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United States Mission to the OSCE



Session 2: The OSCE's Role, including its Field Presences, in Fostering Stability and Security and Enhancing Cooperation and Integration in the Area of its Responsibility

As delivered by Ambassador Cynthia Efir
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Mr. Chairman:

Since their inception in 1992, OSCE field missions and officers have become a distinguishing feature of the Organization. This includes activities in the economic and environmental dimension, where OSCE economic and environmental field officers have been on the front lines translating OSCE principles into concrete action.

This type of cross-dimensional activities cuts to the heart of what the OSCE is all about and give us a framework on which to build future activities. If we look at examples across the OSCE field offices, we can see that within the EED sector we have achieved some notable successes.

Just one example of cross-dimensional work of the OSCE field offices is the development of a framework for important conflict management discussions among groups along the Kyrgyz-Tajik border. In an area where the border is not always clearly demarcated, and where pastureland and water resources must be shared, the potential for conflict is significant. By teaming with knowledgeable local groups, the OSCE has developed training mechanisms to help foster communication and develop skills on dispute resolution among all parties. These types of projects are low-cost, but return a high value in terms of conflict management and prevention. And these are exactly the types of projects where the OSCE has a distinct advantage because larger organizations, such as the UN, are not willing or are not able to implement effectively simply because of the size of the project.

Despite successes, we must constantly evaluate our goals and objectives for the field presences, and the best means to achieve those objectives. Often the OSCE field presences operate in a crowded field of international organizations, making coordination and cooperation even more essential to avoid duplication or acting at cross-purposes.

The field operations must interpret their mandates in the light of the OSCE's core tasks. Setting priorities for field office activities is an area where better coordination would be welcome. Often activities are started based on themes put forward in the Economic and Environmental Forum, but then are left without subsequent support and follow-through. This is one of the reasons why we support the idea of establishing a new OSCE Academy, in Central Asia, focusing specifically on the facilitation of economic activity that can not only improve licit trade in the OSCE space, but also help neighboring Afghanistan to do so. The Academy concept would ensure longer-term continuity and help make sure economic and environmental projects deliver the maximum benefit for the Academy's host and region.

The deployment of field missions in the Balkans and other conflict areas has been among the OSCE's greatest contributions to security and cooperation in Europe in the last two decades, and we support efforts to improve the effectiveness of OSCE's field presence. The organization needs to develop the flexibility to transfer resources and expertise as needed to address problems and emerging crises before they erupt into conflicts.

Field operations have a critical role to play in early warning and conflict prevention. They are the eyes and ears of the OSCE on the ground, and are best placed not only to detect early signs of tension, but to take initial steps within their mandate to assist the host State avert conflict. In addition, there is a whole range of threats and challenges, including border security and management, environmental degradation and minority issues that requires a broader, regional approach to be fully successful. We look forward to working with other delegations to continually improve the functions of the OSCE field offices.