

Highlights from the Call for Action – Helsinki+50 Central Asia Regional Seminar on “The Role of Neutral States in Strengthening Security, Stability and Dialogue in the OSCE Area”

16 May 2023, Ashgabat

The OSCE PA Call for Action – Helsinki +50 Central Asia Seminar on “*The Role of Neutral States in Strengthening Security, Stability and Dialogue in the OSCE Area*” was held in Ashgabat upon the invitation of the Parliament of Turkmenistan. The event brought together OSCE PA members from the OSCE area, including in particular the Central Asian region, with local and international experts to reflect on the role of neutral states in a polarized geopolitical context.

Introductory remarks

- The special status of neutrality which guides the formulation of Turkmenistan’s foreign policy agenda can help build bridges among the states.
- The importance of inter-parliamentary dialogue in fostering peace and stability in the Central Asian region was repeatedly underlined.
- Preventive diplomacy is one of the most effective and practical tools in multilateral diplomacy: the OSCE’s comprehensive approach to security promotes it in all three dimensions of security.
- 2023 is the International Year of Dialogue as Guarantee for Peace as declared by the UNGA in Resolution 77/32: in this light, the timing of the Regional Seminar was very appropriate.
- Many speakers commended Turkmenistan’s initiative to declare Central Asia ‘a zone of peace, trust and cooperation’ at the UN General Assembly.

Main points raised by panellists:

- Pointed out the increasingly complex international agenda, with a progressive replacement of multilateral processes with a “multipolar” environment, which has progressively led to lack of dialogue and trust, to deep divisions in the international community and eventually to new conflicts and wars.

- Stressed the significance of Turkmenistan's positive neutrality status and its contributions to international peace and security. On an increasingly divided international scene, neutrality is seen as an asset for negotiations, addressing conflicts, and global threats such as climate change and transnational threats.
- Acknowledged the challenges and the spectrum of instabilities faced by neutral states and underscored that Turkmenistan's positive neutrality serves as a significant factor in regional security and co-operation and helps in reconciliation processes in Afghanistan.
- Pointed out that the region is experiencing a period of increasingly active involvement in the geopolitical and geo-economic processes taking place in the Eurasian space.
- Noted that in the context of geopolitical turbulence and of instability of the world economy, the countries of the region have understood that the preservation of security and stability in Central Asia requires close co-operation and dialogue, a key precondition for joint engagement in addressing new challenges and threats. Therefore, co-operation between the Central Asian states is progressively developing in the spirit of a strategic partnership, as demonstrated by the ongoing process of regular meetings involving regional Heads of State.
- Emphasized the need for dialogue, peaceful resolution of conflicts, joint efforts in prevention of transnational crimes, and boosting economic development.
- Stressed the role of young MPs and, more broadly, the need to promote a strong engagement of the younger generation in building peace and in addressing increasingly serious global challenges.
- Analysing the Austrian and Swiss models of neutrality, their potential and limitations, discussing modalities of military and non-military engagement, concluded that the notion of neutrality can be considered as an important asset for the OSCE and for the future of the region.
- Stressed that neutrality is not about being friends with everyone, it is more about being credible, active and able to engage conflicting sides in dialogue, while not precluding firm views and a clear alignment of neutral States in respect of individual issues.
- Underlining that political will and good faith engagement is an essential condition for dialogue to be successful, noted that it is paramount to restore trust and engage in honest dialogue about the future of the organization preserving the Helsinki, Paris and Astana spirit.
- The UN (in particular, the General Assembly) and the OSCE were acknowledged as essential platforms for promoting peace and co-operation. Participants stressed the need to exploit these organizations' full potential in conflict prevention and resolution and in restoring the Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security architecture.

General recommendations:

- Attendees underlined Turkmenistan's role in mediation and encouraged to utilize its status for reconciliation purposes vis-à-vis regional border conflict, regional challenges and Russia's war in Ukraine, which put dialogue among participating States on halt.
- Participants agreed that neutral engagement gives a possibility for a return to more cooperative relations in the OSCE space.
- Emphasized that Central Asia states should continue this joint parliamentary dialogue initiative in a regional format through a process that may help develop a common platform for dialogue of engaged countries acting in the interest of common security and stability both at the regional and at the broader OSCE-wide level.