

**Remarks by Ambassador Natalia Zarudna, Head of the OSCE Programme Office in
Astana, at the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly 2015 Autumn Meeting**

***Session 1: Regional security, fighting against terrorism, trafficking in human beings
– The role of the OSCE and regional co-operation***

(16 September 2015, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia)

Excellencies,
Distinguished members of parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Allow me, at the outset, to express my appreciation to the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly for convening this roundtable with all heads of OSCE Field Operations in Central Asia on regional security and co-operation. We are grateful to our Mongolian hosts for the warm welcome and hospitality!

I would like to begin by stating that academically and strategically Central Asia should be rather perceived as a geographical and not a geopolitical region. It unites countries, which differ in their strategic visions, foreign policies, national interests and development models. Yet there are many things they have in common. All Central Asian countries face similar challenges to their security and stability and all of them are OSCE participating States and share concerns related to threats from within and outside their geographical area. Their shared concerns carry a strong potential for co-operation and common purpose in addressing these challenges. And that is what the OSCE missions are for.

During our recent Central Asian Youth Network seminar, I asked the students, who came from all nations in the region as well as from Mongolia and Afghanistan, to think of the key security challenges their countries face. As the seminar progressed, they all soon realized that not only are these threats shared by all the countries in the region and beyond, but they, in fact, require active interaction of the Central Asian nations and, in many cases, of the entire international community.

The mandate of our Programme Office clearly states the need to address the security challenges and threats in a regional context thus promoting co-operation between the countries in Central Asia. To this end, we strive to encourage the participation of representatives from other Central Asian nations alongside Mongolia and Afghanistan in the OSCE activities in all three dimensions focusing on strengthening regional security, combating organized crime, violent extremism, trafficking in drugs, weapons and human beings, promoting labour migration management, good governance, energy security, water management, environmental co-operation and the development of civil society as priority areas.

Among the key successful initiatives aimed at advancing regional security I would like to single out annual seminars on arms control and confidence- and security-building measures under the Vienna Document 2011, visits to military installations in Kazakhstan and simulated site visits co-organized with Kazakhstan's Defence Ministry in co-ordination with the CPC FSC Support

Section. For the last decade, hundreds of military officers from Central Asia, Armenia, Belarus, France, Germany, Hungary and Mongolia took part in these events.

Other successful initiatives concern the task to engage youth and academics in debates on different topics of regional security and the role of the OSCE in addressing them. With the support of all OSCE field operations in Central Asia, our Office has annually hosted since 2009 in Almaty seminars in the framework of the Central Asian Youth Network. Currently, this network unites over 400 students and recent graduates from all Central Asian countries, Afghanistan and Mongolia serving as multipliers in their respective countries and promoting a strong understanding for regional co-operation among future leaders. Regional security, violent extremism, environmental challenges, the culture of youth participation, new and old challenges for the region security are just a few topics to name, which have been discussed by them in recent years.

The Central Asian Leadership Programme on sustainable development, supported by the Office, gathered these days in Almaty for the sixth consecutive year young environmentalists from Central Asia and Afghanistan, who will learn how to address challenges related to climate change and to promote green growth principles, integrated water resources management and enhance public participation in the decision-making on the environmental and economic issues, including in a transboundary context.

The Office also promotes the involvement of the academic institutions and think tanks from a wider region in discussing the OSCE-related themes. The third international conference with the participation of the researches, politicians and civil society leaders from the Central Asian and European countries will be co-organized by the Office, the Foreign Ministry and Kazakhstan's Institute of Strategic Studies on 23 October in Astana.

Our Office recognizes the importance of a strong and representative political leadership in helping promote security. Under a three-year project aimed at enhancing the political parties system and parliamentary factions' activities, our Office supported, *inter alia*, international conferences in 2012-2013 for party leaders, government officials, members of parliament and civil society representatives from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Poland, Sweden and the United States.

To help the countries' in the region successfully counter organized crime, illicit trade, irregular migration and drug trafficking jointly with our national and international partners we have co-organized various capacity-building events with the participation of the border, customs and police officers from the region and beyond, including from Afghanistan.

Recently, we have added to our project portfolio the training courses on the use of dogs for detecting explosives. Actually, the canine-training centre in Almaty could be more actively used to assist dog-handlers from law-enforcement agencies not only from Kazakhstan but from other countries in the region in detecting drugs, currencies and protected species.

The Central Asian Internet Forum annually co-organized since 2010 by the Office and its national and international partners in Almaty has become a regional platform to exchange best practices between media experts, officials and journalists from the Central Asian and European countries and to develop relevant recommendations to all stakeholders in the region. Among the

main concerns of the participants, which emerged in the last years, is Internet security, cybercrime and the abuse of the Internet for terrorist purposes.

Needless to say that fighting these transnational threats begins at home with effective law enforcement and continues into cyberspace where only unified multinational efforts can combat it. Actually, countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes proved to be one of the most complex and difficult challenges in this battle. Only in 2014, some 500 participants from 20 countries addressed an issue on countering the use of the Internet for terrorist purposes at three international conferences held in Astana. At many of the OSCE-supported regional and national events in Kazakhstan discussions focused on mechanisms to enhance international co-operation in preventing and combating VERLT.

Since 2012, preventing and countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT) has been a focus area both for our Office and for the host country. In recognition of the need for a comprehensive and multi-faceted approach in addressing this threat, we co-organized in co-operation with the OSCE Department of Transnational Threats multiple activities with regional-level participation. Numerous government officials, law-enforcement officers, members of parliament, information security specialists, academics, theologians, journalists, international experts and civil society activists from the region and beyond have analysed ways to strengthen interaction in confronting these regional security threats.

In preventing and countering VERLT we follow a multidimensional approach and focus on awareness-raising and capacity-building activities. We aim at:

- promoting the implementation of the international legal framework against terrorism and enhancing regional legal co-operation in criminal matters;
- strengthening travel document security;
- combating the financing of terrorism;
- facilitating dialogue and co-operation on counter-terrorism issues, in particular, through public-private partnerships between State authorities and the private sector, civil society, youth, women, religious leaders and the media; and
- promoting and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms in the context of counter-terrorism measures.

To enhance the effectiveness and visibility of our activities we joint efforts with other international partners and the OSCE executive structures. For instance, during the last three months alone, we have provided support and participated in three important regional events hosted in Astana and Almaty: the high-level Central and South Asia Regional Conference on Countering Violent Extremism, a joint UNODC/OSCE Regional Workshop on “Preventive Obligations and Criminalization of Offences regarding Foreign Terrorist Fighters prescribed by UN Security Council Resolution 2178(2014)” and an advanced regional research workshop “Violent Extremism in Central Asia: Indicators, Trends and Possible Responses.”

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Our Office in co-operation with the host authorities and civil society conducted multiyear projects on combatting human trafficking and promoting labour migration management as one of the ways to reduce the risk of migrants becoming victims of transnational organized crime. In

particular, we trained police officers countrywide to identify the victims of human trafficking, and to provide them assistance, to detect the criminals engaged in trafficking of human organs and to prevent underage orphans and children with special needs from falling prey to criminals. We also helped over 1000 judges for the last four years learn about the application of international legal instruments and national legislation related to human trafficking cases.

Additionally, we assisted in drafting and implementing amended legislation on trafficking in human beings in line with the international standards and supported the development of social services standards for victims of human trafficking. The new guidelines define the scope and requirements for the conditions and procedures for state and NGOs providing social services, including temporary shelter, to victims of cruel treatment. We hope that a full-fledged national Referral Mechanism for the victims of human trafficking will be adopted in Kazakhstan soon.

Our multiyear efforts on promoting labour migration management were also multifaceted and diversified. We place a special emphasis on engaging state authorities and civil society activists from neighbouring nations in dialogue on the integration of migrants, gender-sensitive issues and the prevention of crimes related to irregular migration.

In spite of some successful events with regional participation on migration and human trafficking topics, unfortunately, the involvement of all Central Asian countries in the comprehensive efforts to prevent and address challenges in this area at the regional level is still an outstanding issue.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In spite of the multiple initiatives and numerous successful activities outlined above, further encouraging regional co-operation in Central Asia does not come without challenges. Some of these challenges are practical, others are more complex. While we often succeed in convening representatives from all five Central Asian countries around one table on issues of mutual interest, we also don't, more often than not.

Central Asia as a region has significant potential for regional co-operation in a wide array of areas, in addition to combating violent extremism and countering trafficking in human beings. Environmental degradation, climate change, unsustainable use of natural resources and mismanagement of waste and pollution are challenges to security, too. The importance of promoting water resources management and energy efficiency and supporting green economy development - issues that the OSCE Programme Office in Astana actively works on - cannot be overestimated in a regional context.

The OSCE, with an established field presence in all five countries of the region, continues to offer a unique platform not only for continued fruitful co-operation between the missions and our host countries, but between the field missions themselves as we continue to jointly strengthen security for the region.

Thank you.