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## OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan: Recent Developments, Opportunities, and Challenges

In 2007, the participating States adopted Madrid Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/07, which established the framework for the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan, an OSCE Partner for Co-operation since 2003. Four years later, in Vilnius, they decided to strengthen and expand this engagement. Today, as the international community prepares for the withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) by 2014, at which point Afghanistan is expected to take full responsibility for its own security, it is time to examine what the OSCE engagement with Afghanistan has achieved so far and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.

### *Implementing the Madrid Decision*

From its inception, the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan has been underpinned by the understanding that security in the OSCE region is influenced by developments beyond its borders, particularly in neighbouring regions. This concept of interdependence fostered the OSCE Partnership for Co-operation, a platform for OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation to address common security-related challenges and advance their common interest. At the 2007 Ministerial Council in Madrid, OSCE participating States voiced their concern about the impact that the situation in Afghanistan was having on security in the OSCE area and took action to address Afghanistan's request for assistance in the fields of border security, police training, and combating illicit drug trafficking.<sup>1</sup>

The Madrid Ministerial Council Decision on "OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan" provided a strong foundation for stepping-up and operationalizing the Organization's support for the country. Such support was to be provided through tailor-made activities aimed at strengthening the management of borders between the Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan, combating terrorism, and fighting trafficking in small arms and light weapons, illicit drugs, and human beings. The decision entrusted four main tasks to the Secretary General: 1) to examine the prospects for intensifying OSCE action to support measures for securing the borders between the Cen-

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Note: The article reflects the personal views of the author.

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

tral Asian participating States and Afghanistan, 2) to explore all co-operation options, in co-ordination with the UN and other relevant actors, and make proposals for further actions to participating States as appropriate, 3) to support the further involvement of Afghan counterparts in OSCE activities, and 4) to develop specific projects and programmes for Afghan counterparts in the OSCE area.<sup>2</sup>

In implementing this decision, the Secretariat, in close consultation with participating States, Afghanistan, and international and regional organizations, developed a total of 16 projects, of which twelve were finally launched. Of these twelve projects, seven were border-related and five concerned with counter-narcotics.

The twelve projects, most of which were fully implemented by the end of 2011, resulted in the training of about 400 Afghan border, customs, and law-enforcement officers. Training took place mainly in Central Asia, often with the participation of officers from Central Asian countries, but also in the Russian Federation and Turkey. In order to increase their impact and multiplying effect, activities were based on a “train-the-trainer approach”. To strengthen training in the area of border management, the OSCE Border Management Staff College (BMSC) was inaugurated in May 2009 in Dushanbe. Since then, the BMSC has been providing specialized training for senior management of border security agencies and aims to create open but secure borders.

The implementation of projects relied heavily on the OSCE field operations in Central Asia, drawing from their well-established co-operation with host country authorities and expertise. In addition, through their regular activities under their respective mandates, the field operations in Central Asia continued to strengthen local capacities needed for addressing domestic security threats and challenges.

The OSCE engagement with Afghanistan also continued to take place through the partnership mechanisms. Under this framework, Afghan experts participated in OSCE events that raised their awareness of OSCE principles and commitments and enabled them to establish contacts and share experiences with counterparts from participating States and Partner countries. Specific events were also designed to address the needs of Afghanistan, such as the 2010 workshop on “Combating Illicit Crop Cultivation and Enhancing Border Security Management: Thailand as a Case Study”.

Finally, another important strand of work included OSCE technical assistance to Afghanistan concerning fair and free elections. Building on previous assistance provided in 2004 and 2005, ODIHR deployed Election Support Teams in support of the 2009 and 2010 elections. Following each of these visits, reports containing detailed recommendations on electoral reform were produced and translated into the local languages.

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2 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 20.

The Madrid Decision constituted an important milestone in the OSCE's recent history, showing that the Organization was willing and able to address security concerns emanating from Afghanistan. Yet its implementation was not without challenges.

First of all, the bulk of the OSCE's Afghanistan-related activities were to be financed through extra-budgetary contributions, making it clear from the onset that participating and Partner States' commitment to provide sufficient and sustained resources for the implementation of activities would be key.<sup>3</sup> Out of the 16 projects, four could not be launched due to lack of donor support.

Second, given the absence of an OSCE presence in Afghanistan, the Organization had to rely entirely on the Afghan authorities, participating States, and representatives of other international organizations present in Kabul to identify both capacity-building needs and prospective trainees. As a result, making sure that the right officials received training, assessing the impact of training, and providing necessary follow-up proved difficult tasks.

In addition, political considerations limited the geographical scope of activities. Two of the most ambitious border-related activities, could not be launched due to lack of agreement among participating States in authorizing the implementation of project activities inside Afghanistan.<sup>4</sup> These two projects, "Border Training Facility at Shir Khan Bandar/Nizhny Panj" and "OSCE mentoring at Afghan Border Crossing in Northern Afghanistan", had price tags of over twelve million and over 25 million euros, respectively, and were to be implemented over a period of five years. Despite a strong appeal from Afghanistan, which considered that the exclusion of these two ambitious projects "handicapped"<sup>5</sup> the decision adopted in Madrid, some participating States remained unconvinced due to concerns over the security of OSCE staff as well as scepticism regarding the added value of in-country activities.

#### *Strengthening OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan: From Astana to Vilnius*

Three years after the Madrid Ministerial Meeting, the 2010 Astana Summit provided new momentum to the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan. In the Astana Commemorative Declaration "Towards a Security Community", the OSCE Heads of State or Government recognized that "the security of the

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3 Cf. Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan, in Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2008*, Baden Baden 2009, pp. 361-368, here: p. 367.

4 The implementation of OSCE activities outside the OSCE region requires a consensus decision by the participating States.

5 Cf. Delegation of Afghanistan, Statement by Mr. Wahid Monawar, Acting Permanent Representative of the Permanent Mission of Afghanistan to the OSCE, at the 724th Permanent Council, PC.DEL/687/08/Rev.1, 4 August 2008

OSCE area is inextricably linked to that of adjacent areas” and vowed to enhance the level of their interaction with the OSCE Partners for Co-operation. They also underscored “the need to contribute effectively, based on the capacity and national interest of each participating State, to collective international efforts to promote a stable, independent, prosperous and democratic Afghanistan”.<sup>6</sup>

Tasked with organizing a follow up process to the Astana Summit, the 2011 Lithuanian Chairmanship sought to strengthen OSCE engagement with Afghanistan through concrete projects that would help to stabilize Afghanistan and address transnational threats stemming from its territory. As the year 2011 started, the unfolding “Arab Spring” reinforced the notion of an inter-linked and mutually dependant security environment between the OSCE region and its adjacent areas. The events prompted the participating States to explore possibilities to strengthen their engagement with OSCE Partners for Co-operation, including Afghanistan, and share the OSCE experience and expertise in supporting countries in transition.

As a product of discussions that took place throughout 2011, the participating States adopted a decision on “Strengthening the OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan”<sup>7</sup> at the Vilnius Ministerial Council. This decision provided fresh political impetus to the OSCE’s engagement with Afghanistan and set the stage for intensified OSCE support to the country in the run-up to the 2014 ISAF withdrawal.

As in the case of the Madrid Decision, the Vilnius Decision emphasized the “primary role of the UN” and the complementarity of the OSCE’s work, and recognized that the OSCE could make a tangible contribution to the international community’s efforts based on its comparative advantages.

To this end, the decision further linked the OSCE’s work to the international community’s efforts towards enhancing regional stability (Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process) and supporting Afghanistan’s transition (Bonn Process). The Central Asian participating States were identified as key players in the OSCE’s efforts, as the decision stressed the importance of regional co-operation as well as their essential role in helping promote long-term security and stability in Afghanistan. In addition, widening the scope of OSCE activities to include the economic and environmental dimension as well as the human dimension enabled the OSCE to fully incorporate its comprehensive approach to security into its Afghanistan-related work. Finally, recognizing the 2014 presidential elections as a transition milestone, the decision expressed the OSCE’s readiness to provide election support.

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6 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Summit Meeting, Astana 2010, *Astana Commemorative Declaration. Towards a Security Community*, SUM.DOC/1/10/Corr.1, 3 December 2010, section 10.

7 Decision No. 4/11, Strengthening OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan, MC.DEC/4/11, 7 December 2011, in: *Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Eighteenth Meeting of the Ministerial Council, 6 and 7 December 2011*, Vilnius, 7 December 2011, pp. 17-19.

In an effort to ensure co-ordination and coherence in the implementation of Afghan-related activities, the Vilnius Decision strengthened the Secretary General's role, tasking him to "act as a focal point among all OSCE executive structures". As a contribution to implementing this decision, the Secretariat was also tasked with developing a new package of activities covering the three dimensions of security.

The ensuing list of so-called "second generation Afghanistan-related projects", which took into account lessons learned from the implementation of the first generation of projects as well as areas identified by Afghanistan for further assistance, contained 32 projects in the three OSCE dimensions to be implemented by 2014.<sup>8</sup>

A number of these projects were formulated as follow-up activities to those undertaken in the first phase of projects. This approach was guided by the understanding that past OSCE activities aimed at securing the borders between Afghanistan and Central Asia and strengthening the capacities of Afghan border, customs, and law-enforcement officers had proven their value.

New projects include the "Patrol Programming and Leadership Project", which is training both Afghan and Tajik patrol officers; the Border Management Staff College; the "Customs Training project in Bishkek", which is enhancing the competencies of both Kyrgyz and Afghan customs officials; the "Border Liaison Officers project", which seeks to strengthen co-operation and trust among border officials from Central Asia and Afghanistan; and the "Project on Strengthening Border Guards Capacities in Turkmenistan", which aims to build the surveillance and detection capacities at the Turkmen-Afghan border.

In addition, the new project list includes activities in the economic and environmental dimension, with particular emphasis on good governance and the promotion of trade, as well as in the human dimension, including human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, and freedom of the media.

At the time of writing, two of the new projects have been completed and four others are being implemented. The two completed projects are the "Development of Women's Entrepreneurship through SME [Small and Medium-sized Enterprise] and Small Handicraft Support" and "Promoting Bilateral and Regional Co-operation on Border Security and Management". The former, implemented by the Office of the Co-ordinator of Economic and Environmental Activities, succeeded in supporting 24 Afghan, Tajik, and Azerbaijani women entrepreneurs in further developing and managing their textile, jewellery, and handicraft businesses by developing their skills and improving their networking. Under the second project, 37 border experts, cus-

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8 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, *Chairmanship's perception paper, Strengthening the OSCE engagement with Afghanistan*, CIO.GAL/221/11, 9 November 2011.

toms officers, and diplomats from six participating States and Afghanistan were brought together to discuss issues of mutual concern.

As for the projects currently under implementation, two in the area of border management are a joint undertaking of the OSCE's Transnational Threats Department of the Secretariat (TNTD) and the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. These are the "Patrol Programming and Leadership Project", which by the end of 2013 will have trained 110 Afghan border police alongside a similar number from Tajikistan; and the "Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe", formally a project under the Office in Tajikistan. Since its inauguration in 2009, the College has provided training to close to 400 Afghan law-enforcement experts. The two other ongoing projects have an economic focus and aim to support Tajikistan's cross-border trade and promote good economic governance on the border with Afghanistan. The "Free Economic Zones", which receive expert support from the OSCE, attract investors to the border regions by offering a safe business environment. The "Cross-border Trade Resource Centres", managed by the Office in Tajikistan, provide fee consultations to traders from Afghanistan and Tajikistan on issues relating to customs, taxes, and other trade-related issues.

The limited number of completed and ongoing projects demonstrates that, despite the generous contribution of funds by a number of participating States and partner countries, financial resources have become increasingly scarce. Due to financial constraints, even those countries that maintain their financial commitment have scaled down the amount of their contributions. In July 2012, substantial funding gaps led to the identification of nine "priority" projects to which participating States were invited to direct available funding.<sup>9</sup> Though additional pledges have been received since then, six of those projects are still in need of funding.

Alongside the implementation of projects, the OSCE Partnership for Co-operation continued to act as a valuable instrument for the provision of further support to Afghanistan. Examples include the "Workshop on Promoting Security through a Comprehensive Approach to Development in Border Areas – a Capacity-Building Programme According to Thai Experiences", which was organized for a group of Afghan experts in the margins of the 2012 OSCE-Thailand Conference, and the training programme "Afghanistan Capacity-Building: Strengthening the Diplomatic Service", held in April 2012 in Ulaanbaatar.

With regard to election-related work, in July 2012, an ODIHR team travelled to Kabul to present the Final Report of the 2010 Election Support Team and discuss its recommendations, as well as future ODIHR election work, with the Afghan authorities. In the context of this visit, Afghanistan indicated its interest in legal reviews, round-table discussions, and OSCE engagement in the context of the 2014 presidential elections in general.

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9 Cf. *Joint letter by the Chair of the Permanent Council, the Chair of the Asian Contact Group and the Secretary General*, CIO.GAL/103/12, 25 July 2012.

In addition, in accordance with the Vilnius Decision, the OSCE has remained committed to the Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process, which seeks to promote co-operation between Afghanistan and its neighbours as a way to ensure stability in and around Afghanistan. At the Kabul Ministerial Conference in June 2012, the OSCE announced its participation as a supporting regional organization in the implementation of three of the seven confidence-building measures identified in the Kabul Declaration,<sup>10</sup> namely counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and education.

Moreover, the Secretary General has undertaken steps aimed at ensuring the co-ordination of the OSCE's Afghanistan-related work with other international and regional organizations. In March 2012, he chaired an informal meeting with the five heads of OSCE field operations in Central Asia, representatives from Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan, and high-level officials from international and regional organizations. The meeting, which took place in Dushanbe in the margins of the Fifth Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA V), facilitated an exchange of information on ongoing activities in support of Afghanistan and a discussion of opportunities for further co-operation.

In March 2013, the Secretary General dedicated a Security Day<sup>11</sup> to "International Community Engagement with Afghanistan and Central Asian States – Challenges, Synergies, Possible Responses and the OSCE Role". Panellists included high-level representatives from Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan as well as from the UN, NATO, the EU, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).<sup>12</sup> The participants underlined the important role of the

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10 Cf. Istanbul Process: A New Agenda for Regional Cooperation in the "Heart of Asia", *Heart of Asia Ministerial Conference – Kabul, 14 June 2012, Conference Declaration*, at: <http://heartofasiaministerial-mfa.gov.af>.

11 Launched in 2012 on the initiative of the Secretary General with the aim of revitalizing debate and placing renewed attention and visibility on the OSCE's politico-military work, the OSCE Security Days have since proven to be a valuable forum for dialogue between the OSCE and relevant Track II initiatives on Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security. In this spirit, the Security Days format has allowed prominent groups of experts, think-tanks, and delegates to engage with panellists in a free-flowing discussion, providing fresh ideas regarding the opportunities and obstacles the OSCE faces in addressing current security threats and challenges as well as regarding the role of civil society in shaping a security community and in complementing the OSCE's political dialogue.

12 Including: Vygaudas Ušackas, EU Special Representative and Head of the EU Delegation to Afghanistan; Zamir Kabulov, Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation on Afghanistan; Zarar Ahmad Muqbel Osmani, Minister of Counter Narcotics of Afghanistan; Kairat Sarybay, Deputy Foreign Minister of Kazakhstan; Avazbek Atakhanov, Director of the Department of Eastern Countries and Special Representative on Afghan Affairs of the Kyrgyz Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Nizomiddin Zohidov, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan; Vepa Hajyyev, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan; Ján Kubiš, Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General for Afghanistan; Patricia Flor, EU Special Representative for Central Asia; Gennady Nevyglas, Deputy Secretary General, CSTO; James Appathurai, the NATO Secretary General's Special Representative for the Caucasus and Central Asia; Andrew Steinfeld, NATO Deputy Senior Civilian Representative in Afghanistan; Dmitry Mezentssev, Secretary-General of the SCO; Miroslav Jenča, Special Representative of the UN Secre-

Central Asian states in creating a new regional security paradigm.<sup>13</sup> The concept of “regional ownership” was reiterated throughout discussions as a key component of any international community initiative aiming to promote regional co-operation. There was also a frank acknowledgement that regional stability would require the addressing of existing challenges within the Central Asian region, including those related to energy, territorial and border disputes, and interethnic relations, which hamper regional co-operation and undermine trust among states.

Security Day participants underlined the OSCE’s comparative advantage as both a platform for dialogue and co-operation – including at bilateral and regional level – and a provider of targeted capacity-building projects. Concrete proposals were made for building upon the potential of existing OSCE institutions. In particular it was suggested that the BMSC in Dushanbe could expand its work in order to provide capacity-building with reference to a broader range of transnational threats. The establishment of a research centre on Afghanistan-related issues under the OSCE Academy in Bishkek was also suggested. Another proposal was to create a Centre of Excellence on Police Management in the region, possibly in Kazakhstan, which would provide specialized training to law-enforcement experts from Central Asia and Afghanistan. Finally, the role of ODIHR was highlighted by several speakers, who encouraged it to provide support for and participate in the monitoring of the 2014 presidential elections.

#### *The Situation Today: Afghanistan and the Broader Region*

Today, the attention of the international community is focused on the draw-down of ISAF forces, which is about to enter its fifth and final phase and should be completed by the end of 2014. It is clear that this will open a new chapter for international engagement in Afghanistan. At the time of writing, negotiations were ongoing on the overall size and mandate of international forces in the country beyond 2014. While international support will continue to be provided after that date, particularly through the financing and mentoring of Afghan security forces, the responsibility for ensuring security within the country will be fully in the hands of the Afghan authorities.

The presidential elections that are scheduled to take place in 2014 are generally looked upon as a key test for Afghanistan’s capacity to conduct a successful transition, but perhaps even more important is the government’s ability to deliver much-needed reforms in the areas of human rights and strengthening the rule of law, and particularly in fighting corruption. Progress

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tary-General and Head of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA).

13 A report with highlights from the event was distributed under reference SEC.DAYS/7/13 on 3 April 2013.



in implementing the reform agenda would serve to reassure international donors of Afghanistan's capacity and political will to meet its commitments.

The security situation remains fragile, and many fear that progress made so far could be rapidly reversed. The Afghan National Security Forces (ANSF) are now responsible for ensuring the security of almost 90 per cent of the population. Yet concerns remain about their capacity to maintain stability following ISAF's withdrawal. In late April 2013, Ján Kubiš, the UN Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan and head of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) warned of an increase in civilian casualties in the first three months of the year. Indeed, the start of the Taliban spring offensive opened a new fighting session and foreshadowed a further increase in violence during the coming months. At present, the prospect of peace talks with the Taliban remains uncertain.

It goes without saying that developments in Afghanistan are followed with concern by its Central Asian neighbours, who fear the potential spread of instability – should the situation deteriorate – across the porous borders of the region. Such concerns are shared by other participating States, who have warned about the possible escalation of tensions in Afghanistan's northern provinces and their spillover into the wider region. Among the key challenges identified are the spread of terrorism, illicit drugs, and extremism, which require all the states concerned to address existing shortcomings in border management, to combat widespread corruption, and to enhance inter-state co-operation.

Against this background, the Central Asian countries realize that, as recognized in the Vilnius Ministerial Council Decision, they have a leading role to play in fostering stability within the region. Overall, their bilateral relations with Afghanistan have been marked by both fear and a sense of opportunity. An example of this is the prominent role played by some of the countries in the region in Afghanistan's electricity and transport sectors, which has included the building of important infrastructure aimed at expanding rail and road connections as well as energy supply systems.

In addition, a number of Central Asian countries participate in multilateral initiatives in support of Afghanistan, including RECCA, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA) and the Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process. In fact, the last meeting of the Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process was hosted by Kazakhstan on April 2013. Furthermore, countries in the region have made a valuable contribution to ISAF's efforts through their participation in the Northern Distribution Network.<sup>14</sup>

Unfortunately, regional co-operation, including on Afghanistan-related issues, continues to be challenged by differing national interests and competition. Yet, today's security landscape – characterized by interdependence and intertwined economic, geopolitical, and security interests – requires co-

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14 The Northern Distribution Network comprises several routes for the logistical supply of Afghanistan/ISAF via Central Asia.

operative solutions to common challenges, particularly when addressing transnational threats to security.

*Looking Ahead: Challenges and Opportunities for the OSCE in the Context of the Helsinki +40 Process.*

Within the OSCE, political aspirations declared by the participating States often lack the resources to be translated into concrete deliverables. Currently, a lack of sustainable and predictable funding constitutes a key obstacle in fulfilling the Afghanistan-related commitments undertaken by the participating States in Madrid, Astana, and Vilnius.

Equally worrying is the fact that some participating States appear to lack a sense of ownership over some of the activities undertaken as part of the Organization's engagement with Afghanistan. The fact that Afghanistan-related activities have mainly been funded through extra-budgetary contributions – a system that allows new tasks to be implemented without raising the OSCE Unified Budget – has contributed to this problem. A case in point is the BMSC in Dushanbe. In an attempt to further consolidate and ensure the sustainability of one of the OSCE flagship projects, the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, in co-ordination with the TNTD, proposed the partial funding of the College through the OSCE Unified Budget. However some delegations are reluctant to take over the financing of a project over which they perceive they have had little control and which they consider is yet to prove its value.

A number of challenges that the OSCE's Afghanistan-related work has faced so far – limited political engagement and financial support from participating States, feeling of lost ownership or mistrust on the side of some states, and a lack of a shared and clear strategy on how to implement tasks and commitments – are a reflection of the broader challenges facing the Organization.

The Helsinki +40 Process, launched at the 2012 OSCE Ministerial Council in Dublin in 2012 and carried on in 2013 by the Ukrainian Chairmanship, aims to address these challenges. In addition, it offers an excellent framework for further defining the OSCE's role vis-à-vis Afghanistan, which would help increase the OSCE's relevance as a regional security actor. Furthermore, building on previous steps to strengthen the OSCE's capacity to address transnational threats – including the creation of the TNTD at the OSCE Secretariat – the participating States now have the opportunity to further equip the OSCE with the necessary tools to address such threats, including those emanating from Afghanistan. To this end, the Organization should build on its comparative advantages and potential. In this regard, the following issues could be considered:

- As opposed to other international actors, most notably the EU, the OSCE is particularly well placed to make full use of existing synergies between its Afghanistan- and Central Asia-related work. Indeed, the key added value that the OSCE brings to the international efforts to assist Afghanistan is its ability to engage with Afghanistan in the broader setting of the Central Asian region. The status of the Central Asian countries as fully fledged participating States gives them shared ownership of the Organization's efforts in this area and a unique level of input into the development of those efforts.
- As part of its support for the efforts of the international community to promote regional stability, in particular through the Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process, the OSCE can play a key role in facilitating regional co-operation involving its Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan. Following the adoption in 2013 of action plans for its confidence-building measures, the Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process is now confronted with the crucial challenge of moving forward with the implementation of these measures. While some practical initiatives have already taken place, most of them have been bilateral rather than regional in nature. The OSCE could play a role in initiating and supporting a regional dialogue on the practical implementation of agreed confidence-building measures. In addition, similarly to the Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process, the CSCE Helsinki process aimed to build confidence among countries with diverging interests but who decided nonetheless to work together to avoid further conflict. Though the geopolitical and cultural contexts of each region are unique, the OSCE's experience in formulating and implementing confidence-building measures could be of relevance as the Heart of Asia/Istanbul Process moves into the next phase.
- The OSCE's comprehensive concept of security provides an excellent framework for the Organization to address security challenges related to Afghanistan as well as "home-grown" challenges stemming from Central Asia. This is particularly obvious in the area of transnational threats to security, as it provides a solid basis for ensuring that measures undertaken to combat threats such as terrorism, extremism, and illicit drugs are in compliance with OSCE commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- The OSCE's work in Central Asia, including activities undertaken by OSCE field operations, institutions, and the Secretariat, helps countries in the region implement their OSCE commitments and build their capacity to address domestic security challenges and tackle potential sources of instability. The OSCE, thanks especially to the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), is particularly well-placed to support the countries in the region in addressing outstanding issues related to inter-ethnic relations and cross-border ethnic groups – such as minority participation, discrimination, border demar-

- cation, and the situation in ethnic enclaves – which might pose an additional challenge in the post-2014 scenario.
- Regional stability will also depend on the ability of Afghanistan and Central Asian countries to adopt co-ordinated solutions to security challenges. Though regular high-level meetings take place between the Central Asian authorities and their Afghan counterparts in several forums (UN, SCO, OSCE, etc.), it is important that such networking and co-operation trickles down to the level of senior and middle-ranking officials at ministries and state agencies. This would enable the carrying out of joint security assessments, the establishment of mechanisms for information sharing and the conducting of joint operations. The OSCE makes a key contribution in this regard, particularly through the work of the BMSC. Ensuring the sustainability of the College by providing it with a stable source of funding would allow it to make full use of its potential and, if supported by the participating States, to develop into a fully-fledged transnational-threats institution in the region. Establishing a Centre of Excellence on Police Management in the region, as mentioned above, would represent an additional contribution in the area of law enforcement.
  - Another area where further potential exists is higher education. The primary OSCE contribution is through the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, where students, mainly from Central Asia and Afghanistan, receive full scholarships for masters degrees in Politics and Security or Economic Governance and Development. Developing a research centre on Afghanistan-related issues within the academy would help the OSCE to further support co-operation between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan through a dedicated programme dealing with current and emerging issues of regional security co-operation.
  - Looking ahead, OSCE efforts should continue to follow the overall lead of the UN. In this regard, more could be done to seek synergies between OSCE activities and relevant UN initiatives. A case in point is the Regional Programme for Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), which aims to enhance counter-narcotic capacities across the region through better co-ordination and facilitation of regional co-operation. The regional programme foresees activities such as regional training courses for enhanced counter-narcotics co-operation, providing technical assistance aimed at strengthening operational capacities to conduct regional activities among law-enforcement agencies, promoting regional co-operation among regional judicial institutions in criminal matters, and enhancing contacts among judicial institutions in the region. The OSCE, based on its grassroots presence in all five Central Asian countries, long-standing co-operation with relevant national authorities, and the

expertise of the Vienna-based TNTD, can deliver a key contribution in these areas.

- With regard to the 2014 presidential elections, ODIHR should explore the feasibility of providing targeted support, in response to the request from the Afghan authorities and in close co-operation with the UN. Such support could include legal reviews of the draft electoral law and the organization of thematic round-tables, which could serve to present and discuss international standards and best practices, as well as training on international electoral standards and election observation. Some of these activities might require the participating States to adopt Permanent Council decisions allowing activities to be undertaken inside Afghanistan.

Although the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan has made substantial headway since it was first articulated in 2007, important challenges remain. When looking at the future, one can ask whether additional steps should be taken to improve the OSCE's strategy, as a regional security organization, of complementing the international community's efforts towards ensuring stability in and around Afghanistan. So far, the OSCE has largely followed a piecemeal approach, oriented towards the implementation of individual projects, which, though they are valuable, are not driven by a clearly defined and long-term strategy. Looking ahead, the OSCE could consider developing a strategic framework for its engagement with Afghanistan, which would identify the overall objectives and priority areas for action based on the OSCE's comparative advantages. In addition, the strategic framework could outline specific initiatives and activities through which OSCE would contribute to ongoing international assistance efforts, based on OSCE's role as both a unique platform for dialogue and a provider of targeted capacity-building projects. The strategic framework would conceptually link the work carried out by the OSCE to support Central Asian countries in building their own capacities to address overlapping domestic security challenges and threats stemming from Afghanistan; the capacity-building provided to Afghan officials, including that provided through partnership-sponsored activities; and the OSCE's contribution as a platform for promoting co-operation and building confidence among countries in the region. The Helsinki +40 Process offers an interesting opportunity to consider this further.