

***Address by Mr Jaap de Hoop Scheffer,
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***"Rebuilding the Silk Road:
the OSCE experience in Central Asia"***

Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs

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(12 min.; met vertaling ± 25-30 min.)

(Introduction)

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a great honour for me to speak at this distinguished institute.

Let me clarify right away that I am here in my capacity of Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. As you will know, the OSCE -chairmanship currently rests with the Netherlands.

(Comprehensive security)

If there is one concept that defines the OSCE's unique mission, it is "comprehensive security". Security is more than security in a military sense. Security may also be negatively affected by developments in the economic arena (money-laundering, trafficking etc.), in the arena of the environment and that of human rights.

To understand why economic and environmental security matter we only need to look at the large amounts of uranium waste in former Soviet Union countries. Or at the size of the Aral Sea today compared to its size, say, 15 years ago.

The concept of human security refers to our belief that democracy, rule of law, and respect for minorities and human rights are preconditions for security. Non-respect for minority rights and human rights ultimately means tensions in society, and thus potential for internal conflict. According to the OSCE, minority questions must be settled *within* existing borders, peacefully and with respect for the rights of all concerned.

Max van der Stoel, a former Dutch Foreign Minister and the first OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, put it as follows: "the key is to strike a balance between minority and majority interests that allows for all sides to enjoy their individual identities while realizing and valuing shared interests."

In recent years we have seen several conflicts erupt over minority issues in the OSCE region, but we also successfully *prevented* several ethnic conflicts, in Europe as well as Central Asia.

(Conflict prevention in Central Asia)

Let me focus your attention on Central Asia, a region that is of interest both to the OSCE and to China. Four Central Asian countries, apart from Russia of course, are members of both the OSCE and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation; three of them border on your country.

During his time as High Commissioner, Mr Van der Stoel played a key role in preventing ethnic conflict in Central Asia, most notably in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan: when these two countries became independent, tension quickly arose over the position of the Russian minorities left within their borders. Van der Stoel entered into a discrete dialogue with the leaders in both countries and managed to convince them that it would be wise to improve the access of ethnic Russians to education and to upgrade the status of their language. With the bone of contention removed, tension subsided. Van der Stoel also helped to prevent the escalation of ethnic tensions in the Ferghana Valley.

The lesson is simple: through discrete mediation the OSCE can contribute to improving minority rights and strengthening the cohesion of the states concerned -- and achieve both at the same time.

However, there is no denying that the situation in Central Asia is still very fragile. As the OSCE's CiO, I had the opportunity to travel to Central Asia from 6 to 11 July. As well as visiting Dutch troops serving with ISAF in Kabul, I spoke to the leaders of Kazakhstan,

Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. (I had already visited Turkmenistan on a separate occasion.)

By far the dominant common concern of all the people I spoke with was Afghanistan. The country remains a potential source of instability, and tensions between different ethnic groups could spread to other countries in the region. There was also concern about the revival of the drugs production in Afghanistan and the destabilising effects this has on their own countries. Recent research shows that 70 to 90 percent of the heroin that ends up in Europe comes from Afghanistan. According to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime, drugs account for 20 percent of the Afghan economy, and the percentage is growing, despite the international effort being undertaken to rebuild and stabilise Afghanistan. The ancient "Silk Route" is fast becoming the favourite drugs route. The international community, China included, must join forces if we want to prevent Afghanistan sliding back into its former role as Central Asia's "heart of darkness".

(Trafficking)

This leads me to the more general problem of "trafficking".

The Dutch Chairmanship proposed "trafficking" as a major theme for this year's OSCE Economic Forum in Prague, and note the word "Economic".

Trafficking is not a theoretical problem: it is about the multibillion dollar business of drugs trafficking; it is also about women and children being forced into prostitution and what is effectively slavery; and it is about heavily armed criminal structures infiltrating our economic and – ultimately – political structures.

Trafficking concerns China as much as it concerns the OSCE region. International criminal networks have diversified their activities in a way that would make multinationals envious. Research from the Netherlands shows that in 50 per cent of the human trafficking cases, the perpetrators are also involved in drugs or small arms trading.

Last month, in Vienna, the OSCE adopted an Action Plan to Combat Trafficking. It provides member states with a practical tool kit. I believe that the Action Plan contains suggestions that are useful for Asia; I hope China will itself adopt the proposals it considers useful and promote them in a regional context as well.

(Shanghai Cooperation Organisation – SCO)

In my discussions as OSCE's CiO with the Central Asian government leaders in July, other typical OSCE-priorities were mentioned as well: the need to fight terrorism; the need for improved economic cooperation, focusing in particular on transport and communication, food production, and water and energy management; and human rights, including freedom of the media, democratisation, and a moratorium on death penalty. Inevitably, these are, or will become priorities for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

The birth of the SCO "marks an event of historic significance" as an author in this Institute's respected "Foreign Affairs Journal" puts it.

The ease with which the SCO -countries reached agreement on reducing forces in the border areas constitutes a "unique precedent of peaceful settlement of territorial disputes in Asia" as another of your authors rightly claims.

As the current Korean crisis demonstrates, Asia is in dire need of effective regional security structures. So China deserves praise for its lead role in establishing such structures.

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Returning to our common concern for stability in Central Asia, it seems to me that the next big challenge for the SCO is to increase regional cooperation in the fields of economics and human rights. Take the trafficking issue I have just highlighted. Trafficking cannot be effectively dealt with through the use of force alone. As I indicated, there are important economic and human rights aspects to be addressed as well.

We would all love to see the "Silk Road" regain its historic significance, not as a "blood road" along which human beings, drugs and weapons are trafficked, but as a highway for economic, cultural and political development, a highway that benefits all honest stakeholders. I am confident that in a "big community spirit" and on the basis of "equal partnership", we will be able to gradually achieve this ambition.

It is in that spirit that I have invited the SCO to participate in a seminar on "Terrorism and Human Rights", to be held in The Hague on 18 September. Apart from the OSCE-countries, we have invited the UN, NATO, the EU, the Council of Europe and the Organisation of the Islamic Conference. We would be delighted to have a representative of the SCO with us as well.

Thank you for your attention.