

Conflict prevention and peace building: ways forward for OSCE engagement in Central Asia

Presentation at the WISE Event, 10 December 2015, Helsinki

Maria Chepurina, OSCE PA International Secretariat

Today the OSCE area is far from the settled cooperative order it was expected to be 20-25 years ago. However, if in the 1960s, 80% of armed conflicts ended with victory of one of the sides, in the 1990s the percentage dropped to 25%, and between 2000-2014 to 17,2%. The conflicts over the past years have been following different patterns in which mediation and peace building play an ever more important role. Unfortunately, there is always a strategy for war but not so often a strategy for peace, and this is exactly where the Organization comes in to play a role.

Almost all current armed conflicts are intra-state, which means they happen within the country borders, leading to the civilian population being the main victim. It is thus through more active cooperation and engagement with the civil society force that a durable peace solutions can be found and sustained.

Since the early 1990s, the OSCE has had a visible presence on the ground in all 5 central Asian states, several of which have gone through painful conflicts over the past 20 years. The OSCE field presences assist governments, institutions but also people and communities in transforming the commitments of the OSCE participating S into practices. Working on issues to support early warning, conflict prevention, crisis management and post-conflict rehabilitation. The OSCE is also one of the not so numerous larger European organizations which has a direct mandate of working and supporting the peace, security and cooperation in the region, which puts it even more at the forefront.

The OSCE has been operative in supporting the peacebuilding and post-conflict efforts. In Kyrgyzstan, one of the areas of focus has been rebuilding public trust in the police forces whose reputation has been tarnished during the Osh 2010 crisis. To strengthen public trust in the police and ensure transparency and openness, the OSCE invested in professional training and facilitated the drafting of a new law on co-operation between police and civil society. The Community Security initiative, which ran from 2011-2015 also contributed to increasing trust in police forces and creating joint public-state policing.

Tordenskjoldsgade 1, 1055 Copenhagen K., Denmark

Phone: +45 33 37 80 40 - Fax: +45 33 37 80 30 - osce@oscepa.dk - www.oscepa.org

Another example is the **OSCE Border Management staff college**: educational institution offering courses and training activities on border management to OSCE participating States but also partners for cooperation, including Afghanistan. Specific focus on women engagement with around 40% of all participants in 2014 – female.

Reconciliation and fact-finding: the OSCE parliamentarians, less bound by strict inter-governmental agreements, have also been active in supporting the Central Asian states' peacebuilding efforts, notably through fact-finding mission. In 2010, the President of Kyrgyzstan tasked the OSCE PA Special Representative on Central Asia to coordinate the establishment process of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry in the events in S Kyrgyzstan (Osh) to investigate the facts, determine responsibilities and, make recommendations on accountability measures to ensure non-repetitions of such events.

1. Challenges facing the OSCE:

Is the OSCE adequately equipped to prevent conflict and support mediation and peacebuilding?

- Peacebuilding and conflict prevention are inherent parts of its mandate, already clearly stated in the Helsinki Final Act.
 - The example of Ukraine has shown that the answer is yes. Although an intergovernmental organization – usually considered slow in taking decisions with a minimal impact denominator – the SMM in Ukraine has proven the contrary. One week after the decision was made – over 100 monitors were already trained and deployed throughout Ukraine. The Organization has also used a wide array of available instruments and managed to unite the capacities of its institutions to achieve a swift and solid crisis response.
 - However the general question that has been asked – why neither in Ukraine nor in Osh in 2010 was the Organization unable to foresee the outbreak of violence and devise a conflict prevention response? In both cases worrying signals have been clearly perceived months and even years before the actual crisis outbreak, documented by the missions and then left unanswered.
 - The Organization can only be as strong and as active as the member states allow it to be. OSCE as an inclusive organization. The decision making process, based on the consensus rule, can be one of the explanations to the problem. Role of the hosting states reluctant to accept the realities and adjust the mission's mandate to act on them – another. Gradually decreasing budget of the Organization which does not leave it with sufficient follow up capacities – another. But Ukraine, bringing the organization to the fore, has highlighted the need for a developing the OSCE's capacities in addressing the different phases of the crisis.
2. Growing recognition of importance of track 2 diplomacy. The OSCE has been actively interacting and supporting various civil society groups. Bottom up approach with civil society suggesting some projects to the OSCE, such as national election monitoring programmes.

3. Ways forward:

- The recommendation of the OSCE PA Helsinki +40 project put forward several suggestions for OSCE reform, among which – closer cooperation and engagement with civil society actors and greater autonomy to OSCE institutions.
- The OSCE should also use more the broader approach to security lying at the core of its mandate. It is multidimensional. So are the conflicts challenging peace today. Going back to Central Asia and the explosive Fergana Valley, notably the borders between Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan – the two potential explosive issues are non-delineation and non-demarcation of the border and struggle for allocation of natural resources in the border region. Initiatives to develop joint water management projects between local communities, as well as programmes to inform the population about their rights and obligations in border areas can be one of the steps towards preventing violence outbreaks that can generate inter-state conflicts. With presences on the ground and relevant experience, the OSCE is ideally equipped to support this.
- OSCE cannot solve the problem alone. There is a need for a second track component. Security days, OSCE network of think tanks, OSCE cafes. Alternative diplomacy is needed as if done strategically enhances the more conventional byways of traditional diplomacy. And as we know from jazz, improvisation is all the richer, the more players join in.

4. Conclusion:

What you spend years building, someone could destroy overnight. Build anyway.

Mother Teresa