

The Chairmanship and Central Asia

Joint commitment to a community of common values

Ambassador José Ángel López Jorrín, Head of the Spanish Chairmanship's OSCE Task Force, accompanied the Chairman-in-Office, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, on a fast-paced visit to Central Asia from 9 to 14 April. Starting in Kazakhstan, they travelled to Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, each of which hosts OSCE field operations. In an interview for the *OSCE Magazine*, Ambassador López Jorrín explains how direct discussions with the region's top officials and representatives of civil society help strengthen the dialogue between the OSCE and the host countries and raise the Organization's profile.

Kathleen Samuel: Why is Central Asia important to the OSCE?

Ambassador José Ángel López Jorrín: The five countries of Central Asia acceded to independence over 15 years ago. They have embraced their commitments to the OSCE and recognize its comprehensive approach to security.

These countries face a unique set of common concerns — trafficking in illegal drugs, porous borders, land degradation and contaminated soil, among others — that also threaten the stability of other participating States. Central Asia is on the geographical border of the OSCE community and on the front line of an interesting part of the world.

At the same time, each of the Central Asian countries is tackling its specific set of challenges in building strong democratic institutions while undergoing rapid transition. The OSCE's support at this time is crucial; it enables them to maintain stability and to be part of the OSCE family, sharing the Organization's common values and standards.

Since these countries are at the crossroads of the Muslim, Chinese and Trans-Atlantic worlds, they add to the rich spectrum of perspectives embodied by the 56 participating States. Through their delegations in Vienna, they participate fully in guiding the Organization and in keeping the dialogue going.

What are the Chairmanship's priorities as far as Central Asia is concerned?

Overall, we are paying close attention to consolidating and strengthening the mechanisms and institutions that support democratization, rule of law, good governance, and capacity



building for civil society. These themes are relevant across the OSCE area as they support stability and security everywhere, including in Central Asia, and help address the threats posed by terrorism and organized crime.

More specifically, we recognize the importance of helping each of the Central Asian countries to improve their environmental security. Land degradation is just one of the many difficult challenges they face. Water management is another. Let's not forget that when these countries were part of the Soviet Union, there was one system of managing their resources. Today, there are five.

How did the visit of the Chairman-in-Office (CiO) to Central Asia promote these priorities?

We had intense and fruitful discussions on a number of issues and we were able to find common ground on the Chairmanship's priorities.

- In Kazakhstan, the Chairman-in-Office had constructive discussions with President Nursultan Nazarbaev and Foreign Minister Marat Tazhin on the country's political reform programme.

- The CiO was well received by Turkmenistan's newly-elected President Gurbanguly Berdymukhammedov. Increased co-operation was the focus of their meeting.

- In Uzbekistan, President Islam Karimov and the CiO talked about a number of concrete activities and relations with the OSCE.

Kipchak, Turkmenistan, 12 April 2007. An imam at the Spirituality Mosque welcomes Ambassador José Ángel López Jorrín (left), Javier Sancho Velásquez, Director-General of the Spanish Foreign Minister's cabinet, and Chairman-in-Office Miguel Ángel Moratinos.



Kazakhstanskaya pravda of 10 April carried an article by the Chairman-in-Office on the day of his arrival in Astana.

- Continuing to Kyrgyzstan, Chairman-in-Office Ángel Moratinos spoke with President Kurmanbek Bakiev on the need to take further steps to stabilize the political situation.
- On the final leg of the trip, President Emomali Rahmon and the CiO reviewed Tajikistan's achievements since the end of the five-year civil conflict ten years ago. They exchanged some ideas concerning the OSCE's continued support to the host country as it enters a new era of economic and democratic development.

During our meetings, we were also able to share information about the activities of the OSCE's field operations in all three dimensions. We discussed measures to promote OSCE commitments and developed some concepts addressing economic and environmental issues and border management.

Based on the impact of your Central Asian trip, how do you see the role of the Chairmanship's regular visits to key countries in the OSCE area?

As far as Central Asia is concerned, the visit of Chairman-in-Office Ángel Moratinos highlighted the strategic importance of the region to the OSCE community, built on the visits of previous CiOs and continued a tradition in which the Organization reaffirms its commitment to the countries.

Of course I would like to think that the visits fostered a sense among Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan that they are equal partners in, and owners of, this Organization.

I also think that these visits present a unique opportunity for participating States to renew their longstanding interest in the OSCE. The countries' leaders engage with the Organization at the highest level, going beyond the usual mechanisms. National representatives, from the presidential level to members of civil society, are able to share their ideas and points of view directly with the Chairman-in-Office.

You mentioned the tenth-year anniversary of the ending of one of the most tragic conflicts in Central Asia. What is the significance of this milestone for the OSCE?

We very much share in the Tajiks' sense of pride in their achievements over the past decade, as the Organization played an instrumental role in the peace process. Even before the Peace Agreement was concluded in 1997, the OSCE, through its Mission in Dushanbe, was already hard at work helping to build democratic institutions. Thus, there is a long history of dialogue and co-operation between Tajikistan and the Organization.

Although each conflict is unique, I hope that the Tajiks' success in overcoming their differences serves as a model for other participating States to follow. The power-sharing agreement that resulted from the peace accord demonstrated how important it is to involve all major stakeholders in both the process and the outcome.

Another lesson to keep in mind is that the forging of a peace agreement does not necessarily mean that a conflict is over and is unlikely to flare up again. Rather, as Tajikistan has demonstrated, a peace agreement establishes a framework in which divisive issues can be addressed constructively.

Today, though, it is time to look ahead. Discussions between the OSCE and Tajikistan are under way, focusing on how the Organization can assist the country to continue its path to democratic and economic development. The wide scope of OSCE support reflects the Organization's capacity to respond effectively to requests for assistance.

On a personal level, what was the most surprising part of the trip for you?

This was my first trip to Central Asia. It was a discovery and opened up a whole new world for me. I was impressed by the diversity of the region. In the western reaches of the OSCE, we are often inclined to group these countries together because of their common geographical location and modern history within the former Soviet Union (and our lack of knowledge of them).

I was amazed at just how varied the countries and their people were, which gave me a better appreciation of the importance of engaging with each country on its individual merits. I was also impressed by our discussions and the dynamic people we met. Getting to meet and know the people and their leaders was very rewarding.

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