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Mongolia and the OSCE

Introduction to Mongolia

Mongolia is located in the heart of Asia. It shares borders only with Russia (3,543 km) to the north and China (4,709 km) to the south. Mongolia is a landlocked nation with a surface area of 1.5 million square kilometres. In terms of territory, Mongolia is the seventh largest country in Asia and the 19th largest in the world. Mongolia has a continental climate with four seasons, and consists of a mixture of forests, steppes, deserts, and mountains.

In 2013, Mongolia's population was 2.93 million, making it the 139th most populous nation in the world. The latest census shows that 67 per cent of the population is under the age of 35, thus, making the country rather youthful compared to its neighbours.

Mongolia's official language is Mongolian, a language of the Altaic language family. Standard written Mongolian is based on the Khalkha dialect using the Cyrillic alphabet with slight modifications. The most common foreign language used in Mongolia is English, followed by Russian.

Mongolians, like other nomadic groups of Central Asia, mainly adhered to Shamanism until the rapid spread of Buddhism began in the 14th century. Nevertheless, Shamanism continues to be practised. According to the 2010 census, 53 per cent of citizens above the age of 15 identified themselves as Buddhists, three per cent as Muslims, three per cent as adherents of Shamanism, two per cent as Christians, and 39 per cent as atheists.

Mongolia boasts one of the fastest developing economies in the world with GDP growth of 11.7 per cent in 2013. This rapid growth is primarily due to mining. Mongolia has rich deposits of copper, gold, and coal, to name but a few. These minerals account for 80 per cent of the country's exports. Nevertheless, traditional animal husbandry still plays a crucial role in Mongolia's economy. As of 2013, 29 per cent of the population works in this sector, which makes up 14 per cent of the nation's GDP.

Mongolia has a rich history. The first Mongolian nation state was founded more than 2,200 years ago. The 13th century saw the greatest expansion of the Mongolian nation, when the Mongol Empire stretched from the Sea of Japan to the gates of Vienna. However, internal conflict and growing resistance from conquered peoples led to its fall. Mongolian kings and lords continued their fights, thus weakening the state further. The 17th century saw the rise of the Manchu in Central and East Asia. They subjugated the Inner Mongolians in 1634, the Khalkha Mongolians in 1661, and the Oirat Mongolians in 1755.

At the beginning of the 20th century, the Qing Dynasty was greatly weakened and showed signs of falling apart. The Bogd Khaan of Mongolia, the religious and political leader of the country at the time, used this opportunity to declare Mongolia's independence from the Qing, establishing a nation on 29 December 1911. However, in 1915, imperial Russia and China pressured Mongolia to become an autonomous region of China. With the demise of the Tsar in Russia and the support of the newly found Soviet Union, Mongolia re-established its independence in 1921. Although a de facto independent state, Mongolia came under the economic and political influence of the Soviet Union.

As anti-communist movements picked up momentum in Eastern Europe in 1989 and 1990, Mongolia too experienced change. In 1992, Mongolia adopted a new constitution, officially becoming a democracy with a market economy. As stated in the constitution, Mongolia adopted the parliamentary system with the president as the head of state and the prime minister as the head of the government. The constitution also states that elections will be held every four years and that the parliament will have 76 seats. The president of Mongolia is chosen by direct election every four years. The most recent parliamentary election was held in 2012, which the Democratic Party won with 44.7 per cent of votes. The party with the second largest share of the votes was the People's Party, with 34.2 per cent. The most recent presidential election was held in 2013, in which the incumbent president, Tsakhiagiin Elbegdorj, won for a second time with 50.2 per cent of the votes.

Mongolia pursues an independent, open, multi-pillared, and peaceful foreign policy. Mongolia currently has diplomatic relations with 173 countries, and aims to establish formal relations with every United Nations (UN) member state. The foremost priority of Mongolian foreign policy is to keep equal, balanced, and good-neighbourly relations with Russia and China. Mongolia maintains friendly relations with the USA, Japan, Germany, and the Republic of Korea.

Mongolia joined the UN in 1961. Since then, it has actively participated in UN operations and initiatives. Mongolia has sponsored many resolutions and remains very active to this day. Since the transition to democracy, Mongolian soldiers have honourably served in UN peacekeeping missions in Sierra Leone, Western Sahara, Congo, South Sudan, Chad, and Ethiopia. Outside the UN, Mongolia is also active on the international stage. In 2004, Mongolia became one of the first observer nations to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). In 2012, Mongolia became the 57th participating State of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). That same year, the country became a NATO Partner across the Globe. From 2011 to 2013, Mongolia presided over the Community of Democracies as chair of the organization.

Core Principles of Mongolia's Foreign and Security Policy

In the 1990s, as a great wave of change swept over the world, Mongolia too began its transformation into a democratic state with a market economy. It was during this time that Mongolia saw the need and obtained the opportunity to conduct an independent foreign and security policy. To implement an independent foreign and security policy had been the dream of past generations, as it was seen as an indicator of national sovereignty. However, it was not easy to realize this goal. The victory of democracy lies on the shoulders of the young and energetic, who had the will to change the system, and the leaders of the previous government, who realized that the status quo was not in the best interests of the nation. Nevertheless, Mongolia faced the uneasy task of formulating the principles of its foreign and security policy and deciding for itself exactly how it would participate in international relations.

Mongolia, like many other “small” powers, faced the challenge of defining its foreign policy principles and development strategy. There are countless examples of smaller nations maintaining their sovereignty and guarding their security. The strategies they have used include allying themselves to a great power, forming alliances with other smaller powers, entering unions with other great powers, remaining neutral no matter what the circumstances, and staying neutral without a formal declaration.

At the beginning of the transition, decision and policy makers proposed various ways of conducting foreign policy. These proposals included to closely ally ourselves to one of our neighbours and have them guarantee our security, to remain at a symmetrical distance from our two neighbours, or to follow a policy of neutrality. History has shown us that the first option was not feasible, and that an “inactive” neutrality is impossible for a small nation without access to the sea and located between two great powers. Ultimately, therefore, Mongolia chose to pursue a policy of equal and friendly relations with its two neighbours. In addition, Mongolia sought to become an active member of the international community and strengthen its participation in international organizations, and by this means to improve its relations with other nations. By means of these principles Mongolia could pursue an active “multi-pillar” foreign policy.

For a new democracy that aims to conduct an independent domestic and foreign policy and to develop its democracy and economy, formulating a concept designed to uphold the security of the nation is of utmost importance.

Against this background, the Mongolian parliament passed the foundational documents of Mongolia's foreign policy – the National Security Concept and the Foreign Policy Concept – in 1994. As the new millennium dawned, Mongolia saw a need to synchronize its development goals with global trends, and these fundamental documents were revised in 2010 and 2011, respectively.

Fundamental Principles of the National Security Concept of Mongolia

According to the National Security Concept, Mongolia's national security means "ensuring favorable external and internal conditions for securing and protecting the genuine national interests of Mongolia".¹

National interests are defined as comprising "the very existence of the Mongolian people and its civilization, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity and inviolability of its borders, national unity, constitutional establishment, security, economic independence and sustainable ecological development".²

The key goal of national security is to safeguard and guarantee "national independence, sovereignty and unity".³

Foreign policy plays a vital role in safeguarding and protecting Mongolia's national security. This is reflected in key documents of state. The constitution states that "the duty of the state is to secure the country's independence and to ensure national security and public order".⁴ And the National Security Concept defines "the basic methods for ensuring Mongolia's independence and sovereignty" as "political and diplomatic actions. Accordingly a multi-pillared foreign policy directed towards building active relationships and cooperation with foreign states and international institutions shall be implemented."⁵

Fundamental Principles of the Foreign Policy Concept of Mongolia

Mongolia's foreign policy objectives consist in ensuring independence and sovereignty by pursuing the development of society, maintaining friendly relations with all countries, strengthening Mongolia's position in the international community, and forming a network of relationships with influential countries in the region and in the world based on the interdependence of political, economic, and other interests.

The priority of Mongolia's foreign policy is to safeguard its security and vital national interests by political and diplomatic means, and to create a favourable external environment for its economic, scientific, and technological development.⁶

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- 1 Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia, *Concept of National Security*, section 1.1, available at [http://nsc.gov.mn/sites/default/files/National Security Concept of Mongolia EN.pdf](http://nsc.gov.mn/sites/default/files/National%20Security%20Concept%20of%20Mongolia%20EN.pdf).
 - 2 *Ibid.*, section 1.2.
 - 3 *Ibid.*, section 1.3.
 - 4 *The Constitution of Mongolia*, Article 11 (1), available at <http://www.parliament.mn/en/law/categories/2541/pages/4428>.
 - 5 *Concept of National Security*, cited above (Note 1), section 3.1.1.2.
 - 6 Cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Mongolia, *Concept of Mongolia's Foreign Policy*, General Provisions, at: http://www.mfa.gov.mn/en/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=36&Itemid=55&lang=en.

Mongolia upholds the following principles when conducting foreign policy:

*Peacefulness:*⁷

- Mongolia shall not join any military alliances unless under eminent military threat.
- Mongolia's land and airspace shall not be used by any nation against another.
- Foreign troops shall not be stationed in or transit through Mongolia.

Openness:

- Mongolia shall pursue friendly and mutually beneficial relations with all nations without discrimination in terms of culture, religion, or political or economic system.
- Mongolia shall have open relations in the political, economic, cultural, and scientific dimensions.

Independence:

- Mongolia's foreign policy shall be formulated independently.
- Mongolia's national interest shall be of the utmost priority.

Multi-Pillar:

- Mongolia shall pursue a policy of active participation in international organizations
- Mongolia shall pursue equal, balanced, and good-neighbourly relations with its two neighbours and its "third" neighbours.

Mongolia and the OSCE

Throughout its history, Mongolia has not been able to practise a balanced foreign policy. Thus, after its transition to democracy, one of the first things Mongolia did was to proclaim its equal and balanced foreign policy with its two neighbours. This was reflected in the National Security Concept and the Foreign Policy Concept of Mongolia. Mongolia enjoys close economic ties with both its neighbours. Political relations with Russia and China are also very good. However, this situation brings the danger of a small nation falling under the influence of its two giant neighbours, both economically and politically. So, in order to balance these huge forces, Mongolia must create a new pillar for its foreign policy. Thus was born the "third neighbour" policy, which aims at building closer ties with partners other than Russia and China. This too was reflected in the revised versions of the National Security and

7 Cf. *ibid.*, Mongolia's foreign policy in the political field.

Foreign Policy Concepts. The “third neighbour” concept refers not only to nations but also to international organizations. Mongolia maintains good relations with organizations such as the European Union and NATO. These help Mongolia to maintain balance in its foreign policy. It is within this context that Mongolia’s efforts to co-operate with the world’s largest regional security organization – the OSCE – must be understood.

Mongolia became the OSCE’s 57th participating State on 21 November 2012. However, the history of Mongolia-OSCE relations can be traced back to 2004, when Mongolia became an OSCE Partner for Co-operation. Since that time, Mongolia has shown its interest in and commitment to the OSCE and vice versa. The Astana Commemorative Declaration and its vision of “a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community stretching from Vancouver to Vladivostok, rooted in agreed principles, shared commitments and common goals” prompted Mongolia to formally apply to become an OSCE participating State. The accession process was complicated due to issues regarding the application of existing OSCE commitments to a country that is outside the area of application of, for example, current arms-control agreements. Russia, in particular, pointed out that Mongolia was not a part of the original geographic zone covered by the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE), which started in the 1970s. This zone consisted of all European countries up to the Urals plus the five Central Asian states. A specific problem concerned the fact that Mongolia is outside the zone of application of the OSCE Vienna Document on Confidence and Security-Building Measures (CSBMs). It was ultimately decided to treat Mongolia using the model already applied to Canada and the United States: Vienna Document commitments will apply to Mongolian forces in the zone of application but not to the territory of Mongolia itself. In other words, Mongolian officers could take part in inspections in European countries, but there can be no inspections of Mongolian military exercises or facilities.⁸

In line with country’s commitments as an OSCE participating State, the government of Mongolia invited the OSCE’s Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to observe and monitor the presidential elections in June 2013.

Mongolia joined the OSCE fairly recently. Compared to other participating States, our nation has very little experience in dealing with the Organization. However, one positive aspect is that we are able to hear from the people who decided that Mongolia should join the Organization what their reasoning was. In this regard, Enkhsaikhan Jargalsaikhan, Mongolia’s Ambassador to Austria and Permanent Representative to the OSCE, shared his opinions on why Mongolia joined the OSCE.

8 Cf. Walter Kemp, Europe Moves East: Mongolia Joins the OSCE, *IPI Global Observatory*, 26 November 2012, at: <http://theglobalobservatory.org/2012/11/europe-moves-east-mongolia-joins-the-osce>.

It is often asked why Mongolia joined the OSCE. Mongolia agrees with the Organization's overall goals and principles, which are in line with its foreign policy goals. The spirit of the OSCE coincides with our policy of ensuring security primarily by political and diplomatic means. It also harmonizes with the "third neighbour" policy. Furthermore, most of the OSCE participating States are small and medium-sized countries, which creates commonalities and mutual understanding, including understanding of Mongolia's needs and challenges.

Although the OSCE still lacks a formal charter and other legally binding commitments, it is nonetheless an indispensable forum where issues of broad co-operation are discussed to the fullest possible extent, the positions of states can be brought closer, and agreements on some issues lead to separate and joint actions.

Mongolia can use the OSCE to share its experiences of socio-political development, both positive and negative, while also learning from others' experiences. In view of its geographical location, Mongolia is interested in serving as a bridge between Europe and East Asia. Furthermore, Mongolia has great interest in widening its co-operation with the OSCE in all three dimensions, which are all important, as well as being mutually reinforcing. Without political will and agreement, many of the issues in the second and third baskets will not be easily addressed. Yet if they are not addressed then no agreement can ever emerge.

Nevertheless, I am optimistic that the OSCE will play a more useful role in the future, since all participating States have common goals and have many agreed instruments to promote those goals. I am sure that on all but the most controversial political issues, the participating States will be able to work out their differences. Broad-based co-operation and shared values will gradually bring the participating States even closer, where not blocked by narrow immediate geopolitical differences. Though differences will persist, nevertheless common approaches and common values will prevail, allowing issues to be addressed in a more co-operative spirit.

Another frequently raised issue is whether Mongolia's participation in the OSCE could have any drawbacks. Mongolia does not believe that its status as a participating State will have any negative consequences. On the contrary, it believes that it can benefit greatly by working with the other participating States. Mongolia's socio-economic and human rights goals are to bring its level of development up to that of middle-income European states. That is why it is keen on adopting European standards where possible. The OSCE is one means by which such norms can be introduced more broadly, which is why Mongolia is interested in co-operating both with participating States on a bilateral basis and within the OSCE itself.

It is possible that regional organizations along the lines of the OSCE will be formed in Asia, especially Northeast Asia, in the future. However, this will take time (a few decades, at least) and would require a great effort

and extensive co-operation. I say this is possible because the alternative is mutual suspicion and division into blocs. However, due to its specific features, the form of pan-Asian co-operation will probably be different.