

# Security Sector Reform in authoritarian regimes: The OSCE experience of police assistance programming in Central Asia

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Since 2002 the OSCE has been engaged in a variety of programmes to help reform the security sectors of Central Asian states.<sup>2</sup> The OSCE Centre in Bishkek has overseen a significant police assistance programme in Kyrgyzstan, and smaller initiatives and activities have been implemented in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Since 2008 the OSCE has been developing a police assistance programme in Tajikistan. Security sector reform is a long-term process, and early breakthroughs in these projects would be unlikely. Nevertheless, this paper suggests that several of these initiatives have clearly failed to achieve their objectives, and in certain cases they may have had a negative impact on the OSCE's credibility in the region as an organization that promotes a comprehensive view of security, which includes attention to human rights and civil liberties.

The interest in police reform by the OSCE in Central Asia fits within a much broader international interest in security sector reform (SSR) programmes, which have grown rapidly since the 1990s. A growing literature on SSR argues that a neutral and effective police force, under civilian oversight, is an important element in processes of peace-building, democratisation and state-building.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, ineffective, weak and politicised security forces may contribute to conflict or make peaceful political change impossible. As Nicole Ball puts it: '...by contributing to insecurity, instability and various forms of conflict, the security bodies were a major part of the problem confronting developing and

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<sup>2</sup> A fuller appraisal of OSCE police assistance programmes in Central Asia was prepared by the author for the Open Society Foundations Occasional Paper series. See David Lewis, 'Reassessing the Role of OSCE Police Assistance Programming in Central Asia', Occasional Paper Series, No. 4. Available at [http://www.soros.org/initiatives/cep/articles\\_publications/publications/occasional-paper-4-20110411](http://www.soros.org/initiatives/cep/articles_publications/publications/occasional-paper-4-20110411).

<sup>3</sup> Much of the literature on SSR is focused on post-conflict environments, much of it in the shape of problem-solving manuals and guidelines. For an overview of the concept, see Nicole Ball, Dylan Hendrickson, 'Trends in Security Sector Reform (SSR): Police, practice and research', Paper given at Workshop on 'New Directions in Security Sector Reform', International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada, 3-4 November 2005; The OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) 'Handbook on Security Sector Reform' (available at: <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/43/25/38406485.pdf>, accessed ...) is the main set of international guidelines for SSR programming and projects. Specifically on police reform, see David H. Bayley, 'Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to Do and How to Do It', US Department of Justice, June 2001.

transitional countries as the end of the 20th century approached'.<sup>4</sup> As a result, SSR has become an important tool in international engagement in post-conflict environments and also in states viewed as potentially unstable or 'fragile'. In the latter camp are many states that have authoritarian regimes, in which the security forces are frequently involved in political repression and widespread abuses of human rights.

Despite the international support for SSR programming, genuine success stories have been rare. Analysts suggest that the impact of SSR programmes tends to be 'superficial, localised and temporary',<sup>5</sup> or that while laudable, the tendency of SSR programmes to downplay political factors is 'ahistorical'.<sup>6</sup> According to two leading advocates of SSR, Ball and Hendrickson, much of the work in SSR is 'misleadingly optimistic about the prospects for change', and much of the policy discussion '...tend[s] to be prescriptive (and technical) in nature, focusing more on outcomes and modalities for delivering assistance, rather than on obstacles to change'.<sup>7</sup> Major recent initiatives, such as the SSR programme in Afghanistan, which has attempted to create a new Afghan National Police Force, have been judged to be largely failures.<sup>8</sup>

The OSCE has so far not developed a concept or doctrine of 'security sector reform', and tends not to use the term to describe its programmes. Instead, the OSCE has focused on police assistance programming, often rather divorced from other initiatives addressing problems in the justice sector, for example. The OSCE has tended to focus on a model of 'democratic policing', a concept that is difficult to define, but generally includes the basic principles that police should observe the rule of law, respect human rights, and be accountable to citizens and subject to democratic oversight.<sup>9</sup> While not working with the same terminology of SSR activities, in practice many of the OSCE's initiatives take a similar

<sup>4</sup> Nicole Ball, 'Dilemmas of Security Sector Reform', Berghoff Foundation, Available at: [http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue2\\_ball.pdf](http://www.berghof-handbook.net/documents/publications/dialogue2_ball.pdf) [accessed 1 October 2010].

<sup>5</sup> Alice Hills, 'The dialectic of police reform in Nigeria', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46(2), pp. 215-234.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Egnell and Peter Haldén, 'Laudable, ahistorical and overambitious: security sector reform meets state formation theory', *Conflict, Security & Development*, 9(1), 2009, pp. 27-54.

<sup>7</sup> Nicole Ball and Dylan Hendrickson, 'Trends in Security Sector Reform (SSR): Police, practice and research', Paper given at Workshop on 'New Directions in Security Sector Reform', International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Ottawa, Canada, 3-4 November 2005, p. 26. Available at: [http://www.ssrnetwork.net/uploaded\\_files/3278.pdf](http://www.ssrnetwork.net/uploaded_files/3278.pdf) [Accessed 1 October 2010].

<sup>8</sup> See Robert M. Perito, 'Afghanistan's Police: The Weak Link in Security Sector Reform', United States Institute of Peace, August 2009. Available at: [http://www.usip.org/files/resources/afghanistan\\_police.pdf](http://www.usip.org/files/resources/afghanistan_police.pdf) [accessed 1 October 2010].

<sup>9</sup> See OSCE, 'Guidebook on Democratic Policing', Vienna, May 2008, pp. 12-15. Available at: [http://www.osce.org/publications/spmu/2007/01/23086\\_795\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/publications/spmu/2007/01/23086_795_en.pdf) [accessed 23 November 2010].

approach, highlighting ideas such as ‘community policing’, improved training and education, and attention paid to human rights and the democratic oversight of security forces.

Like many other SSR programmes, OSCE police reform programmes are guided by multiple motivations, some of which may be contradictory. Ideas about police reform in OSCE rhetoric stress the shift from a centralized, controlling police force to one oriented towards serving citizens. At the same time, the OSCE has also stressed the importance of police assistance programmes (and support to border agencies and other state bodies) in contributing to OSCE initiatives to tackle ‘transnational security threats’, such as organized crime and terrorism.<sup>10</sup> A drive for more democratic policing as part of a broader democratic political development often sits uneasily with the demands for more action against potential terrorist threats or transnational crime. This potential contradiction is particularly true in certain types of authoritarian states, particularly those in which a closed political system is linked to transnational criminal activity. Central Asian states have often developed these types of political systems that mix repression with organised criminality: such states pose particular problems for international security assistance programmes.

### **Central Asian police assistance programming**

In the global context, the OSCE is a relatively minor player in security sector reform, and its programmes in Central Asia are a small part (in budgetary terms) of its overall police-related activities. The total expenditure in the OSCE Unified Budget on police-related activities in 2009 was €10.6 million, of which only €1.6 million was spent in Central Asia.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, police-related activities have a high profile in the OSCE’s ‘self-narrative’, and extra-budgetary contributions are actively sought for these projects. A wide range of OSCE bodies in the secretariat in Vienna are involved in security sector assistance and reform in some way, including the Strategic Police Matters Unit (SPMU) and the Action against Terrorism Unit. Other OSCE bodies also contribute to policing affairs, in a broad sense, such as the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) and the Office on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). However, for the most part it is field missions that continue to take the lead in developing and implementing police-related activities in Central Asia.

The shift to police-assistance programming in Central Asia came rather late, in 2002-03, after the OSCE had been involved in policing in Croatia, Kosovo, and Macedonia in the late 1990s.<sup>12</sup> In the Balkans the OSCE began to explore ideas

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<sup>10</sup> On the shift towards transnational threats, see Wolfgang Zellner, ‘Addressing Transnational Threats and Risks — A Key Challenge for the OSCE’, *Helsinki Monitor*, 16 (2005), pp. 214-217.

<sup>11</sup> Strategic Police Matters Unit, ‘Report by the OSCE Secretary General on police-related activities of the OSCE executive structures up to the end of 2009’, Vienna, April 2010, p. 127.

<sup>12</sup> For an historical overview of OSCE involvement in police-related activities, see Thorsten Stodiek, ‘OSCE’s police-related activities: lessons-learned during the last decade’, *Security &*

such as community policing, which appeared to reflect the organization's emphasis on both security and human rights, but in many ways these early initiatives in the Balkans were a poor preparation for programmes in Central Asia, where the political environment was much less familiar to OSCE officials and the leverage exerted by the international community was much weaker. The shift in emphasis in the OSCE towards policing after 1999 was inevitably influenced by the terrorist attacks in the US in September 2001. The impact of those attacks was also reflected in the post-2001 geographical view of security, with a new focus on Central Asia. An OSCE declaration in Bishkek in December 2001 (the Bishkek Plan of Action for Combating Terrorism) contributed to a growing momentum for more security initiatives in the Central Asian region. In 2002 a newly appointed Senior Police Advisor in Vienna began to explore the possibility of police assistance programmes in Central Asia.<sup>13</sup>

### **Central Asian policing**

Following independence in the early 1990s, Central Asian states mostly simply renamed existing Soviet-era security institutions. Although each country followed its own path of development, in the security sector there were some trends common to all five states. The military in each country was relatively weak, and most security functions in post-Soviet states were carried out by successors to the Soviet interior ministry — primarily the police or militia — and a range of successors to the Soviet intelligence service, the KGB. Central Asian governments routinely used domestic security and intelligence services to suppress dissent and to arrest, torture and imprison political and commercial opponents of the ruling elites. In this process they were assisted by a highly politicized procurator's office (prokuratura), a Soviet institution almost unchanged since Stalinist times. These institutions worked in concert with court and legal systems which were under strong political influence in the Soviet period, and have remained equally subordinate to political elites in the post-Soviet period. These legacy systems of security maintenance proved highly convenient for the political authorities in each country as they asserted their own control over society. By the early 21st century there had been remarkably little change in post-Soviet policing in Central Asia, reflecting a broader continuity in policing policy and structures across the post-Soviet space.<sup>14</sup>

Attempting to reform these security systems was extremely difficult. There was no significant political support for significant change, since these forces were reliable instruments of control for existing political elites. In addition, institutional reforms threatened to undermine vested interests in the security forces that controlled lucrative systems of corruption and criminality, in which

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*Human Rights*, 2009, 20(3), pp. 201-211.

<sup>13</sup> Annual Report of the Secretary General on Police-Related Activities 2002 [SEC.DOC/2/02/Rev.2 12 December 2002].

<sup>14</sup> L. Shelley, 'Post-Socialist policing: limitations on institutional change', in R. Mawby (ed.), *Policing Across the World: Lessons for the Twenty First Century*, UCL Press, 1999.

bribes were collected at all levels of the force from members of the public, while high-ranking officers and officials gave protection to business entrepreneurs or organized crime. At least some aspects of this criminalised policing system emerged in each of the five Central Asian states, despite their relatively divergent paths of development.<sup>15</sup>

The repressive nature of Central Asian policing and widespread corruption in the system was compounded by limited funding and a lack of human resources. Indeed, without certain types of corruption in poorer countries, such as Kyrgyzstan, the police would have been unable to function in the 1990s, given their limited budgetary resources. Police forces faced severe shortages of equipment and supplies, and survived on very low salaries. Lack of capacity in the police applied to both equipment and human resources. Despite the obvious drawbacks of Soviet police forces, they did possess relatively high levels of discipline and reasonable technical competence, training and education. Many of the most competent officers encountered in Central Asian police forces today tend to be older officers trained in the late Soviet period, but gradually these officers are reaching retirement age. Soviet-era officers were frequently replaced by officers who had little experience and had risen through the ranks on the basis of nepotism and bribery rather than competence.<sup>16</sup>

### **The political context**

Given the nature of policing that had developed in the post-Soviet Central Asian states, it was always going to be difficult for the OSCE to find ways to achieve some kind of reform in the sector. From the very beginning, OSCE personnel involved in police assistance programmes (and many participating states supporting them) appeared to underestimate the challenges facing security sector reform initiatives in Central Asia. The scale of the potential challenges was evident from police reform in other countries: two major conclusions from previous efforts were particularly relevant. Firstly, the seemingly obvious lesson that '[t]he success of foreign assistance in promoting democratic policing is directly proportional to the country's enthusiasm for it'. And, secondly, the conclusion that police reform programmes should not be left only to police officers: police reform is highly political and requires an understanding of the political context and culture.<sup>17</sup> Far from being a narrow technical exercise, police reform could only take place in the context of a broad process of political reform launched by political elites inside the country. Unfortunately, neither of these lessons were evident in OSCE approaches to police assistance programmes: too

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<sup>15</sup> For a more detailed account of how these systems developed and how they work, see International Crisis Group, 'Central Asia: The Politics of Police Reform', 10 December 2002. Available at: [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org).

<sup>16</sup> For some examples, see International Crisis Group, 'Central Asia: The Politics of Police Reform', 10 December 2002. Available at: [www.crisisgroup.org](http://www.crisisgroup.org).

<sup>17</sup> David H. Bayley, 'Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to Do and How to Do It', US Department of Justice, June 2001, pp. 35-36.

often they were devised as technical exercises, run by law enforcement officers, with only limited attention paid to the political context in which they were implemented.

There was certainly little evidence to support the belief that the governments of Central Asia would support programmes to develop democratic policing. Two of these states — Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan — have human rights records that are among the worst in the world. Kazakhstan has a more liberal state, but maintains a strong security sector that has not permitted any significant political pluralism to develop: rights such as freedom of assembly and expression are in practice severely limited. In 2002, when the first police-related activities were launched, Kyrgyzstan appeared to be entering a new phase of increasingly authoritarian rule under President Akaev. Since then, it has passed through several political upheavals, but the role of the police has posed significant political challenges throughout the period. Tajikistan's security forces have been important players in the continued concentration of power in an authoritarian political system, in which there is little interest shown towards human rights issues or democratisation. Overall, the OSCE was entering an extremely complex set of political environments in which the police played key roles in maintaining a range of repressive authoritarian regimes, which also faced substantial security threats and future uncertainties. Here OSCE engagement in three of these states, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, is examined to illustrate some of the dilemmas of conducting police assistance programmes in the region.

### **Uzbekistan**

Uzbekistan demonstrates many of the problems faced by the OSCE in engaging with a host government in a meaningful police reform programme. In 2002 and 2003 SPMU staff visited Uzbekistan and set out a range of potential priorities for engagement, including modern criminal investigation techniques, a human rights position at the Police Academy and increased training for non-commissioned officers in the Uzbek police.<sup>18</sup> These proposals, however, appear to have received little response from the Uzbek government, which gradually hardened its stance towards external assistance in the wake of widespread criticism of its human rights record during 2003.

The OSCE's critical response to the killings of protestors by security forces in Andijan in 2005 led to a change in status of the OSCE mission in Tashkent, with a new mandate aimed at '[assisting] the Government of Uzbekistan in its efforts to ensure security and stability, including fighting against terrorism, violent extremism, illegal drug trafficking and other transnational threats and challenges'. This was an attempt by the OSCE to remain engaged in Uzbekistan despite political differences over the Andijan events, but the new mandate raised

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<sup>18</sup> 'Annual Report of the Secretary General on Police-Related Activities 2003' [SEC.DOC/2/04/Rev.1, 11 June 2004], pp. 32-33.



serious questions about the focus of the mission and the continuing credibility of the OSCE on human dimension issues.

In 2007, when Uzbekistan was still seeking to avoid international pressure for an international investigation into the events of Andijan in 2005, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between the MIA and the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan (PCUZ).<sup>19</sup> An agreed two-year programme included a range of activities in the Tashkent Police Academy, such as training for public security and crime-fighting operations, information technology and material assistance. There was no mention of human rights training, issues of democratic oversight or any reference to the involvement of civil society. Instead, the project appears to have mainly provided *ad hoc* technical aid to the Police Academy and a study tour: Uzbek police officers visited Ireland in November 2007 to familiarise themselves with Irish policing techniques. Even within this study tour there was no mention in the official documents of any emphasis on democratic policing or human rights protection.<sup>20</sup>

A particularly controversial programme launched in 2007 by the PCUZ was a regional canine training programme for all Central Asian states, designed to train dogs to assist in ‘the fight against organized crime and terrorism’.<sup>21</sup> This project attracted internal opposition from some other OSCE staff engaged in Central Asia,<sup>22</sup> and was subsequently criticised by experienced OSCE observers.<sup>23</sup> Given the regime’s tactic of planting illegal drugs on its political opponents and dissidents and its use of sniffer dogs to ‘detect’ drugs in such cases, it seemed almost inevitable that police dogs would be misused. In June 2008 Uzbek police using two sniffer dogs arrested journalist Salijon Abdurahmanov on charges of possession of illegal drugs; human rights groups claimed that the drugs had been planted by the police.<sup>24</sup>

The engagement with the OSCE on policing helped the Uzbek government to develop a narrative of ‘normalisation’ in its relations with the West after 2005,

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<sup>19</sup> The OSCE representation in Tashkent had been downgraded from a Centre in the aftermath of Andijan, and particularly in response to a critical ODIHR report on the events in Andijan (see footnote 27).

<sup>20</sup> ‘Annual Report of the Secretary General on Police-Related Activities in 2007 [SEC.DOC/2/08, 28 September 2008]’, p. 65.

<sup>21</sup> ‘Press release: OSCE Project Co-ordinator helps train Central Asian police dog handlers to combat organized crime, terrorism’. Available at: [http://www.osce.org/uzbekistan/item\\_1\\_26025.html](http://www.osce.org/uzbekistan/item_1_26025.html) [Accessed 25 August 2010].

<sup>22</sup> Author interviews, former OSCE staff, Bishkek, Vienna.

<sup>23</sup> Former ODIHR official Vladimir Shkolnikov commented: ‘What is completely clear is that the OSCE is not able to reflect on the substance and potential impact of projects. Apparently it is not at all bothered about the likelihood of strengthening the repressive apparatus of the Karimov regime as a result of such a project.’ [Vladimir Shkolnikov, ‘Retrospective on OSCE Strategic Thinking on Central Asia’, *Security and Human Rights*, 2009, No. 4, p. 301].

<sup>24</sup> Frontline, ‘Uzbekistan: Journalist and human rights defender Salijon Abdurahmanov detained’, 20 June 2008. Available at: <http://www.frontlinedefenders.org/node/1478> [Accessed 10 September 2010].

despite the government's failure to permit any international investigation into the killings of hundreds of civilians in Andijan. In all these OSCE activities, there was no sense of any overarching political strategy, and no apparent awareness of how these ad hoc projects might be perceived by a broader public, including human rights groups, or how they might impact on a broader OSCE discourse that emphasises comprehensive security, including the inclusion of a human dimension. Despite criticism, since 2007 similar types of OSCE projects involving law enforcement agencies in Uzbekistan have been common. In May-June 2009 the OSCE conducted human rights training for police officers, an activity which appears to be uncontroversial, but provokes understandable scepticism among independent human rights groups. One such group writes: 'Such events have demonstrated that holding such activities have not changed the situation, but more likely have been held simply to appease and even distract the international community'.<sup>25</sup>

### **Kyrgyzstan: Challenges of Political Change**

OSCE police assistance programming in Kyrgyzstan showed much greater potential than in Uzbekistan, but suffered from the same lack of political understanding and an unwillingness to address human rights concerns as part of a broad, holistic approach to security issues. Kyrgyzstan has been the most politically open of the Central Asian states in political terms over the past 20 years, but its security forces have often been at the centre of political controversy, particularly during periods of political upheaval. In 2005 and 2010 the country experienced mass unrest, which led to the overthrow of the existing regimes: first President Akaev, and later President Bakiev, fled the country.

The Kyrgyz police assistance programme was the most extensive OSCE programme in Central Asia, developing after 2003 into a wide range of activities led by a full-time international staff based in Bishkek. The programme began against a difficult political backdrop — in March 2002, police had opened fire on demonstrators in the southern district of Aksy, killing five people, and sparking off several months of political unrest against the government of President Akaev. Against that political backdrop, an international programme to assist the police was bound to elicit criticism from opponents of the regime. During the planning phase, there was no formal mechanism for consulting NGOs or civil society and the OSCE clearly underestimated the potential negative reaction from local NGOs and human rights groups. Inaccurate rumours that the OSCE was supplying the police with non-lethal weaponry, such as rubber bullets, galvanised the NGO community, concerned that the OSCE was simply making it easier for the government to crush antigovernment protests. In July 2003 several NGOs organized a demonstration against the OSCE in front of its Bishkek office, an

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<sup>25</sup> Human Rights Alliance of Uzbekistan, Committee for the Liberation of Prisoners of Conscience, Uzbek-German Forum for Human Rights (Germany), 'Torture in Uzbekistan: still systematic and unpunished' (Report submitted to the 98th session of the UN Committee on Civil and Political Rights).



unprecedented experience for an organization that had generally been highly supportive of civil society. The OSCE eventually made some concessions to NGO sensibilities, and gave reassurances that no controversial equipment would be provided to the police. The programme developed a new centre for training the police in dealing with protests and other public order incidents in a peaceful way. Nevertheless, this was a difficult beginning for the project, and some observers suggested that ‘the OSCE’s police program seemed to have been implemented at the wrong time and in the wrong place’.<sup>26</sup>

However, the programme did make some headway in improving police training, developing the idea of community policing in Kyrgyzstan and improving links between the police and NGOs. During the unrest in 2005, when President Akaev was overthrown, the police largely disappeared from the streets and were not involved in trying to suppress the opposition. The looting and crime that accompanied the 2005 unrest perhaps did play a role in increasing public support for a reformed policing role — the absence of police during the 2005 violence demonstrated the importance of an effective law enforcement agency and persuaded some NGOs to take a more supportive stance towards the OSCE project.

As the regime of President Bakiev became increasingly authoritarian in 2007-08, concerns were again raised by NGOs and the political opposition about the impact of the programme, now re-launched as the Kyrgyz Police Reform Programme (PRP). Far from launching a more democratic regime after the ousting of Akaev, President Bakiev introduced new, more restrictive legislation on freedom of assembly in September 2008, and pressure on public protests and actions against the political opposition accelerated during and after the July 2009 presidential elections. One demonstrator, who was holding a vigil in July 2009 at the Iranian embassy, commented: ‘We were holding a peaceful gathering for those being persecuted in Iran when the police arrived. They were very aggressive. They barked at us ‘so why have you come down to the streets?’ I was then arrested and taken immediately to the police station’.<sup>27</sup>

These kind of arrests of anyone involved in street protests became commonplace. In Balykchy, police using riot gear and stun guns violently dispersed a peaceful protest over election results, and arrested 21 protestors. Subsequently some of the demonstrators were charged with attempting ‘to overthrow the state’, and received prison sentences of up to four years. The accused claimed they were ill-treated and threatened with rape while in detention.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Erica Marat, ‘Civil society in Kyrgyzstan before, during and after the March 24 revolution’, *Helsinki Monitor*, 2005, No. 4, p. 270.

<sup>27</sup> Ben Judah, ‘Kyrgyzstan: a political retreat’, *Open Democracy*, 25 August 2009. Available at: <http://www.opendemocracy.net/article/kyrgyzstan-a-political-retreat-0> [accessed 15 October 2010].

<sup>28</sup> US Department of State, ‘Human Rights Report 2009: Kyrgyzstan’, Available at: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2009/sca/136089.htm>

By 2009 it was clear that there was no police reform programme in Kyrgyzstan, and that the OSCE assistance was being used to modernize, but not to reform, the police, who were increasingly involved in violence against political activists and journalists. Not surprisingly, many NGO leaders and political opponents of the regime were concerned about the direction of the PRP, and the apparently limited response by OSCE officials to the growing repression in the country. The Ministry of Interior/ OSCE Police Steering Committee in Kyrgyzstan would have been an appropriate forum to at least allude to some of these problems in the context of the police project, but the OSCE representative did not mention human rights at all in a speech to the committee.<sup>29</sup> The OSCE's stance again highlighted the danger of viewing police reform as primarily a technical exercise, divorced from the political changes that were going on around it.

This lack of political awareness could also be seen in some broader programmatic priorities in OSCE approaches to police reform. For example, although there were some positive results from attempts to develop a community policing approach, particularly in cities, there was little sense that these programmes might have negative impacts in certain contexts. In some political contexts, community policing approaches can unwittingly provide the opportunity for further patronage of certain sections of the community at the expense of other groups. In addition, the actual everyday meaning of community policing in Kyrgyzstan will still depend on the political context in which it is implemented. As David Bayley notes: '...community policing may produce a constructive partnership between police and the public in the United States, but in authoritarian countries it can be used for co-optation and top-down regimentation'.<sup>30</sup>

Since 2010 and the ousting of President Bakiev and the subsequent ethnic violence in Southern Kyrgyzstan, the PRP has faced even more significant challenges, but there is still no overall political commitment from government officials to a genuine reform programme for the security services. The situation under Bakiev demonstrated the problems faced by police assistance programmes that take place in an environment of increasing repression and authoritarianism. Although there was monitoring of human rights issues and political developments in the OSCE Centre in Bishkek and in other parts of the OSCE, there was no clear information or policy linkage with the PRP. Programme managers often want to remain engaged with governments in all circumstances and are unlikely to scale back programmes in response to changing political circumstances. This puts the onus on political oversight bodies to ensure that programmes still fit with a broad commitment to the kind of values that the OSCE

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<sup>29</sup> See the speech by Ambassador Andrew Tesoriere to the Forum of Ministry of Interior/OSCE Police Steering Committee in Kyrgyzstan, 14 October 2009. Available at: [http://www.osce.org/documents/cib/2009/11/41479\\_en.pdf](http://www.osce.org/documents/cib/2009/11/41479_en.pdf)

<sup>30</sup> David H. Bayley, 'Democratizing the Police Abroad: What to Do and How to Do It', US Department of Justice, June 2001, p. 36

espouses. The best programmes will have these kinds of commitments built into planning, making it easier for programme managers to subsequently scale back programmes to respond to shifts in the political climate.

### **Tajikistan: Dealing with Transnational Threats**

International engagement in police assistance programmes in authoritarian states is often justified with reference to a wide range of international security threats: terrorism, drug trafficking, people trafficking and other criminal activities. The OSCE has been paying increasing attention to these kinds of criminal activities, which it groups under the label of ‘transnational threats’ (TNT). A rhetoric of shared security threats has become commonplace within the organization, a discourse that has been welcomed by Central Asian leaders, keen to find themes that gloss over the significant gaps between democratic and non-democratic states within the organization. At the OSCE Astana Summit in December 2010, Kazakh President Nazarbaev proposed a ministerial council to address issues of organized crime and also a new Security Institute. President Berdymukhamedov of Turkmenistan also pointed to ‘opposition to political and religious extremism, terrorist threats, drug trafficking and transboundary crime’ as priorities for the OSCE.<sup>31</sup>

This thinking has been reflected in police assistance programming in Central Asia, but particularly in Tajikistan. An OSCE Counter Terrorism and Police Adviser Unit (CTPAU), has been established in Dushanbe which ‘...helps all law enforcement agencies to better combat the complex phenomenon of organized crime, drug trafficking and terrorism. It focuses on the development of police training, structural and operational reforms and the introduction of community policing’.<sup>32</sup> There is no mention in its mandate of the democratization of the police force or any emphasis on human rights in the mandate.

The focus on security threats in the context of Tajikistan is understandable. A long and porous border with Afghanistan has been a major route for heroin trafficking since the early 1990s, and concerns are rising over the potential for Islamist militant groups to cross from Northern Afghanistan.<sup>33</sup> As elsewhere in the region, the narrative developed by the government suggests that an embattled government faces an overwhelming challenge from drug traffickers and terrorist groups, and that international security assistance is an important support mechanism for the government’s efforts to promote security. In reality, there is clearly a complex interaction between the state and criminality in the country that threatens to undermine international efforts to improve the law enforcement

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<sup>31</sup> Statement of the President of Turkmenistan H.E. Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov at the OSCE Summit in Astana 1-2 December 2010. Available at <http://www.osce.org/cio/73906> [accessed 17 March 2011].

<sup>32</sup> <http://www.osce.org/tajikistan/13484.html>.

<sup>33</sup> International Crisis Group, ‘Tajikistan: The Changing Insurgent Threats’, Asia Report No. 205, 24 May 2011.

agencies.

The police certainly need extensive reform. Popular discontent with the police is widespread, and they are generally viewed as unprofessional, corrupt and highly criminalised. The OSCE organized a series of focus groups in 2009, in which attendees expressed their feelings about the police. In Kulyab, some of the comments included: 'Police defend the true criminals'; 'The only people who believe in the police are the officials who pay them'; '90 per cent of the people have no confidence in the police. Only the 10 per cent who have money and are well connected have confidence in them'. 'You have to know someone with power; otherwise don't go to the police'.<sup>34</sup>

Since OSCE engagement began with Tajikistan on police-related activities in 2008, progress has been limited. The CTPAU's initial activities appeared to focus primarily on encouraging the participation of Tajik police officers in various conferences and roundtables. This has certainly had some impact on the isolation of Tajik security forces from international policing trends and standards. One of the first activities was another canine training project, an area in which the OSCE appears to be developing a considerable track record. This project involved not just training, as in the Uzbekistan initiative, but the construction of a whole new canine training centre in Dushanbe. This centre is designed to 'enhance the efficiency of MIA operations and investigations in combating drug trafficking, preventing acts of terrorism and securing public order'.<sup>35</sup>

In 2009 there were signs of more engagement from the Tajik side with the OSCE, with the increased involvement of senior police officers and ministry officials in meetings on police reform. A consultant report initiated some wide-ranging discussions on the challenges of reform. The interior ministry was reported to be positively engaged in the process.<sup>36</sup> Simply engaging with high-level police officers on issues of reform could be considered a success in the context of Tajikistan, and some areas showed signs of progress. For example, progress was reportedly made in police training on domestic violence issues. In 2011 there appeared to be some movement towards more substantive policy steps, with a new MoU being signed with the OSCE on police reform in April 2011, and the establishment of a police reform steering group.

However, the basic problems of achieving reform in the Tajik context remain acute. Since there is no sign of any commitment to political reform in the

<sup>34</sup> The publication of these kinds of findings is useful. The results suggest that candid focus groups appear likely to provide more robust findings than opinion polling in the Central Asian context. OSCE, 'Report on Results of Focus Group Research Regarding Public Security Concerns and Experiences with Local Law Enforcement in the Republic of Tajikistan', Available at: <http://polis.osce.org/library/f/3713/2979/OSCE-TJK-RPT-3713-EN-Report%20on%20Results%20of%20Focus%20Group%20Research.pdf> [accessed 30 September 2010], p. 11.

<sup>35</sup> 'Annual Report of the Secretary General on Police-Related Activities 2008', p. 82.

<sup>36</sup> OSCE/Global Crisis and Rule of Law Development Association, 'Assessment Report'. Available at: <http://polis.osce.org/library/f/3710/2974/OSCE-TJK-RPT-3710-EN-Assessment%20report.pdf> [accessed 30 September 2010], p. 7.

country, there is a danger — as in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan — that the wrong type of international assistance merely helps to legitimise an authoritarian political system, without having a significant impact on police repression and corruption. The Tajik security forces continue to be engaged in widespread repression, despite commitments by the government to tackle abuses. The government does not permit any access to places of detention for the ICRC, and torture and police brutality remain widespread, according to independent media.<sup>37</sup> In this context, police assistance programming will face significant challenges in improving police behaviour and responsiveness to the public.

However, the OSCE is also focused on supporting the MIA in tackling drug trafficking and organized crime. Western governments often cite the need to support counter-narcotics activities as a reason to support police assistance programmes and other forms of assistance to security forces, even in non-democratic regimes. In some contexts such assistance may be effective in improving police capacity and the seizure rates of drugs. But the experience of over a decade of international assistance to Central Asia in tackling drug trafficking provides some alternative conclusions. Official figures suggest that for the most part, international assistance programmes have failed to have any significant impact on the Central Asian drug trade. In fact, as assistance has increased over the years (mostly through UN ODC or bilateral US and EU funding), the level of seizures of opiates has remained flat or fallen: about 9.4 tons was reportedly seized in 2006 in Central Asia, almost matching a 1996 figure of 9.2 tons,<sup>38</sup> but since 2006 seizures have generally fallen, reaching just 4.4 tons in 2009.<sup>39</sup> In 2009 the amount of heroin seized in the region decreased by 34.4 per cent, from 3.7 tons in 2008 to 2.4 tons in 2009.<sup>40</sup> The UN concludes that the '[post-2001] rise in opium production and estimated increase in the opiate trafficking volume has not resulted in consistently higher opiate seizures in Central Asia'.<sup>41</sup>

These statistics suggest that an influx of millions of dollars of aid to Central Asian border guards and law enforcement agencies from the US and other Western countries over the past decade has not been effective in limiting the transit of narcotics through the Central Asia region. The reasons are clear. As

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<sup>37</sup> 'Tajikistan: Human Rights in Spotlight After Detainee Deaths', *Eurasianet.org*, 16 June 2011. Available at: <http://www.eurasianet.org/node/63688> [accessed 15 June 2011].

<sup>38</sup> The pattern of seizures has been more volatile than suggested by these figures, but overall the pattern is fairly consistent, with an average of 9,632 annually in 1996-2006, followed by some decline. See UNODC, 'Illicit Drugs Trends in Central Asia', April 2008, p. 10. Available at: [http://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends\\_Central%20Asia-final.pdf](http://www.unodc.org/documents/regional/central-asia/Illicit%20Drug%20Trends_Central%20Asia-final.pdf).

<sup>39</sup> 'International Narcotics Control Board, 'Report, 2010', Available at: [http://www.incb.org/pdf/annual-report/2010/en/AR\\_2010\\_Chapter\\_III\\_Asia.pdf](http://www.incb.org/pdf/annual-report/2010/en/AR_2010_Chapter_III_Asia.pdf) [accessed 10 June 2011], p. 98.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> UNODC, op. cit.



Central Asian countries have stabilised, groups close to the political leadership and key players in the security apparatus have increasingly monopolized the control of narcotics trafficking. These groups have successfully squeezed out rival drug gangs, which have sometimes been associated with rival political or ideological groupings. This process of centralisation has led in turn to less instability and crime associated with drug trafficking and a more stable state, at least in the short term.

In this context, the impact of international assistance to counter-narcotics agencies becomes controversial: international assistance programmes primarily allow police and security forces to focus on smaller-scale drug traffickers that are not linked to the security forces or government officials. As a result, international assistance programmes essentially assist drug traffickers linked to the state to retain a near monopoly on the trade in narcotics through the region. This may have at least two relatively positive outcomes: it reduces the potential for violence by limiting the potential for conflict between different drug gangs and it reduces the likelihood of drug trafficking being used to finance armed insurgency against states. What it does not do is reduce the volume of drugs passing through the region to their final markets in Europe.<sup>42</sup>

This analysis has important implications for the potential success of police assistance programming in the region. It is unlikely that there will be any success in counter-narcotics activities by the police to compensate for the lack of genuine police reform in states such as Tajikistan. The reality of the impact of counter-narcotics programmes and police assistance programmes should provoke a rethink of security sector assistance programmes in the region. Effective counter-narcotics regimes will require a much more complex and holistic approach. This may still involve security sector assistance, but it should be conducted with an understanding of the potential negative impacts that might ensue, and be implemented in conjunction with other political and economic measures to protect vulnerable populations and put pressure on major drug traffickers linked to the regime.

## Conclusion

Police reform is a profoundly political process that can only be effectively carried out as part of a broader process of democratic reform. In most circumstances, reform will be most effective if implemented by actors in local governments with a proper understanding of these political issues and the security context. External actors may be able to help in specific, targeted ways as part of a broader package of support for reforms. Such support needs to be highly attuned to the political context and will require not only technical expertise by law enforcement officials, but also input and oversight from officials with political experience and engagement at high levels in government.

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<sup>42</sup> For more discussion on this paradoxical situation, see, *inter alia*, David Lewis, 'High Times on the Silk Road: The Central Asian Paradox', *World Policy Journal* 27(1): 39-49.

For the most part, the OSCE has failed to take these principles into account during its attempts to initiate police reform processes in Central Asia. Police assistance in authoritarian states such as Uzbekistan has done nothing to improve the performance of the police, but has undermined the reputation of the OSCE locally and internationally by questioning its commitment to human rights and its comprehensive concept of security. In Kyrgyzstan, the OSCE failed to respond to concerns about the drift towards highly authoritarian governance under President Bakiev, and allowed the Police Reform Programme to continue unchanged while security forces were becoming increasingly repressive. In Tajikistan, the willingness of the Tajik authorities to begin discussions about police reform has been viewed as a major breakthrough, but has not yet been accompanied by any significant change in police behaviour. Justifications for police assistance in countries like Tajikistan, based on the need for counter-narcotics cooperation, have often failed to take into account the close relationship between the state and organized crime in parts of Central Asia. International assistance to security forces has failed to stem the flow of drugs through the region.

In retrospect, the OSCE's experience in policing in the Balkans was an inadequate basis for engagement in policing in Central Asia. Security sector reform in authoritarian or semi-authoritarian states needs to be approached in a completely different way to security sector reform in countries in transition, or in post-conflict environments, such as Kosovo. In most cases, unless there is genuine willingness on the part of the government to embrace genuine political reforms, police reform on its own is unlikely to be successful. There may be some areas where engagement with security forces can produce positive results, such as tackling violence against women or human trafficking. On other issues, the OSCE may be able to help to open up dialogues between the police and civil society or support public dialogues about the role of the police. And in most contexts, it will remain important to maintain channels of engagement between the security forces and the outside world. However, achieving overall reform will depend on genuine political leadership of a deep-seated review of security structures and the justice sector, and a commitment to a new approach to tackling security threats that prioritises the genuine needs of society.