

Address
by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan
Mr. Hamrokhon Zarifi at the 18th OSCE Ministerial Council
(Vilnius, 6 December 2011)

1. First of all, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to His Excellency Audronius Ažubalis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, Chairperson-in-Office of OSCE for excellent arrangement of our work and congratulate His Excellency Deputy Prime-Minister, Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade of Ireland Mr. Eamon Gilmore with his election as the next Chairperson-in-Office of the Organization.

2. A year ago the heads of our states agreed the Astana Commemorative Declaration in which they reaffirmed their commitments to free, democratic, common, and indivisible security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok based on the agreed principles, shared responsibilities, and goals.

Today, we note the purposeful and fruitful work done under the Lithuanian Chairmanship in OSCE. We continue to believe that the OSCE as the most inclusive and comprehensive Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian regional organization remains an important forum based on consensus and equality of all Participating States destined to assist these states in preventing and resolving conflicts, strengthening measures of trust, and development of cooperation.

3. This year, Tajikistan celebrated the 20th Anniversary of its independence. During this short phase of history the people and Government of the country under the leadership of President Emomali Rahmon have managed to strengthen the foundation of a new young sovereign state, determine the main directions of domestic and foreign policies, achieve significant results in the political, socio-economic and cultural spheres, as well as to create favorable conditions for sustainable and progressive development in all spheres of life of society. During the years of independence, a solid foundation of new social system that meets the spirit of democracy, civil society, fundamental principles of human rights, and freedoms was laid.

Tajikistan supports the expansion of multidimensional cooperation and strengthening of integration processes in OSCE area, particularly in the Central Asia. This priority is determined by historical commonality of nations living in this territory, centuries-old economic ties, and cultural traditions of our countries.

4. Presuming that expansion of cooperation in economic and environmental fields is destined for enhancement of confidence-building measures among the states, thus making significant contribution to strengthening peace and stability within entire space of the Organization, we tend to consider the OSCE's economic and environmental activities as one of the most important and integral component of its comprehensive approach in ensuring security.

Climate change and environmental disasters have a growing impact on economic development and energy and regional security. We are deeply convinced that these problems are not the concern of separate states only, but are of collective responsibility of international community, including the OSCE, since they are vital for establishing normal economic activities, public health, and food security.

Unfortunately, we must note that due to inefficient farming methods in recent years the average rate of water consumption in Central Asia became extremely high. According to the World Bank's highest estimations about 79% of the water used for irrigation is simply lost. Per capita water use in the region is significantly higher than in most of the other parts of the world, which severely inhibits the growth of socio-economic development.

It is well known that glaciers feeding the main rivers of Central Asia and composing 60% of the region's water resources are formed in the mountains of Tajikistan. However, the accelerated melting of glaciers in recent years due to the climate change is of great concern relative to further economic development in the region, population growth and the continued practice of irrational use of water resources for irrigation in the lower reach countries.

To assist solution of the problem the Government of Tajikistan has adopted the Program of Study and Preservation of Glaciers for the period up to 2030 which includes a number of measures for monitoring and recording abnormal phenomena. For this reason, President Emomali Rahmon in UN Climate Change Summit in Copenhagen in 2009 initiated establishing of the International Fund for Saving of Glaciers and suggested an integrated assessment of totally inefficient water management systems of the region and large number of reservoirs in lower reach countries.

5. The tragedy of the Aral Sea is one of the worst environmental disasters in the world giving an evidence of the former Soviet Union's destructive water policy and excessive human activities. This crisis could be met only through joint efforts and fundamentally altering the existing approaches, especially through the rehabilitation of the outdated irrigation systems and improvement of agricultural policy with a focus on reduction of one-cropping and over-water-consuming crops.

In addition, in recent years the OSCE region has been subjected to destructive natural and anthropogenic disasters. Huge areas have been covered by floods, landslides, and forest fires. We are convinced that OSCE with its comprehensive mandate, broadside approach, and geographical coverage has a good potential for assisting the participating states to respond effectively to these challenges.

6. Hydropower and renewable energy sources are the important economic spheres which in the future would influence sustainable development and well-being in the whole OSCE region. The Central Asian countries have substantial energy reserves. Potentially, the region could provide up to 71% of its energy needs only by its hydropower industry.

The close cooperation between Central Asian states in full range of energy issues, their engaged and constructive participation in joint long-term hydropower programs and projects with active assistance of the international organizations, including the OSCE, will facilitate strengthening the security and prosperity in the region. Based on these considerations the Republic of Tajikistan within the framework of the United Nations Organization has initiated declaration of the year 2013 "The International Year of Water Cooperation."

7. Ironically enough, recent years, possessing enormous water resources Tajikistan continues to experience persistent shortage of electricity in winter time which causes suffering to population, social infrastructure, and industrial production. Therefore, achieving energy independence for Tajikistan is not just an idle question, but a matter of vital importance, solution of which will have impact on further social and economic development of the country.

Following this strategic objective, on October 26 this year, the Government of Tajikistan has made a special statement which notes the steadfast position of the nation's leadership in implementation of hydropower projects, primarily the construction of Roghun HPP with consideration of national and regional interests, and in this matter Tajikistan is ready for close cooperation with its neighbours. This position was reiterated recent years by President Emomali Rahmon from rostra of the 63rd and 64th UN GA as well as the Copenhagen Summit on Climate Change and other international forums on water issues.

Technical feasibility, economic profitability, and environmental safety of Roghun had been tested many times and this project never was viewed unfavorable, however, the Government of the Republic of Tajikistan expressing its good will and desire for an open and transparent dialogue with all interested parties has appealed to the World Bank, which is represented as the UN authorized entity, for conducting another independent international expertise of the project.

In response to this request, at the moment, feasibility study and environmental and social impacts assessment are being successfully conducted; there are two working groups of international experts involved, one on technical, economic, and dam safety issues, second one deals on socio-ecological aspect .

The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan fruitfully cooperates with international consultants, a group of international experts, the World Bank, and the public of downstream countries on the results of the above-mentioned studies. These studies cover a wide range of issues, including security, payback, reservoir filling period, water management, social and environmental impacts and, therefore, should not cause any concerns voiced by some countries.

The Government of the Republic of Tajikistan, in coordination with international consultants, the World Bank's group of experts and specialists, is not considering the intermediate construction of the Roghun HPP's first stage, but the implementation of the whole project. Tajikistan is strongly supporting international consultants to successfully complete assessment and waiting for results of the international expertise, while conducting repair- and-rehabilitation activities in the Roghun construction site.

To this day, there were no significant disagreements between the Tajik side and the consortium.

Overall, while implementing this project, Tajikistan will remain committed to earlier agreements and observe the principles of transparency and corporate governance respecting the existing rules of the World Bank.

8. In today's complex and interdependent world we must achieve a greater unity of the purposes and actions in order to counter the new emerging transnational challenges and threats like terrorism, religious extremism, militant radicalism, drug and arms trafficking, illegal migration, and so on.

Along with destroying military infrastructure of international terrorism and blocking its channels for political, military, and financial supports, it is necessary to strengthen cooperation in the field of combating the root causes, jointly seek solutions to the problems of poverty, overcoming the costs of globalization, economic and financial crisis, and regional conflicts.

9. Drug smuggling is a very serious transnational threat in the OSCE region, which thrives because of unsettled boundaries, lack of the special technical equipment, and lack of coordination between anti-drug agencies of various countries. Illegal distribution of drugs from Afghanistan poses a challenge not only for the security of Tajikistan because of its nearness, but for entire Europe, too.

According to recent data by the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, the total area of opium cultivation in Afghanistan this year has reached 131,000 hectares which is 7% higher compared to the last year, and the overall illegal drug production amounts to 5,800 metric tons against 3,600 in 2010. Given the high prices and increasing production, the opium cultivation remains the most profitable business in Afghanistan which is around 9% of the country's GDP.

In this regard, we would like to reiterate the initiative of creation of a "Anti-Drug Security Belt Around Afghanistan", which was mentioned in the statement of the President of the Republic of Tajikistan at the 20th Special Session of the UN General Assembly in 1998. The main purpose of the concept is about creation of a unified system for countering drug trafficking not only at the regional level, but also globally. We emphasize the important role of the OSCE in the field of fighting against drug trafficking in the region. For this reason, we express our support for the adoption of the "OSCE's Concept on Combating the Illicit Proliferation of Drugs and Chemical Precursors" proposed by the Lithuanian Chairmanship.

10. The growth trend of the illicit drug trafficking in Afghanistan has a significant impact on the Tajik-Afghan border guarding. We welcome the progress in the implementation of the OSCE border projects in Tajikistan. We look forward with a keen interest in continuation of the OSCE's activities in the framework of the well-known Madrid Ministerial Council Decision which aims to support the efforts of the Government of Tajikistan in further strengthening of the Tajik-Afghan border.

We consider the OSCE Border Management Staff College as the vanguard of anti-terrorism and border activities of the OSCE. Taking into account the escalation of the transnational threats from outside the OSCE the Government of Tajikistan intends to continue to support the functioning of this very important and highly sought college.

11. According to the Tajik Mine Action Centre in Tajikistan from 1992 to the present more than 800 people become victims of landmine explosions, 358 of whom died. The victims are exceptionally civilians, mostly residents of the border villages engaged in agriculture and children. During the next 10 years Tajikistan is going to clear 43 minefields with total area of 11 million square meters.

Accordingly, we call on the coming OSCE Irish Chairmanship and the International Trust Fund to make additional efforts for completion the approval process and early opening of the OSCE Regional Mine Coordination Council in Dushanbe. We stand for the initiative of declaring the Central Asia a mine-free zone.

12. Tajikistan reaffirms its commitments to the formation of Afghanistan as a peaceful, democratic, and economically developed state free of terrorism, extremism, and drug trafficking. We support the results of the International Conferences on Afghanistan recently held in Istanbul and Bonn. Tajikistan is ready to make its contribution to the further stabilization of the situation and economic revival of this friendly neighbouring country.

The history of Afghanistan once again shows that military means alone cannot have success in the country. The international community including OSCE should be ready to assist the country to ensure its security and peaceful development after 2014. It is necessary to agree a comprehensive approach that would involve the simultaneous solution of several important problems especially Afghanistan's socio-economic reconstruction and elaboration of a package plan of its development with specific economic projects and participation of the neighbouring Central Asian states, including Tajikistan.

We are convinced that this goal can be achieved by helping Afghanistan in its electrification and construction of the transport corridors and bridges connecting the country with Central Asia and other OSCE regions. Our country continues to make its own contribution to this issue. It includes the completion of 220kV transmission line from Tajikistan to Afghanistan, commissioning of five bridges and construction of three others over the Panj River, implementation of CASA-1000 project, creation of free economic zones, promotion of the border trade, training of the Afghan civilians and military personnel, and much more.

We believe, it is important to continue further cooperation within the framework of the "Quaternary" uniting Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Russia. The last meeting of the Heads of the "Quaternary" States, which took place in early September 2011 in Dushanbe, proved that this international structure becomes a new format for effective cooperation between Afghanistan and the countries mentioned. "Quaternary" participants share not only common approaches to the security ensuring issues in the region but joint promising economic projects.

Tajikistan supports the implementation of an initiative called "Silk Road" covering Afghanistan and Central Asia and intends to take an active part in it. The subject of the post-conflict reconstruction in Afghanistan is also included in the agenda of the coming Fifth Regional Conference on Economic Cooperation on Afghanistan to be held next spring in Dushanbe.

13. It is well-known that labour migration contributes to economic development and prosperity of the countries of origin and destination. The labour migration is a transnational phenomenon. In order to optimize the process of reaping benefit from migration the countries of origin need to develop an effective migration policy and get international organizations' assistance in establishing a lasting and sustained dialogue with the countries of destination.

On this basis we believe that OSCE has a good potential for rendering such assistance to participating states to protect migrant's rights, promote economic development and improve the human well-being.

14. Unfortunately, until now the process of reforming the OSCE and its adaptation to the today's realities remains incomplete because of the lack of consensus among participating states. Today, it is extremely important to complete the process of transforming of the OSCE into a full-fledged international organization and increase its ability to effectively pursue its goals.

In this regard, we believe that the adoption of the Charter will accelerate the development and entering into force of Convention on OSCE's personality, privileges, and immunities. We are convinced that it is time to significantly increase the role of the OSCE Secretary General as well as to evaluate the OSCE field presence on the basis of analysis of fulfilment of mandates and regulations in accordance with Paragraph 41 of the Charter for European Security.

15. Tajikistan welcomes the joint efforts aimed at deepening cooperation between OSCE and UN, CIS, CSTO, SCO, and OIC in areas of conflict prevention, strengthening international and regional security, combating terrorism, organized crime and drug trafficking, rational use of natural resources, and energy and food security.

16. Tajikistan consistently advocates for a balance between the three dimensions of the OSCE and as always gives a priority to ensuring human rights and fundamental freedoms. We reaffirm our commitments within the OSCE and support continuing an active dialogue with our partners in the entire range of the human rights issues.

This year, the Government of Tajikistan effectively communicated on these issues with the OSCE, the European Union and the United States. OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media Dunja Mijatovic visited our country twice. Only a few days ago, on October 29-30 we jointly with abovementioned structure of OSCE held the 13th Central Asian Conference on Mass Media which was attended by more than 100 journalists, representative of NGOs, and parliaments of the region. Also, earlier on October 25 the Fourth Meeting on Human Rights called "Tajikistan and the European Union" was held in Dushanbe during which a wide range of issues related to pluralism and observance of basic human rights and freedom.

17. We continue our support to the active role of the OSCE with regard to protection of human rights issues. It is necessary to react timely to increasing racial intolerance and xenophobia in the OSCE area. It is intolerated any more action would be taken by the extremist groups and neo-Nazis.

18. We have a unique opportunity to strengthen and enhance the main purpose of the Organization – to serve for a broad, open, and equal political dialogue between participating states on key issues of security and cooperation in Europe. Tajikistan expresses its willingness for a constructive and fruitful interaction with the coming Irish Chairmanship and OSCE participating states in order to achieve this noble goal.