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The OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation: Concept, Development, Trends

In 2015, the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation celebrated its 20th anniversary, marking two decades since the Permanent Council decision, shortly before the 1995 Budapest Ministerial Council, to apply the term “Partners for Co-operation” to Japan and the Republic of Korea.¹ This new framework established the basis for more Asian States to join the Partnership, starting with Thailand in 2000, followed by Afghanistan in 2003, Mongolia in 2004, and Australia in 2009.² In addition, following a decision of the Permanent Council in 2003, the Contact Group with the Asian Partners for Co-operation was officially established, providing a permanent forum for informal dialogue between the OSCE and the Asian Partners.³

Since 2000, the OSCE and its Asian Partners have also co-organized an annual conference to discuss “common challenges and common opportunities”,⁴ underlining the growing interconnectedness of the regions and highlighting issues of common concern.⁵ Recurring themes of the OSCE Asian Partnership have included confidence-building measures, options for addressing transnational threats, and the potential for enhancing economic co-operation. Many of the events held within this partnership framework have sought to cover all three dimensions of security. The same topics are covered in the Contact Group meetings as well as in other events organized at the initiative of Asian Partners, which have contributed substantially to the OSCE’s dialogue on many different aspects of comprehensive security.

Several Asian Partners have also provided financial support for OSCE activities over the years and decades, contributing significantly to the stabilization and democratization processes in the Balkans in the 1990s, to Af-

Note: The contribution reflects the personal views of the authors and does not necessarily reflect the official position of the OSCE, its participating States, and Partners. The article covers developments up to July 2017.

- 1 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 94*, PC.DEC/94, 5 December 1995, available at: <http://www.osce.org/pc/20366>.
- 2 Mongolia eventually became a participating State in 2012.
- 3 Until then, the Asian Partners had been integrated into the Mediterranean Contact Group. The latter had already been established in 1994 by Chapter X of the CSCE Budapest Document, cf. CSCE, *Budapest Document 1994. Towards a Genuine Partnership in a New Era*, 21 December 1994, pp. 44-45, available at: <https://www.osce.org/mc/39554>.
- 4 This was the motto of the 2017 OSCE Asian Conference, which was held in Berlin on 19-20 June; cf. OSCE, Office of the Secretary General, Section for External Co-operation, *2017 OSCE Asian Conference on Common Challenges and Common Opportunities, 19-20 June 2017, Federal Foreign Office, Berlin, Consolidated Summary*, SEC.GAL/109/17, 27 July 2017, available at: <https://www.osce.org/partners-for-cooperation/asian/374029>.
- 5 Cf. *Opening speech by the Special Representative for the OSCE, Gernot Erler*, PC.DEL/820/17, 19 June 2017.

ghanistan-related activities in Central Asia, and to the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. Furthermore, several Asian Partners for Co-operation have provided staff to the OSCE by regularly seconding experts to OSCE field operations and election observation missions undertaken by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

Nonetheless, within the day-to-day life of the Organization, the OSCE Asian Partnership is somewhat marginalized, as reflected by, among other things, the comparably low level of attention paid to Asian Contact Group meetings in Vienna.⁶ In addition, since the outbreak of the conflict in and around Ukraine, the OSCE's engagement with its Asian Partner Afghanistan has decreased, despite the reaffirmed commitment to further strengthening the OSCE's engagement across the three dimensions with Afghanistan as expressed in the 2014 Basel Ministerial Council Declaration on Co-operation with the Asian Partners.⁷

Regional organizations, such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), the Trilateral Cooperation Secretariat (TCS), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA), and the Shanghai Co-operation Organisation (SCO), are invited to relevant OSCE events and activities, and staff-to-staff co-operation in specific areas is promoted wherever applicable. There is certainly more potential to develop co-ordinated responses to the increasingly complex security challenges in today's globalized world.

The Framework of the OSCE Asian Partnership

The 20th anniversary of the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation in 2015 provided a good opportunity to take stock of this format, look back at what it has achieved, and articulate prospects for increased co-operation between the OSCE, its Asian Partners, and regional organizations in Asia. The results of this process were documented in a small publication, which was presented on 5 November 2015 on the margins of the Permanent Council and supported by the Asian Partner Delegations. The publication describes how the Partnership has evolved over the years, while also giving examples of the different priorities set by the various Asian Partners within this rather heterogeneous group. Despite these differences, the Asian Partners have shown growing interest in deepening their understanding of the OSCE's expertise in confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs). This desire has been taken up by the OSCE in various forums, which underlines the Organiza-

6 The situation is slightly easier for the OSCE's Mediterranean Partners, who are not only geographically closer, but also more homogeneous, simplifying the formation of common priorities.

7 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Basel 2014, Ministerial Declaration on Co-operation with the Asian Partners, MC.DOC/10/14, 5 December 2014, available at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/130566>.

tion's readiness to support initiatives aimed at sharing and promoting best practices in Asia. There was broad agreement that the starting point for such discussions should be the OSCE's experience and best practices relating to the development and implementation of CSBMs, including those stemming from the Vienna Document, small arms and light weapons (SALW) commitments, and the OSCE Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security. Consequently, during the Mongolian Chairmanship of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) in the first trimester of 2015, a conference was held in Ulaanbaatar in March 2015 on the Code of Conduct for participating States and Asian Partners for Co-operation.⁸ The event initiated a discussion and dialogue with Central Asian countries and the Asian Partners for Co-operation about the key principles and commitments of the Code of Conduct. While the event in Ulaanbaatar was perceived as a promising first step in initiating dialogue on the Code of Conduct with the Asian Partners for Co-operation, the original idea of a follow-up conference hosted by one of the Asian Partners has not, so far, been taken up.

During recent Asian Contact Group Chairmanships, most recently Germany's in 2017, the OSCE Asian Partnership has been the subject of increased engagement on the part of OSCE Troika members.⁹ At the tenth Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Summit on 16-17 October 2014 in Milan, the then OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Didier Burkhalter of Switzerland, highlighted the three priorities of his country's upcoming Asian Contact Group Chairmanship, namely: 1. to strengthen co-operation between the OSCE and its current Partners in Asia, 2. to promote dialogue and co-operation between the OSCE and multilateral forums in Asia, and 3. to encourage co-operative security in the Asian context.¹⁰ In 2015, he remained personally committed to the OSCE Asian Partnership framework, by addressing both the International Institute for Strategic Studies' (IISS) Shangri-La Dialogue and the OSCE

8 Cf. OSCE, *Mongolia hosts OSCE conference on the role of armed and security forces in democratic societies*, press release, Ulaanbaatar, 10 March 2015, at: <http://www.osce.org/fsc/144226>, and OSCE, *The OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation: Reflections and Perspectives*, 5 November 2015, available at: <http://www.osce.org/partners-for-cooperation/asian/197801>.

9 The OSCE Rules of Procedure from 2006 state that the Contact Group with the Asian Partners for Co-operation shall be chaired by a representative of the preceding Chairmanship, cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, *Rules of Procedure of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe*, MC.DOC/1/06, 1 November 2006, para. V(A)2(c), available at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/22775>. Switzerland and Serbia, who followed a joint working programme during their consecutive Chairmanships in 2014 and 2015, were highly engaged in the Partnership, particularly in 2015, and continue to remain particularly committed. Germany is also dedicated to the Partnership and has contributed considerably to OSCE projects; it was involved in the work of the Contact Group well before its own Chairmanship year.

10 Cf. OSCE Switzerland 2014, Statement by Didier Burkhalter, President of the Swiss Confederation and Chairperson-in-Office of the OSCE, "Cooperative security à la OSCE: Building bridges in Europe and Asia", 10th Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM10), "Enhancing Dialogue and Cooperation between Europe and Asia and the Future Directions of ASEM", Milan, 17 October 2015, available at: <http://www.osce.org/cio/125673>.

Asian Conference in Seoul.¹¹ As a follow-up to the Conference, the Swiss Chairperson of the Asian Contact Group proposed increasing co-operation in the following areas: counter-terrorism, disaster risk reduction, information and communications technology security (ICT)/cyber-security, and structured co-operation with Asian regional organizations, namely ASEAN and the ASEAN Regional Forum.¹²

The subsequent Serbian Asian Contact Group Chairmanship incorporated these suggestions into its planning and ensured they were reflected in the regular dialogue between the participating States and the Asian Partners in the context of the Asian Contact Group, the rolling schedule of the Asian Contact Group itself, the agenda of the 2016 OSCE Asian Conference in Bangkok, and other side events. As a result, the Conference in Bangkok was the first OSCE Asian Conference ever to be addressed by the ASEAN Secretary General. It was also the first OSCE event to dedicate an entire session to the promotion of the United Nations' (UN) 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, thereby launching a new debate on the OSCE's potential contribution to the attainment of the UN's 2030 Agenda.¹³ To date, the OSCE Asian Partnership remains the only formal OSCE framework in which a discussion about the link between security and sustainable development has taken place. The Asian Conference in Bangkok was also notable for kick-starting a debate on cyber-security: Through a side event chaired by the Permanent Representative of the USA to the OSCE, who was then also the Chairperson of the Informal Working Group established by PC Decision No. 1039, it provided a forum to share the OSCE's experience in the development of confidence-building measures in cyber-security.¹⁴ The side event ultimately led to the incorporation of a paragraph in Ministerial Council Decision No. 5/16 stating that the "OSCE Partners for Co-operation [are invited] to enhance dialogue on efforts to reduce the risks of conflict stemming from the use of information and communication technologies".¹⁵ This suggestion was

11 In his speech at the 2015 Shangri-La Dialogue, Chairperson of the OSCE Asian Contact Group, Didier Burkhalter, emphasized the relevance of a strengthened security dialogue between Asia and Europe, and promoted a co-operative security approach to the global challenges, cf. International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), 14th Asia Security Summit, The IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, *Special Session 5. Avoiding Military Competition and Arms-Racing in Asia*, 30 May 2015, Provisional Transcript, at: <https://www.iiss.org/en/events/shangri-la-dialogue/archive/shangri-la-dialogue-2015-862b/special-sessions-315c/session-5-2c9b>.

12 Cf. PC.DEL/1553/15, 16 November 2015.

13 Cf. OSCE, Office of the Secretary General, Section for External Co-operation, *2016 OSCE Asian Conference, Strengthening Comprehensive Security, Bangkok, Thailand, 6-7 June 2016, Consolidated Summary*, SEC.GAL/121/16, 26 July 2016, available at: <http://www.osce.org/partners-for-cooperation/asian/280701>.

14 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, Decision No. 1309, Development of Confidence-Building Measures to Reduce the Risks of Conflict Stemming from the Use of Information and Communication Technologies, PC.DEC/1039, 26 April 2012, available at: <http://www.osce.org/pc/90169>.

15 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Hamburg 2016, *Decision No. 5/16. OSCE Efforts Related to Reducing the Risks of Conflict Stem-*

taken up by the Republic of Korea, which, supported by the OSCE Secretariat, organized the first-ever inter-regional conference on ICT/Cyber Security in Seoul on 4 and 5 April 2017.¹⁶

The Mechanisms

With the adoption of the OSCE Rules of Procedure in 2006, the Asian Partnership for Co-operation was fully formalized, and the Partners have since been included in OSCE activities wherever applicable.¹⁷ They have gained access to official OSCE documents and are invited to take part in meetings of the OSCE decision-making bodies and a number of its informal subsidiary bodies. The Asian Partners' own forum for dialogue, the Asian Contact Group, is one of these informal subsidiary bodies.¹⁸ There are five Asian Partners, and at least five meetings are held per year at ambassadorial level, each co-organized by the Chairmanship of the Contact Group and one of the Partners, along with the state holding the Chair of the Contact Group. The Partner State determines the choice of topic, submits a concept note, and selects keynote speakers, which is the means by which they impact the overall design of the annual rolling schedule. The meetings are generally perceived as a key opportunity for the Partner to present and discuss a security topic that they consider to be of particular relevance. As a result, in recent years, the agendas of Contact Group meetings have included a number of recurring topics with only limited relevance to the OSCE agenda.¹⁹ While the Asian Partners seek to encourage the OSCE to pay more attention to Asia and to make a long-term commitment to deal with security concerns in Asia, delegations of the participating States tend to make their attendance at Asian Con-

ming from the Use of Information and Communication Technologies, MC.DEC/5/16, 9 December 2016, para. 11, available at: <http://www.osce.org/cio/288086>.

- 16 Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Inter-Regional Conference between OSCE and Asian Partners on Cyber/ICT security, at: <http://www.osce.org/secretariat/304946>. See also the contribution by Velimir Radicevic entitled Promoting Cyber Stability between States: OSCE Efforts to Reduce the Risks of Conflict Stemming from the Use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the Context of Global and Regional Security, in this volume, pp. 201-212.
- 17 The 2006 Rules of Procedure provide Japan with a special status and rights, as stipulated in IV.1(D)3 and V(A)7(a), and this is regularly questioned by the other Asian Partners. For Japan's special status see also Timur Dadabaev, The Evolution of Japanese Diplomacy towards Central Asia since the Collapse of the Soviet Union, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2011*, Baden-Baden 2012, pp. 441-458; Takako Ueta, Japan and the OSCE, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 1997*, Baden-Baden 1998, pp. 387-395.
- 18 Cf. para. II(C)1, in: OSCE Rules of Procedure, cited above (Note 9). Since Partners can participate in most thematically focused OSCE meetings, covering all the relevant topics, the meetings of the Contact Group have to seek to complement these discussions.
- 19 Cf. *Rolling schedule 2015*, PC.INF/2/15, 4 March 2015; *Revised tentative work plan for 2016*, PC.INF/7/16/Rev.1, 18 April 2016; *Rolling schedule 2017*, PC.INF/5/17, 12 March 2017.

tact Group meetings dependent on the topic's relevance to the OSCE agenda. Consequently, the attendance of OSCE participating States in Contact Group meetings has, with a few exceptions, been rather low in recent years, despite increased efforts by the various Contact Group Chairs to increase the meetings' attractiveness by better linking the chosen topics to the OSCE agenda and inviting prominent external speakers.

Similar challenges also occur when planning the OSCE Asian Conferences. Based on decisions adopted by the participating States, the Conference is considered as the annual highlight of the Partnership, complementing the regular exchange of information in Vienna by means of a visible political dialogue at the level of representatives from national capitals. These meetings are generally hosted by one of the Asian Partners, but an exception was made in 2017, when the German Contact Group Chairmanship hosted the event in Berlin.²⁰ The discussions in Berlin once again illustrated the variety of topics common to the Asia-Pacific and the OSCE regions, establishing the common ground for a mutually enriching dialogue. The regional focus on Afghanistan was also well received, and the participation of Afghanistan's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Co-operation ensured high-level representation for that country at the Conference. By ensuring the participation of the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kyrgyzstan and the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan, Germany was also successful in raising attention among the Central Asian participating States.

Priority Issues within the Asian Contact Group

The issues prioritized within the Contact Group reflect the heterogeneity of the Asian Partners, and the Group has a wide range of concerns that stretch across all three dimensions. The OSCE is increasingly aware of the potential for involving Partners in OSCE activities, and the Hamburg Ministerial Council proved particularly successful, with one declaration and three decisions explicitly mentioning the Partners – on the issues of counter-terrorism, migration and refugees, connectivity and good governance, and ICT/cyber-security.²¹

20 Cf. *2017 OSCE Asian Conference on Common Challenges and Common Opportunities*, cited above (Note 4).

21 In the documents adopted by the Hamburg Ministerial Council, the Partners are variously invited to join participating States in affirming a declaration, encouraged to voluntarily implement relevant provisions, invited to enhance dialogue on respective efforts, and encouraged to use the OSCE platform to continue addressing respective issues and improve dialogue. Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Hamburg 2016, *Declaration on Strengthening OSCE Efforts to Prevent and Counter Terrorism*, MC.DOC/1/16, 9 December 2016; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Hamburg 2016, *Decision No. 3/16, OSCE's Role in the Governance of Large Movements of Migrants and Refugees*, MC.DEC/3/16, 9 December 2016; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Hamburg 2016, *Decision No. 4/16, Strengthening Good Governance and Promoting Connect-*

Engagement with Afghanistan

The Organization's engagement with Afghanistan is based on the Madrid Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/07 and was reinforced by the Vilnius Ministerial Council Decision No. 4/11. While the earliest assistance projects for Afghanistan focused primarily on border management and border security, later projects gradually expanded to cover aspects of customs control, combating drug trafficking, as well as education, gender-sensitive capacity-building, and support for election processes. Nonetheless, financial support from participating States for Afghanistan-related projects remained fairly limited, and much potential for engagement was unused. Except for the five ODIHR election support teams deployed in Afghanistan between 2004 and 2014, consensus was never reached authorizing the implementation of project activities inside Afghanistan.²²

With the crisis in and around Ukraine the overall priorities on the OSCE's security agenda changed. This has resulted in a significant reallocation of funds to OSCE programmes focused on Ukraine, which has reduced the funds available to programmes and projects in other OSCE field operations, including in Central Asia. The participating States reconfirmed their specific commitment to engagement with Afghanistan in the Basel Ministerial Declaration No. 10/14, which emphasized the focus on border cooperation.²³ Additional policy recommendations were, however, not articulated. In 2015 and 2016, Japan contributed a total of more than 1.5 million euros to the Border Management Staff College (BMSC) in Dushanbe – a significant level of support for the training courses and seminars run by the BMSC, which are also attended by Afghan border and custom officials. The implementation of Afghanistan-related projects remains fully dependent on

ivity, MC.DEC/4/16, 9 December 2016; Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Hamburg 2016, *Decision No. 5/16, OSCE Efforts Related to Reducing the Risks of Conflict Stemming from the Use of Information and Communication Technologies*, MC.DEC/5/16, 9 December 2016; all documents are available at: http://www.osce.org/event/mc_2016.

- 22 For an analysis of the OSCE's (limited) engagement with Afghanistan up to 2013, see Arantazu Pagoaga Ruiz de la Illa, OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan: Recent Developments, Opportunities, and Challenges, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2013*, Baden-Baden 2014, pp. 285-297; 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; Boris Wilke, Regional Security Strategies for Afghanistan and Its Neighbours – A Role for the OSCE? In: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2005*, Baden-Baden 2006, pp. 347-355; Robert L. Barry, The Future Tasks of the OSCE, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2004*, Baden-Baden 2005, pp. 27-32, here: p. 29.
- 23 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Basel 2014, Ministerial Declaration on Co-operation with the Asian Partners, MC.DOC/10/14, 5 December 2014, para. 4, available at: <http://www.osce.org/mc/130566>.

efforts to secure funding. The BMSC is a special case as it is funded entirely by extra-budgetary contributions.²⁴

As well as the participating States' limited political engagement and financial support for Afghanistan-related projects, the OSCE's engagement with Afghanistan is also impacted by the geopolitical context, particularly with regard to Afghanistan's relations with its Central Asian neighbours.²⁵ In practice, most of these projects are implemented in OSCE field operations in Central Asia, with the consent of the relevant host country.

Australia

Australia, the most recent state to become an Asian Partner for Co-operation, has contributed to a variety of OSCE activities in all three dimensions. In doing so, it has paid particular attention to the human dimension and the protection of human rights. Australia supported a project implemented by ODIHR between 2012 and 2015 that aimed at enhancing capacities to ensure protection of the human rights of trafficked persons and vulnerable groups in Central Asia. The Asian Partners have contributed significantly to OSCE efforts towards integrating a gender perspective into comprehensive security and Australia dedicated the 2013 OSCE Asian Conference to the topic of improving the security of women and girls, with discussions on combating violence against women and human trafficking, as well as increasing women's economic participation.²⁶ So far, the distance between Australia and the OSCE region means that this has been the only OSCE conference hosted in Australia.²⁷ At the same time, however, feedback on the 2013 Conference indicated the relevance of an agenda that seeks to cover all three dimensions of security – an approach that the following Chairmanships of the Contact Group have also pursued.

In 2017, Australia has shifted its focus more to security dynamics in the Indo-Pacific, while still attempting to raise cross-regional awareness and emphasizing a constructive and committed partnership that will help to maintain

24 A number of OSCE participating States oppose including the BMSC in the OSCE Unified Budget, and this option is currently not open for discussion. This has a strong impact on the sustainability of the BMSC, which is otherwise often portrayed as an OSCE flagship project.

25 For Afghanistan in the regional context of Central Asia cf. Sebastian Schiek, *The Afghanistan Conflict As a Power Resource for Central Asia?* In: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2014*, Baden-Baden 2015, pp. 301-313.

26 In an Asian Contact Group meeting in 2016, Australia also presented its perspectives on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security, cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Ministerial Council, Hamburg 2016, *Report by the Chairperson of the Contact Group with the Asian Partners for Co-operation to the Twenty-Third Meeting of the Ministerial Council*, MC.GAL/2/16, 2 December 2016, p.3, available at: <http://www.osce.org/cio/286376>.

27 In 2018, Australia will host the annual OSCE Asian Conference for the second time.

a rules-based system to foster the overall objectives of peace, security, and prosperity.²⁸ It is through the OSCE that Australia conveys its message and calls for Europe's continued, active support to reinforce global rules and norms and pursue constructive engagement with Indo-Pacific countries including China.

Japan

As the longest-standing Asian Partner (since 1992), Japan enjoys a special status among the OSCE's Asian Partners. This is based on the early commitment it made in the context of the G7 to contribute to reform and reconstruction following the fall of the Iron Curtain.²⁹ Japan is deeply committed to the OSCE and participates actively in meetings and events. Since 2001, Japan has hosted four OSCE Asian Conferences and has regularly sought to broaden the OSCE agenda. The OSCE has greatly benefited from Japan's extra-budgetary contributions, and Japan is ranked among the ten top extra-budgetary contributors due to its significant financial support for projects in the Balkans, Central Asia, and Ukraine. Since 1999, Japan has regularly seconded experts to OSCE field operations, including the OSCE Mission in Kosovo, the OSCE Mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina, and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) to Ukraine.

Japan's current focus lies on addressing common security challenges and increasing co-operation on security issues impacting the OSCE Asian Partners, such as the threat posed by the Pyongyang's missile and nuclear programmes, which have reached a new level since 2016, and the tensions in the South China Sea. It has called for joint efforts to build on an international rules-based order and has identified connectivity as a key factor for confidence-building to promote peace, stability, and prosperity.

The Republic of Korea

Since 1994, the Republic of Korea has contributed both substantially to the OSCE's dialogue and financially to OSCE activities.³⁰ It has hosted four OSCE Asian Conferences as well as several other workshops and events co-organized with the OSCE. Since 2016, it has further enhanced its engagement with the OSCE by increasing its financial contributions to OSCE extra-

28 Cf. invitation and concept note distributed as PC.GAL/108/17/Rev.1, 30 June 2017, and Keynote by Mr. Robert McKinnon, The Indo-Pacific Security Dynamic, at the OSCE Asian Contact Group Meeting on 7 July, PC.DEL/961/17, 11 July 2017.

29 Cf. footnote 17.

30 Cf. Soong Hee Lee, The OSCE and South Korea, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2001*, Baden-Baden 2002, pp. 433-440.

budgetary projects, indicating a clear preference for cyber security-related topics. This priority was also evident in the first ever inter-regional conference on ICT/cyber-security, which was held in Seoul at the initiative of the Republic of Korea.

Against the background of the situation in the Korean peninsula, the Republic of Korea is promoting opportunities to share experiences with the OSCE as a platform for dialogue, primarily with a view to the Organization's expertise in CSBMs. While the Republic of Korea has reiterated its willingness to contribute to regional initiatives and to continue looking into the OSCE as a model of regional co-operation, it is also striving to place the security challenges in the Korean peninsula prominently on the OSCE agenda and to identify and adapt a suitable set of CSBMs.

Thailand

As the only Asian Partner for Co-operation that is also an ASEAN member state, Thailand has often underscored its role as a bridge-builder between the OSCE and the Asia-Pacific. Even before becoming an OSCE Partner State, it hosted a workshop on potential future co-operation. Since 2000, Thailand has co-organized many OSCE Asian Conferences and workshops looking into the application of a comprehensive concept of security in the Asian context. Thailand is also well represented at OSCE events, including Ministerial Council Meetings.

Thailand's top foreign-policy goals include the implementation of the UN's Agenda 2030 and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and the agency responsible within the Thai government is personally chaired by the Thai prime minister. Consequently, Thailand sent an expert from the prime minister's office to the 2017 conference in Berlin to present its policy and progress in attaining the SDGs. Thailand has also been working with ASEAN member states on the implementation of the ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity to improve infrastructure and digital networks and has shown great interest in the OSCE's activities in the field of economic co-operation and connectivity. In addition, Thailand has lately shown an increasing interest in the area of cyber-security, and actively participated at the inter-regional conference in Seoul in April, also hosting a workshop on security co-operation between ASEAN member countries in June 2017. Migration, with its various facets, is another area of OSCE activity in which Thailand has been deeply interested. Following similar discussion at the 2016 Conference in Bangkok, Thailand is planning to co-organize a Contact Group meeting in 2017 on "irregular" migration and challenges to regional security and development.

Regional Co-operation – Challenges and Opportunities for the OSCE

In his opening remarks at the 2017 OSCE Asian Conference, the outgoing OSCE Secretary General, Lamberto Zannier, reiterated the Organization's increased efforts to work on expanding inter-institutional co-operation with regional organizations in the Asia-Pacific region and establishing relations with a number of regional frameworks in Asia, including ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, CICA, the Heart of Asia initiative, the TCS, and the SCO.³¹ During his tenure, the OSCE's readiness and willingness to engage further in inter-regional co-operation had been constantly addressed in relevant meetings and forums. However, in many cases, relations did not go beyond formal meetings, and the basis for in-depth, working-level co-operation could not be developed due to a lack of common interests or for operational reasons. There were always great expectations regarding the possibility of relations with the ARF.³²

Particularly during its term as Chair of ASEAN (2008-2009), Thailand strongly advocated for deepening relations between the OSCE and ASEAN, using Contact Group meetings for briefings on ASEAN and the ARF and highlighting areas for potential co-operation, including CSBMs, anti-terrorism, maritime security, non-proliferation, and disarmament. In November 2011, an ARF High-Level Workshop on CSBMs and Preventive Diplomacy was held in Berlin, co-hosted by Germany on behalf of the EU, and by the Republic of Indonesia as the then ARF Chair. In the run-up to its next ASEAN Chairmanship in 2019, Thailand has again increased its active promotion of ASEAN/ARF relations with the OSCE, issuing invitations to ASEAN Regional Workshops dealing with preventive diplomacy and cybersecurity co-operation in the ASEAN region.³³

From the OSCE Annual Security Review Conference (ASRC) in Vienna to the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, major security conferences in

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- 31 On regional co-operation in the Asia-Pacific cf. Elena Atanassova-Cornelis, *Northeast Asia's Evolving Security Order: Power Politics, Trust Building and the Role of the EU*, IAI Working Papers 17/04, January 2017; Michael D. Swaine et al., *Conflict and Co-operation in the Asia-Pacific Region: a strategic net assessment*, Washington, DC, 2015. Charles E. Morrison, *The Asia-Pacific Cooperation Agenda: Moving from Regional Co-operation Toward Global Leadership*, in: *AsiaPacific Issues*, No. 116, October 2014, pp. 1-6; Alfred Gerstl, *The China Factor in Regional Security Cooperation: The ASEAN Regional Forum and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, in: *ASEAS – Österreichische Zeitschrift für Südostasienwissenschaften* 2/2008, pp. 118-139.
- 32 The Swiss perception paper from 16 November 2015 (PC.DEL/1553/15) also promoted increased co-operation with ASEAN/ARF and saw great potential for the OSCE and ASEAN secretariats and chairmanships, together with Thailand, as the only ASEAN member state that is also an OSCE Partner, to take the lead in developing inter-institutional dialogue of this kind.
- 33 The OSCE Secretariat participated in this workshop, which was held in Bangkok; cf. Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand, *Press Release: Strengthening and Enhancing Cybersecurity Cooperation in the ASEAN Region: Towards an Integrated Approach in Addressing Transnational Crime*, 22 June 2017, at: <http://www.mfa.go.th/main/en/news3/6886/78632-Strengthening-and-Enhancing-Cybersecurity-Cooperat.html>.

Europe and Asia alike share the perception that the regional security environment is becoming increasingly challenging and that there is an advantage in developing existing forums to foster collaboration in areas, such as countering terrorism and responding to cyber threats. Asia's increasing economic and geostrategic weight has a considerable impact on stability and security in Europe and will continue to do so. The Asia-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic areas face common security challenges and have a common interest in co-ordinating their responses. The question of what form this co-ordination should take is yet to be explored.³⁴

The Untapped Potential of the OSCE Asian Partnership

The OSCE participating States and the Asian Partners for Co-operation are jointly affected by increasingly complex and increasingly global security threats that require international co-operation and joint action. The Asian Partnership offers a valuable platform for all stakeholders to share experiences and best practices and to create new synergies. Continued efforts to advance dialogue and co-operation with the Asian Partners and Asian regional organizations have constantly been reiterated. However, in practical terms, the Asian Partnership is only reflected in the OSCE agenda to a limited extent. This could be due to the generally difficult situation the Organization has been facing in recent years, including severe security crises in Europe. On the other hand, there is still a lack of awareness of the added value of the Partnership and of concrete action to involve the Partners in the OSCE schedule.

The OSCE Security Days on “Creating inclusive, safe and sustainable cities: Local approaches to global challenges” in Vienna in March 2017, at which the mayor of Seoul was the keynote speaker, were a good example of how this should work. The OSCE would benefit from including officials and experts from Asia in OSCE events more systematically, both as speakers and as moderators, to diversify discussion and share lessons learned. Another prominent example was the address by Afghanistan's deputy foreign minister for economic co-operation to the Permanent Council on the invitation of the 2016 German OSCE Chairmanship. There is also a need to increase awareness of how Asian security concerns are linked to the OSCE agenda and to enhance relevant dialogue. Asian regional organizations could be invited more frequently to participate and engage in OSCE events. The annual programme of the Contact Group and the annual OSCE Asian Conference agenda should consistently reflect the inter-institutional exchange of best practices between the OSCE and Asian regional organizations and/or actors.

34 Cf. *Keynote by Dr. Tim Huxley, Executive Director IISS-Asia, OSCE Asian Contact Group Meeting, 7 July 2017*, PC.NGO/8/17, 20 July 2017.

Beyond the regular meetings and the Conference, practical co-operation with the Partners can be realized in multiple ways, including via projects, workshops, and side-events. Through the Partnership Fund, Germany, together with other participating States and Partners, has also made funds available for Partnership projects, which include participation by Partners in OSCE events and a young professional programme for junior diplomats from Partner countries.³⁵ Co-operation activities are offered depending on the needs and interests expressed by individual Partners and there is still potential for more.

35 The Partnership Fund was introduced in 2007 by PC.DEC/812 to foster deeper relations with the Partners by implementing Partner-relevant OSCE projects and activities. Cf. Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Permanent Council, Decision No. 812, Establishment of a Partnership Fund, PC.DEC/812, 30 November 2007, available at: <http://www.osce.org/pc/29502>.