



Conflict Prevention and Peace Building: Ways Forward for OSCE Engagement in Central Asia

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Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure to be here today at the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and to talk with you – the future leaders of this region – about how we can work together to protect and improve peace, security and prosperity in the OSCE region. Many thanks for making this exchange possible.

I was asked to give a short presentation about the work of the OSCE in this region: How is the OSCE involved in conflict prevention? How does the OSCE support the peace building process in Central Asia? What can be the future engagement for the OSCE in Central Asia?

I have divided my presentation into four parts.

1. First I will give you a little background Information about what exactly we do at the OSCE.
2. Then I will point out the challenges that we are currently facing. Asking the question whether the OSCE has actually all it needs to prevent modern conflicts or to support mediation and peace building.
3. After that I will talk about how the OSCE is engaging in so called Track 2 Diplomacy.
4. And finally I will present you some ideas on how we could move the OSCE forward.

- 1) So what is the work of the OSCE? How does the OSCE contribute to secure peace, security and development?**

Let me give you one example from Kyrgyzstan.

In the summer of 2010 the southern city of Osh suffered from violent ethnic clashes between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks. The violence caused many deaths, injuries and displacements. It severely damaged the relations between the public and the police forces.

The OSCE helped the Kyrgyz government in the aftermaths of this crises: to rebuild and strengthen public trust in its police forces and to ensure transparency and openness. The OSCE invested in

professional training and facilitated the drafting of a new law on co-operation between police and civil society. And it launched the Community Security Initiative which ran from 2011-2015 and helped to rebuild trust and to create joint public-state policing.

The OSCE PA also got involved and played a constructive role, because the Kyrgyz government asked my predecessor as Special Representative for Central Asia to co-ordinate the establishment process of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry – whose task it was to investigate the facts, establish responsibilities and make recommendations on accountability measures to ensure that such events cannot happen again.

This is a nice example on how the OSCE is helping to rebuild, maintain and improve peace and stability in Central Asia or other parts of the OSCE area.

We assist our member governments, institutions, the people and communities to improve their early warning systems, their conflict prevention, their crisis management and their post-conflict rehabilitation and reconciliation.

It also shows that the OSCE nowadays has to deal mostly with intra-state conflicts:

- conflicts that happen within the country's borders in the form of civil wars, insurgencies and terrorism;
- conflicts with the civilian population as a main victim.

This is why the OSCE is always trying to work closely with civil society and to involve them in their peace-building efforts.

Of course preventing inter-state conflicts and promoting cross-border cooperation is still an important part of the OSCE's work – also in Central Asia. A good example here is the Border Management Staff College. This college offers courses and training activities on border management to our Member states and to our partner states like Afghanistan. The college is also a very good example on how the OSCE is trying to improve the participation of women in security policies. In 2014 around 40 per cent of its participants were women. This is a very encouraging number.

2) Now – we had a short glance of what the OSCE is actually doing. But how well is it equipped for its job?

For this I would like to draw your attention to the current Ukrainian crisis. The mandate of the OSCE according to the Helsinki Final Act and the Chapter VII of the UN Charter is clear: peace building and conflict prevention.

But there is still the question: how was it possible that a crisis as big as the one in eastern Ukraine or even the smaller one in Osh could happen? Did OSCE prevention fail in these cases?

The cases in Osh and in eastern Ukraine show that the OSCE is very capable to manage crisis, to mediate and to rebuild peace.

In Ukraine, the OSCE and its participating States were able to formulate resilient and widely accepted political agreements – not despite but precisely because everyone had to agree.

The Special Monitoring Mission showed that the OSCE is not a toothless tiger as many believe, but that it can act swiftly if necessary.

Only one week after the OSCE got the mandate there were already 100 trained monitors deployed throughout Ukraine fulfilling the mission. The SMM enjoys a high acceptance with all conflict partners and was contributing greatly to contain the conflict.

But what about crisis prevention? Why did the OSCE not foresee the outbreak of violence in Ukraine or in Osh in 2010, and come up with a conflict prevention response?

In fact – in both cases OSCE Missions actually documented worrying developments weeks, even years, before the crisis occurred. But no one listened to the warnings or was willing to act.

And this is another truth of the OSCE: the OSCE is based on unanimity and non-binding agreements. This is why the OSCE can only be as strong as its participating States allow or want it to be.

On top of that, countries hosting OSCE Missions are free to adjust a missions mandate because they are reluctant to accept the realities.

3) Let me come now to our third point: OSCE's use of Track 2 diplomacy.

As I said earlier, the OSCE is actively trying to work closely with civil society and involve them in their peace and security projects. Not only because the civilian population is one of the major victims of modern conflicts, but also because civil organizations have become important key stakeholders in security and peace policy.

Including the views and experiences of civil society groups is therefore crucial in modern conflict prevention, resolution and peace building.

Civil society plays an important role also in another field of Track 2 diplomacy – sometimes called backdoor diplomacy. The OSCE regularly organizes events such as the OSCE Security Days and the OSCE Café. And it works through the OSCE Network of Think Tanks to bring key non-governmental stakeholders together and to foster cultural, religious, civil, and simple inter-personal dialogue and exchange.

Even though Track 2 diplomacy does not necessarily include governments themselves, OSCE participating States support the increase of this alternative diplomacy because this is what our modern-day reality looks like.

Parliamentarians are another important group for the OSCE Track 2 diplomacy. For example: they play an important part in the National election monitoring missions. They are deeply involved in analyzing, assessing, and reporting on elections across the OSCE area. After all, we parliamentarians have gone through our own election campaigns. The OSCE is benefiting greatly from pooling these experiences.

4) Now let me get to my last point: the future. How should the OSCE develop further? Which new path should the OSCE explore? Which proven methods should we continue to refine?

Today, OSCE participating States face a wide range of security challenges ranging from traditional inter-state conflicts, inner- and intra-state conflicts to terrorism, organized crime, minority issues, migration, fair and sustainable allocation of natural resources and deficits regarding democracy, rule of law and human rights.

This is why it is crucial that the OSCE intensifies its successful broad approach to security and peace building, and also strengthens its afford to better include women. Because women play a crucial role in confidence building, in dialogue and conflict resolution.

The concept of comprehensive security is multidimensional – and so are the conflicts challenging peace today. For example in the Ferghana Valley – where we have two explosive issues, one the lack of border delineation and demarcation and the other being the struggle for a fair and sustainable allocation of natural resources in the border regions.

Both require a broad and comprehensive approach to security.

Initiatives to develop joint water management projects between local communities and programmes to inform the population about their rights and obligations in border areas – these activities can be one of many future steps to prevent outbreaks of violence that – in the worst case – can lead to both inter-state conflicts as well as intra-state conflicts.

And the OSCE has the geographical and political scope, the presences on the ground and the relevant experience to support this kind of activities.

Finally the OSCE should further foster inter-parliamentary diplomacy through the OSCE PA.

Because the Parliamentary Assembly is a unique place, where we, the elected representatives of over one billion people, from 57 different States and with all kinds of cultural and religious backgrounds can come together.

It is an international place where we can gain access to knowledge and experience beyond the scope of our domestic politics. Knowledge which we then can take back with us, to inform our colleagues and civil society on the national level.

And parliamentarians are important to intensify the dialogue with civil society and all political levels.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We are today facing enormous challenges from within and from outside the OSCE area. The stability and security to which most of us have become accustomed are being threatened on a daily basis. Old conflicts awake, new conflicts arise, and unconventional threats like terrorism are a growing reality.

It is during these times that it becomes obvious: we cannot take for granted the level of peace, freedom and stability that we have already achieved within the OSCE.

We constantly need to stand up for it and maintain it – if we don't want to lose it again.

It is therefore essential that we constantly work to maintain and improve the OSCE -our common organization for cooperation and security.

We have a lot of work to do.

Thank you, yrakmat