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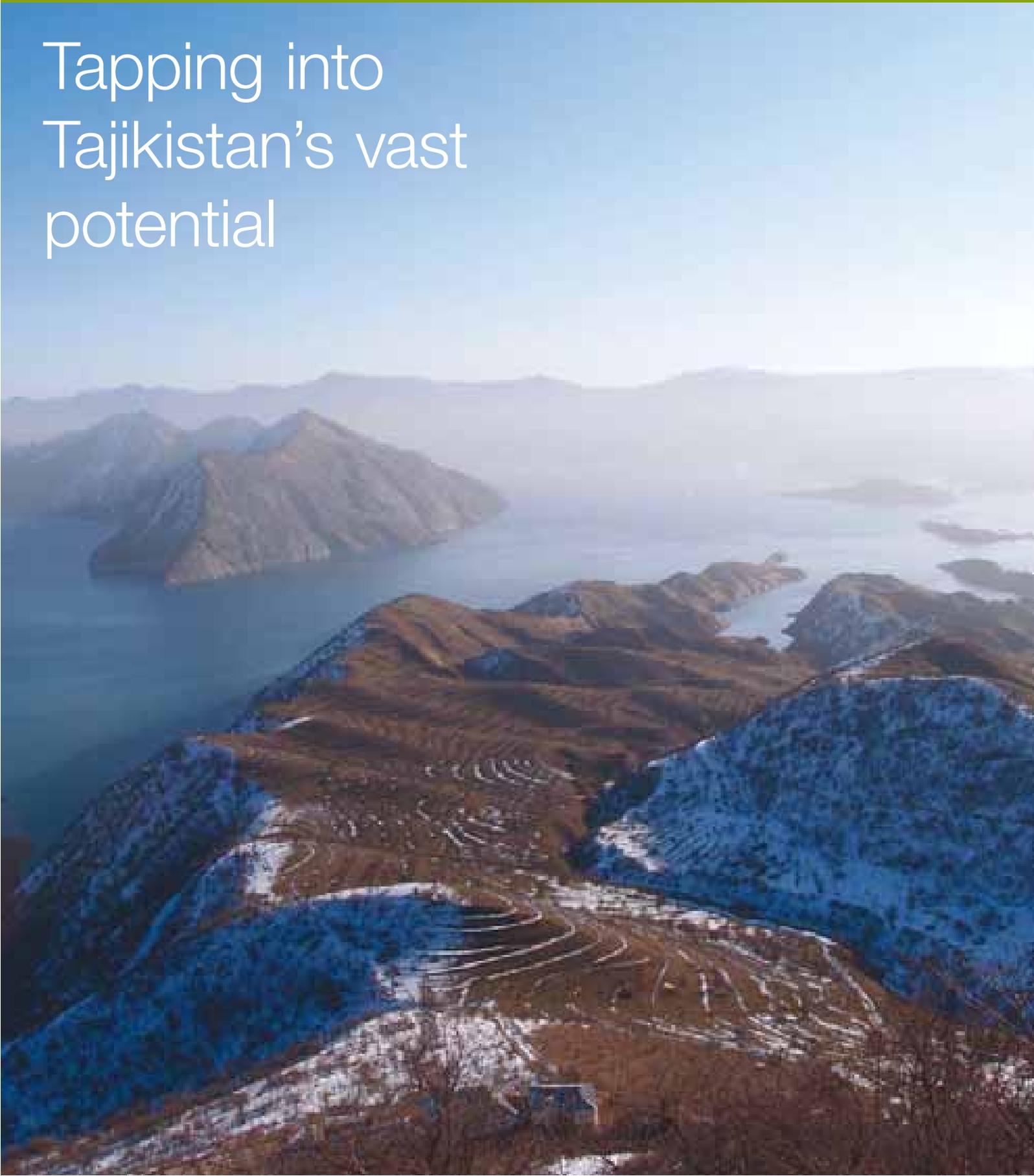


**Tajikistan and the OSCE:
Celebrating the tenth anniversary of the General Agreement on the
Establishment of Peace and National Reconciliation**

Dushanbe and Vienna: Spirit of partnership is alive and well

**The Spanish Chairmanship and Central Asia:
Joint commitment to a community of common values**

Tapping into Tajikistan's vast potential





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Message from the Ambassador of Tajikistan

I am very pleased to be settling into my new post in Vienna precisely at a time when my country is marking, with great pride, the tenth anniversary of our Peace Agreement of 1997.



The signing of the accord in Moscow was a major unifying act and truly one of the greatest moments in our history. I was

especially glad to learn that the *OSCE Magazine* would devote almost an entire issue to Tajik-OSCE co-operation in the light of a decade of successful peace-building.

As the long-time head of our Foreign Ministry's department responsible for international organizations, I am thoroughly familiar with the OSCE and its work, and consider it one of our most important partners. The wide variety of themes featured in the next several pages clearly show how mutually satisfying our relationship has been through the years.

However, my Government would like the Organization to make its presence felt even more strongly, not only in Tajikistan, but also throughout Central Asia. We are a region made up of old nations but young countries. We face many challenges that have a direct impact on security and stability. And, since these challenges do not start or stop at our borders, we urgently need to involve our next-door neighbour, Afghanistan, more closely in our activities.

My Government has presented a number of priorities including fostering economic activities aimed at alleviating social problems, strengthening border management, and tackling land degradation and other environmental issues. We are working closely with the Spanish Chairmanship and the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe to address these.

Needless to say, it is an exciting time to be my country's envoy to the OSCE. I look forward to continuing the excellent work of my predecessors and playing a major role in this interesting phase in Tajik-OSCE relations, which go back a long way. After all, the Organization was a guarantor of our Peace Agreement, and its advice, assistance and commitment made it possible for us to move on from post-conflict rehabilitation to sustainable peace.

Nuriddin T. Shamsov
Vienna
June 2007

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Cover: Tajikistan's Nurek Dam is currently the world's tallest, while the reservoir is the country's largest. Central Asia's major source of water is Tajikistan, a global leader in terms of hydropower potential. Photo: OSCE/Michael Unland

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Dushanbe and Vienna: Spirit of partnership is alive and well

By Herbert Salber

On 27 March 2007, in Dushanbe, I had the privilege of chairing a meeting of the OSCE-Tajikistan task force aimed at identifying, in a joint effort, the country's needs and priorities.

The gathering was attended by First Deputy Foreign Minister Saimumin Yatimov and more than 20 high-level national officials, along with representatives of the Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE, the Secretariat and the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe.

We concluded our discussion on a note of common understanding: Issues relating to border security and management, economic and environmental concerns, and gender and human rights should be better reflected in the OSCE's future activities in the country. Both sides agreed to continue the dialogue in a spirit of partnership with one goal in mind: to strengthen the dialogue between the OSCE and the host Government.

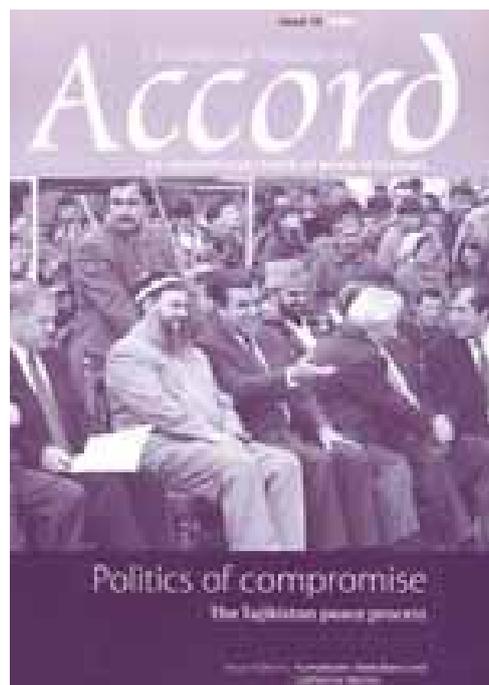
This event, deemed a historic chapter in OSCE-Tajik co-operation, was significant for another reason: It symbolized a turning point, from looking back at the past to looking towards the future. The OSCE presence in Tajikistan is the Organization's longest-running operation in Central Asia, having been established in early 1994 by a CSCE Council decision adopted in Rome in 1993.

In 2002, in recognition of Tajikistan's achievements since the end of the civil war of 1992-1997, the participating States revised the mandate of the OSCE's field operation in Tajikistan and established a Centre in Dushanbe,



Dushanbe, 27 March 2007. Ambassador Herbert Salber, Director of the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre, and Tajikistan's First Deputy Foreign Minister Saimumin Yatimov at the meeting of the OSCE-Tajikistan task force.

Courtesy of
*Accord: an
international
review of peace
initiatives,*
published by
the Conciliation
Resources, an
international
NGO based
in the United
Kingdom.
www.c-r.org



similar to those operating in Almaty, Ashgabad, Bishkek and Tashkent.

Today, as Tajikistan celebrates the tenth anniversary of the signing of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Reconciliation on 27 June 1997, the country — together with its neighbours — has assumed its rightful role in promoting and strengthening regional security and stability through the Organization's comprehensive and co-operative approach.

No longer considered a "post-conflict" country, Tajikistan fully participates in the OSCE as an equal partner. Just like its neighbours in Central Asia, Tajikistan continues to engage in a strong dialogue with the OSCE. It does so through the task force and by hosting numerous high-level visits, such as the recent ones by the Chairman-in-Office, the Secretary General, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly and many others.

Indeed, the dialogue between the OSCE and the countries of Central Asia has been particularly intense this year through a series of visits and exchanges. Kazakhstan's Foreign Minister and its Justice Minister have travelled to Vienna especially to address the Permanent Council. Kyrgyzstan continues its strong support for the OSCE Academy. Turkmenistan's new President has received the Secretary General in Ashgabad, and the Director of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights visited the country for the first time. Uzbekistan has strengthened its support for the work of the High Commissioner on National Minorities, among other OSCE activities.

I am convinced that with the appointment of Ambassador Vladimir Pryakhin as the new Head of the Centre in Dushanbe, the field operation in Tajikistan will continue to support this high-level dialogue and enhance our assistance to the host country in fulfilling its OSCE commitments and contributing to regional security and stability.



Tajikistan and the OSCE

Celebrating a productive decade of peace-building

Ten years after the signing of a painstakingly negotiated Peace Agreement between the Tajik Government and the then-armed opposition, in June 1997, Tajikistan has undergone a remarkable transformation. From 1992 to 1997, the newly independent country was in the midst of a devastating civil war and was on the brink of economic, social and humanitarian collapse. The conflict and its aftermath led to an estimated 100,000 deaths. More than a million residents fled to neighbouring countries or were internally displaced. A decade after the post-conflict phase got under way, the Government has managed to bring about a certain degree of stability, enabling it to shift its focus to strengthening democracy and improving the lot of its 7 million citizens. Now at peace with itself, Tajikistan has started to actively promote a stronger regional framework for security and economic co-operation with its immediate neighbours in Central Asia and beyond.

BY KLAUS RASMUSSEN

When I arrived in Dushanbe on 6 November 2006 to take up my new role as Deputy Head of the OSCE Centre — as well as its Acting Head — I was struck by the capital's air of calm and tranquillity. This was in sharp contrast to unsettling images that came to mind after listening to accounts of colleagues who had worked and lived in Tajikistan in the 1990s. Clearly, the country had come a long way.

The OSCE has played a major role in this steady transformation. Since the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) opened a Mission to Tajikistan in early 1994, we have been closely co-operating with the Government and civil society in laying the foundations of a durable peace.

The Mission was an observer at the inter-Tajik negotiations, while playing a dynamic role behind the scenes. We assisted in the implementation of the peace process, which was completed when multi-party parliamentary elections took place in early 2000. As one of the guarantors of the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Reconciliation, the OSCE has been a key partner of the United Nations in Tajikistan. More specifically, we were responsible for helping implement the protocols dealing with political and military issues and the human rights of returning refugees, supporting the authorities to help them return and reintegrate into society.

The enhancement of the Mission's mandate in late 2002, when it was renamed the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe, was a sign of recognition that the country had made commendable progress since the end of the civil

On Dushanbe's central Ozodi (Liberty) Square, the country pays tribute to Ismoil Somoni, revered as the founder of the first Tajik State.

Photo: OSCE/Lubomir Kotek

war. Today, with 87 staff members, of whom 70 are Tajik nationals, the Centre and its five field offices make up the largest OSCE presence in Central Asia in terms of personnel, carrying out a rich spectrum of activities and projects in all three OSCE dimensions.

The OSCE's quarters in Dushanbe are located just off the broad, tree-lined central avenue, named after the tenth century Persian poet Rudaki — a reminder of the shared roots of the Persian and Tajik cultures, language and history. Opposite Parliament, a statue of Lenin has been replaced by a large monument dedicated to Shah Ismoil Somoni, who founded the Tajik nation in the ninth century.

Looking towards the north, the capital's skyline is framed by a spectacular range of snow-capped mountains rising right at the city limits and continuing into the Pamirs to the east. From some of these highest peaks in the world flows a resource that, despite its abundance, increasingly gives rise to intraregional tension: water.

My first day of work in Tajikistan happened to coincide with the day of the presidential election. The incumbent, President Imomali S. Rahmonov (Rahmon as of March 2007), was re-elected for a third term by an overwhelming majority without any significant opposition or electoral debate. I was told that, having lived through the social upheaval of 1992-1997, many people consid-

er their President as someone who not only has brought peace to the country but also guarantees its stability.

I joined a fairly new team at the Centre: Four out of seven programme managers had taken up their posts just before I did. We hit the ground running, winding up a large volume of projects by the end of November and preparing a fresh series of programme activities for the start of the new year.

After President Rahmon's re-election, the Government embarked on a new phase of the country's political development. As the tenth anniversary of the Peace Agreement approached, the country's leadership felt that a milestone had been reached and that it was time for Tajikistan to move beyond the phase of post-conflict peace-building and turn to consolidating stability through economic development. The country is keen to strengthen its relationship with the OSCE while seeking to define a role for itself within Central Asia and in the wider world.

This re-engagement has prompted an intense and fruitful dialogue between the OSCE and the Tajik authorities on how the Organization could strengthen its activities in the country and in the region as a whole. I felt there was considerable scope for the OSCE Centre to be more supportive of its host country and to foster greater transparency in our mutual relations. With the help of the OSCE's new management tools in

Vladimir Pryakhin, a Russian career diplomat, assumes his post as Head of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe in June 2007. At the time of his appointment, he was completing his term as Head of the OSCE Office in Yerevan, Armenia, a post he had held since October 2003.

Ambassador Pryakhin's foreign service assignments have focused on regional issues in the Commonwealth of Independent States, on disarmament and on scientific and technological co-operation.

He served as Deputy Department Head at the Russian Foreign Ministry from 1995 to 1997, after which he was posted to Vienna as Senior Counsellor at his country's Permanent Mission to the OSCE until 2002.

"It is with sadness that I am leaving Armenia after more than three years of service in this beautiful country," Ambassador Pryakhin said. "I hope that the activities of the OSCE Office in Yerevan during this period have contributed towards a greater awareness of the Organization and its shared values among the society at large."

Judging from the broad range of sectors covered by the Tajik authorities' requests for support and assistance, "my new assignment in Tajikistan promises to be no less challenging," he added. "The entire international community is in complete solidarity with the country's earnest efforts to move forward a decade after the signing of the Peace Agreement. I will do my best to be worthy of the confidence that has been placed in me by the OSCE."

Ambassador Pryakhin holds doctorates from the Moscow City University for Pedagogy and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations.



Syunik, southeastern Armenia, April 2007. Ambassador Vladimir Pryakhin plants a *platanus* tree as his contribution towards reviving the biggest natural plane-tree grove in the world. The OSCE Programme Implementation Presence in Syunik supports a project to promote environmental conservation and promote ecological tourism in the region. With him is Jeannette Kloetzer, economic and environmental officer.

planning and programming, we were able to sharpen the focus of the results that we were aiming for, and to strengthen our dialogue with the authorities.

These efforts culminated in a meeting of the joint OSCE-Tajikistan task force in Dushanbe on 27 March. Hailed as “historic” and “particularly constructive” by the Foreign Ministry, the event brought together representatives of the Chairmanship, the Secretariat, and the Centre in Dushanbe, along with more than 20 government officials. We sat together and identified Tajikistan’s needs and priorities, sought ways to ensure that these would be reflected in the OSCE’s activities, and examined how the Organization could respond most effectively to the country’s vision.

The dilemma behind large numbers of Tajiks seeking employment abroad is just one of the many tremendous economic challenges that needs to be tackled. We are continuing our initiatives to develop small and medium-sized enterprises and to assist the Government in implementing land reform. We will also do our part to address the security risks posed to the region by soil degradation, weak water management and nuclear wastes stored in the north.

Together with partner organizations, the OSCE will support Tajikistan’s own efforts to manage and secure its borders, and will examine how best to address the country’s most pressing security requirements relating to trafficking in drugs and weapons, and terrorism, especially along its border with Afghanistan. Participating States have been sympathetic to Tajikistan’s appeal for assistance in this area and have been demonstrating their support. Discussions are under way on the possibility of Tajikistan’s hosting a regional structure on border management and security — if the participating States agree.

While Tajikistan’s borders pose risks, the construction of bridges across the Panj River connecting Tajikistan with Afghanistan will offer new transport routes, opening up new trade and economic opportunities for Tajikistan and its neighbours. Since Tajikistan has a direct security interest in a stable and prosperous southern neighbour, it has offered itself as a gateway for support to Afghanistan, with whom it shares a common language, in addition to a long border.

The OSCE has been enjoying an unprecedented level of co-operation with the Tajik Government through projects aimed at the destruction of its surplus small arms, light weapons and conventional ammunition,



improvement of the security of its stockpiles, and clearance of landmines. These activities are proceeding smoothly, with a strong focus on building national expertise.

Aiming for a sound balance in the way it addresses all aspects of security, the Centre is also assisting Tajikistan to develop its democratic political institutions and processes. This includes an appropriate legal framework, which is acknowledged by the authorities as vital to economic growth. We are carrying out several projects in support of human rights and fundamental freedoms, independent media, and gender and equality issues. The Centre has also been involved in a unique project to stimulate a constructive dialogue between the Government, civil society, political parties and national minorities through the Public Council, a consultative body established under the 1997 Peace Agreement.

As of this writing, we are expecting Ambassador Vladimir Pryakhin to take over the helm of the Centre and complete our team. We look forward to benefiting from his leadership and experience. Together, we will continue encouraging Tajikistan to tap into the entire array of programmes and activities that underpin OSCE’s unique concept of security and co-operation.

Tajikistan deserves no less as it emerges from the shadow of a turbulent past, ready to forge a clearer identity for itself among the community of nations.

Klaus Rasmussen, seconded from Denmark, has been Acting Head of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe since 6 November 2006. Prior to his appointment as Deputy Head, he worked in the Office of the OSCE Secretary General, Executive Management, and also served in the OSCE Mission to Georgia.

Dushanbe, 8 June 2007: Klaus Rasmussen addresses members of Tajikistan’s Public Council on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the Tajik Peace Agreement. To his right is Karomatullo Olimov, State Adviser to the President of Tajikistan on social development and public relations.

Towards a mine-free Tajikistan

Leaving no stone unturned



BY MICHAEL UNLAND

Michael Unland: What's it like to have a job where one is exposed to what many consider the most pernicious remnants of conflict?

Mike Storey: We carry out our demining work in accordance with internationally accepted levels of risk. Personally, I believe that if you follow procedures correctly, starting out from a known safe area, you actually run less risk than you do, for example, when trying to cross a busy main road in a big city. But if you flout the rules and take shortcuts, it's like placing a paper bag over your head while crossing the same street.

Clearing landmines involves following a set process in a rigid and professional manner. This is the approach we take in teaching the Tajik teams how to identify dangerous areas, delineate the exact boundaries of suspected minefields, and destroy explosive remnants of war. They're taught, for example, that they always have to demine in an uphill direction, since doing it downhill can cause them to lose their balance or trip and roll down onto a mine field.

Are you saying there is no emotional aspect to it?

There is! Every mine that's taken out of the ground and destroyed means lives saved. The satisfying thing about this job is that

This year marks the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Ottawa Convention, also known as the Mine Ban Treaty, which is the most comprehensive international instrument for ridding the world of the scourge of anti-personnel mines. Since 2003, the OSCE has been part of these global efforts through its mine action programme in Tajikistan, with the help of its main implementing partner, *Fondation Suisse de Déminage* (Swiss Foundation for Mine Action), under the national co-ordinating body, the Tajik Mine Action Centre. In an interview for the *OSCE Magazine* on the mine-clearance process, Mike Storey, Project Adviser at the Foundation, says a mine-free Tajikistan is attainable, provided donor funding continues to flow in to accelerate the encouraging results achieved so far. A Dutch national born in Zimbabwe, Mr. Storey spent more than two years working on mine clearance in Sudan. He completed training in explosive ordnance disposal in Kenya's International Mine Action Training Centre.

Deminers and supervisors gear up for a long, hard day.



FSD (SWISS FOUNDATION FOR MINE ACTION)

it has a direct, immediate benefit for others. That's the emotional part. It is very different from organizing workshops or handing out pamphlets.

Can't accidents be completely avoided?

Human error figures to a large extent in every accident, just as in many other industries. A supervisor, for example, might miscalculate the risk or the type of mines or the size of the area. We are not robots.

Do you set out with a goal of clearing a certain number of mines a day?

We don't look at it from that point of view. Sometimes after working long and hard over a large tract of land, we don't come up with a single mine. That's fine. What counts is how much land previously suspected to be mined can be handed over to communities for their productive use.

So, often what you're doing is actually not eradicating mines, but fear?

Absolutely. A landmine is an "area denial weapon". If a mine blast accidentally kills or injures someone, it doesn't matter how small or how large the site is; you can be sure people will stay away from that area out of fear. About 93 per cent of Tajikistan is mountainous terrain and there is not much arable land to begin with, so every bit of agricultural land that is left idle means rural communities are being denied an asset of great value.

Are there certain discernible patterns in the way mines are laid out?

In Mozambique and Sudan, where I worked, randomly placed mines are quite frequent. We call them "nuisance mines": Just enough of them are placed to keep people away from the whole area. In the case of Tajikistan, when the Russian forces handed over mined areas on the Afghan border to the Tajik authorities in 2005, they also provided maps showing how the mines were laid out. These are reliable and make demining easier, since one of the most difficult tasks in demining is to accurately identify the minefield borders.

In contrast, there are no records relating to the areas that were mined during the civil war near Garm in central Tajikistan. Some people recall that the place was strewn with mines, but they are not sure exactly where. So we can spend years clearing these areas and not come up with anything.

How is the co-operation between the Tajik authorities and the demining teams?

The Government of Tajikistan has created a positive working environment. There is full co-operation from all units and all divisions — whether it's the army, border security or emergency services. It's the authorities who assign the personnel — mostly servicemen from the Tajik Defence Ministry — to be trained by us. We're provided with maps and some facilities. In many countries where



OSCE/ALEXANDER SADRICOV

Project Adviser
Mike Storey

Now in its fifth year, the OSCE-FSD demining programme in Tajikistan has:

- Carried out technical surveys in more than 1,000 villages, marking dangerous areas and enabling priorities for clearance to be set;
 - Identified more than 100 mined areas;
 - Cleared an area totalling close to 500,000 sq m;
 - Destroyed 2,264 anti-personnel mines, three anti-tank mines, 753 other items of unexploded ordnance and 4,096 rounds of small-arms ammunition;
 - Handed 10 cleared sites over to local communities for their safe use;
 - Provided or arranged 29 training courses for medics, surveyors, deminers, team leaders, explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) operators and data-base personnel; and
 - Trained more than 350 national deminers.
- Website of Tajikistan's National Mine Action Plan: www.mineaction.tj

I've worked, the government actually hinders you from doing your job. Over here, it's totally the opposite.

How do landmines in border areas affect surveillance and security?

The mines that were planted along the Tajik-Afghan border in the early 1990s now prevent patrolling from taking place and checkpoints and observation towers from being built. These infested areas are inaccessible not only to smugglers and militants — the intended target group — but also to border guards. Mines don't discriminate, so before certain border surveillance methods can be implemented, the mines have to be cleared.

Do you see any end in sight to Tajikistan's landmine dilemma?

Tajikistan is, in fact, one of the few countries where there is light at the end of the tunnel. The problem is relatively small and manageable and there is a strong political will to solve it. However, if we continue going about it at the current pace, it is going to take decades. We need to boost our capacity, bring in mechanical mine clearance machines to help us, hire more survey and clearance teams, and obtain more funding for all the activities.

Once we've managed to do this, we will be able to accomplish so much more. We've been here for four years now; we know what we are doing, we have very experienced people out in the field, and the project is at an advanced stage. We are like a greyhound in a box eager to run.

Do you think it's realistic for the country to meet its set goal under the Ottawa Convention and complete its mine clearance by April 2010? That's less than three years away.

I can't put a date on it, but I can tell you that the more experienced and more confident we become, the more land we will be able to clear. In 2006, we covered 100 per cent more territory than we did in 2005, with less resources. Can you imagine what we could do this year, and in 2008, 2009 and 2010, once we've increased our capacity? We could definitely solve the problem in the foreseeable future. And that is the challenge.

By acceding to the Ottawa Convention in 1999, the Tajik Government left no doubt that it was serious about pursuing its vision of a Tajikistan safe from the negative humanitarian and economic impact of landmines. In 2004, the authorities destroyed their last stockpiles — more than 3,000 mines. Now it is just the stuff buried in the ground that's waiting to be tackled. Unfortunately, the country does not have the means to fulfil this commitment, and so we are appealing to donor countries' generosity and sense of responsibility to step in and help Tajikistan reach its objective.

Michael Unland is a Media Officer in the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe. He was a radio and online journalist before moving on to development work in Germany, Chile, Belarus, Russia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. He was responsible for several communication projects at the UNDP and Mercycorps.

Mine action in Tajikistan

Main donors: Canada, the OSCE and Germany

Other donors: Belgium, France, Japan, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom

2007 budget: \$3.7 million; to date, the OSCE, the UNDP and donor governments have provided \$1.4 million.

Personnel: four international and 160 national staff organized into four manual clearance teams.

According to official sources, some 25 million sq m of Tajikistan's territory were contaminated by anti-personnel mines and unexploded ordnance:

- In the early 1990s, along the southern Tajik-Afghan border;
- During the civil war (1992-1997), especially in central Tajikistan; and
- In 2000, on the Tajik-Uzbek border, in the east and north of the country.

Over the past 15 years, 277 citizens of Tajikistan have been killed and 300 have been injured by landmine accidents. More than 20 per cent of them were children from poor rural areas.

Under the OSCE-FSD programme, 12 mine-detecting dogs, trained in Afghanistan, have been helping reduce suspected mined areas since mid-2006.



The people of Pahtakor



FSD (SWISS FOUNDATION FOR MINE ACTION)

Bearing the brunt of landmines and their ripple effects

BY ALEXANDER SADIKOV

“This is dead land,” says Lolahon. “The water has destroyed it.” The old man in worn-out clothes shows me around the small village of Pahtakor, in the southern Panj district of Khatlon.

Pahtakor lies along the 1,350 km-long border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan, parts of which are said to have been heavily mined by Russian border troops in the early 1990s to protect it from smugglers and militant groups. The area has been chosen as the focus of the start of this year’s demining season. Because of harsh weather conditions during the winter months, demining work can take place only between March and November, at best.

As we walk along a dusty road, the wind wafts the odour of fetid earth from waterlogged fields. Clusters of clay homes look abandoned. The surrounding fields are wet and devoid of any vegetation, a sharp contrast to the green spring fields elsewhere in the country.

Pahtakor was once known for its farm products. Through a web of hundreds of canals, the Panj River supplied the water that irrigated this arid area, enabling its inhabitants to grow cotton. Then, what had worked for hundreds of years came to a stop during the civil war, when the canal that drained the water into the Panj was mined. With no way out, the water gradually turned the fertile land into a swamp.

“These canals meant everything to us:

They gave us our bread, our life and our hope,” said Ranohon Saidova, deputy head of Quldimon, the *jamoat* (local self-government unit) that has borne the brunt of the catastrophe.

“We used to clean the canals every year. But now we’ve stopped; the water does not go anywhere anyway, as the downstream canal is mined.”

Several elders of the *jamoat* had invited me to the local school where they wanted to talk to me about their problems.

“Water has already destroyed seven houses in the village of Gushon,” says a village elder, looking weary. “And in Quldimon, about 76 hectares of land have been lost to water. Several of our cattle — which we simply cannot afford to lose — have been infected with diseases.”

And then there is the worrying impact on human health. The swampy area provides an ideal breeding ground for mosquitoes. According to Hudoyberdi Saidov, deputy head of the Tropical Disease Centre in Panj, more than 115 people in the area were diagnosed with malaria in 2006.

Five-year-old Munis was among them. His family’s two-storey house is only 10 metres from a waterlogged area. “There are just too many mosquitoes here in the summer,” said Munis’s mother, Sabohat Mirzoeva. “They bite us and there’s nothing we can do about it. All we can do is hope that they are not malaria-carrying mosquitoes.”

Alexander Sadikov is a Senior Press and Public Information Assistant in the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe. A university graduate in international relations and journalism, he comes from the tiny mountain town of Panjakent in northern Tajikistan on the Uzbek border.

Educating communities throughout Tajikistan about land mines is a key task of the mine action programme.

Managing porous borders on the “roof of the world”



Explored by Marco Polo, conquered by Alexander the Great, Genghis Khan and Tamerlane, and turned into a neutral buffer zone between the British and Russians during the “Great Game”, the Pamir Mountains and their surroundings have seen their share of action and drama. In July 2006, an OSCE borders team embarked on a 12-day trip to the “roof of the world” (see map on page 31) to make an on-site assessment of Tajikistan’s capacity to secure and manage its porous southern border with Afghanistan and its eastern border with China.

BY HENRY BOLTON

In June 2006, Tajikistan requested the OSCE’s assistance in identifying exactly how its domestic agencies could best tackle the host of daunting challenges it faced regarding its borders.

To be able to analyse the situation as accurately as possible, we needed to drive up to and across the Pamir Mountains, which soar up to 7,600 metres. Travelling to this rugged and isolated corner of the world over poor roads required complex and meticulous planning with the help of various offices in the Secretariat, the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe and the Tajik Delegation to the OSCE.

Furthermore, the mountain ranges are located in the south and east of the country in the autonomous Gorno Badakhshan *oblast*. We would be able to enter this area only if we obtained special clearances and internal visas from the Tajik Government.

In the early hours of 21 July, after an eight-hour stopover in Istanbul, Jarek Pietrusiewicz, Johann Wagner, Kathleen

Samuel and I, all from the Conflict Prevention Centre, landed in Dushanbe. By 8.30 a.m., we were holding the first of what would be a round of 35 meetings with a whole range of government ministries and departments and international donors.

Early on 23 July, we were joined by Riccardo Lepri from the Centre in Dushanbe and Major Abdul Vaghel, our escort from the Tajik Border Guard. Having made sure that each of our three four-wheel-drive vehicles was equipped with two spare wheels, 60 litres of water, extra fuel, radio and satellite phone communications and food supplies, we set off on our 2,000 km journey.

Having driven over the most incredible terrain, we were greeted with a temperature of 51°C in Nizhniy Panj, where we met representatives of two border posts and a border crossing. The River Panj, a tributary of the Amu Darya, Central Asia’s longest river, runs along the entire length of the Tajik-Afghan border. Previously known as the Oxus, these were the waters that Alexander the Great crossed in 329 B.C. in pursuit of the Persian nobleman Bessus.

We headed north-east and east along the northern bank of the River Panj towards Kulyab. No rest stop was ever more welcome than our overnight stay at the UNDP guest-house in the town. The next day, we crossed the internal boundary between Khatlon *oblast* and Gorno Badakhshan as we entered the autonomous province. At the border guard base in Khal-e-Khum, we were briefed on the border situation: Sightings of

Ishkashim is the southernmost border crossing point with Afghanistan.
Photo: OSCE/Johann Wagner

armed groups and cross-border exchanges of fire are apparently not uncommon here.

It was soon after leaving the area that we spotted, just about mid-stream in the River Panj, a basic but functional volleyball court on an islet between a Tajik village on the one side and an Afghan village on the other. Long live cross-border co-operation!

The further east we travelled, the more interesting the food became, which was to reach a climax in the Pamirs. We continued on to Khorugh, capital of Gorno Badakhshan, studying border guard facilities on the way. After a 14-hour journey along dirt roads, we were rewarded with comfortable local accommodation, where we spent the first of two nights.

On the morning of 25 July, having replenished our supply of drinking water (we were consuming five litres per person a day), we gathered at the regional border guard headquarters in Khorugh, a potential site for training activities focusing on border patrolling under a proposed OSCE project. Just like most of the camps currently run by Tajikistan, this one was inherited from the Russian Border Guard when they handed over the task of border security to the national authorities in 2005. The facilities are reasonably sound and solid, but they are ageing and badly need basic refurbishing.

Following discussions with the commander of the regional border guard and his staff, we left Khorugh on an eight-hour round trip: Along some rough tracks, we followed the Panj through its gorge to Ishkashim, the southernmost Tajik border crossing point with Afghanistan, at the mouth of the Wakhan corridor and only about 15 km from the Pakistani border.

This is where the “Great Game” played out in the nineteenth century, when Britain and Russia signed a treaty adding a strip of the Wakhan corridor to Afghanistan to create a neutral buffer zone between their two empires.

Ishkashim provided us with some welcome diversion. As we were having lunch, a young British couple appeared out of nowhere and approached us for help: Halfway through a round-the-world journey, their four-wheel-drive vehicle had broken down.

We returned to spend a second night in Khorugh, to give ourselves time to become acclimatized to the altitude in preparation for our ascent into the Pamirs the following day. This was more than simply a matter of comfort. If one climbs too rapidly (more than 350-500 metres per day) above 2,500

metres, one could suffer from altitude sickness, which, if not treated properly, can lead to cerebral or pulmonary edema — an often fatal condition.

After the routine morning check of our vehicles and communications equipment, we headed off, up into the Shughnan Mountains and the Pamirs. We were treated to stunning scenery. In the more fertile patches of the mountains, we spotted occasional single-level mud brick houses that are typical of the lower-lying areas of the Panj. Gradually, though, the vegetation made way for desert surrounded by snow-capped mountain ranges.

Eventually, we arrived in Murghab, capital of the Pamirs. Tajikistan’s highest town at over 4,000 metres, it is a regional trading hub. Chinese traders transit through the town en route to the interiors of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, as they must have been doing since the days of Marco Polo.

During the Soviet era, a large military garrison was stationed at Murghab to defend Tajikistan from the threat of Chinese invasion. The landscape is dotted with traditional low buildings, *yurts* (portable dwellings) and nomadic Kyrgyz herding their yaks.

However, Murghab was of interest to us for other reasons: It is the site of the main customs clearance facility for the Chinese border, and the last population centre before reaching the Chinese frontier and the border crossing point at the Kulma Pass, 98 km away, across the desert.

The next day, we headed across the Aksu Plain desert, east to the Kulma Pass and

On the way to the Tajik-Afghan border through the Pamir Mountains.





OSCE/HENRY BOLTON

At the Kulma Pass, looking out to the Chinese border from Tajikistan.

the Chinese border. At 4,365 metres above sea level, the Kulma Pass is in the middle of nowhere. In the winter, the temperatures plunge to -60°C , which explains why the border is closed throughout the winter months. On the day of our visit, though, it was $+43^{\circ}\text{C}$.

Since the Kulma Pass is Tajikistan's only border crossing with China — the rest of the frontier being fenced and patrolled by armed guards on both sides — it is a vital transit point for commercial trade and is, therefore, crucial to the Tajik economy. At the same time, it is a potential route for trafficking of precursor chemicals — essential for the processing of heroin — to Afghanistan. Having satisfied ourselves that, indeed, the OSCE could be of assistance at Kulma, we

Henry Bolton (right) and friends in front of the border team's lodgings in Murghab.



OSCE

returned for our second night in Murghab before setting off the next day for the Tajik-Kyrgyz border.

We drove north, past Lake Sasyk-Kul, and through the ex-Soviet army garrison of Kara Kul and the Khargush Pamir hills to the Kyzyl-Art Pass and the border crossing from Tajikistan to Kyrgyzstan. Here the Border Guard are on duty for seven months at a stretch — 15 km away from the nearest water supply and without any access to transport.

From there we entered Kyrgyzstan to continue our journey via the OSCE Field Office at Osh and the Centre in Bishkek, where we held meetings with the Kyrgyz authorities on their own border security and management concerns.

Following the assessment visit, the OSCE has proposed four specific assistance projects for Tajikistan:

Development of a national border strategy. Providing the Tajik Government with technical assistance in drafting a national border strategy;

Patrol programming and leadership on the Tajik-Afghan Border. Providing trainers with the skills and knowledge necessary to conduct human surveillance of the Tajik-Afghan border;

Enhancement of immigration controls. Building Tajik capacity to detect false, stolen and lost travel documents and develop common national data recording and reporting procedures; and

Customs assistance on the Tajik-Chinese border. Refurbishing and equipping of the Tajik customs clearance facility at Murghab to enhance its capacity to detect precursor chemicals, other illegal goods and contraband.

In addition, the idea of establishing an OSCE centre in the country focusing on regional border management is under discussion.

Henry Bolton, Senior Border Issues Adviser in the OSCE since June 2006, has served the Government of the United Kingdom, the British Army, the European Commission, the United Nations and several OSCE field operations. His assignments, ranging from supervising international police monitors to drawing up integrated border management strategies, have taken him to Canada, Denmark, Norway, Germany, Georgia, the Balkans and Central America.

Arms and ammunition

Out of harm's way with more than a little help from Tajikistan's friends



What do the OSCE Delegations of Finland, France, the Netherlands, Norway, Slovenia, Sweden and the United States, and most recently, Andorra, Belgium and Spain have in common? All are members of an informal “Group of Friends of Tajikistan” that have made it a prime priority to help protect the country’s population from the environmental and security hazards posed by massive reserves of small arms and light weapons (SALW) and conventional ammunition — a grim legacy of six years of civil strife.

BY WILLIAM PRYOR

In 2003, when the OSCE set up a mechanism within the Forum for Security Co-operation to help participating States build their capacity to destroy and manage their surplus of small arms, light weapons and ammunition, Tajikistan was among the first to seek assistance.

Under a weapons amnesty after the civil war, the authorities were left with a staggering cache of tens of thousands of small arms and more than 20 tonnes of high explosives. On a visit to Tajikistan’s central storage facility in August 2004, experts led by the OSCE’s Conflict Prevention Centre confirmed the Government’s worst fears: The conditions under which the stockpiles were being kept and the level of skills of the personnel responsible for guarding them were completely unacceptable by any safety and security standards.

Apart from environmental accidents waiting to happen, the possibility of terrorists gaining access to this dangerous loot or its

diversion to illegal markets was simply too great. There was no time to lose. A comprehensive, tailor-made programme was launched in June 2005. Today, its first phase, focusing on the Dushanbe area, is about to be completed.

The results speak for themselves. The Tajik authorities have:

- Built a destruction site for ammunition at Lohur, near Dushanbe;
- Trained nine experts in the disposal of explosive ordnance;
- Destroyed 34 tonnes of high explosives;
- Built and equipped a facility for the destruction of SALW at Lohur;
- Destroyed 26,000 rifles and pistols, including AK-47 and AK-74 assault rifles and Makarov pistols; and
- Either built or upgraded seven storage sites in Dushanbe for the Ministry of Internal Affairs, the Drug Control Agency, the General Prosecutor’s Office, the Military Prosecutor’s Office, the Ministry of Defence, the Tax and Revenue Ministry, and the State Border Protection Committee.

Alexander Anoshkin, project manager, explains why implementation has gone extremely well so far.

“Firstly, the Tajik authorities themselves have demonstrated unstinting support for our joint efforts, including identifying qualified and enthusiastic partners within the relevant government agencies. Secondly, the Group of Friends of Tajikistan has put its

Safe and secure storage facilities for SALW and ammunition have been built under the OSCE programme with the help of Sweden, Slovenia and the Netherlands.
Photo: OSCE/Tom Schröder



OSCE/SUSANNA LOOF



Hydraulic shears are used to cut weapons at the Interior Ministry's destruction facility.

OSCE/SUSANNA LOOF

Lt. Col. Morten Lødøen briefs visitors on how hazardous material is stored.

money where its mouth is, mobilizing more than €730,000 in support of the first phase.”

To find out how the operations were progressing, representatives of five donor countries went to Lohur as part of a visit to Tajikistan in April. They saw for themselves how a newly refurbished facility had enabled the Ministry of Defence to manage the destruction of more than 34 tonnes of ammunition and explosives in the past year and a half.

“I am impressed with the results so far and am encouraged to recommend our continued support for the programme’s next phase,” said Misa Kangaste, the Finnish Delegation’s Military Adviser.

His counterpart in the Norwegian Delegation, Tom Schröder, agreed. “We are all satisfied with the way the OSCE Centre and the Tajik authorities have been co-operating to enhance security, not only for the good of the citizens here but also for the OSCE area as a whole,” he said.

Both officials are active participants in the Forum for Security Co-operation, which meets weekly in Vienna to discuss and take decisions regarding military aspects of security in the OSCE region. Other countries that have asked for help in addressing the threats stemming from the uncontrolled proliferation and destabilizing accumulation of SALW and conventional ammunition are Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Montenegro, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

The Group of Friends of Tajikistan also travelled to several areas in the southern region of Khatlon that were potential storage sites for SALW.

“We should all welcome the fact that Tajikistan is so conscientious about storing hazardous equipment in accordance with best practices,” said Lt. Col. Morten Lødøen,

who has been seconded by Norway to serve as the programme’s chief technical adviser. “By doing this, the country is able to keep its stockpiles out of the reach of potential criminal elements.”

LOOKING AHEAD

Nothing succeeds like success, so in late 2006, in response to requests from several national agencies that the programme should be extended, the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe designed and launched the next series of activities. Measures include:

- Disposing of surplus rocket boosters;
- Building capacity for the disposal of improvised explosive devices (sometimes referred to as IEDs, or roadside bombs);
- Constructing storage facilities for SALW and conventional ammunition throughout the country’s regions;
- Constructing a storage facility for conventional ammunition; and
- Providing training in the handling of ammunition and management of stockpiles.

Not surprisingly, all this comes with a hefty price tag: more than €1.5 million, of which half a million euros are still being sought.

“The benefits, however, are priceless and promise to set Tajikistan on a clear course towards serving as a model for stockpile management in the OSCE region,” says Alexander Anoshkin.

“We have high hopes that the second phase will complete the country’s efforts to set up needed facilities, with qualified experts, to manage stockpiles responsibly and effectively — not only right now but also far into the future.”

William Pryor is the OSCE Field Officer in Kulyab in southern Tajikistan.



Boon for small businesses

Microfinancing on remote mountaintops

BY BESS BROWN

Half a million men — perhaps more — leave Tajikistan each year to take up seasonal or permanent employment abroad, mostly in Russia, because they cannot find work at home. This stark reality underlies the Tajik Government's drive to create employment opportunities as a major element in the country's socio-economic strategy. Nudged by the international donor community, this approach increasingly calls for the development of small businesses as a means of generating desperately needed jobs.

After launching some moderately successful start-up activities in co-operation with international partners in 2003 (see box), the OSCE in Tajikistan initiated a microcredit programme of its own in 2004 in response to requests of local officials that activities be carried out directly with home-grown groups.

While one partner in the southern province of Shartuuz, on the Tajik-Afghan border, abandoned the scheme by the end of the year, Madina, a domestic non-governmental organization in Khorugh, persevered: It turned its initial grant of \$6,000 into a

self-sufficient microfinance institution, eventually gaining national recognition.

Khorugh is the administrative centre of the Gorno Badakhshan Autonomous Region, which hardly offers an environment conducive to launching a commercial activity. The *oblast* occupies nearly half of Tajikistan's territory and boasts some of its most spectacular scenery, including its highest mountains, the Pamirs. However, accessibility has improved only gradually in recent years.

Even though the main road from Dushanbe to Khorugh has been upgraded, the journey by car still takes about 12 hours each way, even at the best of times. At least one flight is scheduled daily by Tajik Air, but it is often cancelled due to inclement weather.

Now, the economic prospects in this least developed part of the country are improving. Environmental and adventure tourism affords great potential for income generation. In addition, a new border post on the Kulma Pass in eastern Badakhshan has opened up the remote region to transit traffic from China, delivering goods to markets throughout Central Asia.

Indeed, far-sighted Pamiris see Badakhshan becoming an integral part of

During the civil war, the Aga Khan Foundation served as the main lifeline of the Pamiris, many of whom adhere to the Ismaili faith.
Photo: OSCE/Lubomir Kotek

a trans-Asian transport network that will, sooner rather than later, link Tajikistan with Pakistan and India via the Karakorum Highway, which is the world's highest paved international road.

The challenge is to ensure that the people of Badakhshan master the business skills that will enable them to take advantage of these more favourable circumstances.

The OSCE is fortunate to have two excellent partners in Badakhshan:

Milal-Inter, an NGO, actively promotes the development of regional trade. Having initially concentrated on trade with Afghanistan, the group has expanded its work to include the development of contacts with China's autonomous Xinjiang region and with southern Kyrgyzstan.

The other partner is Madina, which started out as an NGO teaching skills to vulnerable groups, particularly women, so they could be self-supporting. Now it is a full-fledged micro-finance institution.

Madina's Director, Naobot Dodkhudoeva, recalls how she and her staff used the microcredit fund of \$6,000 from the OSCE to extend \$100 to \$200 loans to course participants who were keen to start their own small businesses.

"To qualify for a loan, applicants had to demonstrate that they had fully grasped the essentials of running a business, assessing local market conditions and drawing up a realistic plan to improve the sustainability of their ventures," she says.

During the fund's first year of operation, the repayment rate on the loans was 100 per cent. Most of the borrowers were women, who used the money to start bakeries and other small food services. Two young men took a loan to buy a used truck and launch a transport company.

"The repayment performance has remained largely constant through the years," Ms. Dodkhudoeva says. "When the national legislation on microcredit facilities was tightened in 2005, we went through a lengthy procedure to qualify for a National Bank licence as an officially recognized microfinance institution."

By the end of 2006, Madina had quadrupled the seed capital received from the OSCE and had become largely self-supporting. That same year, the OSCE employed the group to set up a permanent legal advice and business training centre for entrepreneurs in Khorugh. The centre is now being considered by the Aga Khan Foundation's Mountain Societies Development Support Programme as a possible partner for its business incubator schemes.

Bess Brown is an Economics Officer at the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe, where she has held various functions since 2004. She was a research analyst on Central Asia at Radio Liberty for 16 years, and has worked at the OSCE's Liaison Office in Tashkent and the OSCE Centre in Ashgabad.

Teaching the ropes

The Economic Unit of the then OSCE Mission to Tajikistan started promoting the development of small businesses as early as 2003.

By supporting the International Labour Organization's programme, "Start and Improve Your Own Business", which aims to hone instructors' training skills, the OSCE helped create a pool of experts sufficiently qualified to pass on their know-how to aspiring entrepreneurs. This has been paying off handsomely: Today, the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe regularly taps into this human resource for its business training projects.

It was also in 2003 that the Economic Unit began supporting local NGOs in their schemes to set up sewing workshops and community and home bakeries throughout the country. The aim was to build skills and, in some cases, provide women with a properly equipped workplace — especially those who had suddenly found themselves heading households during and after the civil war, and as more and more of the menfolk went off to search for greener pastures.

Successful ventures such as Madina's have inspired other OSCE initiatives aimed at nurturing the growth of small businesses in Tajikistan, where the climate is not always friendly to budding entrepreneurs. The good news is that, at the national level, the Government has finally come round to recognizing that empowering individuals to be more resourceful can prove to be an effective means of pulling them out of poverty. — *Bess Brown*



An OSCE-supported sewing workshop in southern Tajikistan.



Women's Resource Centres make impressive inroads

The Tajik-OSCE experience

BY GRAZIELLA PIGA

Nigina A., 27, is more than just a computer teacher at the village school. She plays a dynamic role in one of the seven OSCE-supported Women's Resource Centres in Khatlon *oblast*, in southern Tajikistan, tirelessly speaking to women and teenage girls about the Centres' activities and encouraging them to take advantage of what they have to offer.

Nigina is not merely preaching from the pulpit. Her life history is not too different from that of many women in the country's rural areas: Forced into marriage at 14, she became a battered wife. After several years of enduring pain and degradation, she and her children went back to her parents' home — only to fall victim once again to physical and verbal abuse, this time inflicted by her own brothers and parents. It was their way of showing her that they could not forgive her for her "failure".

"One day, I went to a seminar on women's rights organized by the Resource Centre in my community," she said. "From that moment on, my life changed." She is now determined to continue her education and make something of herself.

Nigina's story just may have a rosy ending, but how many more girls and women are out there, feeling helpless and isolated?

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the ensuing civil war and the collapse of the economy, Tajiks began experiencing a revival of archaic local practices that are eroding some of the gains made in breaking down gender-based stereotypes.

Ten years after the onset of peace, the negative consequences of the five-year civil war are still being keenly felt by both men and women: An estimated 25,000 women lost their husbands, and as thousands of men continue their exodus to other countries in hopes of making a decent living, more and more women are heading households and raising children on their own, heavily dependent on relatives and in-laws.

Women in less developed areas are especially vulnerable to all types of violence and abusive behaviour and often do not know where to turn to for information and protection. At the same time, most people are still loathe to consider gender-based violence as having anything to do with the violation of women's right to have access to education, family planning and decision-making.

Tajik women emerge from a vocational course at the Women's Resource Centre in Kurgan-Tyube, southern Tajikistan.

Photo: OSCE/Astrid Evrensel

Girls are particularly disadvantaged in the south, where illiteracy is pervasive and it is not uncommon for them to drop out of school after the seventh class. Why should girls bother getting an education, families and communities say, when they end up marrying early anyway?

To support the Government's efforts to live up to its domestic and interna-

The OSCE Centre in Dushanbe sponsors a website and a bimonthly magazine in Tajik and Russian called *Ravzana ba Jahon* ("Window to the World"), featuring information on gender issues in Tajikistan: www.ravzana.tj

tional responsibility to improve the well-being of Tajik women, the Centre in Dushanbe launched a multi-year project in 2004 aimed at building the capac-

ity of local NGOs run primarily by and for women.

For a start, the OSCE created seven Women's Resource Centres in the rural areas of Khatlon and Sughd. Today, these have grown into a network of 11 OSCE-supported "Crisis Centres".

Except for one, which functions as a shelter, the Centres do much more than provide women in crisis situations with psychological support and legal advice. They also offer free computer and vocational courses, teach literacy skills and conduct seminars focusing on women's rights and gender equality. To reach as many women and local officials as possible, activities take place not just at the Centres but also in surrounding villages.

So far, more than 1,500 participants, 75 per cent of them women, have learned a trade through the three-month vocational



Boosting reading and writing skills in Huroson, Kurgan-Tyube.

courses run by the Centres. These efforts, especially in the south, are often co-ordinated with the work of the Economic Unit of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe, which organizes courses on how to start a small business.

The linkages make good sense. Quite often, participants in the activities of the Resource Centres reveal that they are victims of domestic violence and are emboldened to seek help — which they would otherwise not do for fear of being stigmatized by their communities.

These are just some of our success stories — and we are keen to have many, many more to tell. We are working hard to ensure that one day soon, the Centres will be able to become more institutionalized to make it easier for financial support to flow in.

The OSCE, the men and women of Tajikistan, and the Government all share a vested interest in the adoption of a draft law to provide victims of domestic violence with legal and social assistance: That will mean that, together, we will be able to carry out our grass-roots efforts within a robust framework.

Graziella Piga is the Gender Programme Manager at the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe. She has led a wide variety of women's projects in Vietnam, Serbia and her native Italy. She has also worked for the OSCE in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and in Bosnia in police development and human rights

Graziella Piga looks in on a vocational workshop at the Women's Resource Centre in Kurgan-Tyube.



From North to South, OSCE field offices keep an ear to the ground



Garm Field Office, Rasht Valley, central Tajikistan

BY DMYTRO KONOPKO

The weekly staff meeting at the Centre in Dushanbe is over, and once again I am on my way back to my duty station in Garm, 185 km away. It's a four- to eight-hour drive, depending on the weather and the conditions along the Dushanbe-Jirgatal-Saritosh highway. Because the road serves as the main thoroughfare to Osh in southern Kyrgyzstan, it is strategically important to Tajikistan. A Chinese company has committed itself to upgrading it, but progress is unbelievably slow, as I'm about to find out.

Having covered some 40 km, I brace myself for the rough ride on the unpaved section. My Nissan Patrol doesn't like it

one bit and starts groaning and bouncing madly, as if trying to shake my soul out of my body.

The Garm settlement is at the heart of the mountainous Rasht Valley northeast of Dushanbe. During the civil war, it was the scene of fierce fighting between Government and opposition forces. When the field office opened in 1998, staff had their work cut out for them: addressing the return of refugees and a whole range of post-conflict rehabilitation issues.

The terrain becomes more and more circuitous. I pass Rogun, the intended site of an ambitious hydropower project, and drive along the Vakhsh River, zigzagging between mountain serpentines. I see tiny settlements from time to time down below and across the river. I'm told that most of them can be reached only by taking a raft, and that some people earn their living by providing ferry services.

Negotiating the Kabu Jar section of the Dushanbe-Jirgatal-Saritosh highway can prove to be a real feat.

Photo: OSCE/Dmytro Konopko

I overtake heavy lorries enveloped in clouds of dust and black soot. These huge vehicles appear to be the only means right now of transporting goods and produce from Dushanbe. Although an airfield in Garm was upgraded for last year's festivities marking the anniversary of the signing of the Reconciliation Accord between the Government and the opposition in 1997, it remains practically unused, as hardly anyone can afford the price of air tickets.

Marshrutka minibuses, or literally, "fixed-route taxis", ply the Garm-Dushanbe route, but travelling in them can be a hair-raising experience: Most of the vehicles are jam-packed and poorly maintained, and it appears that the qualifications of some drivers are questionable.

I pass the formerly picturesque and now neglected Obigarm resort, famous for its thermal springs, and enter the Rasht Valley. Now I only have to negotiate Kabu Jar, a 4-km passage notorious for its frequent rock avalanches and landslides — caused in the winter by melting snow, and in the spring and autumn, by the rains. And then there



OSCE/ARMANDS PUPOLS

The centre of Garm.

are the occasional earth tremors. A traveller can expect to be stuck here for several hours, waiting for road blockages to be cleared by bulldozers — which often don't have enough petrol.

It is springtime, and the Vakhsh River, where the Surkhob and the Hingob Rivers converge, is filled with stones that roll down the roaring red-coloured stream. However menacing, the sound has long been awaited by the Tajiks all winter long. It means that the land is finally being irrigated and that electricity is coming, bringing the local population back to active life after having endured a daily one-hour power supply for months on end.

I arrive in Garm just as the day is drawing to a close. Tomorrow, another trip lies ahead — this time to Jirgatol, a settlement on the Kyrgyz border, where the Centre in Dushanbe has been spearheading a project to stimulate entrepreneurial activity. This OSCE venture, however modest, promises to be a bright spot on the horizon in one of the country's most depressed regions.

But that's another story.

Dmytro Konopko started his assignment as Field Officer in Garm in April 2006. He is assisted by seven national staff. He is seconded from the Ukrainian Foreign Ministry, where he worked on arms control and disarmament, human resources, and consular matters. He has also served as a member of Ukraine's delegation to the OSCE and to the UN.



OSCE

Dmytro Konopko with assistant Jamilya Sharipova.



Students sweep Khujand's Botanical Garden on the occasion of Earth Day, 2007.

OSCE/DIMITRY PRUDTSKIY

Khujand Field Office, Sughd oblast, northern Tajikistan

BY GIORGIA A. VARISCO

8.30 a.m. It's only been two weeks since I arrived in Khujand, and here I am on a nice spring day, about to deliver a speech in front of hundreds of young students who are members of the "Green Patrol" movement. Today's event, a celebration of Earth Day, seeks to raise awareness about the environment and engage young people in the ecological conservation and preservation of their region.



Khujand's ancient mosque.

OSCE/GIORGIA A. VARISCO

The environment is a big issue here in the northern region of Sughd. The average citizen is still largely unaware of the negative long-term effects of living close to one of the many open-air radioactive waste dumps — a heritage of the Soviet Union. Food for thought: the total amount of radioactive waste in Tajikistan is close to 55 million tonnes, most of it deposited in the Ferghana Valley, of which Sughd is a part.

11 a.m. We meet the deputy governor of the Sughd region to discuss the local government's commitment to the OSCE-run crisis centre set up two years ago. As in many parts of the world, it's hard for battered and abused women here to escape from their plight and find refuge. Leaving one's husband and his family can mean being repudiated by the whole community. A crisis centre such as ours not only serves as a safe haven, it also provides professional legal and medical assistance, advice on women's rights and counselling for couples.

1 p.m. I have a relaxing lunch at the office with my colleagues, Shahlo, Nazokat and Suhrob. It's about the only chance we get to exchange views on global current events and the latest developments in the Ferghana Valley, in Tajikistan in general, and of course, in Italy.

The issue of a multi-party system as an indicator of a democratic society is raised. I was recently asked during an interview with a government newspaper if I thought that the country's multi-party

system met international democratic standards. I did not feel comfortable answering this sensitive question, but I did find it encouraging that this sort of topic *can* be brought up in the Tajik media.

5 p.m. Several university students come by our field office on their regular twice-monthly visits. It's an opportunity for us to interact with the younger segment of society. Today's topic: the new presidential decree banning miniskirts, the *hajib* (Muslim veil), parties and mobile phones in schools. The decree also limits jewellery worn in schools and universities to traditional adornments. Today's discussion was much more lively than usual. Some thought that the measures would actually help preserve Tajik traditions, while others believed that the new directives would cause a further disconnect between young people and the Government.

7 p.m. Finally I find some time to reply to e-mails. I look out the window and am treated to a typical Khujand red sunset. In the distance, the fading light casts a magical glow on the blue domes of the ancient mosque and *madrassa*.

Giorgia A. Varisco, an Italian national, has headed the Khujand Field Office since April 2007. She works with seven national staff. A former programme manager at UNDP and UNAIDS, she has managed, monitored and co-ordinated programmes dealing with anti-corruption, human rights, gender and community mobilization in Kyrgyzstan, Romania, Ukraine, Italy and South Africa.



Donkeys along the road to Danghara on a May day.

OSCE/WILLIAM PRYOR

Kulyab Field Office, Khatlon oblast, southern Tajikistan

BY WILLIAM PRYOR

7.00 a.m. Unwashed again. Along with the other 80,000 people in Kulyab, we've been without running water for a couple of days. I'm hoping our expected visitors from the Media Unit in Dushanbe won't notice.

We have tea and *non* (flatbread) for breakfast, during which we discuss — not for the first time — the vexed issue of women and bicycles. While we're glad to have a four-wheel-drive vehicle for getting

about in the mountainous regions bordering Afghanistan, I was planning to get some bicycles for the use of field staff in town. The idea seems to have run aground on the thorny issue of Ramziya, a female Pamiri colleague, riding around on a bicycle, which would be quite unusual for this region. “It’s fine, I suppose,” says someone in the male contingent, “but if it were my daughter, I’d forbid it.”

10.15 a.m. Ramziya has left to visit the local labour migrants’ information centre to follow up on a monitoring request from our Economic Unit in Dushanbe. We’ve been working with the International Organization for Migration and supporting several of these centres since 2006, helping to ensure that the thousands of Tajiks heading to Russia to work do so with a clear idea of what their rights and responsibilities are once they’re there. We agree we need to do more to encourage potential labour migrants to call at the local centre.

Meantime, our office assistant, Bahodur, has been helping me handle a call from an elderly man whose son appears to have gone to Ekaterinburg in southern Russia for work — only to go missing. He’s heard that his son may be in trouble with the police, but doesn’t know how to go about finding out more. I refer him to the Foreign Ministry and make a couple of calls to contacts in Ekaterinburg. (I subsequently discover that the son is indeed in pre-trial detention on charges of possession of drugs — a sobering reminder of the importance of the labour migrants’ information centre.)

12.30 p.m. The team from the Media Unit arrives for a meeting with local journalists. Some of the difficulties the latter face seem intractable: The vast majority of people in the region are lucky to get more than a couple of hours’ electricity a day during the winter months, so neither radio nor television is effective down here. The OSCE has been working with the local newspaper, *Kulyabskaya pravda*, for a couple of years now, helping to fill the information vacuum. I join them for a discussion of possible strategies for the longer-term sustainability of this enterprise.

3 p.m. With a visit by the High Commissioner on National Minorities imminent, we’ve just hosted a meeting with representatives of the region’s ethnic groups. They reckon that Tajiks make up more than 90 per cent of Kulyab’s population. Kulyab used to be home to a Russian majority, but now Uzbeks, Tatars and Afghans all outnumber the 300 or so Russians.



Some of these national minorities report difficulties getting hold of textbooks in their own language. However, it seems that for most, economic woes loom larger. This confirms the view of the deputy mayor, under whose remit the issue falls: In a meeting earlier this week, she described a largely homogeneous and harmonious community. This community may be united in poverty for now, but I suspect we need to find ways to ensure that future prosperity does not open up divisions.

8 p.m. *Plov* for dinner, along with the first salad of spring. And more *non*. Avoiding the bicycle issue, we fall enthusiastically into an argument about polygamy. Suddenly I’m no longer the liberal at the table — until we touch on the issue of polyandry. Some male colleagues choke on their tea at the idea of women having more than one partner. I’m saved by the bell — a welcome call from the Centre in Dushanbe. I’m to expect a delivery of fuel at some point later tonight.

With the arrival of spring and the flowering of the cherry and persimmon trees in the garden, I’ve almost forgotten the incessant cold of the winter months — though we still rely a lot on the generator. Without it, I’d be writing this by candlelight and filing it on donkeyback.

Bahodur Nazirov (left) of the Kulyab Field Office with Rustam Odinaev, Editor of *Kulyabskaya pravda*, an independent publication.

William Pryor, Field Officer in Kulyab since October 2006, heads an eight-person team. A former human rights adviser to the UK Foreign and Commonwealth Office, he has worked on a wide range of public sector reform projects, particularly in the area of criminal justice, in the UK, in Russia and in several countries of the former Soviet Union.



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 Berdimukhammedov. 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.

Kathleen Samuel is the Senior Policy Support Officer for Central Asia in the OSCE Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre.

Water for life

Central Asians challenged to be joint stewards of a precious resource

By Saulius Smalys

In Central Asia, as everywhere, water is key to advancing social and economic development. In Tajikistan, people put this more simply: *ob manbai hayot ast*. ("Water is the source of life.")

High up in the Tien Shan Mountains in Kyrgyzstan, the Naryn River begins a journey of more than 2,000 km to the Aral Sea, once the world's fourth largest inland body of water. In the Ferghana Valley, the Naryn meets the waters of the Kara Darya and becomes the Syr Darya, quenching the thirst of cotton fields and the communities of Kokand in Uzbekistan, Khujand in Tajikistan, and Kyzyl-Orda and Turkistan in Kazakhstan, before drying up far short of the sea.

The Amu Darya, twice the size of the Syr Darya, is formed by the melting snows and glaciers of the Pamir Mountains. Its source is Lake Zorkul, on the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan. As the Pamir River, the waters rush east, then north-west through the Hindu Kush. As the Panj River, the waters race along Afghanistan's border, first with Tajikistan, then with Uzbekistan, then with Turkmenistan.

Flowing northwards from Kerki, the Amu Darya passes Turkmenabat before tracing the border with Uzbekistan and dividing into the delta of the Aral Sea. These waters, too, disappear into the desert before reaching the Aral because of reckless management.

Mutual dependence on this valuable resource has long been acknowledged as a fact of life. In the Soviet era, a relatively efficient water-sharing network, taking seasonal and regional circumstances into account, nourished the production of cotton, fruit and vegetables for what was then one country.

Nearly two decades later, the needs of upstream States, which use the water to produce hydroelectricity, are less easily managed vis-à-vis the irrigation priorities of downstream neighbours and their agricultural sector.

Furthermore, the prospect of additional consumption in Tajikistan and Afghanistan of as much as 28 cubic km from the Amu Darya is a source of serious concern to the Uzbeks and Turkmens downstream. Though blessed with the largest water resources in Central Asia, Tajikistan has yet to harness much of

its potential and is grappling with its own set of water management problems as its population grows. As for Afghanistan, as its political situation stabilizes and development gathers momentum, it intends to irrigate an additional 1 million acres of land for a variety of crops.

A wealth of legislation regulates international water-sharing, including the Helsinki Rules on the Uses of the Waters of International Rivers (1996) and the Convention on the Protection and Use of Transboundary Watercourses and International Lakes (1992). Several agreements concluded in the 1990s focus specifically on the management of the Aral basin, including those between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Unfortunately most of these agreements — due to their declarative nature and unfeasible tasks and objectives — have not proved sufficient to stem the disappearance of the waters of the Aral Sea, which has led to further ecological and socio-economic decline.

At the same time, individual country efforts in the region, coupled with a lack of financial resources, are making the goal of wiser water management even more elusive. To integrate all these scattered initiatives, it is vital that international

organizations and donors be actively drawn into the process of designing projects aimed at preventing other ecological disasters and at monitoring and managing the environmental impact of industry and agriculture.

The OSCE has taken up this challenge with the launching this year of a project to promote regional co-operation focusing on cross-border river-basin management. Specialists across the region will team up to analyse the water management and ecological problems of the Aral basin, review the relevant legislation and identify

obstacles to its implementation, and prepare recommendations for each of the Central Asian States, as well as Afghanistan.

The OSCE project represents only a first step forward on an ambitious path. The envisaged activities will make a difference only if the OSCE, international donors, and each and every country in the region put their collective political influence, financial support and good will behind the project.

Encouraged by the recommendations of the fifteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum, which recently took place in Prague, the Centre in Dushanbe is poised to take concrete follow-up measures aimed at improving the way the region manages its cross-boundary water resources.

Saulius Smalys is an Environmental Officer at the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe. He headed the EU programmes and projects unit at Lithuania's Ministry of the Environment. He also served as a director of EuroInfoCentre and the US Peace Corps.



Eric Gourlan's photo of the shrunken Aral Sea won a prize in the 2007 OSCE photo contest sponsored by the Spanish Chairmanship of the OSCE. The theme was "Land and water, protecting our fragile environment".

Transport, transit and transactions

Easing trading bottlenecks in landlocked States

BY SUSANNA LÖÖF AND ROEL JANSSENS

Giant distances on roads so bad that trucks transporting goods can travel only at a snail's pace, kilometre-long waiting lines at border crossings, and visa rules so rigid that many companies find themselves banned because of violations: These are just a few of the challenges faced by countries without direct access to the sea as they try to get their products to the marketplace.

To remove these stumbling blocks to progress, the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities has launched an ambitious programme to bolster international action through dialogue and partnerships among the various stakeholders. Out of a United Nations list of 31 landlocked developing countries, nine are OSCE participating States: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Tajikistan, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. (Belarus and Serbia, also landlocked, are not members of the special UN group.)

The OSCE's special initiative began in January 2006 under the Belgian Chairmanship and continues this year, with a major conference on trans-Asian and Eurasian transit transport set for 23 and 24 October in Dushanbe, Tajikistan. The topic was also examined at a conference on strengthening co-operative security between the OSCE and its Asian Partners for Co-opera-

tion on 12 and 13 June. Hosting the event was Mongolia, itself a landlocked country.

Noting that Central Asia is particularly marginalized in the global trading system due to its remoteness from the sea and from principal world markets, Bernard Snoy, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities, says that linking up the region with the Indian Ocean would provide a shorter transportation route, but that it could take decades before connections are created or sufficiently upgraded.

"Trade and transportation links with China, which shares a 3,300-km border (2,050 miles) with the Central Asian landlocked countries, are also taking on increasing importance," he adds. "So China, too, has a vested interest in an improved transit environment."

Effective solutions are sorely needed in Kazakhstan, which is 3,750 km (2,330 miles) away from the nearest sea outlet, making it one of the world's most landlocked countries.

"The long delivery time of goods ultimately adds to their value and reduces the country's competitiveness," says Munavara Paltasheva, director of the Forum of Entrepreneurs of Kazakhstan.

National borders also present an obstacle to exporters because of complex, expensive and time-consuming customs procedures. It takes five days to collect all the required documents and another seven to get final authorization,



Ms. Paltasheva says. “There are too many controlling bodies at the borders that do nothing but sell stamps. High customs duties are the worst problem we face today.”

And the vehicles proceed at a snail’s pace. “A truck transporting goods from Khargos at the Chinese border to Tashkent in Uzbekistan moves at an average speed of 31 kph (19 mph),” she says. “Total time spent at borders is around 20 hours.”

Another constraint, she adds, is the different rail widths in Kazakhstan and in China, which need to be standardized.

The OSCE is fostering co-operation aimed at helping Kazakh and other entrepreneurs in the region overcome the impediments posed by geography, thereby contributing to their development and prosperity. The blueprint is the Almaty Programme of Action, a landmark document adopted at a United Nations conference in Kazakhstan in 2003, which seeks to promote global partnerships in transit transport matters (see next page).

Although building better highways and rail systems in landlocked countries does not fall within the OSCE’s ambit, the organization can still make a difference, Mr. Snoy says. “The role we are very capable of playing is that of a facilitator and a political catalyst offering a platform for dialogue and co-operation among international actors as well as among our participating States.”

However, it is the landlocked countries themselves that will have to drive the efforts forward, he adds. “There should be more coherence in national policies and trade, and transport facilitation should be embedded in the countries’ economic and social strategies.”

Back in Kazakhstan, transport companies struggle not only with potholes and customs queues, but also with visa rules that are so strict that many companies end up violating them, says Theodor Kaplan, General Secretary of Kazakhstan’s Union of International Road Carriers.

The length of stay permitted in the country issuing a Schengen visa is often limited to ten days — not enough time for transporters to deliver goods to their destination, pick up a return load and leave Schengen territory. Those who fail to exit before their visa expires may be slapped with a lifelong entry ban.

“It means that most companies are deprived of the possibility of delivering goods to these countries, and stay out of this market,” Mr. Kaplan says. “More than 50 companies have been deprived of the right to enter Schengen countries in the past two years.”

He urges countries to reach an agreement that would allow the granting of visas with a longer period of validity, thus enabling companies to complete their transactions. “The real solution is at least an annual multi-entry visa for bona fide professional drivers without specific restrictions on time and Schengen space,” he says.

Eduard Titov, transport department manager at the CBC Transport Company, says it takes 15 days to transport goods from Kazakhstan to Hamburg — provided there are no delays at the borders.

“The most serious problem at the borders is the bribes,” he says. “From year to year, they are increasing. Customs procedures are not regulated, which frequently leads to delays at the borders.”

These factors combine to “significantly decrease the level of exports and imports of the Republic of Kazakhstan and keep its economy from developing,” he adds.

Businesses in other landlocked developing countries face similar hurdles. In Kyrgyzstan, small and medium-sized enterprises struggle to grow despite prohibitive transportation costs and their remoteness from major markets, says Abdimomun Goldoshev, Director of the International Business Council branch in the southern city of Osh.

“It is really difficult for local businesses in my country to compete with their counterparts at the regional or international level,” he says. “As a consequence, the rate of foreign direct investment is quite low in the region these days.”

The only way out of this dilemma, says Mr. Goldoshev, is for governments and the international community to work together.

This is precisely why the OSCE has been devoting increased attention to regional and global co-operation in this crucial area, Mr. Snoy says. For one, the Organization has

Khatlon province, southern Tajikistan: Poor rail infrastructure, rolling stock and bogie change facilities impede Central Asia’s international trade.



OSCE/ASTRID EVRENSSEL

been encouraging participating States to develop integrated transport and logistics systems encompassing all modes of transport.

The OSCE has also been urging States to introduce more efficient visa procedures, reduce their dependency on customs revenue, and streamline the paperwork for exports, imports and transit of goods.

“Some of the barriers to trade amount to a sort of protectionism of the national industry,” he says. “Countries should understand that trade and transport facilitation bring other positive effects such as more foreign direct investment and a more stable business climate.”

Susanna Lööf is a Press Officer in the Secretariat's Press and Public Information Section. Roel Janssens is an Economic and Environmental Adviser in the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. Additional reporting: Lea Bure (Centre in Almaty) and Kimberley Bulkley (Centre in Bishkek).

OSCE CENTRE IN ALMATY/ZAKHAR SVIRIDENKO

Border checking point in Kazakhstan: The Government is keen to improve the transit environment of the region's inland countries.



The Almaty Programme of Action: Unlocking growth and development

At their Ministerial Council meeting in Brussels in December 2006, OSCE participating States agreed to support the implementation of the Almaty Programme of Action in the OSCE area, the first United Nations-endorsed global document addressing the needs of developing countries with no coastlines.

In doing so, the Ministerial Council also encouraged the Secretariat to work closely with the UN Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States (UN-OHRLLS).

The current High Representative, Under-Secretary-General Anwarul K. Chowdhury, says that the kind of co-operation the OSCE promotes is one of the best ways to address the unique needs of this group of countries.

“Regional integration and collaboration would allow the dismantling of barriers to trade, cut transaction costs and encourage economies of scale, all contributing to the mutual economic growth of both landlocked developing countries and their transit neighbours,” he says.

The Almaty Programme was adopted at a UN conference in Kazakhstan in 2003, following the UN Millennium Declaration of 2000. Action measures aim to:

- Secure sea port access by all means of transport in accordance with international law;
- Reduce costs and improve services to increase the competitiveness of landlocked developing countries' exports;
- Reduce imports' delivery costs;
- Address problems of delays and uncertainties in trade routes;
- Develop adequate national networks;
- Reduce loss, damage and deterioration of goods en route;
- Open the way for expansion of exports; and

- Improve the safety of road transport and the security of people along transit corridors.

The OSCE's Transit Conference in Dushanbe on 23 and 24 October is expected to contribute to a review of progress under the Almaty Programme of Action.

The review process is a “common rallying point” for governments of landlocked countries, their transit neighbours, development partners and the private sector, Mr. Chowdhury says. “Of course, we also count on the OSCE's active involvement and support.”

To be hosted by the Government of Tajikistan, the conference follows a joint OSCE/UN-OHRLLS workshop in Vienna on 12 and 13 December 2006, which brought together some 30 senior experts and several representatives from virtually all the key organizations.

Closest distance from the sea (km)

OSCE Participating States

Armenia:	693
Belarus:	623
Azerbaijan:	870
Kazakhstan:	3,750
Kyrgyzstan:	3,600
the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia:	77
Moldova:	170
Serbia:	78
Tajikistan:	3,100
Turkmenistan:	1,700
Uzbekistan:	2,950

OSCE Partners for Co-operation

Afghanistan:	1,960
Mongolia:	1,693

Main source: UNCTAD

Republic of Tajikistan



OSCE Centre in Dushanbe

The OSCE presence in Tajikistan is the Organization's longest-running operation in Central Asia and is the largest in terms of personnel.

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