

# 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.

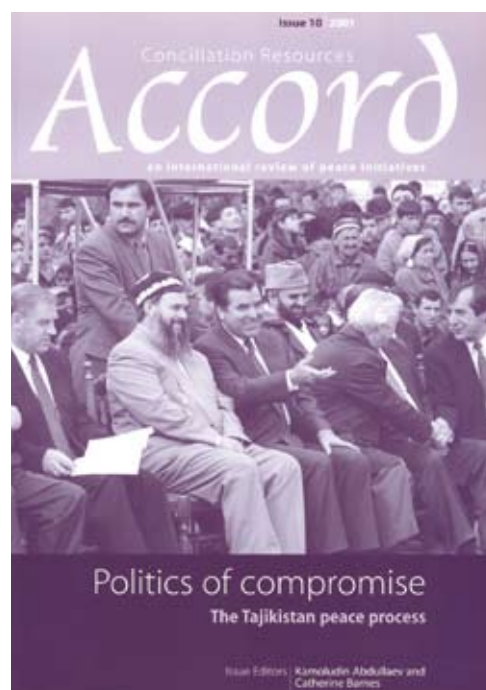
This event, deemed a historic chapter in OSCE-Tajik co-operation, was significant for another reason: It symbolized a turning point, from looking back at the past to looking towards the future. The OSCE presence in Tajikistan is the Organization's longest-running operation in Central Asia, having been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

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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.

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

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

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.