
Chairmanship: Finland**REPORT OF THE CHAIRMANSHIP OF THE
ASIAN CONTACT GROUP (SPAIN), TO THE HELSINKI
MINISTERIAL COUNCIL ON THE 2008 WORK WITH THE
ASIAN PARTNERS FOR CO-OPERATION**

This year has been a year of considerable achievement by the Asian Partners, given the interesting and productive dynamics that characterise the Asian Contact Group, and the stimulating contribution brought to the OSCE's debate by such a varied region.

The work of the Asian Contact Group, and the broader dialogue with the Asian Partners, this year has continued along three main pillars. First of all, the Spanish Chairmanship has endeavoured to continue deepening dialogue along the three dimensions of security. Secondly, it has sought to provide continuity with previous achievements and follow-up to recommendations made in previous years. Thirdly, it has continued to foster and support new initiatives for which the Asian Partners themselves brought full ownership.

The year started with important input from the Madrid Ministerial Council. Three major documents were adopted in Madrid, which dictated the main thrust of our work in 2008. First of all, the OSCE Ministers had adopted the unprecedented decision on OSCE engagement with Afghanistan, whereby for the first time the OSCE participating States specifically decided on an assistance package to a Partner for Co-operation. Secondly, the Ministerial Declaration on the Partners for Co-operation whereby the participating States welcomed the increased engagement by the Partners for Co-operation in the OSCE, noting that, over the years, a solid foundation has been laid for a strengthened partnership. They further underlined the importance of dialogue and co-operation with the Partners for Co-operation, exploring the scope for wider sharing of OSCE norms, principles and commitments with them. Thirdly, the Permanent Council decision on the adoption of a Partnership Fund, an initiative that Spain had so supported against all odds and could only finally meet consensus after protracted and sensitive negotiations.

The Contact Group in 2008 held five meetings, concentrating on a number of issues in all three dimensions. These have ranged from counter-terrorism to border management and security, police activities and anti-trafficking. Following previous recommendations to strengthen relations with the ASEAN Regional Forum, discussion took place on the outcome of last March's ARF Seminar on CSBMs and preventive diplomacy, hosted by Germany and to which the Secretariat and the Chairmanship had contributed. This discussion was aimed at providing continuity with past discussion in the context of the Contact Group. Innovation was provided through an address to the Contact Group by the Head of the OSCE Centre in

Dushanbe, to brief participants on the scope of the Centre's activities, with focus on those activities that were of relevance to Afghanistan and Mongolia as Asian Partners. This innovative address was universally praised and allowed to broaden the scope of dialogue and enter more concrete details of the OSCE's range of activities in the field. Hopefully, this also laid the foundations for more similar addresses in the future by other heads of OSCE field operations.

The Contact Group also held a solid discussion on the outcome of the Madrid Ministerial Council, focussing on the three decisions highlighted above. The Asian Partners indeed renewed the assurances of their determination to continue deepening dialogue with the OSCE and make best use of the Partnership Fund. The fact that two Asian Partners have contributed to the Fund bears witness to their collegiate and co-operative spirit, in line with the OSCE's vision of co-operative security and the underlying notion of mutual assistance with which the participating States over the years have based the whole OSCE architecture.

The 2008 OSCE Afghanistan conference on "Strengthening Co-operation between the OSCE and its Asian Partners for Co-operation to Address Challenges to Security" held in Kabul on 9 and 10 November 2008 was the highlight of the year's work. The conference was articulated over three main substantive sessions: the OSCE's contribution to capacity-building in the OSCE region and the Asian Partners for Co-operation; threats to the common security and stability of the OSCE participating States and the Asian Partners for Co-operation, with particular attention to Central Asia and Afghanistan; and challenges and opportunities in border security and management, including customs modernization.

The conference also brought together high level representatives of the Government of Afghanistan, the international community representatives based in Kabul as well as the representatives of participating States and the Asian Partners for Co-operation based in Vienna or in the national capitals. It was specifically this important mix of people that led to a lively discussion and added a much valued range of different perspectives.

To have had this conference in Kabul, focussing on Afghanistan but also on the broader security implications for the region of Central Asia was in itself of particular importance and high symbolic value. As our host H.E. Dr. Rangin Dadfar Spanta, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, pointed out in his welcoming remarks, Afghanistan in the last few years has taken great strides on the path toward a stable and prosperous state. Despite such progress, however, many challenges continue facing this country and the Central Asian region, requiring continued international support.

Many of the issues included on the agenda are indeed threats to security that are trans-national, trans-boundary and trans-regional in their very nature. Threats such as trafficking in narcotics and terrorism are indeed a global threat affecting us all, and cannot be circumscribed within the boundaries of one country. At the same time, they cannot be faced by one single State or organization in isolation, they require solid and systematic co-operation. As has been rightly noted in the debate, there is a wealth of expertise and best practices that can be shared among all states in the region, both participating States and the Asian Partners.

The third main element that emerged from the debate is that regional co-operation also implies an exchange of experience between different regions. A number of concrete

examples drawn from the recent experience in Southeast Europe that have much relevance to Afghanistan and Central Asia were duly raised.

Concerning Afghanistan, the underlying thread throughout the conference was that the OSCE does have a role to play in Afghanistan. This rests on three pillars. First of all, the OSCE's co-operative and comprehensive approach to security is precisely what participants said is needed to address the challenges facing Afghanistan and this region. Secondly, Afghanistan's remarkable determination in espousing the OSCE's values ensures any OSCE endeavours would not be in vain. The third and most important pillar is the decision taken by our Foreign Ministers in Madrid on OSCE engagement with Afghanistan. The Afghan Government once again in Kabul expressed its wholehearted support to the package of 16 projects developed by the Secretariat aimed at supporting capacity-building in areas such as customs, border management and security, counter-narcotics and police.

Possible OSCE support to next year's elections in Afghanistan has also been mentioned. For the OSCE this is not an easy decision to make. However, Spain has full confidence that the Afghan Government's request will be considered with extreme seriousness by the participating States, as was the case in 2004 and 2005.

One can hardly speak about possible assistance to Afghanistan without thinking of the Partnership Fund. As noted in the Secretary General's report to the Permanent Council, in its first year of operation the fund has already proven its strong usefulness as a tool to assist deepening dialogue with the Partners for Co-operation. Concerning the Asian Partners, one project has been implemented aimed at supporting the Afghan election process. This is a contribution by the Secretariat, jointly with ODIHR, to share the OSCE's vast experience and expertise on election monitoring, which hopefully will help strengthen the capacity of the Afghan Independent Central Election Commission to deliver a free and fair election next year. Spain remains ready to participate in further dialogue with the Partners for Co-operation on future use of the Fund for the purpose of assisting their efforts at promoting common security and stability.

Last year human security had made a prominent entry in the OSCE debate, thanks mostly to the good efforts of Japan, who had spearheaded an informal workshop in Vienna. A follow-up informal workshop was held after the summer break also in Vienna.

The workshop focused on concrete human security projects within the OSCE region in order to understand the concept in a practical way. The workshop was articulated in two main parts. In the first part, speakers identified the areas in which both the OSCE and UN have been active, the latter through its Human Security Trust Fund. Speakers highlighted the usefulness of the Fund in the OSCE region. They also highlighted that, in drawing on the expertise of the OSCE, participating States can ensure that their responses to issues affecting human security are timely, focused and appropriate.

In the second part, speakers pointed out how fields in which the OSCE possesses particular expertise, such as human trafficking and landmines, are also fields that have been extensively targeted by the Human Security Trust Fund, bringing the example of specific projects undertaken under it to make their case. These examples showed the concrete areas of common interest and concern between the OSCE and the UN Trust Fund and how mutual co-operation between the OSCE and UN was useful in these areas.

There was one issue in which progress was below the initial expectations. The implementation of FSC.DEC/01/08 on outreach concerning the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Matters. In the decision, the participating States invited the Partners for Co-operation to start voluntarily implementing the Code of Conduct, and in particular participate in the share of information on their armed forces that is regulated by the Code. Despite the systematic efforts of subsequent Chairmanships of the FSC and of the Austrian co-ordinator, regrettably an agreement could not be reached on the Partners' participation in the questionnaire. Spain stands ready in the future to continue supporting dialogue on this issue, hoping that a positive outcome can be determined. Far from limiting the sovereign rights of countries, the Code of Conduct provides increased transparency and confidence among neighbouring states. Furthermore, the participation by the Partners for Co-operation would be on an entirely voluntary basis, therefore not affecting their sovereign rights.

This year has been a year of important achievements. The gratitude of the Chair of the Contact Group goes to the Finnish OSCE Chairmanship for its regular support and also to the Secretary General and the Secretariat for their tireless efforts. Our work depends on them. Most importantly, though, our gratitude goes to the Asian Partners themselves for their determination to make our dialogue a success. In just one month Finland will be taking over the leadership of a healthy and vibrant group.