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OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan

Introduction

At the Madrid Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council in November 2007, OSCE participating States acknowledged the importance of Afghanistan's long-term security and stability for the security of the OSCE area, and in particular for Central Asia. The foreign ministers therefore pledged their support to deepen the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan across a spectrum of activities, and tasked the Secretary General with exploring ways to accomplish this objective and making concrete proposals to the participating States.

This effort is not new; the OSCE has already provided support to Afghanistan in various ways – through its election support teams in 2004 and 2005, and through Afghan participation in a number of activities organized by the OSCE's field operations, its Secretariat, and its participating States. On the basis of this positive experience, Afghanistan has requested OSCE assistance in border security and management, police training, and combating drug trafficking.

Ministerial Decision No. 4/07 provides a strong foundation for augmenting the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan.¹ In initial consultations with the Secretariat in January 2008, participating States identified a number of areas where the OSCE might provide assistance to Afghanistan. In general, there was agreement that the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan must be a part of a long-term and sustainable endeavour, complementing other national and international efforts already under way. Obviously, this would require substantial co-ordination among all relevant actors. Moreover, it was agreed in principle that the OSCE's approach to Afghanistan should be cross-cutting and cross-dimensional, ranging across a wide variety of OSCE funds and programmes.

The Ministerial Decision focuses on OSCE activities aimed at strengthening the management of borders between Central Asian states and Afghanistan, combating terrorism and trafficking in small arms and light weapons (SALW), illegal drugs, and human beings. Other areas may also be considered, provided such support is requested by Afghanistan and evaluated positively by the participating States. Given the complexity of the tasks ahead, the implementation of Ministerial Decision No. 4/07 will require the

¹ Cf. *Decision No. 4/07, OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan*, MC.DEC/4/07/Corr.1 of 30 November 2007, in: Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Fifteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 29 and 30 November 2007, Madrid 2007, 30 November 2007, pp. 19-22.

commitment of considerable human and financial resources for the next several years.

Despite these challenges, the OSCE is uniquely placed to contribute to the existing efforts of other international actors due to its comprehensive understanding of security, its broad membership, which includes Russia as well as all of Afghanistan's northern neighbours, and Afghanistan's direct engagement with the Organization as a Partner for Co-operation. The OSCE also offers an extensive network of field operations in Central Asia, which in many cases can access border crossing points more easily than operations based in Kabul, as well as a clear mandate and experience that is directly relevant to many of the most pressing security challenges of Afghanistan and its neighbours.

Milestones in OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan

The OSCE and Afghanistan have come a long way together in a relatively short period of time. On 18 February 2003, the Transitional Islamic State of Afghanistan requested the status of Partner for Co-operation. On 3 April 2003, the Permanent Council, in Decision No. 537, granted this request, noting "the interest of Afghanistan in establishing close relations with the OSCE based on exchanges of views and information on various issues of mutual interest",² and recalling that Afghanistan shared common borders with three OSCE participating States and had mutual security interests with these neighbours as well as with other OSCE States.

As a Partner for Co-operation, Afghanistan has participated in major OSCE-related events, including Ministerial Council Meetings, Human Dimension Implementation Meetings, meetings of the Economic and Environmental Forum, and the Annual Security Review Conference.

The OSCE has also provided limited assistance to Afghanistan in the form of Afghan participation in ongoing and subject-specific OSCE projects and events. Thus, Afghans have participated in round tables and workshops organized by the Thematic Units of the OSCE Secretariat, the OSCE institutions and some OSCE field operations on subjects such as countering terrorism, fighting organized crime, and drug trafficking. These events are often conducted in co-operation with other international organizations. For example, Afghan representatives have participated in conferences on combating illicit drugs organized jointly by the OSCE and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC). Most recently, on 18-19 July 2008 in Vienna, two high-ranking representatives of the Afghan Counter Narcotics Agency attended such a conference, which addressed illicit trafficking in Afghan opi-

2 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 537, Granting of the Status of Partner for Co-operation to Afghanistan*, PC.DEC/537, 3 April 2003, p. 1.

ates. A recent regional training seminar in Almaty focused on mutual legal assistance in the confiscation of criminal assets and combating money laundering. It was organized by the OSCE's Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA), and the UNODC, and also included Afghan officials. Afghan representatives have participated in cross-border training programmes on issues such as combating SALW trafficking.

Other projects that provide for Afghan participation are also being developed to support capacity-building efforts, for example, by providing internship opportunities for young Afghan diplomats in the Secretariat as well as training and sharing experience on elections.

In co-operation with the OSCE, Afghanistan hosted the 2008 OSCE-Afghanistan Conference on Strengthening Co-operation between the OSCE and its Asian Partners for Co-operation to Address Challenges to Security, which took place in Kabul on 9-10 November 2008. The conference was attended by OSCE participating States, OSCE Partners for Co-operation, international organizations and institutions, as well as non-governmental organizations.

The OSCE's co-operative initiatives with Afghanistan have always been confined to activities conducted within the OSCE area – that is, outside of Afghanistan – with two important exceptions. In 2004, the OSCE sent an election support team to assist in organizing Afghanistan's first presidential elections. This experience was repeated in 2005, when the OSCE dispatched an election support team to assist with Afghanistan's first parliamentary elections. Permanent Council decisions made such direct OSCE involvement on Afghanistan's territory possible, even though the decisions clearly stipulated that this was not to "set a precedent for OSCE activities beyond the Organization's geographic area of responsibility".³

On both of these occasions, the OSCE made use of a novel concept—an "election support team" rather than a traditional observation mission. There were several reasons for this: For one, not all OSCE participating States had initially been supportive of the OSCE's carrying out activities on Afghan territory; appropriate Permanent Council decisions were therefore necessary that stipulated the duration, size, and specific mandate of the OSCE effort; second, as a Partner for Co-operation, Afghanistan had not subscribed formally to the OSCE's Copenhagen Commitments on election standards; and third, the volatile security environment did not lend itself to ODIHR election observation based on random visits to polling stations.

Given these considerations, providing technical expertise and analysing aspects of the electoral process by deploying OSCE/ODIHR Election Support Teams (EST) was deemed the appropriate way for the OSCE to fulfil Afghanistan's request for election assistance. Following up on the positive role

3 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 622, Election Support Team to Afghanistan*, PC.DEC/622, 29 July 2004, p. 2.

played by the OSCE Election Support Teams in Afghanistan in 2004 and 2005, it is conceivable that further follow-up activities, particularly with regard to the 2009 elections, might be considered, should the OSCE again receive a request from the Afghan authorities.

In November 2007, Ministerial Decision No. 4/07 provided an opportunity to create a potentially new, more sustained form of OSCE engagement with Afghanistan. Participating States have tasked the Secretary General “with examining the prospects for intensifying OSCE action to support measures for securing the borders between the Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan in line with the objectives and principles set forth in the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept”⁴

While the implementation of Ministerial Decision No. 4/07 on OSCE engagement with Afghanistan poses significant challenges, it also provides important opportunities for the OSCE to truly practise its cross-dimensional and comprehensive approach to security. In addition, the OSCE can provide for value-added activities, given its expertise in border security and management, police training, and other related competencies.

Implementation of Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/07

The Ministerial Decision is the result of a request by Afghanistan in September 2007 that the OSCE “provide assistance to the country in the fields of border security, police training and combating drug trafficking”.⁵ The Ministerial Decision also acknowledges the concern of participating States that the situation in Afghanistan will continue to have an impact on security in the OSCE area, particularly in Central Asia, for some time to come.

Among these possible security challenges are particularly those associated with the existence of weak and uncontrolled borders: the increase of narcotics production and trafficking via the “Northern Route”, directly affecting Tajikistan and Turkmenistan, as well as other OSCE participating States; large-scale criminal activities associated with regional narcotics flows which also fuel insurgency and corruption; the potential spillover of religious extremism; and the trafficking of small arms and light weapons.

Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/07 assigns a number of tasks to the Secretary General. In addition to the task mentioned above, he has been requested to explore “possible co-operation options with the United Nations and other relevant regional and international organizations and other actors”.⁶ Moreover, the Ministerial Decision tasks the Secretary General “with providing support for intensifying the involvement of Afghan counterparts in

4 OSCE Ministerial Council, Decision No. 4/07, cited above (Note 1), p. 20.

5 Ibid., p. 19.

6 Ibid., p. 20.

OSCE activities”⁷. It also encourages the OSCE field operations in Central Asia, in consultation with their host governments, to engage Afghan counterparts in relevant activities.

From the very beginning, it was clear that the implementation of the Ministerial Decision would depend on three factors: the commitment of participating States to provide guidance, expertise, funds, and qualified personnel; the development of concrete OSCE activities that correspond to the needs and priorities identified by the government of Afghanistan; and the complementarity of OSCE involvement with the existing efforts of the international community in Afghanistan and its neighbours.

To ensure that OSCE engagement with Afghanistan proceeds on the basis of these three factors, the Secretariat chose to develop its efforts through a proactive and wide-ranging participatory approach, involving OSCE participating States and all other relevant actors. In January 2008, the Secretariat held consultations with participating States, asking for concrete suggestions for specific activities to be implemented under each of the areas mentioned in Ministerial Decision No. 4/07. Participating States were also asked to provide preliminary indications of financial commitments to future OSCE activities with Afghanistan. International organizations with which OSCE activities were to be co-ordinated were contacted in parallel. These were, first and foremost, the United Nations, NATO, the EU, and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), as well as the World Bank and the World Customs Organization (WCO). The purpose of these communications was to inform relevant international actors about the OSCE’s commitment to contribute to long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. Moreover, international organizations were encouraged to share their ideas on roles the OSCE could play, so as to complement existing international efforts as effectively as possible and avoid unnecessary duplication.

The responses received from both the participating States and international organizations provided some specific guidance to the Secretariat on how to proceed with implementing the Ministerial Decision. Most of them focused on activities that would enhance the security of borders between the Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan, as foreseen in the Ministerial Decision. They also highlighted certain modalities for implementing OSCE activities, expressing in particular strong support for training and capacity building for customs and border officials and police, with a special emphasis on counter-narcotics. Other activities, such as preventing corruption, terrorism, and the trafficking in drugs, weapons, and human beings, were also suggested, as were electoral assistance, de-mining, and cross-border transport facilitation. The OSCE Secretariat also dispatched several fact-finding missions to Afghanistan, not only to assess the situation on the ground, but also to establish working contacts with Afghan and international partners.

7 Ibid.

The direct involvement of participating States and international organizations in assisting the Secretariat in implementing the Ministerial Decision by proposing concrete activities and modalities was a positive first step, and so far it has worked well. The concrete activities that have been suggested underline the importance of existing projects, particularly those activities in Central Asian participating States that could be further enhanced by facilitating the participation of Afghan counterparts. This suggests an awareness that the OSCE already had a solid basis for implementing elements of the Ministerial Decision.

A strong preference was also voiced for the OSCE to complement existing bilateral and multilateral efforts. It is to this effect that the implementation of the Ministerial Decision has seen a widening and deepening of efforts to consult, co-ordinate, and co-operate with international actors to avoid unnecessary duplication of programmes and projects and ensure compatibility with existing border or police development programmes in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region.

So far, the Secretariat has developed sixteen options aimed at addressing the situation in Afghanistan, strengthening border security and management, fostering cross-border co-operation between the Central Asian states and Afghanistan, and enhancing national law-enforcement capacities. In developing these options, the Secretariat took account of the suggestions of the participating States, international organizations already on the ground in Afghanistan, and the Afghan authorities. Several build on OSCE activities in its participating States, particularly training Afghan customs and border police (including counter-narcotics police). One particularly notable existing project is the undertaking to create a centre for training on border management in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, known as the Border Management Staff College. By working with these states on delivering most of these initiatives, the OSCE can promote cross-border co-operation and security to the benefit of all. Also, by incorporating elements of "train the trainer", institution and capacity building, and best-practice development, OSCE efforts can expect to be sustainable in their impact.

The proposed projects and activities have also been fully aligned with the Afghan National Development Strategy. This strategy highlights the need to strengthen border police and customs enforcement and interdiction capacities, one of the eight pillars of the government's efforts in counter-narcotics.

In developing these options for engagement with Afghanistan, the OSCE has sought the following: 1) to provide for a rapid, yet effective response to Ministerial Decision No. 4/07 that is aligned to the stated needs and strategies of the Afghan authorities and that is committed to a co-ordinated and co-operative approach with other international actors working in the region; 2) to exploit the unique strengths of the OSCE, the opportunities provided by its long-standing field presence in participating States bordering Afghanistan, and the relationships and experience that this presence has pro-

vided; 3) to address border management- and law enforcement-related matters in a comprehensive and “cross-dimensional” manner; in this respect, all OSCE activities adhere to the OSCE’s concept of comprehensive security; and 4) to develop capacities in such a way as to create a long-term, sustainable impact of significance to Afghanistan’s efforts to strengthen its law enforcement and border security.

Conclusions

Despite these already promising beginnings, a number of inherent challenges lie ahead for the OSCE in its engagement with Afghanistan. One is certainly the political and security environment in the country and the potential impact any deterioration in the security situation would have on the Central Asian participating States. Even though the bulk of the projects developed by the Secretariat in response to Ministerial Decision No. 4/07 would take place in neighbouring Central Asian participating States, co-ordination with Afghan authorities requires a security environment that allows for consultations and other necessary interactions.

The second challenge is the availability of financial resources. Since the majority of activities would be conducted through extra-budgetary projects, the realization of new Afghanistan-related projects will depend on the readiness of participating States and Partner countries to make funds available. Because these projects are likely to be of a long-term nature, donor states will need to provide some assurance that their support is sustainable. Third, the OSCE will also have to rely on expert knowledge from outside the Organization, and in particular from national experts and other international organizations. This means that participating States will have to take an active role in ensuring the availability of such experts.

Fourth, the sustainability of OSCE engagement with Afghanistan requires unambiguous political support from the participating States and other relevant actors. Participating States must therefore have a common sense of ownership of OSCE activities related to Afghanistan. This also necessitates that the pattern of consultations and decision-making established by the Secretariat at the start of the process be maintained and further enhanced, particularly through OSCE governing bodies such as the Permanent Council and its Security Committee.

On the political and technical levels, the OSCE executive structures will have to assist the future Chairmanships in keeping the process of engagement with Afghanistan on track. A solid framework for the planning and implementation of activities within the Secretariat needs to be assured, as does effective planning and co-ordination mechanisms with other international actors, both on the ground and at headquarters level.

Current international mechanisms provide a solid basis for ensuring that the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan is well co-ordinated and does not duplicate existing efforts. In working with other international actors, the OSCE welcomed in particular the "Declaration of the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan" issued under the authority of the three co-chairs, President Nicolas Sarkozy, President Hamid Karzai, and UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon in Paris on 12 June 2008. The Declaration notes "the importance of regional cooperation on political, economic and security matters", and agrees that "Afghanistan's neighbouring countries have an essential role to play in supporting Afghan Government efforts to build a stable Afghanistan with secure borders".⁸

In early October 2008, the Chairmanship decided to advance OSCE activities on Afghanistan on the basis of a Permanent Council decision in order to ensure political support and sustainability of the implementation process. A relevant draft decision was circulated on 1 October 2008, with an annexed *Programme of Activities on the Implementation of the MC Decision 04/07*. So far, consensus has not been reached, and the adoption of the draft Permanent Council decision is still pending.⁹

What then lies ahead? As Secretary General, I remain inspired by the OSCE's ability to address new security challenges in a way that enhances the security of all OSCE participating States and Partners. The OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan is an important step in that direction.

8 *Declaration of the International Conference in Support of Afghanistan*, Issued Under the Authority of the Three Co-chairs, President Nicolas Sarkozy, President Hamid Karzai, Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Paris, 12 June 2008.

9 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Report of the Secretary General on the implementation of the Madrid Ministerial Decision 04/07 on OSCE engagement with Afghanistan*, SEC.GAL/228/08, 28 November 2008.