



FORUM FOR SECURITY CO-OPERATION

Ready to lead on politico-military issues

Belarus puts focus on practical projects

An OSCE assessment team inspects the ammunitions demolition pit at the Lohur military firing range near Dushanbe.
Photo: OSCE/Conflict Prevention Centre

Belarus took on the Chairmanship of the OSCE's Forum for Security Co-operation on 13 April, shortly after the country's new Permanent Representative, Alyaksandr Sychoy, arrived in Vienna. A former Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Sychoy gives a preview of the projects-oriented path of the Forum's politico-military agenda in 2005 and says the autonomous, decision-making body should continue adapting its guiding principles to suit the evolving global security scene.

BY ALYAKSANDR SYCHOV

Four project proposals for Tajikistan, on-site visits to Belarus, assessment missions to Kazakhstan and Kaliningrad, and a series of workshops and seminars: These are just some of the on-the-ground activities stemming from the flow of requests from participating States for practical assistance in disarmament, arms control, and confidence- and security-building measures.

Meticulously reviewing every single one of these requests is one of the many core tasks of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC). Without too much fanfare, through patient and persistent dialogue, consultation and negotiation, the independent body has been able to deftly carve its politico-military niche within

the Organization's comprehensive security structure.

Belarus has always been an active advocate for a vigorous Forum, and we are particularly honoured to have taken over the Chairmanship for the first time. We were, in fact, the first country, in July 2003, to turn to the Forum's assistance mechanism to address the security and destruction of our stockpile of surplus small arms and light weapons. This initiative is about to bear fruit: Staff from the Conflict Prevention Centre and experts from the United Kingdom, Switzerland and Spain have completed a series of four assessment visits to Belarus and are drawing up a project concept based on their findings.

The question uppermost in everyone's mind at the start of a new four-month Forum Chairmanship is its chosen focus

and priorities. The current FSC Troika — Azerbaijan, Belarus and Belgium — has opted for a pragmatic approach, in tune with the Organization’s overall reform drive towards greater efficiency. And so, under the Azerbaijani Chairmanship at the beginning of the year, we decided to travel down a continuous path in the form of a coherent agenda for the whole of 2005.

Our traditional core activities, designed to prevent conflict between States, are unchanged since they remain as vital as ever. The challenge lies in putting our landmark politico-military instruments into operation and building on them to ensure that they serve us in the most open, transparent and effective way possible in response to today’s new risks and realities.

The instruments I am referring to are the politically-binding OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW), adopted in 2000, and the OSCE Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition, adopted in 2003. There is also, of course, the Vienna Document 1999, which has been serving as the impetus for regular information exchange between participating States’ military services — to name just one in a comprehensive range of confidence- and security-building measures. The FSC’s latest decisions, aimed at stricter controls over the exporting and brokering of man-portable air defence systems (MANPADs) and other arms and weapons, show that we are keeping up with emerging security demands.

URGENT TASKS

So far, since the adoption of the five-step assistance scheme under the SALW Document in 2002, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan have approached the FSC for concrete help in destroying and managing their stockpiles. Each request is at a different stage of project development, with that of Tajikistan being the most advanced.

These three countries have also asked for assistance in destroying their surplus ammunition, as have the Russian Federation and Ukraine. Horrific images of the disastrous explosion in south-eastern Ukraine in May 2004 are still fresh in our minds. Sparked by an accidental fire at a huge dump of Soviet-era artillery shells, which was waiting to be decommissioned, the blasts lasted eight days, killing five people, wounding hundreds, and sending thousands of residents fleeing from their homes. Ukraine has approached the OSCE for assistance in the region’s clean-up operation.

Demand for help in disposing of stocks



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of liquid rocket fuel — also known as “mélange” — has also been growing, with requests in from Armenia (872 tons), Uzbekistan (more than 1,000 tons) and Ukraine (up to 17,000 tons). Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are among several countries that are expected to request assistance in launching their own mélange projects.

Mélange is usually stored in barrels that are prone to corrosion over time. Once leaked, this highly toxic, volatile and explosive chemical substance can have a debilitating impact on the health of whole communities and their environment. Land contamination is likely to linger for almost a century.

In Armenia, the OSCE’s strategy for assistance has been making considerable headway since the start of the year. The chosen

Inside the surplus ammunition storage site of Tajikistan’s Ministry of Interior



OSCE YURI KRYVONOS

An international team examines shoulder-fired “Strela-1M” anti-aircraft missiles near Sluck, Belarus, prior to destroying them.



Remnants of conflict in Tajikistan

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Properly stored mortar shells in a facility in Dushanbe

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method of neutralizing mélange will result in a positive byproduct — a liquid fertilizer that can be used by the country’s farmers. This follows the lead of a pilot project in 2002, which successfully converted 450 tons of mélange into fertilizer for western Georgia’s acid soil.

The mélange dilemma is shared by enough participating States to merit its being addressed by a special OSCE programme. An OSCE-wide workshop in July 2005 on the most effective way to dispose of stocks of the substance might just provide a perfect opportunity to present a special scheme. The FSC would be wise to give this matter serious consideration, especially since the

inherent hazards — encompassing political, human and socio-economic concerns — epitomize the OSCE’s “comprehensive security” approach.

PULLING TOGETHER

It is obvious, however, that the best-laid plans can start making a dent in the problem only if matched by financial support. Disposing of surplus ammunition, explosive material and detonating devices is extremely costly and time-consuming; in the OSCE area alone, the tasks would involve an amount several times the annual budget of the Organization. Since funding depends on voluntary contributions, we will all have to pull together to get the greatest possible mileage out of our efforts and our resources.

A model in productive partnership is a training workshop in Tajikistan that recently brought together 44 local law enforcers and members of the country’s armed forces. The aim was to bolster their ability to stem the spread of accumulated weapons, including MANPADS, and to prevent them from falling into the hands of terrorists and criminal groups. Following the OSCE’s best practices, the group also learned how to improve the physical safety and security of stockpiles.

The gathering, in early April, was initiated by the FSC, organized by the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe, and supported by the National Drugs Control Agency of Tajikistan, the U.S. Defense Threat Reduction Agency and the OSCE’s Conflict Prevention Centre.

The Belarus Chairmanship will seek to encourage similar joint activities and stimulate the project-development process by encouraging closer co-operation between the Forum, potential project donors, the

Anton Martynyuk, Officer in the Conflict Prevention Centre, and Capt. Philippe Houliat, a French expert (back to camera), train Tajik personnel on the proper defusal of mines.



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OSCE Secretariat, field operations, and regional and international organizations.

Let me emphasize that during our FSC Chairmanship, the Belarus Delegation is ready to discuss new initiatives and proposals from every participating State. Whether the debate is on the merits of a proposed seminar on military doctrines, or on contributing to the Organization's concept on border security and on its fight against terrorism, we should persist in examining the relevance and value of our tried-and-tested

instruments in the politico-military sphere.

Our Chairmanship is not setting out impossible, "super-goals"; rather, we are ready to roll up our sleeves for some serious and pragmatic work geared towards practical results. As German Ambassador Dieter Boden reminded us at the first session of the FSC under our Chairmanship, "We are judged on what we finish, not on what we start."



OSCE/MIKHAIL LINSTAFIEV

Alyaksandr Sychov became Permanent Representative of Belarus to the OSCE on 24 March. From 2000 until his current assignment, he was his country's Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs, a post he first held from 1992 to 1994. He has also served as the Permanent Representative of Belarus to the United Nations in New York and as Head of the Foreign Economic Relations Department of the Foreign Ministry of Belarus. Ambassador Sychov is a graduate of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

Surplus munitions: hazardous remnants of wars and conflicts

One day in November 2004, when an OSCE team of four experts entered an ammunition warehouse in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, they were astounded by the chaotic scene that greeted them. Grenade launchers, man-portable air defence systems (MANPADS), Kalashnikovs, home-made rifles, artillery shells, unexploded ordnance and fused anti-personnel mines — among a bewildering assortment of menacing-looking munitions — were strewn haphazardly in piles and boxes on the floor or left casually leaning against the wall.

The thought that a deadly blast could be triggered by a simple mobile phone signal, by an accidental human touch, or by a slight shifting of some of the containers sent a

shudder through the inspection group, which included representatives of nine Tajik ministries and agencies.

"We estimated that the total potential explosive power of the ammunition would be capable of wreaking havoc on a vast expanse of the densely-inhabited district where the depot is," reported team leader Anton Martynyuk, Officer in the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre.

"We simply could not believe that the facility had been around for 10 years, just 50 metres from a kindergarten and 100 metres from a prison," he added. "Considering that the storage conditions and the level of skills of the security personnel were completely unacceptable by any standards, it's a miracle that nothing disastrous has happened

so far. And this was only one of eight sites we visited in Dushanbe."

Responding to a request for a similar on-the-spot visit, this time from the Russian Federation, an OSCE team is set to inspect facilities in the northwest region of Kaliningrad. Supported by Denmark, the experts will map out a plan for the initial destruction of some 5,000 metric tons of surplus conventional ammunition, which are in a precarious state.

It is no wonder that Kaliningrad is often referred to as a ticking time-bomb, what with its stockpiles of deteriorating conventional weapons and munitions, including missiles, maritime and aerial bombs, and anti-personnel landmines. The decomposing explosives loom threateningly over a region which, as it

happens, is host to a special economic zone.

The Tajik and Russian cases dramatize the fact that the state of surplus munitions is rapidly deteriorating and that the risks posed by these hazardous remnants of wars and conflicts all across the OSCE area are growing constantly. In Russia, the ammunition heaps are vestiges

of the Cold War. In the regions of Tajikistan, munitions at five highly populated storage points are grim reminders of six devastating years of civil strife in the 1990s — as well as of the uphill battle against the multi-billion dollar trade in drugs and weapons originating in neighbouring Afghanistan.



OSCE/ANTON MARTYNYUK

Standing guard over a bewildering assortment of surplus small arms at Tajikistan's Ministry of Interior