secularism and Islam and the West.

In December 2003, secular and Islamic politicians signed a document on confidence-building measures in the Tajik capital, Dushanbe. This is the preliminary result of an informal dialogue on two central questions: How can problems in relations between secular and Islamic politicians be prevented from coming to a head? And: How is it possible to manage the structural causes of conflict that could lead to a "clash of civilizations" on a Eurasian scale.

A New Situation for Europe

With regard to fundamental indices of development in Central Asia, what new challenges does the Islamic factor¹ pose for the project of establishing Europe as a zone of stability?

First: The participation of the Central Asian countries in the OSCE means that, politically, Europe stretches to the borders of China and Afghanistan. More than 40 Islamic peoples, comprising over 57 million individuals, live in the southern republics of the former Soviet Union. They are most concentrated in the Caucasian country of Azerbaijan and in the five states of Central Asia. The Russian Federation also has a sizeable Muslim population, estimated at between eleven and 22 million members of more than 40 ethnic groups and accounting for between eight and 15 per cent of Russia's total population. Russia's Muslim population is expected to rise to between 30 and 40 million in the next 30 years.²

More than 20 Islamic political organizations operate in this region.³ The best organized and most politically active include the Party of the Islamic Revival of Tajikistan (PIRT), *Hizb ut-Tahrir* (which is banned in Germany), and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU, recently renamed the Islamic Movement of Turkestan), whose members have gone underground since the fall of the Taliban regime. New groups, operating illegally, are constantly being formed,⁴ as the bomb attacks in Tashkent and Bukhara at the end of March 2004 show.

At the start of 2002, US Central Command reached an agreement with Tajikistan on demining the border to Afghanistan.⁵ New bridges were built over the Pyanj, the river that marks the border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Road links to Iran and via Pakistan to the Arabian Sea are also planned. Afghanistan has been an OSCE partner for co-operation since the start of 2003. If Central Asia is a bridge between Europe and Asia, it is becoming increasingly passable in both directions. It is not yet possible to say what consequences this will have for the face of Islam in Central Asia and, beyond that, for Europe and the CIS area as a whole.

One thing is certain: Islam and the various peoples, elites, and powers that adhere to Islam are, and will remain, major cultural and political forces in the Euro-Asiatic area. Recognizing that Europe now has its own Euro-Asi-

1 "Islamic factor" is used here in the special sense of the totality of factors related to Islam.
2 Cf. Aleksei Malashenko, *Islamskoe vozroshdenie v sovremennoi Rossii*, Moscow 1998, pp. 7-8.
3 Cf. Aleksei Malashenko, Islam i politika v gosudarstvakh Tsentralnoi Azii, in: *Tsentralnaya Aziya i Kavkaz*, 4/1999, p. 59.
4 Cf. International Crisis Group, The IMU and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir: Implications of the Afghanistan Campaign, in: *Central Asia Briefing*, Osh/Brussels, 30 January 2002, p. 14, at: http://www.crisisweb.org/library/documents/report_archive/A400538_30012002.pdf.
5 Cf. isn-daily-news, *Security Watch*, 24 January 2002, isn-daily-news@sipo.gess.ethz.ch.

atic Orient and its own Euro-Asiatic Islam makes it necessary to acknowledge that dealing with Islam has become a matter of European security.⁶

The Politicization of the "Islamic Factor" Is Inevitable.

This politicization is brought about by structural development processes, linked, in the first instance, to the fact that state- and nation-building in Central Asia are far from complete, as well as to the hardships of economic and socio-political transformation. The way the problems listed below are dealt with will determine whether stable relations between secularists and Islamists prevail in the secular states of Central Asia or whether both sides will turn to confrontation:

- *First*, national identity and Islam cannot be separated in Central Asian state- and nation-building processes.
- *Second*, the economic transformation will remain complicated for a long time to come, and this will inevitably lead to social tensions.
- *Third*, the dispute between politics and religion is primarily one between secular government leaders and the followers of political Islam.
- *Fourth*, the dissatisfaction of the population due to the rapid deterioration of the social situation is already being exploited by radical Islamic opposition movements that strive for the replacement of the region's secular regimes by Islamic "caliphates".
- *Fifth*, secular leaders have not shown much commitment to strengthening democracy and the rule of law. This also plays into the hands of the Islamic opposition.

As a consequence, Europe will not be able to escape Islamic social opposition in the OSCE area.

A Change in Traditional Western Patterns of Thought towards Political Islam Is Required

If strategic stability is to be maintained in Central Asia – something that is vital in geopolitical, economic, and energy-policy terms – social and ideological conflicts must be prevented from turning into political antagonism. Europe must therefore make a new start in its relations with Islam within its own political area. This will only be possible if Europe perceives Islam and Islamic political movements in the Asian part of the OSCE area as an organic element of the societies there and not as an alien force. Only if they can perceive secure religious and socio-political opportunities in their own states and in the Euro-Asiatic context as a whole will the followers of Islam adopt na-

6 For more details, see also: Arne C. Seifert, *The Islamic Factor and the OSCE Stabilization Strategy in Its Euro-Asian Region*, CORE Working Paper No. 4, Hamburg 2001.

tional political platforms rather than embracing extremist pan-Islamism. It would thus be better for Europe to reach out a hand to “its own” Islamists rather than leaving them to come to the conclusion that they have to fight for their beliefs with the assistance of foreign extremist forces.

Europe Cannot Afford a Profound Crisis in Its Relations with Islam.

Unfortunately, European security policy lacks a strategy for dealing with political Islam. The issue is treated primarily in the context of the fight against terrorism and is thus dominated by military and “hard-security” measures, in short: repressive means. What is required is a many-sided diplomatic and political initiative towards Islamic movements and politicians that goes beyond this one-dimensional approach and deals with the socio-political and economic environment in which the radicalization of Islam takes place. The danger is not represented by the politicization of Islam as such, but from its radicalization. It is the latter that must be prevented.

In facing this challenge, it is necessary to reformulate the fundamental questions of Europe’s relationship to Islam: How can the stigmatizing fixation on terrorism be overcome? Can the Islamic factor be integrated in co-operative strategies for security and stability in the OSCE area? Can it play a constructive role both within and outside the Euro-Asiatic area? Can Muslim populations, Islamic activists, and secular politicians develop a political consensus based on the intelligent adaptation of modern principles as well as the norms and values of the OSCE?

The best opportunity and probably the most productive testbed for forging such a new relationship lies in Central Asia. A constructive approach to Islam, Muslim populations, and the political representatives of Islam could quickly bear fruit in the OSCE’s own Euro-Asiatic space, where the potential for action and the prevailing conditions are still favourable. Secular lifestyles and secular government continue to enjoy considerable support among the population. Politically, Islamic elites continue to support the development of the nation state and close relations with Europe. The politicization of Islam as a whole is in an early stage, which limits its potential to be abused for political purposes. Young people do not yet have extensive knowledge of the Koran and Sharia, and their links with Islamist organizations generally remain weak. Central Asian Islamists also differ from those in other areas of the Islamic world. In the Soviet Union, they were educated in European philosophy and culture, rationalism, and dialectics. It should be possible to take advantage of this exceptional situation. In just one more generation, this opportunity will be greatly diminished or will have vanished altogether.

Dimensions of Confidence-Building

One can distinguish between three main levels on which co-operation between Europe and Islam has to be achieved:

The Global Dimension

European states have joined the anti-terrorist coalition and are participating in military operations. However, co-operation with Islamic political organizations, both local and international, is also indispensable if the situation in countries such as Afghanistan and Iraq is to be stabilized. Western military intervention has thus unintentionally linked the potential for the political and economic restructuring of these two countries to co-operation with Islamic political representatives and organizations. Furthermore, since the US and some other Western countries have publicly linked the question of global security with stabilization in those two countries, the whole Islamic world, including terrorist organizations, will be watching the outcome of this attempt. For that reason alone, the West cannot afford to come out of this situation as the loser. It therefore has to develop a new strategy for co-operation with Islamic organizations on a national and regional level.

The European Dimension.

Although the European dimension is not the main subject of this contribution, it cannot be ignored. A challenge to European security is posed by the fact that large groups of immigrants have only adapted to the European environment in a superficial way. European states today contain large non-indigenous Muslim populations (as high as 14 per cent in France). Most European Muslims are not integrated into their European communities; their ethno-confessional isolation is increasing, and this makes radicalization more likely. A dormant sense of ethnicity, often closely linked to religion, can awaken and act as a powerful instrument to mobilize radical forces creating a dividing line between "them and us".

This kind of dividing line has existed in Europe for some time, and various ethnic and confessional groups are acutely aware of its existence. While Muslim newcomers enjoy the benefits of Western liberalism, the latter's true nature, which is associated with values different from their own, remains alien to them. Because of their marginal position in their host states, they are more aware of their differences and tend to emphasize them. Liberal legislation makes it easier for extremist Islamic groups to organize. Radical Islamists win supporters among migrants who feel they are socially disadvantaged compared to the local population. It is by no means certain that tougher legislation is the best way to solve these problems. Furthermore, the core problem is not simply the influx of new Muslim immigrants, but rather

the growth of extremism among those who already live in Europe. Against this background, the most important political and practical tasks for Europe are to combat long-established stereotypes and to prevent conflicts from developing into crises.

The Euro-Asiatic Dimension

The Euro-Asiatic dimension emerged with the accession of the newly independent states of Central Asia to the OSCE. Political leaders in the region generally consider the preservation of secular regimes to be a necessary condition for maintaining political stability. Although a Muslim majority among the population does not automatically lead to an Islamic state, the secular elites cannot guarantee the secular character of these states forever. As long as the question of social and political orientation remains open, it will be a locus of political struggle. Resolving this struggle will take time, perhaps a generation, but there is also the risk of rapid and unexpected developments leading to social and political crises. In order to prevent this, it is necessary to take into account not only the impact of political Islam but also its heterogeneity. Focusing solely on radical and extremist Islamists is extremely non-productive. In reality, radical religious organizations – whether globally active or merely national – remain marginal in the Muslim world. Paying insufficient attention to or attempting to isolate mainstream Islamic organizations and parties risks strengthening radical elements, thus worsening opportunities for dialogue between Islamic and secular forces.

Against this background, basing an anti-terrorism strategy on a repressive conceptual and political foundation is revealed as a cardinal error. Rather than taking account of Islam's significance as a permanent factor of central socio-political importance, this approach reduces relations with political Islam to the single aspect of using force to combat individual Islamist groups (the "extremist fringe"). Based on this error, this strategy does not deliver where it counts: It cannot replace the repressive approach that has tended to predominate with a constructive strategy that could lead secular-Islamic relations out of the intellectual and political impasse they find themselves in.

Goals, Nature of Involvement, Policies, and Instruments

In view of the three levels mentioned above, one can define the main goals for co-operation between Europe and political Islam as follows:

- To sustain the European space of stability and extend it beyond the geographic borders of the EU;
- To initiate a process of mutual accommodation between political Islam and Europe;

- To overcome the “dilemma of distrust” between political representatives of Islam and ruling secular elites in the Asian regions of the OSCE, and to create a new model for relations based on political argumentation rather than the use of force.

These goals determine the nature of the OSCE’s further involvement and the choice of policies and instruments.

Nature of Involvement

In seeking to promote accommodation between political Islam and the European stability zone, we have to take into account profound differences in conceptions of social development and organization. It is also necessary to deal with both the national and the European dimensions. The OSCE thus requires two separate strategies of accommodation: one for peacefully integrating the Islamic factor into processes of national transformation and state-building, and a second for integrating it into the common political space and its institutional framework (in our case the OSCE). Charles William Maynes, the president of the Eurasia Foundation, Washington, writes on this issue:

During the Cold War, the United States developed long-run policies that took years to bear fruit. [...] It was cautious in the use of force and developed programs to reach out to local elites. The time has come to adopt a similar approach toward Islam, particularly in Central Asia. [...] Western countries should reach out not only to secular forces with which they are comfortable but also to leaders who are likely to rise to positions of influence in the religious parties. [...] Such an approach might enable the United States to manage its engagement in Central Asia more happily than it has managed its presence in many other parts of the Muslim world. It may well permit the United States to accomplish through cooperation and diplomacy what it will find difficult to achieve by force. Finally, it might provide lessons for reconciling the West and Islam more generally, one of the critical issues of the age. Now it is the time and Central Asia is the place for the United States to develop a set of policies appropriate to the new challenges of the post-September 11 world.⁷

Maynes’ far-sighted views are still far from being taken up in the political practice of the OSCE participating States, which exhibit shortcomings in their dealings with the Islamic factor in general as well as specifically with regard to its role in the state-building process in Central Asia. European security policy does not take account of either of these, leaving several funda-

7 Charles William Maynes, *America Discovers Central Asia*, *Foreign Affairs* 2/2003, p. 132.

mental issues that need to be addressed, including the need to recognize that achieving coexistence between secularism and Islam in Central Asia is an essential aspect of stabilization and security strategies, both internally, in the state-formation process, and externally, in relation to the West. The politically relevant questions that arise from this are: How can different systems of values and social policy be kept from coming into conflict? What needs to be done to stop religion from being politicized and resulting in the growth of radical Islamist movements? And finally, once such movements exist, how can they be transformed in a peaceful, reformist direction?

So far, the need for a specific approach to these questions has not even been recognized. "Islam" has tended to be seen only in the context of efforts to ensure freedom of religion in line with the Western understanding of human rights, and not in a complex socio-political and cultural sense.

Conflict prevention in relation to the Islamic factor in the OSCE's Asian regions needs to deal both with the objective conflict material and with elites that appropriate Islam for their private ends. The latter is clearly a task for the OSCE's democratization strategy, and the Organization is thus to some extent directly linked with – even dependent on – political Islam. If it does not proceed in this manner, it risks a fate similar to that of the West in Afghanistan and Iraq: Without co-operation with Islamic organizations, movements, and parties, there can be no hope of achieving stability. Furthermore, the more the OSCE democratizes the political environment in the Central Asian states, the more it opens the political arena to Islamists. In attempting to deal with this "contradiction", the current reduction of the problem to "combating terrorism" clearly falls short.

Discrepancies Between Secular and Islamic Concepts of State- and Nation-Building

When thinking about strategies of accommodation, it is certainly important to be sensitive to the deep discrepancies that exist between secular and Islamic concepts of state- and nation-building, democracy, rule of law, human rights, the equality of women in society, education, and in many other areas. To deal with those discrepancies constructively, the strategies must be based on a combination of co-operation and co-existence. They have to define the fields where compromise is vital. In order to forge a common political culture, principles of conduct and mutual respect have to be developed.

Europe's priority should be encourage the development and realization of measures aimed at building trust between secular and Islamic forces and organizations. This is relevant for the whole OSCE area and for Central Asia in particular. A high level of mutual distrust is the result of the absence of guarantees from either side that it will not attempt to eliminate its unwanted partner from the political process after gaining power. Secular leaders fear that if Islamic parties gain power through democratic means, they will start to

establish a theocratic state in which there will be no place for the secularists. Islamic leaders, on the other hand, are concerned not only that, under secular rule, their organizations may be prohibited as terrorist groups, but that even the political legitimization of their parties cannot guarantee that they will continue to exist in a political structure that has not solved the question of co-existence with political Islam.

This “dilemma of distrust” also has a European dimension. The question remains as to whether European OSCE States would agree to legitimizing a democratically elected Islamic government that they fear might initiate a radical change of existing constitutional norms.⁸ It is also unclear whether, if moderate Islamic parties gain power, they will guarantee the stability of the constitutional order or will be tempted by more radical Islamic forces to act in an undemocratic way.

Thus far, neither side has offered the other acceptable guarantees of its likely magnanimity in victory, and the process of mutual estrangement and distrust continues. The Islamic elite wants to be confident that it will indeed continue to enjoy political, religious, and cultural equality in the various states and on the Euro-Asiatic stage as a whole. The secular parties want to be sure that the recognition of OSCE principles and commitments by moderate Islamist leaders is more than just a tactical manoeuvre.

Strategies and Instruments

What is required in the first instance is efforts to stabilize relations between secularists and Islamists, as the tension that currently characterizes them is – alongside socio-economic factors – a major potential source of conflict. Mechanisms, instruments, and methods should be tailored to meet this goal. Ideally, religious and cultural enmity should be nipped in the bud. Where this is not possible, the strategy should be one of containment. To achieve this, it is necessary to reduce hostility and the contradictions on which it is based to their substantive core, thereby identifying the areas where consensus or dissent prevail, and making it possible to find appropriate solutions. This approach could be summed up as follows: co-operation where common ground can be found, peaceful coexistence where disagreement runs more deeply.

While this will be a long-term process, there is a practical requirement for some rapid progress. This is true especially with regard to the OSCE’s Euro-Asiatic area, but also applies to Europe’s increasingly heterogeneous towns and cities. A few early successes would send positive signals both to the Islamic world and to Europe’s own multicultural and multi-confessional

8 How will the OSCE states react to the growing influence of Islamic political parties and to the fact that they could win a considerable number of seats in national parliaments? If this happens, will the OSCE states recognize the results of legitimate elections or, because they are apprehensive of the Islamists, will they prefer to close their eyes to violations (as has occurred before) in order to weaken political Islam and strengthen secular regimes?

societies, which still face the challenge of working out cultural differences in the far-reaching and profound integration processes of the enlarged EU.

Various strategies, methods, and instruments that have proven themselves in Tajikistan are available to help achieve the initial successes required.

Dialogue with moderate Islamic political organizations and with those radical groups that do not reject *a priori* the possibility of developing contacts with secular forces and do not consider violence to be the only means of achieving their political goals can be viewed as the prime instrument for creating a new political reality in the context of secular-Islamic relations. This implies a need to work with both Islamic political organizations and secular forces in Central Asia, as the possibility of providing stability throughout the entire OSCE area depends on the positions of both groups and their interaction.

The main task of the dialogue is to search for means and mechanisms that can support the co-existence of secular and Islamic forces. The dialogue should initially take the form of talks with groups of moderate Islamists who already have the experience of operating within a secular state, as is the case in Tajikistan. At the same time, factors that encourage Islamists to fight to create an Islamic state must be minimized.

This general task can be divided into a number of more specific steps:

- Encouraging the secular state to reassess its attitude towards Islamic institutions such as mosques, madrassas, and universities as well as political parties or movements. To quote Maynes once again: "The West should urge the region's leaders to open local governments to electoral challenge and to allow all parties seeking peaceful change to take part. Perhaps it will turn out that more radical Islamists enjoy little support. Even if they do garner electoral support, however, Islamic forces may gradually develop a stake in the system, so that when they do finally enter national government, it will constitute an act of inclusion, not revolution. In all these efforts, Washington must show patience."⁹
- Confidence-building measures. "Sustainable internal and external stabilization requires measures to build confidence between the representatives of the state power and religion and in civil society as a whole."¹⁰ The goal of confidence-building is to initiate a process of understanding that will remove the danger of escalation, to identify common ground, and to overcome divisions and misunderstandings wherever possible. In the short term, steps should be taken to prevent the radicalization of the political representatives of Islam, and joint initiatives should be under-

⁹ Maynes, cited above (Note 7), p. 132.

¹⁰ Centre for OSCE Research (CORE)/Program for the Study of International Organisation(s) (PSIO), *Confidence-Building Measures adopted by the participants of an informal secular-Islamic dialogue in Tajikistan*, CORE Working Paper 12, Dushanbe 2003, p. 13.

taken to develop Islam's integrative potential. In the long-term, efforts should be made to ease tensions permanently and create a situation of self-sustaining stability.

- Adapting the prevailing concept of "the separation of religion and state" to the specific social and religious conditions under which state-building is taking place in Central Asia. For the Tajik Islamists in the PIRT, the original secular concept of the "separation of church and state", interpreted as separation of religious institutions and state, proved to be more acceptable than the old Soviet concept of the "separation of religion and state" that was defended by the ruling secular elite.¹¹ In fact, the incumbent secular regime must realize that it cannot separate the state from the religion of its society under conditions where the majority of population are Muslims. This indicates a further fundamental problem with the principle of the separation of religion and state: that the secular state becomes disconnected from its own population. As a result of this unpopular principle, the word "secular" is becoming synonymous with "hostile" and, even worse, "anti-Islamic".

In their declaration on "Confidence-Building Measures" from December 2003, Tajik secular and Islamic representatives concluded correctly that "Circumstances of nation-state development change the parameters for understanding relations between state and religion. Islam as a religion of the absolute majority of the citizens of Tajikistan is an organic constituent of Tajik society and national culture and has a real influence on socio-political processes. Nor can the state separate itself from the dominant religion in Tajik society. It becomes apparent from this interdependency that constructive relations, mutual understanding, and mutual concessions between the ruling circles of power and religious leaders are important factors for maintaining the internal stability of both state and society."¹²

- Encouraging the secular state to redefine its policy in relation to Islam. Harmonic relations between state and religion are a vital precondition for the preservation of the national, political, and moral unity of all the young Central Asian states, and the maintenance of stability in the course of their further development. At the same time, they are also an important component in preventing the development of religious extremism.

In concrete terms, this involves "[creating] flexible means for co-operation and [establishing] mutually beneficial relations between the state power and the representatives of religion". The secular state "must find means of relating to religion, and to Islam in particular, that convince the religious representatives of the sincerity of the state's intentions to co-operate. The core of this intention consists in providing full

11 Cf. *ibid.*, p.11.

12 *Ibid.*, S. 8.

freedom of religious belief to citizens and in granting religious institutions independence from state power.”¹³

- Encouraging the development of a mutual code of conduct between secular and Islamic forces. The Dushanbe document on confidence-building measures recommends the creation of a consultative forum under the Tajik President to “ensure a permanent dialogue between the representatives of state and the representatives of religion, religious parties, and organizations. Its tasks should be to discuss the priorities for co-operation, open questions and ways to overcome misunderstanding. An important goal is to create a climate of trust and harmony, a culture of constructive exchange, co-operation and coexistence, and to prevent political and religious radicalization.”¹⁴

This document also represents the first time that an agreement has been reached in Central Asia on principles of non-violent relations. These are contained in the “Principles of co-operation and coexistence” elaborated by the Tajik dialogue partners. They begin by stating that “The basic philosophy of the dialogue [author’s note: between secular and Islamic participants] is to exercise tolerance and to look for specific ways to achieve the common goal of stable conditions for the processes of national development. Defining the common ground does not exclude identifying contradictions and vice versa. Priority should be given to the commitment of all parties to seek solutions – both independently and jointly – that could provide security and stability in each country, in Central Asia, and in the Eurasian space as a whole.”¹⁵ The first and most basic principle of non-violent coexistence is “to acknowledge that constructive and ongoing dialogue is the main principle of co-operation and the only legitimate method of *stating, discussing* and *solving* controversial issues”.¹⁶

- Dialogue on the co-operation and co-existence of civilizations and cultures in the OSCE’s Euro-Asiatic space. Willingness on the part of Europe to recognize political Islam as an integral part of the political process in Central Asia would be a key element in overcoming the above-mentioned “dilemma of distrust” on the part of the Europeans. However, European willingness alone cannot create an atmosphere of trust. Europe will require some assurances of its own before it can provide Islamists with certain guarantees. Consequently, a process of confidence-building should also be initiated with the aim of agreeing on a Euro-Asiatic mutual code of conduct. The following mutual assurances should be discussed:

The Islamic representatives assure that:

13 Ibid., p. 14.

14 Ibid. p. 9.

15 Ibid.

16 Ibid. (emphasis added).

1. They recognize the secular character of the state and its constitution.
2. They are prepared to share responsibility for the formation and development of their state. They are prepared to participate in consolidating the nation state, resolving serious social and economic problems, supporting democratic processes and safeguarding the political rights of citizens, upholding domestic and regional stability, and reducing the influence of extremist groups while preventing the formation of new ones.
3. They are ready to participate in the process of democratizing their society; in return, the secular government guarantees freedom of religion and religious expression, democracy, and the rule of law as a basis for removing those factors that encourage Islamists to perceive the secular state as anti-Islamic.
4. They are capable of restraining the growth of radicalism.
5. They are prepared to work to ensure the stability and security of the entire Euro-Asiatic area of the OSCE.

Moderate Islamists, who aspire to co-operation with Europe as a means of enhancing their legitimacy, are likely to see the mere existence of this dialogue as giving them the recognition they desire. Of primary importance for the Islamists at the current juncture is the possibility that with European assistance they may be recognized by the Central Asian regimes.

At the same time, they also need to receive certain assurances from Europe, which should also be reflected in the mutual code of conduct. The European side should therefore make the following commitments:

1. Muslims and Islamic politicians have an accepted place within the OSCE's Euro-Asiatic area. Europe has an interest in co-operation for the sake of mutual security and prosperity.
2. Europe shall use the OSCE framework to ensure that the official consent of the state authorities to include Islamic parties in the political process is upheld in the long term.
3. Europe shall support the democratic participation of religious representatives as equals in the state-building process, including their assumption of administrative positions alongside representatives of the secular side.
4. The European powers will not apply double standards in responding to acts of repression carried out in the guise of combating extremism but in reality aimed at weakening of Muslim organizations and institutions, including political representatives of Islam.

5. The principle of free elections is universal and applies to representatives of Islam along with all other groups.
6. If Islamic parties gain power through democratic parliamentary means, Europe will be willing to recognize the legitimacy of the new government.
7. A state with an Islamic government will remain a part of the OSCE if it can guarantee basic human rights (taking into account the differing Islamic concept of human rights).¹⁷

Within the framework of the dialogue and the mutual code of conduct, both sides will have to develop rules of behaviour that will make their actions predictable in certain political situations: i.e. where a secular regime has to co-exist with political Islam; where there is a division of power between secular and Islamic forces; and where there is a change of regime from secular to Islamic. The dialogue with Islamists will definitely be conducive to reforming political Islam by making it more tolerant and more moderate.

Learning from the First Islamic-Secular Compromise Process in Central Asia

The project of mediating a confidence-building effort between Islamic and secular groups in Central Asia was a pragmatic attempt to achieve an early success within the OSCE area. The dialogue process, which was moderated by German and Swiss research centres and funded by the German and Swiss ministries of foreign affairs¹⁸ made it possible for Islamic and secular politicians to sign the aforementioned document on confidence-building measures in Dushanbe, the Tajik capital, on 11 December 2003. The Tajik participants, of whom there were more than 20, included not only the moderates, but also the radical wing of the PIRT. The document was delivered to Tajikistan's President Rakhmonov, who read and countersigned it.

The document consists of a summary, recommendations for the president, principles for co-operation and coexistence, a more detailed analytical section with findings and conclusions, and an appendix in which various problems are classified as either easy or difficult to solve.

The dialogue process provided an insight into the forces that have led to the recent escalation of problems in secular-Islamic relations (a further escalation in Central Asia cannot be ruled out). It also generated conclusions use-

17 There is a fundamental question as to whether Europe will maintain its relations with a state in which a change of regime (from secular to Islamic) has occurred, thereby preventing its isolation and eliminating a key reason for radical groups to become more militant.

18 The Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) and the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva.

ful for pursuing a political and diplomatic course with regard to the “Islamic factor” based mainly on tackling the causes of conflict. The value of both these aspects is apparent in light of the fact that the confrontation with violence-prone extremist Islamism can only bring about lasting and stable positive results when the work of alleviating the structural causes is consistently placed centre stage.

Together with economic and social causes of conflict, tension between secular and Islamic forces in Central Asia is of particular concern. Hence, both the Tajik secular-Islamic compromise process, the first of its kind in the OSCE area, and the knowledge gained in the course of the mediation process provide a vital insight into specific details of the process of resolving the conflict between secularists and Islamists. Both impressively demonstrate that it is vital to achieve peace and compromise *precisely* with the *radical* forces.

Although Tajikistan’s civil war makes it a special case, the country offers a unique insight into how former radical Islamists and secularists were able to transform an armed conflict into a co-operative relationship (however fragile it may remain). Among the questions into which the Tajik experience provides insights are the following: How can the escalation of conflicts between a secular government and an Islamic movement be prevented or stopped? What are the principles that form the basis for a self-sustaining compromise process? And finally: What questions does Europe have to answer?

The central insights developed as a result of moderating the secular-Islamic dialogue process are as follows:

First: Compromise, co-operation, and coexistence between a secular government and Islamic politicians and parties can be achieved. It is also possible, under certain conditions, for political relations between the two sides to be framed in terms of non-violence rather than repression, which reduces the risk of civil war. Furthermore, peace-building efforts must include a willingness to compromise with the radical groupings. These exist on both sides.

Second: The positions of the Islamic and the secular parties do allow for a certain amount of political manoeuvring and there is a degree of common ground in terms of motives and strategic intentions. Democracy and the shared nation state are basic factors that connect the two sides. These connecting factors are interesting for Europe inasmuch as they provide a suitable foundation for a dialogue with Islamists and secularists in Central Asia. The mere fact that Central Asian Islamists and secularists have recognized such commonalities and agreed to make them the basis for confidence-building, co-operation, and coexistence is remarkable progress by itself. Recognizing these shared factors also helps to counter the fear, widespread in Europe, that the involvement of Islam in state-building processes in the OSCE area represents a risk to the core values of Western civilization and is therefore not in the European interest. If it can repeatedly be demonstrated that this fear is un-

founded until it is finally overcome, it will open completely new prospects for an open-minded European relationship to the Muslim regions in Europe's own backyard.