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Borders and Borderlands: Working across the Lines That Divide Us in Central Asia

Introduction

Since ancient times, people have built walls to defend and protect themselves from enemies and invasions, and to announce to the world the common will of a community bound together within those walls. Through the centuries these walls have been destroyed, and raised again. The geographic lines that divide us – our borders – have been probed by assault, erased by conquerors, redrawn by political alliances, challenged by criminals and, like those early walls, they remain a visible statement of our existence and our sovereignty. Through the gates of walls, or borders, come vibrant trade, dynamic people, and the mysterious opportunities of the external world. And through those same gates also come deceit, threats, and the worries of our modern world. It is the modern challenge then to best secure those borders, while ensuring that trade and people flow to the advantage of our economies.

During the 38-year lifespan of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the borders of more than 20 nations within the Organization have seen change. The borders of larger political alliances – Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union, and Czechoslovakia – have been redrawn to define new nations sovereign unto themselves. These “new” borders represent a challenge, as nations work to secure them against all manner of threats, while remaining economically viable partners with neighbours and beyond. The specific challenges that Central Asia faces contain many aspects, and the OSCE has been involved with the national efforts of Central Asian participating States since the early-to-mid 1990s. Recent years have seen the addition of Afghanistan to the Organization’s dialogue, initiatives, and capacity-building efforts. This contribution examines what has been involved in all this work and where the OSCE’s efforts to tackle cross-border, transnational threats might be effective in the future.

Sharing frontiers with Afghanistan, the People’s Republic of China, and Iran, Central Asia has a special position in the OSCE’s border-related activities. All five Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) receive support that seeks to strengthen their ability to assess, prevent, detect, interdict, and prosecute transnational threats emanating from past conflicts, global challenges, ethnic divisions, vulnerable populations, and conflicts over natural resources. The key cross-border challenges in the region are well known and include illicit drug trafficking, organized crime, irregular migration, violent extremism and its impact on young people, and the cross-border movement of terrorists. Coupled with un-

checked corruption (both petty and grand), the challenges for the Central Asian states remain considerable. Many of these phenomena are interconnected with similar challenges in South-eastern Europe, Russia, Eastern Europe, and across the Atlantic. It is therefore in the interest of the OSCE as a whole to strengthen the capabilities of the national border security and management agencies in Central Asia, as well as to foster greater bilateral, regional, and international co-operation.

In this contribution, the authors describe current OSCE activities in the domain of border security and border management. Several key areas are examined in particular: first, the threats and challenges that are most prevalent in the states of Central Asia; second, the OSCE's comprehensive approach to border security and border management, as exemplified by the commitments of the OSCE Border Security and Management Concept, and its mechanisms and contributions to address transnational threats at, near, and crossing borders; third, the OSCE's major current and historical efforts and initiatives that have shaped the Organization's core programme activities in all five Central Asian states; fourth, OSCE border-related activities and projects in the Central Asian nations; fifth, the obstacle of corruption in the region, and its impact on efforts to ensure open and secure borders; and sixth, co-operation and co-ordination with other organizations – with the aim of ensuring that they complement each other and avoid duplicating each other's key strengths. In the conclusion, the authors seek to set a hopeful but pragmatic tone for the future.

Transnational Threats and Challenges

It should be of no surprise to anyone that Central Asia attracts a great deal of attention within the OSCE. While many observers quickly ascribe this to the proximity of Afghanistan and the many years of conflict, whose effects the Afghan people continue to struggle to overcome, the fact of the matter is that Central Asia has unique characteristics arising as a result of the way in which the region's boundaries were defined during the Soviet period. The complexity of border challenges in the region facilitates cross-border criminal activities, allowing the proliferation of drugs, weapons, illicit goods, and forged documents, trafficking in human beings, as well as the potential influence of extremism and terrorism.

Illegal drug trafficking is a key threat to the region itself and a transnational risk that commands the attention of the international community due to the fact that the trafficking routes reach to all corners of the globe, crossing many borders on the way. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), some 95 metric tons, or 25 per cent of all Afghan heroin exports are transported from Afghanistan to Russia via Central Asia, with

much of this passing through Tajikistan.¹ Every nation in Central Asia has transport routes across its borders, which allows traffickers to adjust when the law enforcement authorities in a given nation begin to impact upon the illegal flow. Compounding the risks associated with trafficking, official statistics indicate that, in the past ten years, Central Asia has experienced the highest increase in the prevalence of drug abuse worldwide. The estimated value of opiates trafficked through Central Asia is approximately 350-400 million US dollars, and the price per gram increases as opiates travel northward towards the Russian Federation.² While illicit drug trafficking is not the only challenge whose origin is attributed to Afghanistan, experts note that the narcotics trade itself may be a source of extremism, terrorism, and regional instability. Furthermore, the impact of drug use and addiction is a burden that the health systems and social programmes of Central Asia can ill afford. Nonetheless, the roots of these problems do appear to lie mostly in domestic and historical factors.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, many of the newly independent states assumed the previous administrative boundaries of the former Soviet Socialist Republics. Local communities and their citizens suddenly found themselves divided from family, services, natural resources, and property. As these new states had no experience of demarcating frontiers and introducing the processes and procedures needed to support borderland communities, the cross-border challenges quickly overcame their capacity and wherewithal. The human impacts of these cross-border administrative challenges are very evident today when looking at the Ferghana Valley, which straddles the borders of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. The ongoing failure to complete the border and boundary treaties and mechanisms for daily co-existence continues to fuel interethnic tensions and aggravate border management, with a great human cost, including loss of life. Imposing restrictions on the movement of people and goods is a common response by border agencies. This reaction, in combination with high population density, a wide variety of ethnic origins, and a lack of direct access to health and education programmes, has too often resulted in vulnerable populations being influenced

1 Cf. UNODC, *The Globalization of Crime. A Transnational Organized Crime Threat Assessment*, 2010, p. 114, at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/tocta/TOCTA_Report_2010_low_res.pdf.

2 For further details of illicit drug trafficking and other crime, see: UNODC, *Opiate flows through Northern Afghanistan and Central Asia. A threat assessment*, May 2012, at: https://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Afghanistan_northern_route_2012_web.pdf; European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA), *2012 Annual report on the state of the drugs problem in Europe*, Lisbon, November 2012, at: <http://www.emcdda.europa.eu/publications/annual-report/2012>; UNODC, *Crime and instability. Case studies of transnational threats*, 2010, February 2010, at: http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/Studies/Crime_and_instability_2010_final_26march.pdf.

by transnational organized crime³ and recruiters for violent extremist groups, involvement in corruption and trafficking in human beings,⁴ smuggling of all varieties of contraband, caching of weapons transported across borders, and the facilitation of the movement of terrorists themselves. While the Central Asian states continue to discuss the delimitation and demarcation of their mutual borders, no significant progress has been reported in the most troubling of areas requiring agreement – including Ferghana. Such bilateral agreements might prove to be the best tools in the fight against transnational threats. Moreover, they might also be the most effective means of stimulating trade for small business entrepreneurs.

Modernizing the border security and management systems in these countries has been a difficult and slow process, as the old Soviet protocols, tactics, and legislative frameworks have remained in place. These systems failed to stem the insidiousness of corruption, and the “stovepipe” hierarchical structures of militarized border-guard services have stifled the development of incentive, risk taking, curiosity, delegation, and accountability. Recent attempts at developing national border-management strategies in several of the Central Asian states have addressed these issues of necessary change, but progress has been agonizingly slow. Governmental corruption alone is a major barrier to reform, and short-term donor support for infrastructure and training projects makes only a limited contribution to the fundamental change that needs to be realized. The longer it takes to address the need for legislative change, budgetary support, and leadership accountability, the longer organized crime and transnational threats will remain active, ebbing and flowing geographically in response to national and regional enforcement operations, which are few and far between. Despite their common history and very similar traditions and cultural identity, the Central Asian states are reluctant, according to the experts, to engage in close bilateral collaboration, and each state tends to find strategic partners outside the region.⁵

Difficult frontier terrain, multifaceted socio-economic challenges in the region, the disparity in the presence of natural resources amongst the nations, and convoluted political and ethnic relations continually draw the international community’s attention to Central Asia. With such a mix of risks, threats, challenges, and human needs, creating open and secure borders sometimes appears impossible, and the discussion often appears futile. Those are the times when dialogue remains the best option, as it makes it possible to keep an open mind regarding future developments. Focusing on the lines that

3 Cf. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *An Assessment of Transnational Organized Crime in Central Asia*, New York 2007, at: http://www.unodc.org/documents/organized-crime/Central_Asia_Crime_Assessment.pdf.

4 Cf. Liz Kelly, *Fertile Fields: Trafficking in Persons in Central Asia*, IOM report, April 2005, at: http://www.iom.int/jahia/webdav/site/myjahiasite/shared/shared/mainsite/published_docs/books/fertile_fields.pdf.

5 Cf. Firuza T. Achilova, *ISAF troops withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014: How should Tajikistan be prepared for that?* PASOS policy paper, 2012, p. 163, at: <http://pasos.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/firuza-achilovaPASOS.pdf>.

divide us – borders – the OSCE, with its field presences in the region, creates a platform for lively and frank discussion that can provide a better understanding of cross-border challenges, their impact on the wider OSCE area, and the future potential for change. When it comes to addressing and managing challenges at the borders, the implementation of the OSCE commitments, including those on border security and management, utilizes confidence-building measures and bilateral and multilateral partnerships that recognize that the challenge of combating cross-border threats is larger than a single nation. Creating trust and confidence between neighbours is always high on the OSCE's list of relationship-building priorities.

The OSCE Border Security and Management Concept

The OSCE's comprehensive approach to border security and management, which has its roots in the Helsinki Final Act, applies fundamental principles from across the three dimensions – politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. The OSCE's current border security and border management efforts reflect the 2005 Border Security and Management Concept (BSMC), adopted at the Ljubljana Ministerial Council in 2005.⁶ The Concept remains just as relevant today. It captures core aspects of transnational threats and related cross-border phenomena for countries to focus upon and balance with the need for open and secure borders. Specifically, by adopting the Concept, participating States committed themselves to:

- Promoting free and secure movement of persons, goods, services, and investments across borders, in conformity with relevant legal frameworks, international law and OSCE commitments, *inter alia*, through enhancing the security of travel documents and encouraging, as appropriate, circumstances that could allow liberalization of visa regimes, in the spirit of the commitments under the documents mentioned above;
- Reducing the threat of terrorism, including by preventing cross-border movement of persons, weapons, and funds connected with terrorist and other criminal activities;
- Preventing and repressing transnational organized crime, illegal migration, corruption, smuggling, and trafficking in weapons, drugs, and human beings;
- Promoting high standards in border services and competent national structures;

6 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Ljubljana 2005, *Border Security and Management Concept. Framework for Co-operation by the OSCE Participating States*, MC.DOC/2/05, 6 December 2005, at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/17452>.

- Promoting dignified treatment of all individuals wanting to cross borders, in conformity with relevant national legal frameworks, international law, in particular human rights, refugee, and humanitarian law, and relevant OSCE commitments;
- Creating beneficial conditions for social and economic development in border territories, as well as for the prosperity and cultural development of persons belonging to all communities residing in border areas, with access to all opportunities;
- Fostering prospects for joint economic development and helping to establish common spaces of freedom, security, and justice in the OSCE area; and
- Ensuring the security of international transport routes for the supply of commodities.⁷

The Concept outlines possible OSCE contributions based on lessons learned from border-related programmes. These are broad and allow for creative implementation: facilitation of political and technical dialogue, and of confidence-building measures, possible mobilization and co-ordination of assistance; technical assistance and information sharing; as well as possible specialized assistance in different fields.

While the Transnational Threats Department/Border Security and Management Unit (TNTD/BSMU) in the Secretariat can be considered the “custodian” of the Concept, many other OSCE units and structures provide efforts that support the implementation of the BSMC. The Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU), the Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, the Action against Terrorism Unit (ATU), the Office of the Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Affairs (OCEEA), and the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) are all important partners in bringing the Concept to life. In addition, the OSCE field missions provide critical support to participating States and Partners for Co-operation in the area of border security and management. The field missions are the OSCE’s eyes and ears on the ground, and the local relationships that are forged with the host nations are, in many cases, as valuable as the training and capacity-building efforts provided to national border services.

7 Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

The OSCE's Comprehensive Approach to Security and Borders

Shared cross-border challenges and threats provide the foundation for ongoing OSCE-wide efforts in the field of border security and management. These broad efforts offer unique opportunities for practitioners from all corners of the OSCE region to interact and develop an understanding of problems and good practices from multiple points of view, while also establishing a network of experts that may assist when specific issues arise. Key issues that have been addressed include border demarcation and delimitation, with the establishment, operation, and maintenance of boundary commissions; civil-military co-operation at the border; the nexus between customs and licensing – two sides of the same coin, both with the ability to detect and intercept goods being illegally transported; and identity management. Border-monitoring operations have assisted participating States in confidence building and conflict prevention.

When threats become transnational, they rarely cross only one border. Transport routes that start in Central Asia easily reach Eastern and South-eastern Europe, the Russian Federation, and beyond. They are a negative identifier of the OSCE region, truly linking the participating States from Vancouver to Vladivostok. Globalization has not only opened numerous legitimate economic markets, it also has presented black markets around the world with an open door that facilitates the operations of criminal organizations active in trafficking drugs, human beings, small arms and light weapons, and other commodities, all of which presents a challenge to the commitment to open and secure borders.

In its role as a platform for discussing and tackling challenges in border security and management, the OSCE has tackled the majority of these issues since the Central Asian states joined the Organization on 30-31 January 1992. They have been important elements in the OSCE's internal capacity-building efforts, as exemplified by the 1999-2004 Georgia Border Monitoring Operation, and the 2003-2007 Ohrid Border Process. The most visible current OSCE-wide effort is the OSCE Border Management Staff College (BMSC),⁸ established in 2009 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. Originally part of the first package of extra-budgetary projects to support OSCE engagement with Afghanistan, the College has (as of spring 2013) provided training to 1,186 individuals from 35 participating States and six Partners for Co-operation, 395 of whom came from Afghanistan. Training activities at the OSCE BMSC address border security and management not only in a comprehensive way through a month-long staff course, but also through targeted shorter training efforts on issues such as human rights and terrorism at frontiers, the identification of forged travel documents, implementation of the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Waste and Their

8 For further details, see the website of the Border Management Staff College, at: <http://www.oscebmsc.org/en/>.

Disposal, and more. While the College is physically located in Central Asia, the courses are open to applicants from the entire OSCE region, including Partners for Co-operation. The exposure to border experts from different countries also adds to the value of the courses by providing unique opportunities to share experiences at first hand. Moreover, the college facilitates the creation of a permanent network of border officials who have attended courses, and they may reach out to each other well into the future.

Planned OSCE-wide future activities include efforts to address commodity identification, to enhance trade-facilitation processes in the operations of border crossing points, to update anti-corruption publications and training, to further facilitate delimitation and demarcation processes, to assist with tracing of arms across borders and regions, and to augment national preparedness that in turn would facilitate cross-border co-operation following a disaster or crisis – all areas that will help to increase the abilities of the participating States and Partners for Co-operation to deal with their front line challenges.

OSCE Border-Related Projects and Initiatives in Central Asia

While many of the targeted efforts in Central Asia were introduced and developed as part of the OSCE's overall engagement with Afghanistan and promote regional co-operation, several projects are designed to bring specific benefits to the host nation. It should be noted that while the OSCE's efforts are concentrated on Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan, all five Central Asian participating States engage in the OSCE-wide efforts mentioned above. Moreover, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan invite their Afghan counterparts to train in their country on a regular basis as part of OSCE activities. Some key projects aimed at strengthening border security and management in Central Asia since the first Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/07 on OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan are as follows:

- *Development of the Tajik National Border Strategy*: The OSCE Office in Tajikistan provided experts to assist the Tajik authorities in drafting their National Border Strategy and the associated implementation plan. The strategy was approved in 2010, and guides the OSCE's ongoing assistance in the elaboration of an implementation plan, which it is providing via assessments and the identification of specific projects and training activities that could be developed and conducted to meet the requirements of the strategy.
- *Customs Assistance Project – Murghab, Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan*: This project supported the construction of a customs cargo terminal with the aim of enhancing the capacity of the Tajik customs service to detect the illegal movement of goods. The facility is situated on the

northern distribution route for illegal drug trafficking emanating from Afghanistan, and, moreover, is a key point through which precursor chemicals for narcotic production are believed to pass. Non-intrusive technologies were provided to seven border-crossing points and to the customs terminals in Murghab and Khorog. Chinese imports are critical to the Pamir region, and the facility allows for clearance in Murghab, rather than transport to Dushanbe for clearance before returning to market in Murghab. This strengthens the economy in several ways that benefit the daily lives of citizens.

- *Patrol Programming and Leadership for Borders – Dushanbe, Tajikistan:* This project aimed at strengthening the capacities of the Tajik border troops to detect and interdict illegal movement across the Tajik/Afghan border. While the original project was conducted solely for Tajik border troops, and a separate project was implemented to conduct similar training for Afghan border police at the same facility in Gissar, Tajikistan, the current phase of the project provides independent training for both services as well as several modules for joint training. The training covers land-border patrolling, management and leadership, alpine operations, map reading and usage, extended patrols in extreme weather, and medical training, among other things. Following the request of the Tajik and Afghan Governments for additional training, the project has been extended into 2015.
- *National Afghan Liaison Officers Project – Dushanbe, Tajikistan:* This project sponsors two Afghan Border Police Liaison Officers attached to the Tajik national border agencies and training institutions and hosted within the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. The two officers provide a vital link with the Afghan authorities and facilitate the identification of participants to several ongoing training efforts and other OSCE projects that are strengthening regional co-operation.
- *Customs Training Development Project – Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan:* This effort aimed to enhance the training capabilities of both the Kyrgyz and Afghan national customs services and to leave behind a cadre of instructors capable of delivering training programmes they have designed to customs officers from entry level to senior inspector level. The results far exceeded the original proposal, as demonstrated by the development of a National Customs Training Strategy for the state customs service, and the construction of a building for classroom training and mock practical exercises. The project engaged with the EU Border Management Programme in Central Asia (BOMCA) and the US Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) programme to enhance the benefits to Kyrgyzstan. Officials from the Afghan Customs Department participated in an extended train-the-trainer programme, and then took part in a larger effort in Bishkek, where Kyrgyz customs officials and their Afghan colleagues delivered entry-level training to more than 150

newly recruited Afghan customs officers. A new project, expanded to cover more advanced topics and processes, was launched in 2013, and will reach more than 200 Kyrgyz customs officers and approximately 150 Afghan officials.

- *Promoting Bilateral and Regional Co-operation on Border Security and Management*: At the request of the Afghan Ambassador to the OSCE in 2011, the BSMU developed a two-part project to promote bilateral and regional co-operation in Central Asia on border security and management. A seminar was held at the State Border Guard School in Medininkai, Lithuania from 5-9 November 2012. Twenty-one officials from the border guard, border police, and customs agencies of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Afghanistan participated in this effort, which was designed to foster professional relationships and a common understanding among the participants.

The second phase of the project took place in Austria from 11-15 March 2013. Plenary discussions and informal bilateral consultations intended as confidence-building steps were held for border officials from Afghanistan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The meeting also fostered information sharing and good practices on illicit drug trafficking, the activities of criminal groups, customs-data exchange, joint training of customs officials and border guards, the development of cross-border protocols, and co-operation with the new Customs Union (Belarus, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation).

In addition to these larger efforts, the field missions continue to conduct projects on key border security and management topics, such as interdiction and detection; to host round-table events to initiate and encourage dialogue on key issues such as maritime security in the Caspian Sea region; and to facilitate the deployment of experts to address specific issues, such as airport security, travel document security, and the identification of forged documents.

Moreover, the OSCE field missions, relevant units of the Secretariat, and the OSCE Institutions continue their intense efforts, which include: demining along the borders and in near-border areas in Tajikistan; coordinating awareness-raising and engagement with communities and authorities to counter violent extremism; and establishing cross-border markets to provide economic opportunities and development.

Casting a Long Shadow – Endemic Corruption

Corruption can broadly be defined as the abuse of entrusted power for private gain. Every country is subject to corruption, but levels and the spheres of corruption differ from country to country. Men and women working in the areas

of border security and management are no different from other officials who may fall into temptation. Maintaining open and secure borders is a matter of both security and economic policy. Unfortunately, the duties of border officials mean that they are presented with many opportunities for corruption. This is particularly true of those who are in direct contact with the public – in passport control, visa issuance, commercial cargo clearance, transport-terminal security – and those who work to process victims of trafficking, persons requesting refugee status, and persons discovered committing acts of criminality. The opportunities for corruption are essentially the same whether they arise in a busy airport or on a dusty horse trail in the mountains. Representatives of many international organizations working in the region have noted that it is hard to develop and operate projects in Central Asia because of corruption at various levels. This has been a major theme in discussions on the establishment of “single windows”, often touted as an anti-corruption tool as well as a means of facilitating trade. Corruption hampers effective border management, increasing distrust between citizens and officials. It also provides an opportunity for organized crime to travel unhindered across borders.

The 2012 report of the international watchdog organization Transparency International indicated that, of 176 countries and territories, the five states of Central Asia plus Afghanistan are consistently near the bottom of the list. Relying on a wide variety of surveys and available data, the organization assigns each country a Corruption Perception Index (CPI) score ranging from zero to 100, with 100 representing the complete absence of corruption. Thus, the lower the CPI rank, the higher the corruption level in a given country. Central Asian CPI scores range from 17 to 28. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan share 170th place on the list with a score of 17, Tajikistan was pegged at 157th with 22, Kyrgyzstan was 154th with 24 points, while Kazakhstan scored 28 – the highest in the region, and was thus 133rd. Afghanistan scored lower than all the other countries, coming 174th with a score of 8.⁹ Such indicators cannot be ignored, as they influence the effectiveness of attempts to modernize border security and management processes within the rule of law.

Several high-level speakers at the 2012 Central Asian Border Security Initiative (CABSI) meeting lamented the endemic nature of corruption in the border-related services of the Central Asian region. Overcoming this plague, which nullifies so many of the benefits of domestic strategies and implementation plans, as well as the efforts of regional and international organizations, while also deterring donors from supporting additional funding requests, will require political decisions at the highest levels and willingness on the part of the Central Asian governments to legislate, facilitate, and enforce change.

9 Cf. Transparency International, *Corruption Perception Index 2012*, at: <http://www.transparency.org/cpi2012/results>.

Experts are quick to ascribe the corruption and conservatism of border officials in the region to the legacy of the Soviet Union and its bureaucratic style of management (as well as to the availability of personal financial gain through corruption). Yet it seems unfair to continue to make this point so many years after the USSR's demise. While acknowledging the ongoing influence of the Soviet period, it is important to update our understanding and to take a more global perspective. The key is to recognize that controlling the transnational flow of commodities – whether licit or illicit – is far more profitable than petty corruption. Anti-corruption efforts can take money that is currently being lost and turn it back into a national revenue stream, to the benefit of the citizens. This is what the Central Asian participating States can gain when they embrace the anti-corruption efforts and activities provided by the OSCE and other institutions.

In line with the OSCE's "good governance" mandate in the economic and environmental dimension and the 2005 BSMC, several training activities and capacity-building efforts have targeted corruption within border and customs agencies. The OSCE OCEEA published Best Practices in Combating Corruption in 2004 and the OSCE Handbook of Best Practices at Border Crossings – a Trade and Transport Facilitation Perspective (together with the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe, UNECE) in 2012. In addition, the TNTD/BSMU, in co-operation with the OCEEA and with the assistance of national experts, recently completed development of an anti-corruption training course that targets border and customs officials. The course was delivered at the OSCE Border Management Staff College in November 2012 and the spring of 2013. During this and other customs-related courses provided by the BSMU and the OSCE Border Management Staff College, the underlying message was that eliminating corruption would facilitate the collection of revenue for the government in the form of customs duty and taxes, benefitting the country as a whole by fuelling economic development. Trade and investment generally increases in those places where the business community finds that practices are fair and rules are transparent. In terms of the free movement of people, eliminating petty corruption can change the international profile of a nation, as happened in Georgia following that country's 2004 reforms,¹⁰ as well as in other countries. A rapid reduction in petty corruption among front line officials in Georgia – brought about by the will and commitment of the government – left citizens and visitors feeling increased trust towards border agencies and police as they entered and exited the country, and improved Georgia's national image overall.

In addition, building and maintaining integrity in the border and customs institutions of Central Asia introduces a new degree of professionalization among officials and provides them with enhanced opportunities for career development. It also fosters the development of human-resources systems

10 For details, see: *Caucasus Analytical Digest* No. 26, Anti-Corruption Reforms in Georgia, 26 April 2011, at: <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Publications/Detail/?id=128742>.

that have the potential to enhance institutional effectiveness, personal initiative, and resistance to corruption.

The Cup Overflows – Partnership, Co-operation, and Co-ordination

During the past decade, considerable attention has been paid to the national resources available to the Central Asian states as they confront cross-border challenges in the region and numerous border-related programmes and other international efforts have aimed to enhance these capabilities. The work of the OSCE predates many of these efforts. The Organization opened field missions in Tajikistan in 1994, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in 1998, Turkmenistan in 1999, and Uzbekistan in 2000 (after having run the Central Asian Liaison Office in Tashkent since 1995). This presence strengthens the OSCE, enabling it to offer a unique set of multi-dimensional training and capacity-building initiatives, as well as efforts to promote regional co-operation. Since 2001, the OSCE has partnered with many other organizations and implementing institutions including the EU's BOMCA and Border Management in Northern Afghanistan (BOMNAF) programmes, UNODC, and bilateral donors such as the United States, Germany, and France. These partners have provided significant infrastructure upgrades and equipment to the various Central Asian states – an area where the OSCE is limited due to a lack of financial resources. In addition, several of the partners can and do operate across the Afghan border, a capability that the OSCE does not possess.

Typically, the division and co-ordination of responsibilities between the various regional and international organizations and national donors has been undertaken informally, sometimes by groups meeting in Central Asian capitals. For example, the OSCE took the lead in assisting the Tajik government to develop its national border strategy, while BOMCA assisted the Kyrgyz authorities to do the same. The strategies and implementation plans produced by these groups have been adopted by the respective governments. Tajikistan's border strategy was adopted in April 2010 and Kyrgyzstan's in 2011. Both governments are in the process of establishing national working groups to facilitate the implementation of these strategies. These implementation plans will also guide the future efforts of the donor community. Early on, duplication occurred when information gathered through assessments might have been shared more readily among all stakeholders. Further duplication was avoided by creating local incentives for all organizations to co-ordinate. Initiatives like the Borders International Group (BIG), husbanded by the OSCE and BOMCA in Tajikistan for all donors, have led to similar informal co-ordination meetings at other BOMCA offices.

At a politically higher level, in 2003, the Austrian Ministry of the Interior (MOI) took charge of organizing and implementing the EU's CABS initiative. This project is a forum where the numerous regional and international

organizations and countries that are providing infrastructure, equipment, and training in Central Asia can meet and discuss the status of border security and management and their respective efforts. In April 2012, the OSCE joined the Austrian MOI, the EU, the UNDP, and the UNODC in hosting the tenth meeting of CABSİ at Ministerial level in the Hofburg Congress Centre in Vienna.¹¹ These meetings provide a venue for the national authorities from the region to come together and present their views of the current situation, including existing and emerging threats and challenges. In 2012, all five Central Asian countries reported that their capacities had improved thanks to the assistance they had received, while some highlighted the need for additional efforts. The gathering also allowed face-to-face meetings between senior officials from many organizations and countries, a key tool for furthering dialogue.

There is still room for improvement in involving other actors in border-related project development. As one expert has observed: “Local NGOs and civilians living in border regions are most attuned to how borders function and are – with rare exceptions – an untapped source of data on corruption rates, emerging crises, and the quality of border officials. They are the best gauge of where the international community stands in fostering ‘open and secure borders’.”¹² This is precisely where the extensive field presence of the OSCE Missions in Central Asia can create value and bridge that gap. Cross-border markets in Gorno-Badakhshan, Tajikistan, are a locus of education as well as entrepreneurship. To complement these efforts, the OSCE maintains local offices that provide economic assistance to people living in border regions. One could also refer to Chapter V of the 2005 OSCE Border Security and Management Concept, where the participating States recall that the OSCE is also a forum for co-operation with subregional organizations. The increased co-ordination on border security and management at the subregional level may constitute a stepping stone towards more balanced management of borders across the OSCE area. Border projects from 2005-2008 in the area south of Osh, Kyrgyzstan, were partnerships between the field office and NGOs active in these borderland communities. Positive communications with trusted representatives – and with the OSCE logo ever-present – created additional opportunities for development for the villages and populations involved. These opportunities should be explored further in the near future.

Promising Horizons and Questions for the Future

Many countries in the OSCE have been expressing concern at how the security balance may change after 2014. The International Security Assistance

11 For further details, see the BOMCA website at: <http://www.bomca.eu/cabsi.html>.

12 George Gavrilis, *Central Asia's Border Woes and the Impact of International Assistance*, Central Eurasia Project, Occasional Paper Series No. 6, May 2012, p. 8.

Force (ISAF) presence in Afghanistan will decrease, and transport routes to and from operational forces will be dramatically altered. The flow of currency through local markets and the jobs attached to these logistics chains will rapidly dry up. These impacts will occur in every nation of Central Asia. Who among today's key players will remain active tomorrow? Will the nature of threats also change? Will nations close their borders?

As the OSCE and other organizations debate these questions, they will assuredly continue to provide assistance to the Central Asian participating States with the goal not only of sharpening their national capacities to protect and manage their borders, but also to increase regional communications and co-operation on cross-border issues. These are critical considerations for the future, and the OSCE will continue to promote a multi-dimensional approach to border security and management to facilitate open and secure movement of persons and goods.

ISAF's imminent withdrawal from Afghanistan reinforces the perception that the country will continue to be a trouble hotspot and a source of future threats. The withdrawal may lead to the emergence of more challenging border problems that had been previously deterred or overshadowed by the international presence, thus increasing the vulnerabilities of the Central Asian participating States.

Given the shared nature of the challenges that participating States are facing at their borders, no matter where they are located on the globe, it is increasingly hard to criticize the sharp focus on efforts in Central Asia. Tackling the threats at or near the source, while simultaneously strengthening capacities to detect, interdict, and suppress criminal organizations and illegal activities along the routes that lead to countries of destination greatly contributes to one of the overarching goals of the OSCE – building a security community within which all people can lead free and prosperous lives.

According to regional experts from within Central Asia¹³ and from international think-tanks and universities, ISAF's withdrawal will inevitably exacerbate existing challenges such as drugs, weapons, radical extremism, and refugees. Weaknesses in the rule of law throughout Central Asia and Afghanistan remain a wide-open door. There is widespread agreement that investing (in the sense of preparedness and planning) in the region in 2013 will pre-emptively address the transnational, cross-border risks of 2014 and beyond. The elephant in the room is corruption, as discussed above. And it is what causes many potential actors and donors to be reluctant to actually make the necessary investments. The surrounding dialogue resembles a marketplace more than a security discussion, and "caveat emptor" remains the rule.

Coming at a time when financial contributions are more limited than in the recent past, an effort to expand the OSCE's activities and programmes

13 Cf. Jeffrey Mankoff, *United States and Central Asia after 2014*, A report of the CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program, January 2013 at: http://csis.org/files/publication/130122_Mankoff_USCentralAsia_Web.pdf.

relating to the better management of the Organization's external borders must be carefully formulated. Large donations can no longer be reasonably expected, nor perhaps are they desirable. While large-scale projects look attractive, it is likely that smaller projects (which may be considered components of larger undertakings) are most likely to find support and funding. Smaller projects will also require less equipment and/or infrastructure, and will be less susceptible to corruption and coercion. Domestic contributions and visible determination will fuel further external donations. Building upon these foundations and the documented successes of 2006-2013, the OSCE's efforts in border security and management will remain viable and valuable in the changing security arena of Central Asia. Further strengthening co-ordination with the other programmes and partners described in the previous section can help to overcome the financial restraints that will remain a reality.

All stakeholders will need to contribute if the overall goal to which the participating States have committed themselves – that of establishing and maintaining open and secure borders – is to be achieved. In the absence of a political incentive such as the promise of EU membership that has been so effective in the Western Balkans, it is up to the Central Asian states themselves to make a commitment to the creation of open and free societies in which the rule of law leads to the strongest possible domestic and international results – and to act on this commitment. A start would be the passing of high-profile anti-corruption legislation and corresponding prosecutions. In the current economic climate, the donor community must collectively insist on well-developed border strategies that allow for clear co-ordination and a minimum of duplication. Finally, as it is in the interest of the entire OSCE to curb the flow of drugs, to crack down on criminal organizations involved in trafficking in all its forms, and to counter violent extremism and terrorism, it is incumbent on the participating States to make a pronounced and visible effort to increase their sharing of information and good practices that will enable them to take action at or near the source of these transnational threats, along their transport routes, and finally at destinations.

There are cross-border risks and transnational threats in all three dimensions of the OSCE – politico-military, economic and environmental, and human. The greatest concern in Central Asia stems from the politico-military dimension. Yet the solutions are likely to be found in the economic and environmental basket, just as Maslow's hierarchy of needs builds from the ability of a person or a family to eat, sleep, earn a living, and be safe. This is also true of the OSCE's achievements in the human dimension.

To answer some of the questions that linger: Yes, the OSCE should remain active and interested in Central Asia through the years to come, initiating and responding to requests for modernizing practices, processes, and procedures at or near the borders of each Central Asian State. Yes, the structure of security threats in the OSCE will continue to change, and the capacity to respond to transnational threats and their cross-border evolution should re-

main a priority in Central Asia and beyond. Yes, the OSCE participating States within Central Asia (and their neighbours) have the capacity to make early and determined changes, without external assistance, that will immediately have positive impact on security – if they choose. And, yes, it is expected that sovereign states will continue to select their partners based either upon mutual interests in wealth creation and economic development (not only symmetrical) or on common threats to their sovereign security. The OSCE should continue to offer a forum in which such relations can be nurtured, with all participating States sharing the commitments that support such beneficial undertakings. The OSCE Border Security and Management Concept, and the Organization itself have the ability to serve Central Asia well into the future, by making imaginative and responsive contributions to the changes likely to occur as these states (and their economies) strive to ensure open and secure borders.