

The Role of the OSCE Field Presences to Support Maritime and Inland Waterways Security and Environmental Concerns

Presented by: William Hanlon, Economic and Environmental Officer, OSCE Mission to Georgia.
E-mail: william.hanlon@osce.org

Introduction

First I wish to thank the in-coming Finnish Chairmanship for their decision to choose a topic for the next Economic Forum that combines elements from the previous two Economic Forums: first transportation and then environmental concerns. This is very helpful from the perspective of the field because it gives a common thread to our work and permits us to build on our experience and past successes. This allows us to be more efficient and effective and gives us greater opportunity to successfully follow up on the chosen topic.

Subsequently, I think there is a great deal that we can do in the field presences of the OSCE in increasing security and protecting the environment for maritime and inland waterways. I will speak particularly about the potentials that I see for Georgia, but I am sure there are many other possibilities for OSCE activities, and I would like to invite my fellow EEOs and colleagues from the different field presences to contribute their ideas during this closing debate.

Background

During this conference we have heard several times about the environmental challenges that exist for the Black Sea, and these of course are very important issues for Georgia. Non – indigenous species, eutrophication, oil pollution, etc. have already had a significant environmental impact on human health, biodiversity, and fisheries.

Furthermore, environmental problems on the Black Sea waters of Georgia will only continue to increase as anthropogenic pressures intensify in the coastal zone due to economic growth. GDP growth in Georgia is predicted to be over 10% in 2008, Foreign direct investment is also expected to double in 2008 and trade is steadily increasing as Georgia becomes an ever import trade corridor linking Europe to Asia.

Georgia is subsequently looking to expand its overall port capacity in order to meet growing demand. Georgia already has an existing oil port in Supsa which is transporting oil directly to oil tankers and oil is also transferred by rail from Azerbaijan to ships in the port of Poti. There are further port facilities in Batumi. Several companies have recently indicated their interest to build a new oil refinery on the Black Sea coast and to develop new port facilities on existing or new territories. I believe that as the "Transport Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia" (TRACECA) becomes further realized, maritime transport to and from Georgia will increase.

We also can not underestimate the challenges concerning security; these are obviously important in the Georgian context. Threats from terrorism events are of the gravest importance and represent both a direct threat to State economic security and the international community. First there is the physical threat to people themselves. Also, an event that disrupts the transportation links would negatively impact commerce. The ports of course could also potentially serve as a transport mechanism for terrorists, drugs, trafficking of human beings, etc.

Recommendations

So, where does the OSCE fit in from its capacity from the field presence? I believe that we are well positioned in the Mission to approach these issues, and furthermore, from the OSCE's security perspective, it is important that we do so. There are several concrete areas, and in general I believe we can categorize these into three general themes: implementation of current obligations, capacity building and awareness raising.

1. International obligations. So far we have heard of several substantial existing initiatives by various organizations working on maritime environment and security issues on the Black Sea and in Georgia. I know there are more. I believe that these initiatives are important, and that it is difficult for a transition country like Georgia to fulfill these along with all its other commitments. We in the Mission are positioned to help the countries to fulfill these obligations. This will have a positive effect for the country and for regional co-operation platforms.

2. Capacity building: We can work with the Georgian government as well as other international organizations to identify areas where we can support current capacity needs in the area of maritime environmental protection and security. We in the Mission have already contacted the Georgian government and we are in a planning phase to hold a workshop on Oil Spill Planning. Georgia is now revising its National Oil Spill Contingency Plan and has asked the Mission for assistance in preparing this effort. I am sure that we could identify other specific areas that would benefit from capacity building projects after further consultations with the Government.

3. Confidence building in conflict zones: The conflict zone of Abkhazia and Georgia share a coastline on the Black Sea. Close to the boundary of Abkhazia lies the port of Supsa, and an oil spill from a vessel or the port itself could migrate into area controlled by Abkhazia. What would happen in this situation? I do not know, but I would be very concerned and I believe it is important to address these issues before such an incident occurs. We can also use the opportunity to use this environmental issue as a bridge between the sides and build confidence through dialogue and joint environmental planning exercises. Here I think the ENVSEC initiative can play a key role. It is already working to provide support on several environmental initiatives in both regions, and I believe we are well positioned to build on these activities to promote dialogue between the sides on maritime environmental issues.

4. Port security and anti-terrorism: This is a cross dimensional issue that we could address from both the Mission's Economic and Environmental Dimension and our Anti-terrorism efforts. We could explore the issue more deeply and look for the niches that could be fulfilled. I have already spoken to our Anti-terrorism Advisor in the Mission, and he has already voiced several ideas where we can fit in, primarily by providing technical port security training sessions and workshops on best practices in port security to practitioners in Georgia.

5. Environmental awareness raising: Aarhus Centres have an important role in informing the public and could further bring them into decision making processes related to maritime environmental issues. The Mission could expand the outreach of the Aarhus Centres to include more dialogue and outreach to better inform the public. For example we sponsor a radio show on environmental issues every two weeks through the Aarhus Centre, and several radio programmes could be conducted on specific coastal environmental issues such as

Integrated Coastal Zone Management planning, marine pollution, evasive species introduction in the Black Sea, etc. We could even create a new Aarhus Centre or Public Environmental Information Centre in a port city that could further promote environmental awareness raising directly to the coastal region.

6. Supporting good governance issues in the port cities: I believe that supporting local governments themselves in the port cities will help to promote safe and secure transport of good. For example we can work on corruption and build on several initiatives of the Belgian Chairmanship which has been promoting good governance in customs. We in the Mission are also supporting several Good Governance Centres that are placed in several municipalities to help them manage public assets. We could open similar centres in port cities to help support the cities' management of their infrastructure and to provide services to the citizens. This will further support democratic processes in these municipalities that would have a direct positive effect on both the security and environmental management of the cities.

Conclusion

These are just a few ideas, and I am sure that we all together will come to more specific and substantial initiatives. I would also finally like to stress that we have the best chance of success in the field if we all work together. We can only reach our potential if we have the support of the OSCE Delegations, the OSCE Secretariat, and from our existing and future partners. With these pieces in place, we will be able to fully assist the in-coming Finnish Chairmanship achieve success in its priorities.