

Omar A. Sultanov

Kyrgyzstan and the OSCE¹

By opening its Permanent Representation in Vienna in May of 1993 Kyrgyzstan became the first of the Central Asian and trans-Caucasian successor states of the former Soviet Union to take up a dialogue with the OSCE.

In a sense, the desire of the Kirghiz Republic for active participation in the CSCE can be traced back to the highly favorable and stimulating evaluation of Kyrgyzstan's progress toward democracy given by the CSCE's then Chairwoman-in-Office, the Foreign Minister of Sweden, Baroness Margaretha af Ugglas, in April of 1993.

At the same time, it must be understood that the positive opinion of the person holding the highest political office in the CSCE and the recognition of Kyrgyzstan's undoubted accomplishments in democratizing its society were a result of Kyrgyzstan's own rapprochement with the CSCE over a period of years.

Paths of Cooperation

To the extent that the majority of scholarly concepts and categories are focused on only one part of the field to be researched or put emphasis on that part, the sub-heading above (like the title of the whole article) is in a sense tautological, as Kyrgyzstan has already become an inseparable part of the OSCE community.

The integration of Kyrgyzstan into the world community is a necessity; indeed, there is no alternative. There are objective reasons for this foreign policy strategy.

For a country like Kyrgyzstan, two and a half times as big as Austria and with a population of 4.5 million, which has no access to the sea and is surrounded by such countries as Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Iran, multilateral institutions and agreements offer in my view a highly effective way of developing a suitable security paradigm. Bilateral security arrangements offer little promise for Kyrgyzstan, if only because of the obvious asymmetries of potential in comparison with the neighboring countries. Kyrgyzstan would

¹ I would like to take this occasion to express to the publishers of this yearbook my profound thanks for this rare opportunity to reach such a large circle of educated and influential readers and to communicate to them the conclusions I came to during my more than three years as the Permanent Representative of Kyrgyzstan to the CSCE/OSCE.

be condemned to the role of the "little brother", a role which anyone who has had a "taste of freedom" surely could not agree to.

Moreover, as a forum for ongoing multilateral political consultations and negotiations the CSCE/OSCE offers Kyrgyzstan a number of indisputably useful options. Membership in the "club" of the most mature democracies provides for Kyrgyzstan a unique chance to profit from their experience and accomplishments.

In view of our lack of adequately trained diplomatic personnel and, in particular, insufficient financial resources, this membership also makes it possible for Kyrgyzstan not only to understand Europe better but to strengthen that understanding in a technical sense.²

Establishing close ties with Europe, one of the strongest and most highly developed and organized parts of the world, is one of the priorities of Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy.

The question "What about the UN?" suggests itself. It is an understandable and legitimate question but there are many factors to be considered in replying. In the UN, where nearly all countries of the world are represented, a small country like Kyrgyzstan runs the risk of being quickly submerged. The variety of civilizations, values, peoples, cultures and traditions leads inevitably to compromises which are acceptable to the majority of participants in this most global of organizations. And even if a common language (a kind of "UN English") is used, it remains for the time being impossible to speak of a consensus, based on a common world view in the UN, on such complicated subjects as democracy, human rights and the rights of citizens, and the rights and duties of states.

Not only is the OSCE smaller, it is also more homogeneous in its values. European democratic values provide the basis of its world view, values which go back to the Renaissance and the period of the Enlightenment.

Beyond that, while the UN has a comprehensive mandate the OSCE has been able to devote itself exclusively to the issues of security and cooperation, thereby ensuring a sharp concentration of its resources and efforts.

In this way, the OSCE makes it possible for Kyrgyzstan, objectively speaking, to avoid being pushed off onto the periphery of international affairs.

These are important matters because it is easier, in my view, to speak the language of force with small countries that have been pushed to the side in world affairs and are not tied into the world community through a network of manifold guarantees.

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It is interesting in this connection to recall the last decision of the Permanent Council of the OSCE on the OSCE-membership of Andorra. For the time being Kyrgyzstan has no Embassy in Paris or Madrid, but in Vienna we can meet with the official representative of Andorra, just as with the representatives of many other European countries in which Kyrgyzstan will be unable to open Embassies in the near future.

Apart from the connection to an international system of multilateral cooperation, the "added value" of Kyrgyzstan's participation in the OSCE consists in the opportunity to find answers to current challenges in the politico-military field.

The OSCE's experience may not be ideal but it is adequate; it already has an elaborate set of instruments for early forestalling and prevention of conflicts, for crisis management and for cooperation in the field of security (principles governing the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and missile technology, the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security).³

It appears that the OSCE's unique experience and its mechanisms in the fields of arms control and disarmament may soon be regarded as models, both on the Eurasian continent⁴ and in the Near East. It is no coincidence that the partner countries of the OSCE from these regions have a special interest in this side of the Organization's activities.

All of the above-mentioned aspects of Kyrgyzstan's interaction with the OSCE can be helpful in the search for answers to *external* threats.

In many countries, however, the threats frequently come from *within*. Few can deny that a government which ignores the interests of a majority of its population, pseudo-parties that represent only themselves, corrupt trade unions, disregard for the rights and the dignity of persons belonging to national minorities, sex discrimination, a view of democracy as anarchy and the "law of the jungle", the lack of generally recognized and established "rules of public life and civilized behavior" - few can deny that all of these things represent a danger for the security of a country no less than a threat from outside.

It is in this sense that the OSCE's efforts within the framework of the program adopted at the Helsinki Summit to coordinate support for the newly independent countries (assistance in building democratic institutions, seminars for journalists and judges, election monitoring, cooperation between the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the President, the government and the parliament of Kyrgyzstan) could not be successful without those states' own substantial contribution to the strengthening of democracy.

In strengthening Kyrgyzstan from within and promoting the consolidation of society and the state on the basis of a classic "social contract" the OSCE has

³ Although it is not a legally binding document it nevertheless creates a political commitment. Its significance lies in the fact that it not only confirms the main principles of security in the OSCE area (renunciation of the use or threat of force, inseparability of the security of each individual State from that of all OSCE countries, the right of individual and collective self-defense) but has also elevated the concept of democratic control of armed forces and other instruments of power to a qualitatively new level.

⁴ The importance of this dimension of activity was even more strongly highlighted by the border agreement on confidence-building measures in the military field, signed on 26 April 1996 in Shanghai between China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan.

provided clear support for the development of a sovereign, independent and democratic Kyrgyzstan and will continue to do so.

Current Problems

It is impossible to understand Kyrgyzstan's significance and status with respect to the OSCE without taking a look at the role and position of Central Asia in Europe's contemporary security and cooperation infrastructure.

The Central Asian region could become an important pillar in a triangular constellation of states along with Russia and the Ukraine and thus exert a potentially stabilizing influence on the territory of the former USSR. It is obvious that security in Europe depends on stability on the territory of the former USSR.

The Central Asian countries are, moreover, a "shield" in the "front line of defense" of the OSCE countries against the spread of religious intolerance, fundamentalism and the illegal drugs and weapons trafficking.

Finally, the Central Asian states can also have an important and advantageous influence on the industrialized countries' position in world markets for energy and metals.

Once it is agreed that Kyrgyzstan's irreversible course of democratization and its reforms aimed at a market economy contribute to the security of all Central Asia, the significance of this contribution cannot be appraised highly enough.

In this sense, independent Kyrgyzstan has since the founding of the newly independent states played the role of a trailblazer for this sub-region with respect to democratic reforms and the move to market economies.

After Askar Akaev took over as our first President, following a bitter struggle with the communist *nomenclatura*, Kyrgyzstan, in the fall of 1990, was the first of the former republics of the USSR to remove the words "soviet" and "socialist" from its name. In parallel with the communist political structures, which followed the instructions of the all-Union center in their entirety, a state administration was built up which was subject to the President elected in Kyrgyzstan and not the one elected by the *staraya ploshchad* in Moscow.

President Akaev's comrade-in-arms, Leonid Levitin, adviser to the President at that time and author of the well-known biography of Uzbekistan's President, Islam Karimov, analyzes that period in the following way: "With no support from either the top or middle levels of the state and party apparatus and before he had set up a staff of his own, Akaev took the only possible correct step in that situation. Insofar as it was in his power to do so he eliminated all obstacles to the strengthening of *glasnost* in Kyrgyzstan and made a

series of unusual statements which were extraordinarily courageous for that time in which he condemned totalitarianism, the criminal alliance between the party leadership and the KGB, and both official and customary anti-semitism. In doing this, he was crowned with success. It was after the putsch of August 1991, however, that Akaev finally received recognition in the West. He was the first of the leaders of the Union Republics to declare the actions of the putschists unconstitutional. In a word, it was thanks to Akaev that Kyrgyzstan, hitherto unknown to the world, appeared in a completely new and democratic form which was fascinating to the West."⁵

These steps undertaken by President Akaev were secured thanks to substantial financial and technical assistance from the United States, Germany, Japan, Switzerland and other leading Western countries.

"The remarkable personality of A. Akaev remains today the main factor which with international assistance has held in check the growth of social and economic problems in Kyrgyzstan."⁶

At the heart of the changes was resolute economic reform aimed at an irreversible reorganization of the market. Thus, in May 1993, with substantial help from the International Monetary Fund, a new national currency, the first in the CIS countries, was introduced which continues today to be regarded as the most stable in Central Asia. In terms of "hardness" only the currencies of Armenia and Moldova are comparable to it.

In this connection it is hard not to agree with the American philosopher, Emerson, who said that there is no such thing as history but only the biographies of leaders; i.e. the political leaders move history forward. They are, to paraphrase Goethe, the apprentices in God's workshop.

The post-communist development of Kyrgyzstan provides convincing proof of this thesis. When Akaev came to power there was probably no other former Soviet Republic that was in as difficult a situation as Kyrgyzstan. That was true not only of the socio-economic situation but of inter-ethnic relations. Thanks to the honest and determined policies of Akaev we were able to avoid serious consequences from the ethnic conflict which took place in the south of Kyrgyzstan, in the Osh region, in the summer of 1990. Just five months after Akaev took over power, in March 1991, the Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation with Uzbekistan was signed. With Akaev's accession, the course of *inter-ethnic understanding* became one of the pillars of official policy and ideology. This course was based on the conviction that in

⁵ Leonid Lewitin, Die politische Entwicklung Usbekistans und Kirgisistans [The Political Development of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan], in: Die Gemeinschaft Unabhängiger Staaten (GUS) und die nicht-russischen GUS-Staaten im Wandel [The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the non-Russian CIS States in a Process of Change], Wissenschaftliche Jahrestagung des Göttinger Arbeitskreises [annual meeting of the Göttingen Working Group], Frankfurt a.M. (no year given).

⁶ Ibid.

an ethnically heterogeneous country democracy offers the only possibility of maintaining stability. Not only the Uzbek minority but all other minorities living in Kyrgyzstan received substantial support from the state. National cultural centers were set up for them, for example. This was the first initiative of its kind in the former USSR.

President Akaev's political credo is based on the motto: "Policy on the basis of ethics and power based on morality". This was clear in 1994 (when, on his own initiative and long before his full powers expired, he made confidence in the President the subject of a referendum) and in 1995.

As is known, the EU made some critical statements in April 1995 on the occasion of referenda held in several Central Asian countries about the extension of full powers for heads of state and issued an opinion on "the undesirable drift of the entire region". But the prognosis of the end of democracy in Central Asia was somewhat exaggerated. Even though citizens' initiatives and social associations had gathered more than one million signatures supporting an extension of Akaev's presidential full powers until the year 2000, the President of Kyrgyzstan declared that he would take part in the elections of December 1995. And he emerged with a convincing victory over the former First Secretary of the Communist Party of Kyrgyzstan and the former Secretary for Ideology, who until recently was chairman of the parliament. The importance of this victory can hardly be overstated because it meant that, the seemingly unstoppable procession of victories marking the communist renaissance in the countries of the former "socialist camp" had, at least in Kyrgyzstan, been brought to a standstill.

In light of the efforts of Kyrgyzstan and other Central Asian countries, which were forced to find solutions for problems that were unprecedented in their magnitude and their unique character while at the same time building their political systems, it would appear that not all of the possibilities of the CSCE/OSCE were made use of in settling the conflict in Tajikistan.

The CSCE ought to have become involved much earlier in lessening the tensions in that most painful situation in Central Asia, the conflict within Tajikistan. It is characteristic of the positions of certain OSCE participating States, however, that they view the Tajik problems primarily from a constitutional and political standpoint while overlooking their military and economic aspects. A comprehensive democratization of the country is being presented as almost the *only* solution for the situation that has arisen. Hardly anyone will deny the necessity and utility of democratization, of creating and broadening its social and regional foundations, for stabilizing the situation in Tajikistan. But the question is whether this view is sufficient and, if it is, whether democratization can even succeed fully under present conditions, when the risk of destabilization in the entire Central Asian region is greater than ever before. The time factor is of equal importance in this context.

One does not want to believe that the position of a number of OSCE countries, opposed to going beyond these proposals, is based on their unwillingness to assume any responsibilities. But it is impossible to ignore the facts.

The generous and timely initiative of the CSCE/OSCE Secretary General, Wilhelm Höynck, proposing the establishment of a *voluntary fund* of the OSCE for Central Asia (March 1994), followed by a political decision of the Committee of Senior Officials (CSO, now the Senior Council) in June 1994, had as of March 1995 still not been adopted by the Permanent Committee - now Permanent Council - even in abbreviated form. This led among astute observers to the witticism that it was "a rather weak child for a nine-month pregnancy". The decision on creating an ombudsman for Tajikistan was handled with equal "alacrity". The first decision of the Permanent Council is dated 9 March 1995⁷ but they needed almost an additional year before a second decision was taken, on 29 February 1996, providing for financial support for this institution. That financing was obviously the bone of contention was made clear by the frequent comments in the course of discussions that this should not be allowed to become a precedent which would oblige the OSCE to pay the costs if ombudsmen were to be established in other Central Asian countries.

To repeat, I would prefer not to believe that the reservations of a number of countries over such modest sums as these provide a litmus test of their attitudes on security questions affecting Central Asia. In this connection, the viewpoint formulated by France back in 1994 still remains valid:

- it is not only the security of Tajikistan which is at issue here, because we cannot rule out a chain reaction;
- the situation on Tajikistan's border must definitely be regarded as a situation on the border of the CSCE.⁸

It is hard not to agree with this analysis, which must be taken very seriously. It was probably the recognition of the extraordinary danger of a "perpetuation" of the crisis in Tajikistan which ultimately led the majority of OSCE countries to search more actively for a solution to the conflict. Among other things, the OSCE Long-Term Mission to Tajikistan was strengthened by the addition of three field offices. Kyrgyzstan welcomes the change of mood in the OSCE in favor of a genuine effort to overcome the conflict in Tajikistan. Nor can Kyrgyzstan be accused of trying to throw the problem into the laps of others. Since Tajikistan acquired independence, Kyrgyzstan's President Akaev has invariably supported the democratic elements in Tajikistan; more-

⁷ Permanent Council, 60th Plenary Meeting, PC Journal No. 60, Decision No. 109. An additional week was required, following this political decision, to clarify financial issues.

⁸ CSCE Permanent Committee, 8 September 1994.

over, Kyrgyzstan has, despite substantial problems of its own, taken in more than 20,000 Tajik refugees.

In recognition of these services the important Tajik poet, Gulrukhsor Sofieva, dedicated the following lines to the President of Kyrgyzstan: "There are presidents who kill, but also those who smile. I am for the latter."

Among the most serious consequences of the conflict in Tajikistan was the development of new problems in the OSCE area whose effective solution depends on joint action by all participating States of the OSCE. The illegal drugs and weapons trafficking from Afghanistan, through Tajikistan, and into the countries of Central Asia and beyond to Europe will draw us all into a vicious circle if no adequate and timely answers are found to these challenges.

The situation in Tajikistan makes clear that among the factors promoting instability there are the immense difficulties associated with rebuilding the national economy - a factor to which too little attention has been given. Here, strengthening the economic dimension of the OSCE could serve preventive as well as regulatory purposes, could contribute both to the prevention and the resolution of conflicts.

Leonid Levitin analyzes the relationships cogently: "In Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan democratic ideas have been anchored in law without there being any private property. Since the people in these countries have no property, they are aware of their rights but feel no responsibility; they have freedom, but without subjecting themselves to discipline and order. Can one speak of the realization of democratic values in countries where the basis for such a (citizen-based) society, the middle class, is deformed?"⁹

It is perhaps appropriate, in the year which brings the 50th anniversary of the famous speech of George Marshall at Harvard University, to quote the words of that great statesman: "Wars come about as a result of poverty and suppression. Lasting peace is only possible in a relatively free and prosperous world."

Despite the unexceptionable nature of these two statements the economic dimension of the OSCE has remained primarily a rhetorical exercise right up until the present time - a Cinderella along side of two beautiful sisters.

There are at least two arguments favoring equality for the economic dimension within the OSCE. If it is ignored, this can be interpreted as ignorance of the interests of certain countries which are concerned over their development. They, in turn, could draw the following conclusion: "If my views are ignored, why should I listen to their proposals?" Beyond that, disregard for political obligations which have been assumed at the highest level is dangerous in principle: not only could it result in the application of double stand-

⁹ Lewitin, Die politische Entwicklung Usbekistans und Kirgisistans, cited above (Note 5).

ards but it could also lead to this kind of attitude being adopted in other areas of the OSCE's work.

What is more, the argument about "duplication" is totally without merit. References to the international organizations for technical cooperation in the UN family are hardly convincing because they do not concern themselves with the reciprocal relationship between economic and security issues.

A comparative advantage of the OSCE which is widely acknowledged is that the economic dimension can deal with problems of an economic nature that have a direct bearing on security. The strength of the OSCE lies precisely in the interdisciplinary access it provides.

Under the Swiss Chairmanship special attention has been given to these issues. The Chairman has provided a survey of the commitments assumed by the OSCE States in the Bonn Document¹⁰ and, in addition, has in principle tied security issues to the economic dimension. The fourth meeting of the Economic Forum (March 1996) brought a turning point with regard to recognition of the economic dimension as an area of OSCE responsibility with equal status.¹¹ We want to stress that our urgent desire to develop this dimension of the OSCE implies no ulterior motives. We are under no illusion that we can get financial assistance from the OSCE. With all due respect to Don Quixote as a literary hero, we cannot afford the luxury of tilting at windmills. We lack the resources for such useless endeavors.

All we want to do is make use of the OSCE's comparative advantages. We need a system of objective criteria, a kind of "economic early-warning system" which would enable us to recognize the worsening of the economic situation in one country or another as a threat to stability and security.

The *political* impulse this would provide is in our view the goal to which development of the economic dimension of the OSCE should lead. It will have been achieved, we think, when we succeed in avoiding duplicate effort and making the best possible use of assistance, without overburdening tax-payers in the donor countries.

¹⁰ At the OSCE Geneva Economic Dimension Implementation Review Meeting (22-23 January 1996) the Kirghiz delegation proposed a concrete eight-point development program.

¹¹ The previous meeting of the Economic Forum in 1995 had clearly shown that the economic dimension had come to a dead end. Debates in the working groups had done no more than repeat facts known to everyone, leading to a few banal recommendations. (One result, for example, was the conclusion that regional, sub-regional and trans-national cooperation can contribute to the development of trade and investment as well as to improvements in infrastructure. Another equally "new" conclusion had it that countries in an economic transition phase can learn a lot of new and useful things from the experience of highly developed countries.)

Conclusions

In his programmatic speech, the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE in 1996, Swiss Foreign Minister Flavio Cotti, named Central Asia for the first time as one of the priorities of his term of office.

The close attention that the world community is giving to Central Asia is, among other things, a result of the efforts of numerous friends of Kyrgyzstan. In this connection it is a pleasant duty for me to point to the most noteworthy contribution to the "rediscovery" of Central Asia, which the first OSCE Secretary General, Wilhelm Höynck, and Germany have together provided. We are thankful to Germany that during his term of office Kyrgyzstan became a member of the pan-European process.

It was thanks to the OSCE that Kyrgyzstan got its first real opportunity to join the pan-European political process. That is why our accession to the OSCE and the unique character of this institution are so important to us.

It is no secret that Europe's contemporary security architecture is far from perfect.

It remains one of the weaknesses of the OSCE that there is often a wide gap between its activities on the rhetorical and on the practical level. If the area between Vancouver and Vladivostok has, rhetorically speaking, attained a consolidated view of democratic ideas and values, much work of consolidation remains to be done on the practical level to overcome the fragmentation of our security architecture.¹² Much depends on the political will of the participating States, as was clearly stated by Germany at the Budapest Summit of the OSCE in 1994: "There is no point in blaming international organizations because they are only as strong and successful as the member countries permit them to be."

In a variation of Ernest Hemingway's words, one would like to believe that the "islands in the ocean" which embody the security of today's Europe might move closer to one another and one day unify themselves into a continent.

¹² The OSCE is meant to become an important instrument for conflict prevention at an early stage and for crisis management. As a basis for this the Organization could adopt the German-Dutch principle "OSCE first": i.e. the OSCE could be involved in the resolution of conflicts from the very beginning and, when necessary, take the lead in a joint appeal to the UN for the use of coercive measures.