

**Workshop  
The OSCE and Political Islam  
The Case of Central Asia**

**Hamburg, 22 – 23 September 2001**

**SUMMARY**

**Saturday 22/9/2001**

**Saturday 9:30: Opening of the Workshop**

Dr. Lutz:

The main focus of Dr. Lutz' opening speech lay in the terrorist attacks of 11 September. These attacks were unique, because they were the largest attack in such a short time against civilians from all over the world, and no political demands were made. They were also symbolic, destroying illusions that a safe haven exists.

The attacks would result in increased tensions between the West and the Islamic world, in the tightening of the NATO alliance, and in higher levels of militarization (in the worst case, war).

In order to avoid conflict in Central Asia, dialogue and more OSCE involvement would be required. Hatred should not lead to hatred. Stability in the region should be ensured, as it is strategically important and a meeting point of different cultures, religions and movements.

The workshop should aim to focus on the Central Asian region, discuss the issue of political Islam in Central Asia, frame some practical questions, and discuss the concerns and recommendations that the OSCE and its participating States could have.

**PART 1: Political Islam in Central Asia – Situation and Perspectives**

**Saturday 9:45 Session: Transformation, State- and Nation-Building and Islam**

**Transformation in Central Asia and its Repercussions on the Perspectives of the Islamic Movement**

Dr. Krummenacher:

Dr. Krummenacher pointed to the special conditions in Central Asia that have resulted in little progress having taken place in the region after the Soviet Union collapsed. These special issues include, firstly, the Soviet legacy that resulted in authoritarianism being stronger than democratic elements. Secondly, political and economic instability, unemployment and lacking infrastructure have inhibited the development of an entrepreneurial or middle class that would strive for democracy. Thirdly, no solidarity exists between states, as they view world politics in a zero-sum manner. Thus, economic and social problems, which can only be solved

through co-operation, remain unsolved. Fourthly, the West neither has a coherent policy for the region or economic interest in backing any policy with sufficient resources.

The consequence of these conditions, in particular in the Fergana Valley, is that the politicisation of Islam is on the rise again. Due to worsening living conditions and frustration, the youth is turning to radicalism and Wahhabism, endangering secularism and extending the rift between moderates and radicals.

### **State- and Nation-Building in Central Asia and Islam**

#### Dr. Akiner:

Dr. Akiner argued that three themes are the key to an understanding of post-Soviet Central Asia: modernisation, the new political order and the resurgence of Islam. The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in psychological and economic dislocation in Central Asia. In a time of flux and uncertainty, conservatives and authoritarianism gained political power and legitimacy. At the cost of political corruption and stalled reforms, they managed to maintain stability, with the exception of Tajikistan, which spiralled out of control into a bloody civil war.

Contemporary political life in the Central Asian states is marked by profound apathy. Opposition movements have either been suppressed or are weak and ineffectual. Civil society is also weak, under-funded, and regarded with suspicion. In the dire economic situation, the chief concern of large sections of the population is survival. They have little time or energy to care about politics, still less about the building of civil society.

At present, many leaders in the region have elevated Islam to a status akin to that of a state ideology. They favour the teachings of orthodox Sunni Islam of the Hanafi school of jurisprudence, which they call “good” Islam. Oppositional forms of Islam are mostly suppressed. It is unclear whether these oppositional groups are militants fighting to establish an Islamic state, or whether they are local mafia barons fighting for control of lucrative narcotic-trafficking routes. In any case, Islam in Central Asia today is becoming part of, and increasingly underpinning, a restrictive, backward-looking culture, rather than providing an impetus for the creation of open, inclusive societies that look to the future with confidence.

### **Saturday 11:15 Session: The Situation and Perspectives of Islamic Movements**

#### Dr. Schoeberlein:

Dr. Schoeberlein emphasised the problem of stereotyping Muslims. Muslims are too often equated with Islam. Islam is often essentialised in a manner that Islam should be political in the form of Shariah law and that everything is centred on Islam.

The reality is that leaders in Central Asia often disagree on what form Islam should take. The Islamic movement is diverse, and several movements exist in Central Asia; e.g. the Wahhabi, the Salafi, the Sufi, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), and the Adalat movement in the Fergana Valley.

Central Asian governments see all Islamic political movements as radical opposition. E.g. in Uzbekistan, state-intervention in religious matters is maximal and religious freedom does not exist. Too much suppression of political and religious freedom has led to an increase in radicalism. After 11 September, the rise of anti-Islam feeling in the West will increase the polarization of Islam in Central Asia.

## **12:15 Session: Experiences with Political Islam in Central Asia (I)**

### **Tajikistan**

#### Mr. Kabiri:

Mr. Kabiri spoke about the Tajik Revival Party and the difficult situation of Islam in Central Asian governments.

The compromises that the Revival Party has made have led to peace. Before the peace agreement, the Islamic Party held 95% of power; afterwards it holds only 30% of government posts. It tries to offer a political solution without becoming a religious organization. Peace is only possible with compromise, through a dialogue and the coexistence of secular and religious values.

The government is, however, in a difficult position. On the one hand, the party was claimed to be a traitor to the Islamic tradition. On the other, political Islam is seen as a negative factor by other Central Asian governments. Tajikistan cannot show too much support for Islam. However, if the government becomes more repressive, the population, and as a result the Revival Party, will become more radical.

### **Tajikistan (continued)**

#### Dr. Olimova:

Dr. Olimova focussed on Islam and the government. During the Tajik conflict Islam became more political, and the Party of Islamic Revival was legalized. However, 78% of the population believe the state and Islam should be separate and 13% believe religion and state should be united.

Dr. Olimova argued that Islam should be included in the secular aspects of the country and the government in order to prevent the radicalisation of a confused population. The survival of legal parties will depend on their support of Islam. The elite must clarify its stance to prevent the radicalisation of Islam.

## **Saturday 14:30 Session: Experiences with Political Islam in Central Asia (II)**

### **Uzbekistan**

#### Dr. Tursunov:

Dr. Tursunov talked of the radicalisation of political Islam in Uzbekistan. In the 1990s, political Islam differentiated itself weakly, as nationalist revivalism was stronger. In seeking power, the Islamic movements became more radical.

The movements were forced to go underground as radicalism increased, illustrated by the acts of extremists in Namangan in 1993. Uzbekistan does not tolerate terrorism or radical Islam, and the Uzbek Government will never agree to reconciliatory measures towards radical Islam.

Dialogue has been attempted with reformists, but this failed. Dialogue with radicals has shown no promise. Islamic radicals cannot be beneficial, neither economically nor strategically.

## **Kyrgyzstan**

### Dr. Tabyshalieva:

Dr. Tabyshalieva concentrated on misperceptions about political Islam in Kyrgyzstan. Political Islam is not a serious threat, because the Kyrgyzs are politically apathetic. In a survey, people could name 5 – 6 holy places, but only 2 political parties.

Political Islam is mostly used as the excuse for the failed economies in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The governments wage small wars to divert the attention of the OSCE and other international organizations from paying attention to humanitarian issues and poor governance to focussing only on political Islam and terrorism.

Islam is important in some regions, but it is heterogeneous. The division in Central Asia is between traditional Islam and radical Islam. The number of people who attend mosques in Kyrgyzstan is increasing, but only 50% have the Koran. Many people are confused about the problematic of religion (e.g. Wahhabism, the IMU's connections to narcotics trafficking).

The OSCE and UN are well placed as observers in Central Asia. Only a coherent, all-inclusive policy, based on strong research focussing on the region can deal with extremism.

## **Kazakhstan**

### Mr. Akimbekov:

Dr. Akimbekov emphasised that Islam is historically and geographically diverse. Islam in Central Asia is unique due to the Soviet impact, which resulted in a weak clergy and the rise of folk movements.

Islam in Kazakhstan is unique because the country is heterogeneous and under constant change. Capitalism has enhanced this wild-west mentality of interaction between different groups (22 Moslem peoples, 4000 unofficial mosques of minorities). Tensions and conflict exist between the clergy and minorities, as well as Christians and Muslims.

However, conflict is only possible due to Kazakhstan's external radicals, e.g. Chechen neighbours and Uzbeks. Kazakhstan itself is a liberal, peaceful country. Islam is not militant, and peaceful policy can be based on moderate wings. Extremism is solely a response to secular extremism in Uzbekistan and other external influence.

Dr. Akiner refuted the idea that no internal conditions to conflict exist. She claimed that the leaders have little experience and interest, and do not even try to seek internal support or seek constituencies. Political Islam, on the other hand, takes a different stance. Hizb-ut-Tahrir (Freedom Party) tries to engage with the population. Its popularity is based on its aim for dialogue, not its extremism. The Revival Party, on the other hand, only recites old, traditional positions.

## **Saturday 16:30 Session: Political Islam in a Regional Context**

### **The Islamic Factor in Russian Security Policy**

#### Dr. Zviagelskaja:

Dr. Zviagelskaja clarified Russia's position on terrorism and Central Asia. Russia is willing to co-operate on the issue of terrorism, but will not participate in military operations in Afghanistan. Military action alone is insufficient to combat terrorism.

Russia is particularly concerned about Central Asia if the US carries out operations. It is unclear how NATO will act, what strategic consequences this will have, and which other states may become targets. If the operation takes long, extremism in both Central Asia, and hence also in Russia, which is home to more than 17 million Muslims, may increase.

No doubt exists that the fight against terrorism is going to be a long one. Military efforts must be complemented with efforts to cut down the financial support, crush drug trafficking, and improve the economic and social situation in Muslim countries. It is important that the majority of Muslims are not converted into opponents of the anti-terrorist operation. A strict distinction must be made between Islam and radical Islamists. Russia believes that Islam is an important ally in the struggle against terrorism.

### **Iran and Afghanistan - two Conflicting Models of the Islamic State and their Impact on the Region**

#### Dr. Rieck:

Dr. Rieck strongly argued in favour of intervention in Afghanistan. He compared Islam in Afghanistan to Iran. Iran is a powerful country, whose influence is more predictable and less disruptive than that of Afghanistan. It has institutionalised Shia clergy rule. However, after Khomeini's death in 1989, the religious leaders are taking a more pragmatic approach, in the direction of a more open and liberal political system. The Iranian model for an "Islamic Republic" could become attractive for Central Asia in the future especially if more power is granted to elected institutions.

On the other hand lies the Taliban, and the Islamist International which it is increasingly linked to, which is interested in eliminating Israel and all influence of the West in Muslim countries, and also in getting rid of Russian influence in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Afghanistan has become the spiritual home for many extremists pursuing the Jihad. After September 11, the Americans and their allies are justified in attempting to overthrow the Taliban system militarily. Supporting the Northern Alliance would open up a real opportunity to negotiate a broad-based government which has been on the UN agenda since 1994. This would have to be backed by massive international force (10-20,000 would solve the problems in Kabul) and financial assistance to rebuild the country.

### **Comment**

#### Dr. Jonson:

Dr. Jonson spoke of the constructive and destructive aspects of external factors. For external factors to have an effect, certain internal conditions have to be met. The socio-economic conditions in which the majority of the population live, as well as the lack of a sense of

identity and faith in the future contribute to the spread of extremism. Even the destructive events of 11 September can be seen as constructive, because they offered an opportunity for multilateral co-operation, acting as a stimulus for large-scale dialogue.

Dr. Jonson regretted, however, that instead of dialogue and the OSCE agenda, the tendency appeared to be more towards a narrow, military, anti-terrorist view of solving problems. Several attempts have been made at multicultural discussion platforms, but most of these have been weak because of their focused on the military aspect and anti-terrorism alone, as was shown in Rieck's views. The Islam-secular dialogue and economic development has been ignored. The OSCE must work to promote and strengthen this dialogue.

### **Saturday 19:00 Session: The OSCE and the Islamic Factor**

#### Mr. Hermann:

Mr. Hermann focussed on the external and self-caused problems that the OSCE faces in Central Asia. The OSCE's success in Central Asia is affected by the nature of the OSCE (consensus), and by reluctance towards external involvement. Dialogue is difficult, as it is perceived as lecturing, as patronising.

The OSCE must see the different views of the parties, taking into account those also beyond the OSCE. It must also have a balanced approach (e.g. not only focus on human rights) that is tailored specifically for each country.

The interest in the OSCE's work has increased with the events of 11 September. A follow-up is now supported for a conference on drugs, crime and terrorism that was held in Tashkent in 2000.

### **A View from the Field (OSCE in Tashkent)**

#### Dr. Legutke:

Dr. Legutke spoke of the problems that the OSCE office in Uzbekistan faces. Firstly, the type of political system is a totalitarian regime. The implication for the OSCE is that it finds it difficult to implement its goals. Secondly, political Islam operates underground because opposition is suppressed and the government considers Islamists terrorists. The overall effect is that co-operation with authorities is limited and difficult, and especially sensitive in the human dimension.

With regard to Islam, the daily activities of the OSCE include firstly its projects. The link to Islam is not direct, because contacts would result in difficulties with authorities. The second task is monitoring and reporting (spot and permanent reports on current events and human rights violations). 90% of OSCE activities are reduced to monitoring, 95% of which are related to human rights.

## **A view from ODIHR**

### Dr. Chylinski:

Dr. Chylinski reported on the ODIHR's work in Central Asia, with particular focus on the development of civil society in the region. The ODIHR focuses on follow-ups on electoral processes and enhancing the human dimension, civil society and dialogue.

As most of the CIS have only been admitted to the OSCE recently, full implementation of obligations at once is not possible. To assist in their fulfilment, a memorandum of understanding was signed with Uzbekistan in 1997, with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan in 1998, and with Tajikistan in 1999. Turkmenistan is outside of these agreements because it has insufficient resources and political apprehension.

The ODIHR is involved in several grass-roots-development projects, each costing a maximum of 5,000 Euros. Space for democracy and civil society is very limited. The region is developing rapidly, which explains why violence and clashes occur. Clashes occur when civil society demands more than the government can offer.

## **PART 2: THE DIALOGUE OF CULTURES IN THE EURO-ASIAN REGION OF THE OSCE**

### **Sunday 9:30 Session: The Dialogue of Cultures in a Global Perspective**

#### Mr. Trautner:

Mr. Trautner argued that a dialogue between civilizations is unviable, because the term dialogue and identity are misleading. A civilization in the form of a geo-political entity or an international-relations actor does not exist. Identities always change, e.g. through migration. Dialogue always occurs within, as well as between cultures.

Dialogue involving religion is problematic, because religion is not an audible player in politics. It is unclear who is a legitimate representative when identities are mostly stereotypes (e.g. Muslim as terrorist and fundamentalist) or unclear (September 11 illustrates this, as dialogue is not possible between the world and those who opt out of it). In Huntington's paradigm "Islam against the West", it was to be a dialogue between governments. However, most governments in the region are not elected nor are they educated.

Drs. Jonson and Zellner asked what alternatives there should be to a dialogue, or how this concept should be restructured if it is unviable. Dr. Trautner clarified his stance by arguing that dialogue as such is not unviable, but only that a dialogue of civilizations is impossible.

### **The CORE Dialogue Project in Tajikistan**

#### Dr. Seifert:

Dr. Seifert focussed on interaction between the West and Islam, how the OSCE can constructively facilitate a compromise, and presented the CORE Dialogue Project. The project works with Muslim representatives of Islamists, secularists, the opposition as well as neutrals. Dr. Seifert also argued that vague terminology, e.g. the "integration" of Islam, should be clarified.

The forum should provide a recommendation to the OSCE, arguing that the Organization should move beyond its negative fixation with regard to the concept of Islam. It should see moderate Muslims and Islam-oriented NGOs as partners in dialogue and co-operation.

Dr. Tursunov objected to the recommendation concerning NGOs. He argued that in Uzbekistan in particular, and in Central Asia in general, NGOs were isolated and weak. Discussions in the CIS region would only be possible at a governmental level.

### **Sunday 11:30 Session: Open Discussion**

Dr. Schoeberlein and Dr. Seifert **summarised** the key conclusions and recommendations of the workshop. The focal points were as follows:

- Islam is political, and an integral part of Central Asian society.
- Central Asian governments have used Islam for nation-building purposes, resisting and suppressing independent forms of Islam.
- Radicalisation of Islam is a response to the socio-political conditions in the region, and increasing authoritarianism of governments.
- Because of terrorism, and in particular after 11 September, radicalisation of Islam must be tackled soon.
- The fight against terrorism must not be a fight against Islam, but Islam should be seen as an integral part to solving problems. Co-operation requires consensus and dialogue, also beyond the OSCE area.
- The fight against terrorism should move beyond mere military measures.
- The OSCE has so far had some success in the region in supporting dialogue and civil society, but it needs to do more in the region.
- A summary should be compiled and a follow-up to the workshop should be held, perhaps in the region itself.

Dr. Tabyshalieva pointed out that the negative aspects of inter-cultural dialogue must also be considered. Dialogue can be negative if it means one participant pressuring the other, or if it takes the form of cultural expansion. Such dialogue is destabilising.

Mr. Kabiri talked about the current situation after 11 September. Political Islam expected a blow in the next days, and in some ways understood that it was deserved. However, the West could not expect to be able to “strike a man and then want to talk to him”.

The following practical **suggestions** were made concerning the OSCE:

- Dr. Oberschmidt spoke of increasing ground presence in OSCE missions, and tailoring the OSCE’s approach specifically to each country, but only if Central Asian states agreed to this.
- Dr. Zviagelskaja emphasised that mission members must be prepared professionally. They need more knowledge about the region, more multi-level contacts, and must be accepted by the local population. Dr. Olimova and Dr.



Tursunov seconded this point. Dr. Chylinski responded by pointing out that not only experts should be sent to missions. Diplomatic skills were more important than expertise on the region.

- Dr. Schoeberlein discussed the problem that mission employees are posted for short periods. This often leads to inefficient duplication of efforts and relearning processes.
- Mr. Neukirch argued that terrorism should be tackled through police training in the OSCE. Dr. Jonson refuted this suggestion, claiming it was unrealistic and such high expectations would have empty results.
- Dr. Tabyshalieva noted that all Western organizations ignore the special conditions of Central Asia. In large conferences, many parties found it impossible to express their opinions, especially concerning cultural and religious matters. Meetings should therefore be much smaller.
- Dr. Tursunov and Dr. Krummenacher focussed on the problem that the West is not prepared to hold a dialogue with Central Asia. Local conditions and opinions are not taken into consideration. The West must conduct a dialogue, not a monologue.
- Mr. Kabiri laid out three criteria for holding a dialogue with Islam: 1) Experience in conducting negotiations, 2) Understanding the problems in Central Asia, 3) Talking to radicals and terrorists would be desirable, even though it may not be possible.

**End**