



The OSCE and its Asian Partners

A meeting of minds

BY FABRIZIO SCARPA

In the early 1990s, as the Organization was taking on a more formal structure and becoming increasingly concerned about the new security threats emerging after the end of the cold war, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) — and subsequently the OSCE — started developing a dialogue with Asia.

That exchange was inspired by the Helsinki Process principle that the security of Europe is dependent on that of adjacent regions and linked to the broader context of world security.

Two principles underlie the participating States' relationship with their five Asian Partners: the desire of the OSCE to share its experience and the Partners' wish to learn from it; and the mutual benefits to be gained from the Asian Partners' contribution to the OSCE's goals. Most importantly, all five fully support OSCE values and commitments and have taken significant steps towards their voluntary implementation.

This Asian dialogue has become an integral part of the OSCE's work and a complement

to the long-standing OSCE-Mediterranean relationship. [The OSCE's partnership with Algeria, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia will be featured in the *OSCE Magazine* in 2007.] These ties have led to activities focusing on human security, anti-trafficking, regional co-operation and comprehensive security in Central Asia, as well as the applicability of OSCE confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) in North-East Asia, a potential flashpoint bordering on the OSCE area.

Japan became the OSCE's first Asian Partner for Co-operation in 1992 and has contributed to the work of the Organization by seconding personnel to OSCE missions and financing a number of field projects.

Two years later, in 1994, South Korea became a Partner and has since seconded experts to the OSCE. The Organization has kept an eye on developments in North Korea, as reflected in the statement of the Chairman-in-Office in early October condemning the country's declared nuclear bomb test as a serious threat to regional and global stability. "Co-operation and dialogue, not nuclear deterrence or larger militaries, lead to global security," said Belgian Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht.

Thailand's accession as a Partner State in 2000 has helped to intensify the dialogue with Asian Partners in the human dimension, especially in human trafficking, and has fostered closer relations with the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF).

In October, a member of the Thai Royal Family, Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha, who works as a Public

Left to right: Ambassadors
Kim Sung-hwan of the
Republic of Korea, Zia Uddin
Nezam of Afghanistan,
Itaru Umezu of Japan,
Luvsandagva Enkhtaivan
of Mongolia and Adisak
Panupong of Thailand.
Photo: OSCE/Mikhail
Evstafiev

Prosecutor, headed a Thai delegation that came to Vienna for a workshop on “Preventing Terrorism: Fighting Incitement and Related Terrorist Activities”, which was jointly organized by the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

Shortly after Afghanistan was welcomed as a Partner in 2003, the OSCE sent election support teams to assist in the country’s presidential elections in October 2004 and its parliamentary and provincial council elections in September 2005.

The newest Asian Partner, Mongolia, joined in 2004 and has since sent two policewomen to a workshop on community policing in Kyrgyzstan that took place this past October. Also in October, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut visited Mongolia — the first OSCE Secretary General to do so.

The OSCE’s dialogue with the Asian Partners is maintained mainly through an informal Asian Contact Group and an OSCE conference held annually in Asia. Countries are regularly invited to attend meetings of the Permanent Council and the Forum for Security Co-operation. They also participate in annual Ministerial Council Meetings, in regular implementation and review gatherings, in the Economic Forum, and in major meetings of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

Workshops were held in Seoul in 2003 and in Bangkok in 2005; an informal meeting on terrorism, together with the Mediterranean Partners, during the Annual Security Review Conference in 2005; and another informal meeting on human security during the 2006 Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw.

The Partners have also provided election observers to the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Most recently, the Asian Partners took part in a CSBM simulation exercise in Slovenia in October, where they were able to play the role of an evaluation team and gain first-hand experience in effective confidence-building, risk identification and security dialogue.

Summing up the relationship of the OSCE and its Asian Partners recently, Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut said: “One way or another, the security concerns of our Asian Partners and those of the OSCE participating States converge, especially in those regions where our borders meet.”

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Ljubljana, CSBM simulation, 17 October 2006. A member of the First Brigade of the Slovenian Armed Forces and Col. Eiju Uchida, Defence Attaché of the Japanese Delegation, exchange views on telecommunications equipment.

Japan, Partner for Co-operation since 1992

Japan’s longstanding involvement with the OSCE stems from a firm conviction of the importance of the OSCE’s mission. The fundamental values of the OSCE — democracy, human rights, and the rule of law — are also Japan’s values.

Japan, as an Asian Partner for Co-operation, has participated in a wide range of OSCE activities for many years. It has exchanged its knowledge and experience with the OSCE by sending its experts and officials to field operations and election monitoring missions, and by providing financial assistance to seminars and other activities.

For instance, Japanese participants made a presentation at the OSCE’s Economic Forum in January and an expert workshop on urban transport security in May, both held in Vienna this year. Currently, there are some Japanese nationals serving on the staff of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo and the Spillover Monitor Mission in Skopje (see page 19).

Japan believes that the Asian Partners can profit from the experiences of the OSCE to frame their own intraregional security dialogue and intensify mutual co-operation. Constructive contact between the OSCE and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) is of utmost importance. The OSCE participating States could also deepen their understanding of the Asian security environment, which is significantly different from the security environment in Europe, with much instability remaining in the region.

We hope to continue to provide such opportunities, co-operating with Partner countries in Asia, as we did on the margins of the OSCE-Japan Conference in March 2004.

Japan also greatly appreciates the work of the OSCE based on the concept of comprehensive security, encompassing not only the politico-military aspect of security, but also that of the human dimension, and the economy and environment.

In our view, comprehensive security overlaps with the concept of human security, on which we place great emphasis. Japan believes that incorporating the concept of human security into OSCE activities is beneficial for obtaining co-operation from other countries and international institutions. To promote this concept in the OSCE area, Japan, with other Asian Partners, hosted a side event on human security during the annual Human Dimension Implementation Meeting in Warsaw early last October.

Co-operation between Japan and the OSCE has brought concrete benefits to both sides. We trust this will continue in the future, and that each year will find us closer to our common goals.

Ambassador Itaru Umezu of Japan

Thailand, OSCE Partner since 2000

Thailand is currently the only OSCE Partner for Co-operation that is also a member of ASEAN. By taking part in specific activities and in various constructive conferences of the OSCE, we are seeking to gain knowledge and experience concerning political and security processes in Europe. The goal is to adapt and apply these to enhance co-operation within our own regional mechanisms.

Thailand is also learning more about evolving security issues — both traditional and new — of concern to the OSCE community. Thailand believes that the participation of additional fellow ASEAN members, as well as other Asian countries, in the OSCE will introduce a diversity of opinions and identities into the Organization's framework, expand the scope of its co-operation, and enhance its capacity to rise to the complex and cross-dimensional challenges of globalization.

Thailand is proud to be an active Asian Partner for Co-operation, especially in human security matters. We attach high national priority to the betterment of

Vienna, 20 October 2006. Her Royal Highness Princess Bajrakitiyabha of Thailand is welcomed by OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut on the occasion of her participation in an OSCE-Council of Europe workshop on preventing terrorism.

people's well-being, and to the prevention and combating of transnational organized crime, particularly trafficking in human beings and in illicit drugs. These threaten the whole international community and call for concerted efforts, at both the regional and the global levels, to bring about sustainable and lasting solutions.

We have co-hosted the following international events that examined human security issues: the OSCE-Thailand Conference on the Human Dimension of Security (2002), the Thailand Conference on the Sharing of Experiences in Combating Trafficking in Human Beings (2005), and the OSCE-Thailand Conference on Challenges to Global Security (2006).

Proposals have been put forward to enhance co-operation between the OSCE and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) with a view to achieving added value and based on their common fundamental principles.



Launched in 1994, the ARF aims to be an effective consultative forum for promoting open dialogue on political and security co-operation in the Asian-Pacific region.

Unfortunately, not much progress has been made due to the reluctance of other ARF members to move the initiatives forward. Nevertheless, Thailand fully supports the idea and is ready to act as a bridge between the two organizations.

Ambassador Adisak Panupong of Thailand



Ljubljana, 4 December 2005. South Korean Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon (left), now Secretary-General-Designate of the United Nations, said at the OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Slovenia: "It is a source of particular satisfaction to me to see progress in our ties since I, as the then Ambassador to Austria, was behind the efforts to initiate the first OSCE-Korea Conference in 2001."

Republic of Korea, OSCE Partner since 1994

The Republic of Korea cherishes its 13-year partnership with the OSCE. As a nation still divided and suffering from the legacy of the Cold War, my country has sought to learn from the rich experiences gained by the CSCE/OSCE through the Helsinki Process over the past three decades.

A multilateral security co-operation mechanism for North-East Asia — patterned after the mechanism for post-Cold War European countries — has yet to be created. Even if there is a regional security arrangement within the framework of the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), North-East Asian countries should continue to strengthen the process of mutual engagement, including confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs), as the first step towards regional stability.

The Korean Government, in its pursuit of peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and in North-East Asia, has been actively

drawing lessons from the OSCE's experiences through participation in joint conferences and workshops.

Korea hosted a first OSCE-Korea joint conference in 2001 and an OSCE-Korea joint workshop in 2003, which explored the possibility of applying the OSCE's experience in CSBMs to North-East Asia. To come up with a common response to newly emerging security challenges in a globalizing world, my country held a second joint conference with the OSCE in 2005 focusing on new security threats and a new security paradigm.

We are following with great interest the OSCE's ongoing work in resolving frozen conflicts, reviewing CSBMs, including those embodied in the 1999 Vienna Document, monitoring elections and reforming the OSCE.

Recognizing the crucial role of the OSCE's election monitoring in securing fair and democratic elections in accordance with the 1990 Copenhagen Document, my country has also taken part in some of the OSCE's successful election observation missions in the Western Balkans and in Central Asia. To cultivate closer contact with the OSCE, we have also seconded Korean experts to the OSCE Secretariat and to a field mission.

At the Ministerial Council Meeting in Ljubljana in 2005, then-Foreign Minister Ban Ki-moon — now the United Nations Secretary-General-designate — chaired a meeting of Asian Partners to enhance mutual understanding of the crucial changes taking place in both Europe and Asia, enabling both regions to tackle the challenges posed by these changes. On behalf of the Asian Partners, the Republic of Korea recommended to the Ministerial Council specific ways and means of strengthening consultation and co-operation between the OSCE and its Asian Partners.

Ambassador Kim Sung-hwan of the Republic of Korea



OSCE/ALEXANDER NITZSCHE

The OSCE played a crucial role in Afghanistan's first elections in decades.

Afghanistan, OSCE Partner since 2003

Following a period of almost three decades marked by invasion, major conflicts, foreign interference, and the emergence of Al-Qaida and the Taliban, Afghanistan was in ashes, with its economy, institutions and social fabric shattered.

As an Asian Partner that shares the core values of the OSCE and its participating States, Afghanistan has participated in many OSCE activities, such as workshops focusing on border management and travel documents.

My Government ascribes the greatest importance to the OSCE's role in supporting the democratic process in Afghanistan. The presidential and parliamentary elections

constituted a key component of our efforts to build a democratic and stable future for our people. The presence of OSCE election support teams monitoring those elections was of utmost significance to my country, and their recommendations will be implemented towards enhancing the general conditions for future elections.

The Bonn Agreement of December 2001 launched the starting point of reconstruction, democratization and nation-building. Five years later, people's lives in the country have certainly improved.

However, the overall situation is still far from good. Multilayered challenges lie ahead. Among these are the fight against terrorism, drug production and drug trafficking; measures to curb corruption and related crimes, secure good governance at all levels, and protect the public's interests; action to improve the situation of women; and work to rebuild the country's infrastructure, thereby reviving our economy.

Since terrorism is not exclusively an Afghan problem, my Government strongly advocates regional co-operation and international assistance to suppress this global menace.

Terrorism is paralleled by another major scourge: the problem of illicit drugs, which must also be addressed multilaterally. We must focus on breaking the linkages between the two kindred phenomena, drug trafficking and terrorism.

Alternative livelihoods for farmers are crucial to curbing the illicit production of drugs. Afghanistan could make use of disseminated know-how and technical assistance from the OSCE, for instance, in creating consulting centres for rural entrepreneurs and farmers.

In this connection, my Government highly values the co-operation between the OSCE and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime. Unless our efforts are tailored to the international nature of these problems, they are destined to fail.

The visit of the Chairman-in-Office to Afghanistan in March this year was highly appreciated by my Government. We also look forward to welcoming the Secretary General in the near future, thereby further strengthening the excellent relations between the OSCE and Afghanistan.

My country shares borders with three participating States of the OSCE. We hope that there might be even greater opportunities in a new phase of co-operation to participate in OSCE activities in the region. Afghanistan and the participating States in the region share not only borders but also mutual security interests relating to such issues as border management and anti-trafficking in arms and drugs. The active support of the OSCE could lead to significant improvements in many areas, such as cross-border control and police co-operation.

Ambassador Zia Nezam of Afghanistan



ERIC GOURLAN

A UN resolution has welcomed Mongolia's efforts to preserve nomadic culture and traditions in modern societies.

Mongolia, OSCE Partner since 2004

Mongolia's foreign policy concept, adopted in 1994, states that as a member of the world community, our country shall strive to make an active contribution to the common cause of settling pressing regional and international issues.

We in Mongolia believe that by joining the OSCE as a Partner, we took a significant step forward in pursuing our foreign policy goals and ensuring our closer engagement in building world peace and security. As the world's largest regional security organization,

the OSCE has amassed a wealth of experience and is playing an important role as a flexible mechanism for addressing the new challenges to regional and international security and stability.

We have been participating in all the Organization's major meetings and conferences, and this has provided us with an ideal opportunity to learn from and share experiences with participating States and other Partners for Co-operation. The knowledge we have gained from these gatherings is helping us in our efforts to tackle the adjustments of transition into a modern democratic nation.

We have expressed our wish to develop more dynamic relations with the OSCE with a view to strengthening the capacity of our law enforcement organizations to fight organized crime; promoting democratization through an improvement in our observance of the rule of law, election legislation and election observation; upholding human rights; and carrying out joint projects in the economic, environmental and human security spheres.

As the newest Partner for Co-operation, Mongolia greatly appreciated the visit of Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut from 8 to 10 October, which we regard as marking a good start to what we hope will be a successful, long-term relationship. We found it symbolic that the first visit of an OSCE Secretary General to our country took place during the 800th anniversary of our Great Mongolian Statehood, celebrating the fact that we have always provided a home for various nations, cultures and beliefs throughout the Eurasian continent.

Ambassador Luvsandagva Enkhtaivan of Mongolia

From Hiroshima to Kumanovo

Japanese confidence-building officer prescribes patience and persistence



Little did I know on my first visit to the former Yugoslavia in 1988 that the federation would soon start falling like a house of cards, that this would inspire me to pursue peace and conflict studies, and that I would eventually devote more than a decade of my life, so far, to helping the region to heal the wounds of war.

BY TAKASHI KOIZUMI

It was the summer of 1988. I was a 22-year-old law student from Hiroshima, traveling solo around Europe. At that time, the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia was just about the only country in Eastern Europe that “westerners” and Japanese nationals could visit without having to apply for a visa.

After crossing the Trieste border from Italy, I spent five days exploring Slovenia, Croatia and Serbia. I remember being struck by the people’s relatively high living standards and by their warmth and kindness towards a rare Japanese tourist. I was also deeply impressed by the ethnic and cultural diversity of the region, which was in stark contrast to the homogeneous character of Japanese society.

To fast-forward to January 2004: After stints with the United Nations Transitional Administration in Eastern Slavonia, Baranja and Western Sirmium (UNTAES), followed by a short stay in Kosovo and then several years in the OSCE Mission in Croatia, I started work-

ing as a “confidence-building officer”, based in Kumanovo in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Kumanovo is a city with a population of more than 100,000, 35 km north of Skopje. With 36 staff members, the Kumanovo office is one of the two field stations of the Spillover Mission to Skopje, the other one being in Tetovo.

These two predominantly ethnic Albanian areas were at the heart of a seven-month armed conflict that broke out early in 2001 between a group of ethnic Albanian insurgents and Government security forces. It was a sad chapter in the history of this incredibly beautiful country, which is blessed with a spectacular landscape, a rich multi-cultural fabric, and open and friendly people.

I now manage the Confidence-Building Unit of the Kumanovo Field Station, supervising ten colleagues: an Italian, a German, an Austrian, a Portuguese, and six national staff, five of whom are ethnic Albanians and one an ethnic Macedonian.

The country’s overall security situation has improved dramatically since the hostilities were resolved more than five years ago with the help of the OSCE and other international partners. However, even as the OSCE Mission is assisting the country’s integration into

“To be an effective confidence-building officer, one needs patience, good communication and mediation skills, and relevant experience at the grassroots level,” says Takashi Koizumi, shown here at the market in Kumanovo with two young members of the Roma community.
Photo: OSCE/Maria Dotsenko

Euro-Atlantic structures, tensions are still simmering at the local level.

This is where the Confidence-Building Unit's contribution is crucial. In a very real sense, our job is to ensure that the peace deal — the Ohrid Framework Agreement of August 2001 — is put into effect through practical, on-site initiatives.

EARLY WARNING

A large part of our role is to operate an early warning system that enables us to intervene in certain situations before they escalate into crises. Confidence-building officers such as myself go on daily rounds of the former crisis areas and interact with local political representatives, mayors, heads of village councils, police chiefs, former guerrilla commanders, religious leaders, school principals and youth groups.

I cannot think of anything more personally and professionally fulfilling than being exactly where things are happening — analysing and reporting on the political and security situation at the grassroots, mediating between parties, and fostering inter-ethnic dialogue and peaceful co-existence through modest but tangible projects.

But it can be tough and frustrating as well. As we go about our daily activities, we do not always see positive changes unfolding before our eyes. Our monitoring and advisory duties demand generous doses of patience and diplomacy. No wonder we rejoice at the most minor step forward.

Occasionally, our mediating role leads us into awkward situations when we find ourselves caught between two parties. Sometimes our efforts to uphold specific rights lead ethnic Macedonians to accuse us of practising “positive discrimination” and “siding too closely” with the ethnic Albanians — who form the country's largest ethnic minority group.

We are also on the receiving end of complaints from ethnic Albanians. I once had to rush to an ethnic Albanian village on the border with Kosovo after a special police operation had confiscated weapons illegally possessed by former guerrilla commanders. Some village residents criticized us for not protecting their human rights.

I am convinced, however, that our monitoring activities have been contributing towards the creation of a stable society in our host country. My conviction is supported by a recent report of the United Nations Development Programme which revealed that people's dominant concerns have shifted from security to socio-economic issues such as poverty, corruption and unemployment — the same issues that preoccupy citizens within the EU.

ASIAN PARTNERS

I often get asked by those who are only vaguely familiar with the Organization's community of States how a Japanese national can work in an OSCE mission, since Japan is not a participating State.

I explain that the OSCE has two mechanisms for external co-operation — one linked with its Mediterranean Partners and another with its Asian Partners — and that my country became the first Asian Partner for Co-operation in 1992.

Unknown to most, Japan, quite apart from its substantial financial contribution, has also sponsored personnel in OSCE Missions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Kosovo, and three other officers before me in Skopje. And quite a few Japanese have served as election monitors under the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

Over the years, relations between the OSCE and its Asian Partners have become closer. However, this has yet to be translated into a comprehensive mechanism for multilateral security and co-operation in Asia. The Asian region is a region grappling with a number of worrying inter-ethnic and religious issues that have the potential to develop into devastating internal or international armed conflict. Some political commentators have even speculated that multi-ethnic Indonesia could suffer a fate similar to that of Yugoslavia in the 1990s.

A pan-Asian equivalent of the OSCE would encourage Asian States to commit themselves to working towards regional security by enhancing democratic processes in such areas as human rights, pluralism and freedom of the media. A forum of this kind would contribute to preventing the escalation of nuclear threats such as the one posed recently by the North Korean regime.

Various factors make it a major challenge to follow the OSCE example in Asia. Asian cultures and religions vary more widely than those in Europe. Furthermore, some Asian countries, especially those with more centralized regimes, believe their populations are better off with “collective human rights” and limited individual human rights.

Still, specialized research on the OSCE and its structures has been gaining in popularity among Japanese academics, who believe that the Organization is playing a significant role in containing ethnic-related conflicts in post-Cold War Europe by promoting internationally accepted norms in democracy and human rights.

Needless to say, I am proud to be part of these efforts and look forward to the day when we can establish an OSCA: an Organization for Security and Co-operation in Asia.

Born in Hiroshima, Takashi Koizumi holds a bachelor of law degree from the Hiroshima Shudo University, and a post-graduate diploma and master's degree from the University of Ulster, Magree College.



Takashi Koizumi and some of his colleagues at the Kumanovo Field Station.