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**REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON  
OF THE**

**CONTACT GROUP WITH THE ASIAN  
PARTNERS FOR CO-OPERATION**

**TO THE  
TWENTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE  
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

## **REPORT BY THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE CONTACT GROUP WITH THE ASIAN PARTNERS FOR CO-OPERATION TO THE TWENTY-SIXTH MEETING OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

During its Chairmanship of the Asian Contact Group in 2019, Italy focused on further promoting and strengthening an open and inter-active dialogue between the participating States and the Asian Partners for Co-operation. In elaborating the agenda of the Asian Contact Group, Italy worked with the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship and in particular, the Asian Partners to ensure the agenda reflected also their priorities and followed a demand-driven approach. The collaboration ensured that the agenda corresponded to the interests and concerns of the Asian Partner countries and supported the priorities of the OSCE Chairmanship.

In 2019, five meetings of the Asian Contact Group were held in Vienna, allowing the OSCE participating States and Asian Partners to engage in timely discussions of key security issues of interest to all sides and share best practices and experiences with each other based on the Ministerial Council Decisions adopted in 2018 in Milan. Each meeting featured speakers from one of the Asian Partner countries as well as presentations on the chosen topics by experts from international organizations, diplomats, academia and civil society.

The first meeting of the Asian Contact Group held on 5 April was dedicated to the topic of “OSCE’s Commitment to Women, Peace and Security” and organized in partnership with Japan. H.E. Ambassador Alessandro Azzoni, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Contact Group indicated that by organizing this meeting the intention was to reaffirm Italy’s commitment to gender mainstreaming across the OSCE’s three dimensions, as it did in 2018 during the OSCE Chairmanship, which ended with the successful adoption of the Ministerial Decision on “Preventing and Combating Violence against Women”. H.E. Ambassador Katarína Žáková, Deputy Permanent Representative of Slovakia presented priorities of the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship for 2019. She emphasized the importance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda for the OSCE as well as for the Chairmanship and the role of the Asian Contact Group. H.E. Ambassador Kiyoshi Koinuma, Permanent Representative of Japan to the OSCE stated that it is through empowering women that we can empower communities. He also mentioned the fifth edition of the World Assembly for Women, which took place in Japan, and that resulted in various useful recommendations. Ms. Makiko Kubota, Senior Gender Advisor on Gender and Development for Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) shared experiences from the field and explained how Japan contributes in the field of Women, Peace and Security. She presented various projects and initiatives supporting women’s access to health, improving their livelihood, promoting women’s participation and leadership state building, as well as fighting sexual and gender based violence. Ms. Gulsara Alieva, Colonel retired and expert on gender issues in law enforcement, from Kyrgyzstan presented the Association of Women Police of Kyrgyzstan, an initiative supported by former President Roza Otunbayeva. Moreover, she also illustrated the concrete actions being carried out in Kyrgyzstan towards the implementation of UNSCR 1325, notably regarding the work of women in the Parliament and at the local level on preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism, as well as preventing and countering terrorism. Professor Enzo Maria Le Fevre from Italy, presented activities of the Italian branch of WIIS (Women in International Security) of which he is the Secretary General. WIIS is a global network dedicated to promote the leadership and the professional empowerment of women in the field of international peace and security. Intervening delegations informed about their national efforts regarding the WPS agenda. Many delegations also emphasized the role of youth in preventing and combatting xenophobia and radicalization.

The second meeting of the Asian Contact Group – organized in partnership with Thailand – was held on 17 May, and was dedicated to the issue of “Advancing Partnership for sustainable security”. H.E. Ambassador Alessandro Azzoni, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Contact Group opened the session by stating that Thailand’s ASEAN Chairmanship provided a timely to look into the current status of interaction between the two organizations. He stressed that Thailand could act as a bridge to enhance dialogue, participation and foster synergies between the OSCE and ASEAN. H.E. Ambassador Morakot Srisawasdi, Permanent Representative of Thailand presented the priorities of Thailand’s 2019 ASEAN Chairmanship guided by the concept of “Advancing Partnership for Sustainable Development”. She presented the ASEAN Vision 2025, which envisaged ASEAN as an outward-looking, people-centered community, within which all member states share a collective responsibility in maintaining peace and security not only in the region, but also beyond. Ambassador Paul Bekkers, Director of the Office of the OSCE Secretary General underscored the role of both regional organizations in the implementation of the new sustainable development goals and recalled the proposal to re-energize the OSCE Asian partnership. He proposed to identify opportunities and trends affecting security and stability in Europe and Asia and define longer-term objectives. Dr. Darmp Sukontasap, Chairman of the Governing Council of the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, made a comprehensive presentation on how to re-energize the partnership including through creation of points of contacts on various peace and security issues, identification of key priority areas and annual planning. Ms. Olivera Zurovac-Kuzman, National Environmental Affairs Officer of the OSCE Mission to Serbia, focused her presentation on the efforts being carried out by the mission towards the implementation of the SDGs. Mr. Sandro Calvani, Senior Adviser on Strategic Planning of the Mae Fah Luang Foundation of Thailand (MFLF), a non-profit organization dedicated to promote community, social, environmental and cultural development, presented the experience of his foundation in implementing sustainable security in a post-conflict area. Intervening delegations mostly highlighted the importance of exploring further co-operation between the OSCE and ASEAN. Representatives also insisted on the need to create synergies. Ambassador Vuk Žugić, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities summarized that there were clear similarities and complementarities between the priorities of the 2019 Thai ASEAN Chairmanship and the OSCE.

H.E. Ambassador Thomas Greminger, OSCE Secretary General personally addressed the third meeting of the Asian Contact Group, held on 28 June organized in partnership with Australia and focusing on “Countering Trafficking in Human Beings and Modern Slavery”. He underlined the direct link between the OSCE’s multidimensional (or cross-dimensional) to combating trafficking in human beings and to the Sustainable Development Goals in particular to targets 5.2 and 8.7. He further noted that increased co-ordination was crucial and announced OSCE’s readiness to assume a leadership role in the UN’s Interagency Action Group against Trafficking in Persons (ICAT) - a platform that the OSCE was co-chairing with UN Women. Mr. Stephen McGlynn, Minister Counsellor of Home Affairs presented legislation developed in co-operation with representatives of the private sector and introduced Australia’s National Action Plan to Combat Human Trafficking and Slavery. He also mentioned the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime, stressing it was the first major policy document dealing with the subject of modern slavery. As next speaker, Ms. Ekaterina Ilyuchok, a survivor of human trafficking shared her traumatic experience of forced prostitution in Thailand. Mr. Valiant Richey, Acting OSCE Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, focused his presentation on the efforts of the OSCE in countering trafficking of human beings. He also identified the opportunities in partnership and co-ordination, as well as in the prevention of the use of goods and services from trafficked persons

and insisted on the need for a holistic response. The representatives of the Asian Partners for Co-operation shared elements of their national action plans including commitments to the Bali Process. A representative of UNHCR, invited to this meeting by the Slovak Chairmanship, shared related recommendations, such as the need to identify victims that may be eligible to the status of refugees, and to reduce the rate of statelessness among trafficking victims. The representative also recalled that partnerships are crucial to create “a future without trafficking”. As part of the final remarks, H.E. Ambassador Maria Assunta Accili, Permanent Representative of Italy to the UN in Vienna emphasized that “although the end of human exploitation may be a utopia, we should still have dreams that promote action”. She also mentioned the important role in this context of the Palermo Convention, and one of its three Protocols, “The Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons, especially Women and Children” to which 174 UN Member States are parties. According to the 2018 UNODC Global Report on Trafficking in Persons, 168 UN Member States have adopted national legislations, complying with the aforementioned Protocol.

The fourth meeting of the Asian Contact Group took place on 19 July and focused on “Current Situation and Ways Forward on the Korean Peninsula”. The meeting was organized in partnership with the Republic of Korea. H.E. Ambassador Chae-hyun Shin, who attended his first meeting as Permanent Representative of the Republic of Korea said that the OSCE’s work and activities was a source of inspiration not just for the Korean peninsula and that his country would like to further advance co-operation with the OSCE in order to share lessons learned and best practices. Regarding the situation on the Korean Peninsula, he stressed that since 1950s, the imminent threat of war persisted and preventing another conflict at any cost was a priority. He briefly mentioned the recent developments including the rapprochement during the Olympic winter games in 2018, the Inter-Korean Summits and the trilateral - US-Korea and DPRK - gathering at Panmunjom on 30 June. He stated that denuclearization was the first important step and that no meaningful economic development would be possible without it. He highlighted the highest level of commitment of the heads of states of both Koreas, US, China and Russia to this process of peaceful resolution of the nuclear issue and called for patience with DPRK as restoring of trust takes time. Ambassador Pesko, Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre of the OSCE, shared best practices and lessons learned from OSCE history focusing on confidence security and building measures (CSBMs). He stated that building mutual trust was a lengthy process and regular military-to-military contacts, both on leadership, and on expert-level were essential. He further stressed that political will was key to any progress. Mr. Dong-weol Rhee, Director-General for Korean Peninsula Peace Regime of the Republic of Korea MFA shed light on the current situation on the Peninsula including developments of the peace process, past summits and ways forward. Ms. Elena Sokova, Executive Director of the Vienna Center for Disarmament and Non-Proliferation gave an overview of the nuclear issue. She stressed that solving the nuclear problem was an integral part of reaching and securing a lasting peace and called for a systematic approach. Ms. Meeri-Maria Jaarva, OSCE Mediation Support Officer presented various OSCE instruments in conflict management and resolution such as Chairman in Office, Secretary General, envoys, Conflict Prevention Centre and the institutions. In their interventions, most delegations welcomed the recent developments, stressed the importance of complete, verifiable and irreversible denuclearization and called for the continued implementation of sanctions.

The 2019 OSCE Asian Conference on “How to Achieve Comprehensive Security in the Digital Era: The Perspectives of the OSCE and its Asian Partners” was held in Tokyo, Japan between 2 and 3 September 2019. All five Asian Partners for Co-operation (Afghanistan, Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and Thailand) and 36 OSCE participating States attended. More

than 130 political representatives and policy experts, as well as practitioners from international, regional, and sub-regional organizations, academia, business, and civil society from across the OSCE's participating States and Asian Partners for Co-operation gathered to explore ways to tackle common security challenges arising from the use of digital technology. The opening session was chaired by H.E. Ms. Toshiko Abe, State Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan. The closing session was moderated by Mr. Hideki Uyama, Deputy Director-General of the European Affairs Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. During the opening session, keynote speeches were delivered by H.E. Mr. Miroslav Lajčák, OSCE Chairperson-in-Office and Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of Slovakia; H.E. Ambassador Alessandro Azzoni, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Contact Group with the OSCE Asian Partners for Co-operation; and Ambassador Paul Bekkers, Director of the Office of the OSCE Secretary General. Speaker after speaker reconfirmed that strengthening co-operation between OSCE participating States and its Asian Partners for Co-operation was key to achieving comprehensive security in the digital era. The opening speakers' remarks were followed by three thematic sessions, which covered all three security dimensions and specific topical areas of comprehensive security in the digital age, namely tackling ICT security risks, the digital economy as a driver for promoting co-operation, security and growth, and the risks to the safety of journalists. During the conference a side event on "Enhancing security, building partnerships: Co-operation between OSCE field operations in Central Asia and Afghanistan on border management" took place. Since 2009, the OSCE had supported the professionalization of border guards and mid- and senior-level border officials in Afghanistan, mainly through extra-budgetary contributions. In the closing remarks, H.E. Deputy Minister of Italy, Guglielmo Picchi, reiterated Italy's commitment to the Asian Partnership and to deepen discussions related to the tangible link between the security situation in the OSCE Area and the Asia-Pacific regions. Speaking on behalf of the OSCE Slovak Chairperson-in-Office, Martin Končal, Minister Counsellor, Permanent Mission of Slovakia concluded by reiterating the need for multilateral co-operation related to the issues of cyber security, safety of journalists and protection of critical infrastructure. He stressed that Slovakia, as incoming Chairmanship of the Asian Contact Group, would work towards a more strategic partnership in 2020.

The fifth meeting of the Asian Contact Group was held on 22 November and focused on "Democratic Institutions and Safety of Journalists in Afghanistan" as a follow up to the discussions held at this year's OSCE Asian Conference in Tokyo, where one session was dedicated to the topic of risks to the safety of journalists in the digital era. The ACG meeting was co-hosted by Afghanistan. H.E. Ambassador Alessandro Azzoni, Permanent Representative of Italy to the OSCE and Chairperson of the Contact Group, opened the session by stating that obvious progress had been made in Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban 18 years ago. He also emphasized the importance of the 2018 Ministerial Council Decision (MC.DEC/3/18) on Safety of Journalists and noted the clear link between democratic institutions and safety of journalists. H.E. Ambassador Thomas Greminger, OSCE Secretary General commented on the impressive program of the Asian Contact Group meetings in 2019. He further stressed the importance to take the 25th anniversary of the OSCE Asian Partnership for Co-operation in 2020 as an opportunity to work towards a more strategic partnership and expressed his support to the draft declaration on the OSCE Asian Partnership. H.E. Ambassador Khojesta Ebrahimkhel, Permanent Representative of Afghanistan, discussed democratic changes that have occurred in her country over the past years. She noted in particular the change in the role of women who in Afghanistan are "agents of change and democracy" that play an important part in the social and economic development of Afghanistan. Ambassador Ebrahimkhel also weighed in on the 2019 Afghanistan presidential

elections stating that the Afghan people had gone to the poll to reinforce the strength of their belief in democracy. She also noted the positive changes in the media sector with many private radio and TV companies broadcasting across the country. Ambassador Ebrahimkhel concluded with a request to support the people of Afghanistan in their quest for democracy and rule of law. Mr. Sami Mahdi, a journalist and Bureau Chief of Radio Azadi, Afghanistan presented on peace and freedom of expression in Afghanistan. Ms. Kristin Olson, Principal Adviser, Office of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media recommended support to strengthen initiatives, both state-led and independent, that reflected the Ministerial Council Decision 3/18 on Safety of Journalists. She addressed the value of multi-stakeholder initiatives, the importance of implementing regulations that are in accordance with international human rights law in order to ensure freedom of expression online, and to actively support specific safety and security responses for female journalists. Following the thematic discussion, H.E. Ambassador Azzoni presented a draft declaration on the OSCE Asian Partnership and invited participating States for its adoption at the 2019 OSCE Ministerial Council in Bratislava. He further pointed to a draft decision on the amendment of the OSCE Rules of Procedure on the order of statements established by the drawing of lots and related Statement at the Ministerial Council to allow heads of delegations from Partners for Co-operation to address the Ministerial Council following the heads of delegation of equal rank from participating States and invited participating States to support this initiative. Ms. Marietta König, Senior External Co-operation Officer, Office of the OSCE Secretary-General announced the re-launch of the project “Placement of experts from OSCE Partners for Co-operation” starting in 2020. The revised five-year project would allow up to five young diplomats per year to observe, during a one-week period, the activities of a department/section/unit of the OSCE Secretariat and gain thorough knowledge of the history, functioning, and current activities of the OSCE during a two-week summer academy.

The Italian Chairmanship of the Asian Contact Group expresses its sincere gratitude to all the Asian Partners for Co-operation and the participating States for their engagement and commitment in the framework of the OSCE Asian Partnership. Italy wishes every success to the incoming Slovak Chair of the Asian Contact Group and encourages to continue the broad, fruitful and productive dialogue with the Asian Partners and to strengthen and advance them further both in the form of meetings in Vienna and through tools such as the annual OSCE Asian Conference.