



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

**4th Meeting of the Joint U.S.-Russia Working Group
on Counterterrorism in Afghanistan
*Vienna, 5 June 2019***

**“Central Asia and Afghanistan: Regional Approaches to Counterterrorism”
remarks by
Secretary General, Thomas Greminger**

Dear Cameron,
Distinguished scholars,
Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting me to distinguished gathering.

I am very pleased to have the opportunity to engage with you today on the important issue of counterterrorism as it relates to Afghanistan.

At the OSCE, we believe that there is an important role for regional responses to terrorism. They can complement national measures, and help connect them to the global fight against terrorism. So, in my remarks I will look at Afghanistan through a broader, regional lens that includes the states of Central Asia.

Preventing violent extremism and countering terrorism are shared priorities across Central Asia. I have seen this first-hand in my bilateral meetings with top officials from all five Central Asian states and Afghanistan. Potential spill-over effects from Afghanistan remain a major concern in Central Asia and add to an already long list of terrorism-related threats and challenges.

Afghanistan has been an OSCE Partner for Co-operation since 2003. The OSCE has provided a platform for dialogue with Afghanistan and on Afghanistan-related issues for many years. With our strong field presence in Central Asia – we have a field presence in each of the five Central Asian countries - we have also been engaging with Afghanistan in very practical ways – mainly, but not exclusively, through our Central Asia-based activities. This includes our efforts to build national and regional resilience to transnational threats, including violent extremism and terrorism.

Let me give you a few examples.

Last year, policymakers from the five Central Asian countries and Afghanistan participated in an OSCE table-top exercise on foreign terrorist fighters. In very concrete terms, they discussed how to address socio-economic drivers of radicalization; how to counter the use of digital media for terrorist recruitment and financing; and how to prevent prison radicalization and promote societal reintegration upon release.

Sharing borders with Afghanistan makes Central Asia vulnerable to cross-border transnational crime, illicit drug-trafficking and the illegal movement of terrorists. In 2009, the OSCE established the Border Management Staff College (BMSC) to address some of these challenges. Based in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, the College offers training for mid-level and senior border security officials from across the OSCE area, but it has a strong focus on Central Asia and Afghanistan. So far 918 Afghans have been trained, together with their counterparts from across the OSCE region.

Thanks to our close co-operation with the Russian Federal Border Police, we have also been able to organize all-Afghan counter-narcotics training for police officers in Domodedovo and St. Petersburg. I take this opportunity to thank our Russian friends for their expertise and co-operation on this effort.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Central Asian states are beginning to recognize that civil society actors can be critical partners in the development of effective strategies to prevent and counter violent extremism that may lead to terrorism. The OSCE wants to encourage such inclusive thinking. It is also in line with our support for approaches that protect human rights and fundamental freedoms and give people a voice to express their concerns. So, for example, we are launching a region-wide initiative in Central Asia to train young people, women and community leaders to speak out and mobilize others to reject violent extremism.

An effective whole-of-society approach by definition needs to include women. We seek to empower women as agents for positive change. For the last two years, Border Management Staff College courses, specifically for women leaders, have offered female border management officials and airport security personnel from Central Asia and Afghanistan a unique opportunity to interact, exchange views and build networks.

Dear colleagues,

The OSCE's comprehensive approach enables us to assist Central Asia and Afghanistan in many different ways and across various dimensions of security. Supporting economic development, transport and water management is one important path toward stabilizing livelihoods and societies. Just last Friday, representatives from the Central Asian States gathered in the Hofburg to discuss energy security and disaster risk reduction. We have also recently engaged Afghan women in region-wide training courses on "Women, Water Management and Conflict Resolution".

Investing in education more broadly is important to security in Central Asia. Our Central Asian Youth Network, supported by the OSCE Programme Office in Nur-Sultan, Kazakhstan, gathers the region's best and brightest, including from Afghanistan, to engage in academic debates on regional security. And the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, offers fully funded Master's degrees in *Politics and Security* and *Economic Governance and Development* to students from Central Asia and Afghanistan. Since the Academy's establishment in 2004, 45 Afghans have earned Master's degrees. This month, ten more Afghan students, including five women, will graduate.

Clearly, it will take many more such programmes and initiatives to move the region forward on the path towards peace and prosperity.

We will also need to keep up and intensify co-ordination between governments and all other stakeholders.

Government-led regional initiatives such as the Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA) and the Heart of Asia – Istanbul Process are important. The OSCE has been actively participating in RECCA ministerial conferences and our field presences have offered technical assistance to Central Asian foreign ministries hosting relevant high-level events. For example, for the last two years, the OSCE Centre in Ashgabat has been assisting the Turkmen Ministry of Foreign Affairs lead work on regional infrastructure confidence-building measures.

We also closely co-ordinate with the European Union and the United Nations, including the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia – both active promoters of regional co-operation. The EU is about to adopt a new strategy for its engagement with Central Asia. The strategy underlines the importance of co-operation with the OSCE and its institutions and “*encourage[s] Central Asian states to step up their own engagement with the OSCE and to support its field missions*”. It outlines two pillars, namely ‘Resilience’ and ‘Prosperity’ and links priority issues such as border management, migration, mobility, and common security challenges to sustainable connectivity, youth and education. This correlates closely with OSCE priorities within the framework of our comprehensive approach to security. The strategy also encourages regional approaches and stronger co-operation with Afghanistan. In the framework of the UN-EU-OSCE trilateral mechanism, I regularly consult with Natalia Gherman, UN Special Representative for Central Asia, and Peter Burian, EU Special Representative for Central Asia, to discuss regional issues, including Afghanistan.

Allow me to also highlight our co-operation with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. Our organizations engage Central Asian countries in regional activities, including international legal co-operation in terrorism cases. Together we have developed comprehensive training programs for Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on countering the financing of terrorism. Just two weeks ago, together with UNODC and the UN Office of Counter-terrorism, we organized a high-level regional conference on international and regional co-

operation on countering terrorist financing through drug trafficking and organized crime. I look forward to intensifying our co-operation further. Speaking of the UNOCT, I should add that I signed a Memorandum of Understanding with UN Under-Secretary-General Vladimir Vorokonkov a few months ago. The strategic objective of this MoU is to co-operate on counterterrorism in Central Asia.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Addressing transnational threats in Central Asia is a central focus for the OSCE – to protect the well-being and human security of local communities, while ensuring national and regional stability. Through our engagement in the region, we remain committed to Afghanistan and will continue to exploit every opportunity to support the country's progress.

In conclusion, let me thank all of you for engaging with each other to discuss Afghanistan in this format. Addressing issues of common concern is crucial, especially in times of great tensions and divisions. And as representative of an organization that promotes inclusive dialogue between East and West, I once again thank the East-West Institute for this endeavor.

Thank you, and I look forward to your comments and questions.