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The OSCE Academy: Working for Long-Term Comprehensive Security in Central Asia

Introduction

In January 1992, all five newly independent post-Soviet Central Asian states became participating States of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE). This was an interesting moment in the history of the region, as the euphoria of independence was counterbalanced, and eventually replaced, by the drastic economic crisis, uncertainty over national security, and the race to establish new rules for domestic politics. In their mutual relation, the states acted swiftly to declare the peaceful nature of their coexistence in the region, via both bilateral and multilateral agreements. For some interested observers, the states' accession to the CSCE served as additional evidence of their willingness to accept some basic but important principles and norms for the construction of relationships with each other as well as with other sovereign states.

A decade later, however, the Central Asian states and societies continued to face an intimidating set of challenges for long-term and comprehensive development and security. These included an acute deficit of well-educated young professionals. The education system remained poorly reformed and seriously under-funded at all levels, while geographical distance from global centres of education meant that young Central Asians faced enormous challenges in their pursuit of education and training in line with the highest modern standards. Those who did manage to receive a good education abroad also had a tendency not to return to the region, thus aggravating the workforce deficit. The erection of "tough" borders, both in physical and political terms, resulted in a deterioration in the levels of human exchange between the countries of the region, including in the area of education and training.

It was in this context that the CSCE's successor, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the government of the Kyrgyz Republic set up the OSCE Academy in 2002. Launched as a project in 2002, the Academy was transformed into a fully-fledged institution precisely ten years ago, in 2004, by the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the OSCE and the government of the Kyrgyz Republic. The MoU clearly stated the importance of the Academy as a regional centre of profes-

Note: The views contained in this contribution are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the OSCE Academy.

sional training, education, and research, with a particular focus on conflict prevention and resolution, post-conflict rehabilitation, and regional security issues.¹ As discussed in detail by Frank Evers in this publication in 2003, the establishment of the Academy was in the interest – though for different reasons and to different degrees – of the region’s governments, the OSCE participating States, and the OSCE institutions, while the overall aim could be stated as to “facilitate the promotion of peace and stability in the region, guided by OSCE principles.”²

Ten years on, time is ripe to review the operation of the OSCE Academy, examine its achievements and the challenges it has faced, and look into its priorities for its future development. The Academy today is an institute that runs two accredited Master’s programmes, hosts several annual professional training programmes, publishes research materials, and actively nurtures an alumni network consisting of over 300 young professionals from the region. This report will present some highlights of the Academy’s work in each of the listed areas, set out the current development priorities, and also examine the major concerns and challenges faced today.

Post-Graduate Education

Offering post-graduate education at Master’s level constitutes the core of the OSCE Academy’s activities. Today the Academy runs two MA programmes, one in Politics and Security (formerly the MA in Political Science), and another in Economic Governance and Development. The programmes are licensed and accredited by the host country’s Ministry of Education and Science. The MA in Politics and Security is a 13-month programme that was set up in 2004, from which nine cohorts of students have since graduated. The MA in Economic Governance is a 15-month programme that was launched in 2012.

Demand for the Academy’s degree programmes has generally been impressive. The MA in Politics and Security has gained a high profile, and annually attracts about 15 applicants from throughout Central Asia for each of the 25-28 available spots. The programme initially focused largely on the five Central Asian states, while remaining open for individual applications from other OSCE participating States as well as non-participating neighbouring countries, such as China and Afghanistan. Whether the figures are evenly distributed among the region’s states is a separate question, and is discussed in detail in the section on challenges below.

1 Cf. *Memorandum of Understanding between the OSCE and the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic*, 22 July 2004.

2 Frank Evers, A New Think-Tank for the OSCE and Central Asia. Establishing the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2003*, Baden-Baden 2004, pp. 337-345, here: p. 341.

From 2009, in the context of increased international focus on assisting transition in Afghanistan, the OSCE Academy started enrolling students from that country on a regular basis. The decision to do so had some important implications for the Academy. For instance, the Afghan students brought their unique educational experience, sometimes quite different from that of Central Asian students, making the classroom more diverse. The Academy also moved the whole academic process into English to allow all students to benefit from classes equally. While students freely use their mother tongues and the Russian language, further improving their command of English enriches their experience and contributes to their success in the labour market.

In 2012, the Academy successfully enrolled the first class to its newly launched Master's programme in Economic Governance and Development. This was a response to rising demand for a competent workforce to develop and manage projects in energy and water policy, regional trade and customs relations, and issues of sustainable economic development. As of July 2014, two classes of students have graduated from the programme, and the third is in the middle of the 15-month course.

Both Master's programmes are essentially interdisciplinary, and designed to equip students with knowledge and understanding of concepts and theories and to introduce real-life policy issues and case studies. For instance, the MA in Politics and Security combines foundational academic courses such as Political Theory and International Relations Theories with subject-oriented modules on topics such as conflict prevention, political Islam, and migration and human trafficking. Similarly, the MA in Economic Governance and Development programme offers general Macroeconomics and Microeconomics modules followed by focused modules on project management, economic effects of migration, integrated water management, and others. Wherever possible, all courses draw on cases from, or relevant to, Central Asia.

Careful selection of faculty is essential towards achieving the goals of the programmes. Ever since its establishment in 2004, the Academy's graduate programme has aimed to maintain a fine balance between international and local or regional staff. In order to allow leading international academics and practitioners to come to Bishkek and work with the Academy's students, many courses are designed as intensive short-term units. Thus, the instructors have represented a variety of institutions, including but certainly not limited to the University of Oxford, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI), the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), and the PIR Center in Moscow. Foreign professors routinely share teaching duties with local experts. While a number of courses used to be taught in Russian, since 2009, all are taught in English, and the Academy has tried hard to ensure that Central Asian instructors come with doctorates from some of the best international universities.

Supporting Alumni Professional Development

The Academy places a great emphasis on supporting students in their further professional development through the teaching of important transferrable skills, including writing, research, and the presentation of ideas. Both programmes offer an intensive course in Academic Writing and demand independent research work in the form of an MA thesis. Nearly all modules and courses require the active participation of the students, including by making presentations and leading discussions. Outside the academic programme, the Academy offers a series of career workshops, focusing on career-building skills and meetings with successful representatives from various walks of professional life in the region. Before graduation, each student has to complete an eight-week internship. The OSCE Academy and its partners have provided funding for leading students to undertake internships at the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, the OSCE High Commissioner for National Minorities (HCNM) in The Hague, NUPI, the GCSP, and various local NGOs and governmental organizations in the region.

The alumni body represents the key output of the Academy, and would serve well as the key indicator of the value of the project as a whole. In order to maintain communication with its growing alumni body, the OSCE Academy appointed an Alumni Co-ordinator. Today the network has 268 alumni, with over 25 more due to join in September 2014. The Academy's engagement with its alumni has focused on three major directions: supporting alumni professional development (travel grants, alumni chapter meetings with prominent institutions and individuals, workshops), maintaining an alumni network (alumni reunions, chapter meetings, conferences, publications), and supporting alumni who wish to give something back to the Academy (alumni mentoring of current students, launch of the Alumni Fund in 2014, etc.). In addition to these, the Academy has established agreements with the ministries of foreign affairs of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan for the placement of selected Academy graduates for three months as junior public officers in these countries.

Over the past ten years, the OSCE Academy's graduate programmes have developed into highly sought-after education and training opportunities for young activists and leaders of Central Asia. In a region where most educational institutions are known to be corrupt and incompetent, the OSCE Academy's curriculum, teaching approaches, and treatment of students represent a rare case of full commitment to academic honesty. In addition to funding the tuition process, the Academy provides each student with a grant to cover their living costs, and non-residents of Bishkek with an accommodation allowance, which enables it to draw the best students from various economic backgrounds. As students have noted, the Academy provides an opportunity for many young people to obtain MA degrees of international

quality without leaving the region. This contributes to more graduates actually staying and working in Central Asia.

Indeed, annual alumni surveys suggest that around 70 per cent of alumni remain in Central Asia and Afghanistan, while the majority of those who leave the region do so for the purpose of pursuing additional qualifications (a PhD or another MA degree). Of surveyed alumni, over 80 per cent were employed as of February 2014. One challenge remains in the fact that nearly half of employed graduates end up working for international organizations, while less than 20 per cent join the public/civil service. There are very clear reasons for this trend; nevertheless, increasing the number of alumni in the decision-making parts of the region's governments remains one of the goals and expectations of the OSCE Academy.

Professional Training

Initiating and organizing professional development training was one of the key pillars of the Academy's establishment. This comes from the understanding that a skilled and educated workforce is of essential importance for the successful and sustainable transformation of the Central Asian states and societies in the longer term. While the Academy's funding and capacity are limited, it was assumed that targeted training on such key subjects as conflict prevention, journalism, and public policy-making could bring tangible benefits to the region's governments as well as societies at large.

In the OSCE Academy's short history, its professional training courses and workshops have covered a wide range of topics, from election observation, via environmental migration, to human rights for lawyers, to name but a few. However, three areas have been established from the very beginning as the Academy's core training competencies. These are conflict prevention, journalism/media, and public administration. All training courses are conducted as short (from one to ten weeks), intensive, and interactive programmes with the goal of helping young leaders from Central Asia to better understand and master the knowledge and skills needed to excel in each of the named fields.

Conflict prevention has been a core part of the professional training offered by the Academy since 2004. Courses in this area were designed and implemented in co-operation with the Institute of Integrative Conflict Transformation and Peace-building (later renamed the Herbert C. Kelman Institute for Interactive Conflict Transformation). These courses have been attended by representatives of human rights NGOs, state administrations, and development organizations from each of the Central Asian states and Afghanistan, though not every country has been represented each year. The training aims at delivering a sophisticated understanding of conflicts, post-conflict developments, and development work in conflict areas (conflict-sensitive devel-

opment). After the tragic violent events in southern Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the training has paid due attention to managing ethnic conflicts, something that has emerged as a key demand in Central Asian society.

The Academy's activities in delivering media training started with co-operation with the Swiss-based consultancy network Media4Democracy in 2005. The courses, initially called Media and Democracy, aimed at providing the participants with a substantial knowledge of both the role of media in democracy and the concept of quality of information. Starting in 2010, and to this day, the OSCE Academy has hosted the training jointly with the *Deutsche Welle Akademie* under the working title of Central Asian School of Contemporary Journalism. Starting in 2011, the training moved to focus on early-career journalists as the key target group, as this group proved to be far more receptive to new approaches and practices, and also represent an investment in the new generation of journalists.

The Academy's provision of training in the area of public administration initially started with a strong focus on administering justice, in co-operation with the Raoul Wallenberg Institute for Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (Sweden). Starting in 2010, the Academy, with the support of NUPI, developed a new format for training in public policy analysis, initially focusing on the case of electricity sector reform. This training has been very well received by various branches of national governments as well as governmental think tanks in the region. Due to high demand, the training is often delivered in two separate rounds in Bishkek, and on several occasions has also been delivered in Tajikistan thanks to co-operation with the Dushanbe office of the German Agency for International Cooperation (GIZ).

These short, intensive capacity-building training courses have helped the Academy grow its network of alumni, expanding it into various government agencies, media organizations, research institutions, and non-profits. As events unfold and domestic and international contexts evolve, the Academy will remain open to new subject areas for professional development training as well as new institutions – domestic and international – to partner in the training projects.

Research and Analysis

Together with postgraduate education and professional training, research is the third “pillar” of the Academy's activities. Mastering research means developing the ability to ask the right questions, employ correct data collection and analysis techniques, and draw conclusions supported by evidence. In the context of the general deterioration of science and education in the region, promoting and supporting research among the young generation of leaders was almost abandoned and “delegated” to graduate schools abroad.

The OSCE Academy aimed at addressing the problem by offering training in research methods and supporting current research on matters relevant to Central Asia's security and development. Consequently, the Academy's postgraduate programmes have made courses in research methods and independent research (an MA thesis) requirements for successful graduation. The Academy has also provided special research training on "Researching Political Islam", which brought several internationally renowned experts on Islam together with young regional scholars to discuss the best ways to research this sensitive topic.

Besides research training, the Academy has also taken proactive measures to encourage young scholars in the region to conduct actual research and publish the results. For instance, in 2004-2005, the Academy supported two pilot research projects: "Rule of Law and Local Traditions", and "Ethnicity and Education in Kyrgyzstan". Both focused on important themes of domestic politics and policy (rule of law, education), and attempted to present a thorough analysis of the status quo and arguments explaining the trends. In 2005-2006, a regional project was launched on "Legal Aspects of Border Management", focusing on yet another fundamental issue dividing the Central Asian states. Five researchers, representing each Central Asian state, contributed to the book, which was edited by Professor Muratbek Imanaliev, former Kyrgyz foreign minister and later Secretary General of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. The 291-page report was published in Russian in both hard and electronic copies. Since 2006, the Academy has also supported two oral history projects, one in Tajikistan and one in Kyrgyzstan. Both focused on collecting first-hand personal accounts of major events since independence in these two countries.

In 2009, the OSCE Academy and NUPI, the Academy's long-time partner and donor, launched a new regional project, the Central Asia Data-Gathering and Analysis Team (CADGAT). The project recruited one researcher from each of five Central Asian states, who would be involved in data collection on topics that invite cross-country comparison. The purpose is to shed light on topics that are important but where data is either widely dispersed or simply absent. The project's results, which have been placed on the Academy's website,³ are intended to be a valuable resource for scholars and analysts working on Central Asia-related topics.

In addition to standard research projects, the Academy has been strongly supporting policy-relevant analysis that could be of equal interest to scholars, students, and policy-makers. The flagship activity here is the Academy's Central Asia Security Policy Briefs series, which publishes succinct analyses of specific and salient policy problems from the region. The topics covered have included border issues, energy tariffs, transition in Afghanistan, co-operation between media and government, conflicts in the mining sector,

3 See: OSCE Academy, *Research and Publications*, at: <http://www.osce-academy.net/en/research/cadgat>.

and more. All policy briefs are stored electronically on the Academy's website, while published hard copies are distributed among the Academy's partners.

At the time of writing, the Academy and NUPI are completing preparation of the newly launched regional research project titled "History Writing and Nation-Building in Central Asia", which will aim at researching the post-1991 evolution of official history narratives in each of the Central Asian states. The output will take the form of a series of academic articles, and an edited anthology is expected by the end of 2016.

Platform for Dialogue

In the past ten years, the OSCE Academy has emerged as a focal communication point for domestic and international researchers, analysts, and policy-makers, hosting conferences, round tables, and other forms of dialogue. Even though most events took place as part of research and training activities, it was easy to see how the Academy's role in bringing various groups of people together for discussion could become a "pillar" of its own. This was helped by the fact that the Academy has remained one of few truly regional education and research institutes to cover a wide range of topics relevant to comprehensive security.

The Annual Central Asian Security Seminar is a flagship event in this respect. Convening annually since 2008, this seminar brings together scholars and policy-makers to discuss the most salient events and trends pertaining to the region's security. The seminar came about as a product of the Academy's co-operation with the GCSP and NUPI. The OSCE Centre in Bishkek has also provided direct support for the organization of this seminar. The topics discussed have varied from year to year, ranging from money laundering, via radical extremism, to geopolitics and developments in Afghanistan. In 2014, the seminar is scheduled to discuss the OSCE's progress and prospects in Central Asia in the context of the forthcoming 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the related Helsinki +40 Process.

Apart from the regional security conference, the OSCE Academy has regularly hosted ad hoc conferences, public talks, and seminars, often in co-operation with partner institutions. Thus, in 2012, the Academy co-hosted, together with the University of St Andrews (UK), a video conference on "Making Aid Work: Security and Development in the Kyrgyz Republic". The same year, an international conference was held on "The Impact of the Russian WTO Accession on Central Asia". In 2013, the Academy hosted a small seminar on "Kyrgyzstan 2010-2013: Civil Society, Political Change and the Role of International Community" with the goal of gauging experts' views on these topics. The outputs of all events are publicized, either in the

form of summaries (Geneva Papers, in the case of the regional security seminars), or presentations and speeches, depending on the type of event.

Funders and Partners

Since its establishment, the OSCE Academy has been generously supported by a number of OSCE Participating States. Initial support was provided mainly by Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland. As activities grew in scale, the pool of funding countries grew as well and now includes some 20 participating States. The current operating budget of the Academy is over 900,000 euros per year, which would be impossible to sustain without committed support from funding partners.

Current donors include the USA, Finland, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, and Austria. The OSCE Centre in Bishkek has continued to provide support from the Unified Budget in the amount of 180,000 euros to cover general support costs. While many states provide support through extra-budgetary funding, the governments of Norway, Denmark, and Switzerland have been generously supporting the Academy through direct grants (in the case of Norway and Switzerland, via NUPI and the GCSP, respectively).

Besides providing financial support, NUPI and the GCSP have also developed into comprehensive partners in variety of activity areas, including teaching, thesis supervision, hosting the Academy's students as interns, organizing conferences, and editing publications. The Academy has worked with representatives of the GIZ, the PIR Center, and the University of St Andrews in teaching and holding conferences, Media4Democracy (Switzerland) and the *Deutsche Welle Akademie* in delivering journalism training, the Herbert C. Kelman Institute for Interactive Conflict Transformation (Austria), and the Raoul Wallenberg Institute of Human Rights and Humanitarian Law (Sweden) in conflict prevention and human rights training. The Academy has also developed productive partnerships with a set of Central Asian institutions, including the National Institute for Strategic Studies and the Diplomatic Academy of Kyrgyzstan, the Academy of Dialogue (Tajikistan), and Gawharshad University in Afghanistan.

Priorities

Since 2002, the OSCE Academy has done much to meet initial expectations, expand its activities, and consolidate itself as an institution. The primary goal today is to continue and further develop each of the activity areas, building upon previous successes and addressing problem areas. There are certainly areas which are seen as priorities for the development of the Academy for the near future. These priorities may be responses to the changing international

and domestic contexts in the region or efforts to fix the areas of activities that have faced challenges in the past.

First, the OSCE Academy has to rediscover itself as a regional idea and institution. Work has to be done to ensure more balanced participation of all Central Asian states in all areas of the Academy's activity. More students and trainees from Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan will positively contribute both to the classroom as well as to the alumni network while underlining the fact that regional co-operation between the future generation of professionals and leaders is a must. The OSCE Academy would like to retain its Central Asian emphasis and focus. However, it also aims to contribute to the understanding of the broader intellectual and policy environment by providing academic and professional training to civil servants and other interested young university graduates to overcome eroding links and contribute to professional expertise in Central Asian matters.

Moreover, the Academy intends to continue the active engagement of students and partner institutions from Afghanistan in all areas of activity. This is seen as a highly valuable contribution to the political and social transformation of this country and a means of overcoming historical divisions that kept Central Asia and Afghanistan apart. At the moment of writing, the Academy is planning to step up efforts to research Afghanistan-Central Asia relations, which may evolve into a separate research centre or unit. In addition to Afghanistan, the Academy also plans to work further to engage Mongolia, the states of the Caucasus, and other adjacent countries into the Academy's activities to further test how truly regional the Academy can become.

Second, the Academy needs to reinvent itself as a highly visible platform for discussions, dialogue, and debate. It aims to become a "natural address" for local and travelling speakers – scholars, politicians, and researchers – and to provide them with the best opportunity to reach out to a regional audience. Kyrgyzstan provides considerable freedom of expression, making this task easier than one might imagine would be the case in the region.

Finally, the Academy has to work further to develop as a research centre. This is a relatively small part of the Academy's activities compared to graduate programmes and training, yet it is no less important. The Academy plans to attract PhD students and graduates to conduct part of their research at the OSCE Academy's premises, and to create links between them and the students and wider local intellectual community. More work also needs to be done to support primary research projects involving young scholars from the region, possibly but not necessarily in co-operation with experienced local and international partners.

Challenges

The OSCE Academy's status as a regional non-profit institute delivering training, education, and research imposes a set of challenges that need to be constantly reviewed and addressed. The first challenge is funding. So far, the Academy has benefited from contributions from over 20 OSCE participating States. In an improvement over the early years, some major donors now allow multi-year funding commitments, while the relatively large size of the donor pool reduces the pressure placed on each individual donor state. Continuing diversification of funding is an essential objective of the Academy.

Nevertheless, there is a high degree of dependence on certain specific sources of funding, as well as uncertainty about the impact of international developments on the funding priorities of the participating States. For instance, current developments in Ukraine have resulted in considerable diversion of extra-budgetary funds to that country. The Ukraine crisis, coupled with general drawdown of foreign presence in Central Asia, may end up posing a real challenge to ensuring funding sustainability for the OSCE Academy. The Academy's administration will consider various ways of addressing these risks, while retaining the Academy's core identity and structure.

Another challenge concerns the possibility that political and security developments in the region could, under certain circumstances, adversely affect the Academy's geographical reach. One has to hope that Afghanistan will continue to provide opportunities for the Academy to reach out to students and researchers in the years to come, as the country faces the withdrawal of international troops in the context of unconsolidated political processes and a precarious economic situation. Proactive political engagement from Central Asian governments is also needed for the Academy to reach out to each country in the region, and serve as a truly regional institution.

Conclusion

Overall, the Academy's activities have expanded in both scope and quality since its establishment. Starting as an item in the MoU, it has grown into an established and high-profile educational, training, and research centre, known for its wide web of international partners, committed support from the OSCE institutions and participating States, and quality delivery of education and training services. As of 2014, there are several areas that the Academy will seek to develop further while maintaining the high quality of its existing programmes. These include upgrading its profile as a regional institute for Central Asia, or even for the larger region of Eurasia, developing as a platform for policy-relevant and academic discussions and dialogues, and attracting

and supporting the cream of researchers working on matters important to Central Asia and the OSCE.