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Tajikistan and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe: Global Problems through the Prism of a Single Country¹

By accepting the states of Central Asia into its ranks in 1992, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe took on significant responsibility for supporting stability and peace in the region as a whole and in each of the Central Asian countries.

This was particularly relevant in Tajikistan, a country where civil war had raged for many years following the collapse of the USSR. The OSCE, in conjunction with the United Nations, undertook appropriate efforts to re-establish civil peace in the country, to support refugee return, and to help the fledgling independent Tajik state come into being. With the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord on 27 June 1997, the country entered a new phase of development in which reconstructing the economy, eradicating poverty, setting up regional co-operation, and building the institutions of a democratic, secular state were of paramount importance.

Key Priorities of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan

Above all, the country needed assistance to clear up the consequences of the civil war. In 2004, the government of Tajikistan requested the OSCE's assistance in destroying *small arms and light weapons (SALW)* and *conventional ammunition*, as well as in improving the country's stockpile security and management systems. Through the OSCE Office in Tajikistan,² the OSCE drew up a comprehensive programme for destroying surpluses, upgrading storage conditions, and reducing the risk that dangerous materials could be stolen.

In August 2005, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan started implementation of a programme to destroy 34 tonnes of surplus ammunition and 26,000 small arms and light weapons. As part of the programme, training was provided to nine national experts in explosive ordnance disposal, and a SALW destruction facility was constructed. In addition, the Office helped to repair or construct seven new storage sites to ensure safe and secure storage of SALW and ammunition. Generous donations were made by Finland, France, the Nether-

1 Translated from the Russian by Peter Morley.

2 Up to 19 June 2008, the Office was known as the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe. For simplicity's sake, it shall be referred to throughout by its current name.

lands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden, and the United States, as well as Tajikistan.

After the first phase of the programme was completed in November 2006, the government of Tajikistan requested OSCE assistance in developing a second phase to resolve regional aspects of the problem across the entire country, including along the Tajik-Afghan border. The second phase of the programme started in 2006 and aimed to destroy surplus rocket boosters and to build 32 storage facilities across Tajikistan for the country's law-enforcement agencies. The group of donors at this stage expanded to include Andorra.

An equally menacing consequence of the civil war are the *mines and unexploded ordnance* that were strewn plentifully across 25,000 square kilometres of the country's territory, which claim seven or eight victims a year – with the total number of fatalities approaching 300.

From 2003, at the request of the government of Tajikistan, the OSCE, through the Office in Tajikistan, helped the country to deal with the humanitarian threat posed by the anti-personnel mines. Mine-clearing contributes to economic and environmental security, since more land becomes available for agriculture and reforestation. It also helps to improve cross-border co-operation.

The OSCE Office is carrying out the first mine-clearing operation in the Organization's history. The programme is run in close collaboration with the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD). Since September 2004, the programme has

- cleared mines from a total of 1.1 million square meters of land;
- cleared mines from roads totalling 214 square kilometres;
- returned 18 square kilometres of minefields to agricultural usage; and
- destroyed some 4,500 anti-personnel mines and 1,400 pieces of unexploded ordnance.

With assistance from the donor states, the Office in Tajikistan created and continues to support a centre that trains mine-detecting dogs. The dogs are used by mine-clearing teams in the Rasht Valley and the Panj District in southern Tajikistan.

As part of the demining programme, the Office has supported activities to allow access to a canal in the Panj District. The canal was previously used to irrigate farmed land in this poverty-blighted area on the border with Afghanistan. During the civil war of 1992-1997, one part of the canal was mined, and the waterway inevitably became silted up. This led to agricultural land becoming waterlogged and subsequently to serious humanitarian, economic, and environmental losses.

In March 2007, with assistance from the FSD, the Office launched a project to clear the mines from the canal. The significance of the project is

attested to by the fact that even before it finished in May 2007, many local residents who had moved away announced that they would return to their native villages once the mines were removed and the canal was back in operation.

One characteristic of Tajikistan is that many of the problems the country has encountered in its development are global in nature and cannot be solved without the assistance of the international community and, in particular, the OSCE.

Such problems would include, first and foremost, that of *drug trafficking* through Tajikistan. Opiates have been transported from Afghanistan to Europe for two decades, crossing the border between the two countries.

In 2007 alone, Tajik law-enforcement agencies seized and confiscated 5,270 kilogrammes of illicit drugs, including 1,549 kilogrammes of heroin, 2,546 of opium, and 1,174 of marijuana. That is ten per cent more than the amount seized in 2006.³

It is therefore no accident that one of the most important priorities for the OSCE in Tajikistan should be assistance in strengthening *border management*.

In July and August 2006, following a request from the Tajik side, the OSCE Secretariat's Border Team carried out an on-site assessment of the needs and capabilities of the Tajik authorities to deal with the country's substantial problems. Based on this assessment, a group of experts made a number of suggestions, of which three were approved by the Tajik government in 2007. March 2008 saw the start of extrabudgetary projects supported financially by the governments of Finland and Norway.

These projects include assistance for the Tajik government in drafting a national border management strategy; strengthening the border regime by providing instructors with skills and knowledge in training border-control personnel; and establishing a modern customs clearance facility at Murghab in the east of the country.

Strengthening border security and combating drugs trafficking requires the development of close co-operation with *Afghanistan*. At its Madrid meeting in 2007, the OSCE Ministerial Council adopted a special decision on Afghanistan that strengthens the hand of the OSCE Office in Tajikistan in supporting the development of cross-border trade and contacts between the two countries' business communities.

With this aim in mind, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan provides assistance to help create permanent business forums for the businesspeople of both countries, to help develop trade in the border regions, and to establish business relations. Of importance here are the border-region markets organized with OSCE assistance near five new suspension bridges crossing the Panj river at the most densely populated points.

3 Cf. Country Report from the Mini-Dublin Group on Tajikistan.

Solving Tajikistan's *transportation* problems is of particular significance, as the country has no access to the sea and suffers from being landlocked in the middle of the Eurasian landmass.

Historically, the great states of the region – including the prominent Tajik Samanid empire – owed their greatness to their location on the most important transport route of past ages: the Silk Road. When this route's importance declined, the region began to stagnate economically.

At present, Tajikistan is playing an increasing role in developing Central Asia's transport infrastructure, both east-west and, in particular, north-south. The opening in August 2007 of a new bridge over the Panj river in the district of Dusti at the Tajik-Afghan border was of particular significance, as it allows more than 1,000 vehicles to cross the border every day, a capacity that means most central Asian states can make positive alterations to their transport strategies as they gain new, cheap access routes to the global economy through ports on the Indian Ocean.

No less problematic for Tajikistan and the region is *water consumption*. The country is a net exporter of water to consumers across an enormous region. Yet its own reservoirs, canals, and irrigation and purification facilities are close to complete collapse. To restore and maintain them in good condition also requires co-ordinated efforts, both at the regional level and more broadly.

Problems of water supplies are closely tied to conservation of an extremely vulnerable *environment*. Glaciers have begun to melt as a result of global warming and rising average annual temperatures, thereby reducing the region's water reserves. This is fraught with serious consequences for regional agriculture, which needs a constant flow of water to irrigate cotton fields and to grow other agricultural crops.

A shortage of water also entails an *energy deficit*. In the harsh winter of 2007/2008, Tajikistan received less than half of the energy it usually gets from the Nurek Hydroelectric Station due to a water shortage. This caused a serious energy crisis and a dramatic drop in both industrial and agricultural production.

The OSCE Office in Tajikistan also has several projects within the Organization's human dimension. Tajikistan is unique among the countries of the international community in that it is building the foundations of a democratic, secular, multiconfessional state on the front line of the struggle against *religious extremism* and irrationalism, both of which are fertile soil for the weeds of *international terrorism*.

Unfortunately, this struggle is frequently conducted using technical means and prohibitions. Yet ideological influence is also of great significance. The huge cultural heritage of the peoples of the Orient in general, and of Tajikistan in particular, is not being exploited properly against the primitive propaganda of racial and religious hatred. Yet it was precisely in the village of Balkh, at the base of the Pamir Mountains, that the poet Jalaluddin

Rumi (1207-1273), also known as Mowlana Balkhi – a great proponent of religious tolerance and a major figure in Persian and world literature – was born 800 years ago.

Rumi's universality can be seen in his beliefs, which, although born in the heart of the Muslim world, cannot necessarily be tied down to one religion in particular – they are closely bound up with any sincere faith in a single universal god.

Eyewitness accounts state that representatives of all religions and social classes mourned Rumi's death on 17 December 1273 – testimony to the universal nature of his ideas. When news of his death reached Constantinople, crowds many thousands strong – including women, children, senior artisans and their journeymen, servants, merchants, and peasants – thronged the streets. Turks, Armenians, Greeks, Muslims, Jews, and Christians read the Koran and the Talmud and chanted psalms; all of them wanted to pay Rumi their last respects.

The OSCE Office in Tajikistan assists the Tajik government in meeting its OSCE commitments in human rights, the rule of law, and democratization. The Office monitors and supports respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country, and also promotes gender awareness and gender equality and the development of a free media.

The OSCE is providing active assistance to bring the country's legislation into line with European standards as well as international human-rights norms and practices. The OSCE Office has financed the work of non-governmental organizations in monitoring and analysing how well court proceedings across the country adhere to international fair-trial standards.

Throughout 2008, the Office plans to support a study on the *judicial reform* index for Tajikistan (JRI). The results of this research will be presented to the government and civil society, and will in future serve as an instrument to assess the development of the country's judicial system. In 2007, the Office began a project on property rights that focuses in particular on cases of potential confiscation of private property by local authorities. In 2008, a round table is planned to discuss the results of this project.

The OSCE also plans to be involved in a project to support a *human-rights ombudsman*, in close contact and collaboration with the government and civil society. This involves setting up a national institution that Tajikistan is obliged to create and to use in order to uncover violations of human rights as well as to resolve private complaints from the country's citizens.

Since 2000, the OSCE Office has been helping Tajikistan to carry out *prison reform*. This is a government programme that has unfortunately not been implemented in a satisfactory manner: There have been numerous instances of human-rights violations, including non-observance of judicial norms and cases of torture and mistreatment of prisoners. Since 2006, the OSCE Office has been part of the penitentiary reform working group, which also includes international organizations concerned at the conditions in which

temporary detainees and prisoners are held in Tajikistan. The Office hopes that the Tajik government will also delegate representatives to the working group and will allow access to penitential institutions for independent parties, including the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

Free and fair elections are a foundation of democracy. The OSCE has devoted significant attention to helping the Tajik government modernize its electoral law and election procedures in accordance with European standards and with its own commitments. In the run-up to the parliamentary elections in February 2005, the Office worked with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to help the Tajik government organize and hold a conference on election issues that led to the drafting of two alternative laws on parliamentary elections. In co-operation with the Tajik government, the OSCE Office helped hundreds of ODIHR observers to monitor elections to the country's parliament in February 2005 and the presidency in November 2006.

Recommendations were drawn up for the Tajik government based on the results of election monitoring done by the OSCE/ODIHR election observation missions in 2005 and 2006. In 2008, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan plans to fund seminars and round-table talks with the aim of discussing recommended reforms that will enable free and fair elections to be held in future. To transfer practical knowledge to Tajik citizens and to guarantee their contribution to democratization in OSCE participating States, the Office intends to provide help in delegating representatives of government and civil society as observers to elections in OSCE participating States that are holding parliamentary or presidential elections during 2008.

Since it began operating in Tajikistan, the OSCE Office has fulfilled the role of an organization that collects and distributes *information for civil society, the general public, and for state bodies*. Special training courses run with OSCE support have enabled future Tajik leaders to become familiar with international standards and obligations in the area of human rights.

In 2007, the Office provided assistance in carrying out a specialized training course on human rights and international law involving 40 university students, split equally between legal students and those studying other subjects.

Course participants undertook two weeks of theoretical and practical training in the application of human-rights principles. In 2008, the Office intends to repeat the training courses and to increase the number of participants. In co-operation with the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (UNHCHR), support was provided in 2007 for the implementation of Resolution No. 272 of the Parliament of the Republic of Tajikistan, under which secondary schools introduce pupils in years 10 and 11 to the topic of human rights.

As part of the project, two textbooks and methodological guidelines for teachers of human rights were drafted; school-teachers and education minis-

try employees took part in two round-table discussions on the results of the project.

The year 2007 also saw the Preliminary Meeting to Assess Social Transformation in Tajikistan. This intensive, one-day discussion took place a few weeks before the main annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting, traditionally held in Poland, which discusses issues of social transformation. The Office was able to finance the trip to Poland for more than ten representatives of government and civil society to take part in the annual meeting. Other events planned for 2008 include commemorating the 60th anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This will be marked by celebrations and charitable events in Dushanbe and suburbs of the capital. Also planned are round-table discussions of human-rights issues and current problems facing Tajikistan.

Gender projects are especially important for the OSCE's work in Tajikistan. The OSCE Office in Tajikistan supports nine women's resource centres across the country that provide free legal, medical, and psychological consultations, and help women to get a basic education and to develop professional skills. Since 2006, more than 24,000 people have benefited from the centres' work. With financial backing from the United States, the Office has supported the first shelter for victims of domestic violence – in Khujand, northern Tajikistan. Since 2006, the shelter has provided psychological and legal support to about 3,000 women, and provided a home for 41 of them.

The Office has also helped introduce gender aspects into education through a pilot project in conjunction with the Teachers Training Institute in Dushanbe. A curriculum was developed to meet the needs of secondary school teachers, and 16 instructors took a course that enabled them to become trainers. Supported by the OSCE, the gender magazine *Ravzana ba Jahon* ("Window on the World") and the website www.ravzana.tj have helped to raise awareness of gender issues among local authorities, community leaders, and non-governmental organizations.

Since 2006, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan has helped to train more than 350 civil servants across the country to implement gender-equality policies. To build capacity among women's non-governmental organizations, the Office sponsored a forum to explore the role of Tajik women in development issues.

The OSCE Office also supported a group of NGO experts in preparing a shadow report on implementation of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). The report, given to the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women in New York, provided valuable information and basic data for the UN recommendations to the government of Tajikistan.

The OSCE Office has worked with the parliamentary committee on social, gender, and ecological issues and the government committee on women and family to raise awareness among members of parliament of *gender*

equality and to promote *gender mainstreaming* in the drafting and reviewing of relevant laws and regulations. The Office also promotes the idea of holding public hearings to discuss implementation of the gender equality law. Several concrete proposals were made to improve this law and to introduce mechanisms for its implementation through norms and regulations.

Work to combat *trafficking in human beings* constitutes an important part of the OSCE's activity in Tajikistan. In particular, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan has supported the provision of professional training to journalists to improve coverage of anti-trafficking cases; it has backed information campaigns, it has helped to identify weaknesses in national legislation; and it has acted as a consultant to devise a national action plan to combat trafficking in human beings.

The Office assisted the Tajik government in implementing projects aimed at preventing trafficking in human beings by means of a number of informational and educational measures designed to raise children's and young people's awareness of trafficking, risks and consequences associated with it, and methods used to ensnare victims for future sexual exploitation. Some 3,216 people have participated in these educational programmes, mainly young people and students. The Office also provides assistance in building the capacity of the Commission on Combating Trafficking in Human Beings by supporting its participation in regional and international anti-trafficking events and conferences.

One of the most important ways of establishing a democratic society is through the formation of an independent and professionally competent *mass media*, an area in which Tajikistan currently has many problems. Public information and the general level of media development in the country leave much to be desired. There is a need to build trust between state bodies and the independent media. Journalists do not possess up-to-date skills in presenting material, and lack shared professional standards. The media-support programme being implemented by the OSCE Office in Tajikistan aims to help solve these problems.

This primarily involves forming the necessary legal basis to guarantee freedom of the media assuming the existence of the requisite journalistic responsibility for the authenticity and quality of the information they distribute. As for electronic media, the OSCE Office has worked with international and local partners to organize a conference and several round-table sessions to identify problems encountered by electronic media, in particular regarding the obtaining of broadcasting licences.

In 2008, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan established a dialogue on current media-related political issues as part of the media-support programme. It aims to enable the Tajik media to become more active and will strengthen trust between the government and the independent media based on democratic principles and professional and ethical standards. The Office has initiated a number of case studies of the media business in the country. Serious study of

press development will include analysis of newspaper and magazine distribution, factors affecting pricing, and business opportunities in the Tajik media.

Technical support for print media aims to increase circulation and to provide the rural population with local publications. To support independent print publications, a project has been initiated that aims to improve their profitability.

In order to improve *access to information* in Tajikistan, the OSCE Office provides assistance to a media resource centre in Dushanbe that has provided free internet access and professional literature to journalists and journalism students since 2004. Work is also being carried out to assist in drafting a new law on access to information.

Ensuring media freedom is inseparable from improving the professional training of journalists and creating reliable self-regulation mechanisms, including by drafting a code of ethics.

In accordance with its mandate and the desire of the Tajik authorities, the OSCE Office regularly carries out monitoring and analyses and reports back on developments in the economic and environmental spheres. Specifically, it supports the development of *small and medium-sized enterprises* (SME), and assists government efforts to carry out land reform and to prevent land deterioration, radioactive contamination, and illegal labour migration. The Office also helps implement the OSCE's regional economic and environmental activity.

To assist with the state poverty-reduction programme, the OSCE has financed projects in Tajikistan to develop SMEs in regions with promising prospects. Since 2006, several permanent resource and training centres have been opened in all the country's regions, with the goal of supporting the government's anti-poverty campaign. In addition to providing training courses on the key aspects of starting and running a business, these centres also offer their clients legal advice. Most of the centres' clients are women whose husbands have gone abroad to work. However, the centres also attract emigrants who have come back home and who want to put their earnings into starting their own business so that they can stay in Tajikistan.

In 1996, Tajikistan started to reorganize large state (*sovkhos*) and collective (*kolkhoz*) farms into co-operatives and private farms. To help the Tajik government implement *land reform*, in 2004 the OSCE started a project to train farmers and increase awareness of their rights and the possibilities of land tenure.

The Office has opened information centres for agricultural enterprises and farms in Khatlon region and the Rasht Valley as the next stage in the development of agriculture. Since Tajikistan's economy is predominantly agricultural, in 2008 the centres assisting SMEs were combined into a single network with the farmers' support centres. In predominantly agricultural districts, they will help to propagate information and skills needed to improve the quality of livestock and crops and to raise productivity. The centres pro-

vide consulting services for entrepreneurs on how to obtain and best use bank loans, and on how to put into practice their new right to independently plan crop rotation and choose which crops to grow on their land.

About one million Tajik citizens leave the country every year in search of work, mostly in Russia and Kazakhstan. Many of them are insufficiently aware of immigration and registration requirements, and become *irregular migrants*.

Since 2004, the OSCE Office and the International Organization for Migration (IOM) have financed information-resource centres for potential migrants. To help the government reduce the number of migrants contravening immigration and registration regulations in the countries of destination, centres were also opened in the regional towns of Khujand, Kulyab, Kurgan-Tyube, and Shaartuz in 2006.

To boost the government's capacity in the field of labour migration, the Office has also assisted the Tajik Foreign Employment Service in expanding and repairing its premises, acquiring computer equipment, and signing agreements with potential foreign employers of Tajik labour migrants. In 2007, the Employment Service assisted the OSCE migrant-support centres in studying the possibility of establishing contacts necessary to arrange employment beforehand so that migrants leaving Tajikistan would know what work they would be doing in their countries of destination.

Since 2004, the OSCE has actively aided the development of *trade between Tajikistan and Afghanistan*. An international conference on developing trade between countries bordering the Pamir region was held in 2005 in Khorogh, the administrative centre of the Gorno-Badakhshan autonomous oblast. The conference facilitated a number of cross-border commercial deals.

In 2007, four centres to promote cross-border trade between Tajikistan and Afghanistan were opened: two in Gorno-Badakhshan, one in the southern part of Khatlon region, and one in the Rasht Valley. The aim of opening these centres was to give entrepreneurs on both sides of the border information on customs rules, markets, and business-training opportunities. Most attention is directed to small enterprises involved in cross-border transit trade. The first three centres are based on the Tajik-Afghan border, while the fourth supports border-regions trade with southern Kyrgyzstan.

The OSCE Office in Tajikistan has helped Tajikistan to develop a *national environmental strategy* for 2005-2020, as well as several specific strategies in the areas of water management and environmental monitoring. The strategies aim to improve legislation, train staff, and set priorities for dealing with environmental problems. The Office also supported the drafting of a Law on Environmental Protection and five by-laws for adoption by parliament in 2008. With support from the OSCE, a movement for implementation of the Aarhus Convention has formed in Tajikistan and is developing successfully.

One of Tajikistan's environmental priorities is *soil degradation and erosion*, which affects 97 per cent of Tajikistan's arable land. Awareness-raising work in this area through the Office in Tajikistan and its field offices in Khujand, Kulyab, Kurgan-Tyube, and Shaartuz has reached more than one million people in the Khatlon and Sughd regions. Residents of the Rasht Valley and Khatlon region in southern and eastern Tajikistan have planted some 600,000 seedlings to stop land degradation and soil erosion as part of OSCE training and awareness-raising programmes. State television regularly broadcasts educational material on environmental issues such as water, land degradation, and air pollution.

During the Soviet era, Tajikistan was one of the most important producers of uranium for the nuclear industry. Massive mining has left behind it a malignant "tail" that presents a threat of *radioactive contamination* for about ten million people living in Tajikistan itself and in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan in the Syr Darya River basin.

The OSCE has supported the health protection of residents of Taboshar in northern Tajikistan, where more than 7.7 million tonnes of radioactive waste are stored, by providing financial aid to restore mudslide defences and damaged irrigation pipes and ditches in and around the town, thereby protecting drinking water from becoming contaminated by radioactive nuclides.

A co-ordination meeting was held in 2007 in Dushanbe at which all participants agreed on the importance of the problem of radioactive waste. The OSCE Office proposed financial support for a project to draft the requisite documents for donors, with the aim of attracting foreign investment into storage of radioactive waste in northern Tajikistan.

Conclusions

Unfortunately, Central Asia has, since time immemorial, been a bone of contention between international powers and the object of geopolitical great games between states as they attempt to secure their strategic military and economic interests. The new challenges and threats of the 21st century have forced the international community to look afresh at the region, including Tajikistan. The country will become less an object of rivalry than a platform for mutually beneficial co-operation between states and peoples in the interests of solving global problems together in a way that benefits everyone.

International co-operation to assist Tajikistan to solve global problems speaks to the need to develop a new ideology that encompasses all humanity: an ideology that unites all people, regardless of their racial, ethnic, religious, or social affiliations.

Global problems, though numerous, have a common root: the pace of technological progress far outstripping the ability of the international community to respond to it. This lag explains global warming and the unre-

strained widening of the wealth gap between rich and poor countries, as well as energy, food and other crises of our era. Scientists have warned that if the international community does not take decisive action to combat these problems, then human civilization will face critical problems of survival before 2030.

The OSCE must play a special role in forming this ideology of international co-operation to solve global problems. It is an organization with a unique mandate and set of participants. Together with its Partners for Co-operation, it brings together the world's most industrially and technologically advanced countries – countries that bear a significant part of humankind's cultural heritage

In the 20th century, the OSCE States put forward a unique formula of human rights to the international community that enabled nuclear self-destruction to be avoided without a single shot being fired. In the 21st century, it must propose to global civilization an alternative to universal self-destruction by thoughtless and insane use of the resources given to us by God.