

OSCE Engagement in the Conflict Circle in Kyrgyzstan

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Abstract

This article examines the OSCE engagement in conflict cycle during June 2010 events in the south of Kyrgyzstan. OSCE has been actively involved in conflict cycle's main segment areas, such as early warning, conflict management and post-conflict rehabilitation in Kyrgyzstan. Although there are certain critical observations to be made concerning OSCE effectiveness and efficiency in its engagement strategy, commitment to be present and to perform adequately on the part of the Organization has been firm. OSCE is fully capable of strengthening its' potential for better crisis prevention in Kyrgyzstan. A solid, long-term prioritization of conflict cycle is needed not only on the part of OSCE, but also from all other key international actors.

Keywords

OSCE – conflict cycle – Kyrgyzstan

The June 2010 Clashes: Description, Root Causes and Preconditions

A crisis unravelled in Kyrgyzstan at the beginning of June 2010 and is rightly considered to be one of the bloodiest cases of inter-communal violence in modern Central Asia. Falling within the same sequence of events as the overthrow of the President, Kurmanbek Bakiyev, on 7 April 2010, interethnic clashes between Uzbeks and Kyrgyz in the south of the country were sparked by violent attacks by Uzbeks against Kyrgyz and Kyrgyz property on the night of 10 June. Riots claimed the lives of more than 400 people and left thousands of people injured, displaced and deprived of their property. The interim government of Kyrgyzstan reacted swiftly by introducing a state of emergency, deploying troops to the cities of Osh and Jalal Abad, and even requesting Russia for urgent military assistance in what looked like a position of despair as reports of bloodshed in the troubled regions flowed in. However, many international and local observers maintained that there was significant involvement by the Kyrgyz armed forces and the police in suppressive practices towards the Uzbek population both during and after the conflict. An international investigation was strongly critical of the interim government's handling of the clashes. Four years after the tragedy, there are still no definitive accounts as to all the instigators and forces behind the scenario. Still, a certain consensus has been forged in academia concerning the root causes, the preconditions and the context of the clashes.

Structural deficiencies, such as widespread poverty and economic underdevelopment, as well as a plethora of accompanying social, economic, political and ideological problems have created what is known as a high conflict potential in the Fergana Valley. The central authority has a low level of legitimacy with very few levers at its disposal in the South. Political volatility in the aftermath of the April revolution, the provocative policies of radical Uzbek leaders and conflicts among criminal gangs over resource reallocation are cited as the main preconditions of the June crisis. The American researcher Reuell Hanks has applied human ecology theory (social Darwinism) to the latter, by stating that human groups (in our case, Kyrgyz and Uzbeks) are constantly struggling over vital resources and goods, and are therefore gradually driven towards stratification in a number of geographical and sociological niches. The probability of violence becomes extremely high when the dominant group, occupying a major niche, feels an imminent danger from the rival group. Hence the conclusion which can be applied to the June conflict: any leader group, trying to defend its social status and gains, will be prone to resort to violence to protect its interests.¹

Complimentary to this approach is the opinion of a British expert, Nick Megoran, which fits into the logic

¹ Reuel R. Hanks. Crisis in Kyrgyzstan: conundrums of ethnic conflict, national identity and statecohesion. Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies. Volume 13, Number 2, June 2011, p. 184

of “prisoner dilemma”. According to Megoran, understanding the southern conflict is impossible without understanding “a profound sense of insecurity about the very survival of the country in the future”², which is inherent to the people and leadership of Kyrgyzstan. In this context, nationalist parties and politicians thrive on feelings of fear and vulnerability, leading to an aggravation of conflict-related tensions in society.

OSCE Conflict Reaction: Status Quo

The OSCE’s conflict reaction capabilities at this point in time seem to be of a dual nature. Although well developed and fully functioning, the OSCE conflict reaction system is one of the most problematic structural entities of the organization. It seems that the general organization-level difficulties with which the OSCE has been dealing for a number of years are also affecting the Organization’s capacity to meaningfully engage in the conflict cycle.

Facing a growing necessity to re-establish confidence in and respect for the OSCE on the international stage, the Greek chairmanship initiated the Corfu process of restoring trust and promoting broad dialogue in 2009. This process was nevertheless not substantially continued in the following years, as was demonstrated by the participating states’ failure to adopt the Astana Framework plan in 2010. It is true that the 2011 Lithuanian chairmanship took several steps towards elaborating specific proposals for crisis management (the Vilnius decision on conflict elements, mc.dec/3/11). However, the tangible outcome has been less than expected, amounting to enlarging the Secretary General’s prerogatives in early warning and endowing the Conflict Prevention Centre with additional functions. The consecutive Irish Chairmanship focused its attention on freedom on the Internet, while the Ukrainian Chairmanship concentrated on protracted conflicts (Pridnestria, Nagorno-Karabakh and the Geneva discussions on Georgia). Switzerland, in charge of the Organization’s 2014 stewardship, also declared that it would view the Western Balkans and the Southern Caucasus as its priorities.

Thus, during the last couple of years the OSCE has worked mainly in a pre-defined geographical direction, following “big” political conjunctures, and not the actual needs of enhancing its conflict-cycle potential. It is true that the concept of the conflict cycle remains one of the fundamental elements in the OSCE’s activities (Astana Declaration 2010) with a large degree of long-term vision and consistency. On the other hand, the concrete results obtained so far leave much to be desired. The OSCE has an important political status and a wide range of political lobbying and advocacy opportunities, but has not been fully using this potential when it comes to early warning and conflict management. The OSCE’s actions during and after the June turmoil in Osh and Jalal Abad were timely and had a stabilizing effect, but this has not been translated into strengthening the OSCE’s capabilities for engagement with the conflict cycle.

OSCE Involvement in Early Warning

As already mentioned, the unpopular President Kurmanbek Bakiyev was ousted from power in the course of mass street protests in Bishkek on 7 April 2010. A period of political and economic chaos ensued, with government reshufflings and the closure of the Kyrgyz-Kazakh border. The OSCE’s political and expert support played a positive role in bringing the situation back to normal during that time, with the Special Envoy, the experienced Kazakh diplomat Janybek Karibjanov, already arriving to Bishkek on 8 April 2010. The special meeting of the Permanent Council on Kyrgyzstan was held on the same day in Vienna. The Kazakh Chairmanship had attempted to coordinate the international society’s response to the April crisis and to assist in the legitimization of state power. However, the active position assumed by the OSCE later on, during the

² Making Aid effective: Security and Development in the Kyrgyz Republic. Transcript of the Round Table, OSCE Academy in Bishkek, 23 November 2012, p. 11.

June 2010 events, was widely misinterpreted by many political actors in Kyrgyzstan. The issue of deploying international consultative police groups, which was the initiative of the Kyrgyz government, received a negative response from some nationalist youth movements. Speaking generally, the OSCE acted as a true neutral arbiter and considerably assisted the government and the people of Kyrgyzstan both during and after the June events. Acting in accordance with its mandate, the OSCE incessantly called for open and peaceful political practices and reconciliation. The Organization was quite successful in raising awareness on the part of the world community concerning the crisis in Kyrgyzstan. Thus, formally, the OSCE has actually fulfilled its tasks and duties in dealing with the June crisis in Kyrgyzstan.

As an actual fact, the outburst of ethnic violence in Kyrgyzstan's south was a serious challenge to the entire OSCE community. Reports of the aggravating political situation had been voiced long before the clashes. While addressing the Permanent Council on 4 May 2010, the High Commissioner on National Minorities, Knut Vollebaek, made it clear that there was a possibility of a further escalation of ethnic tensions in Kyrgyzstan. He appealed to Council members to pay special attention to the explosive situation in the country.³ The OSCE Secretariat and the member countries had been regularly updated on developments in Kyrgyzstan throughout the spring of 2010 by the OSCE Centre in Bishkek. It was highlighted that the pressure was rising, the rule of law and the authorities' legitimacy were being compromised and there was a growing distrust among society in general.

Even before the early warning was issued, the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Kanat Saudabaev, held a press briefing on 11 June 2010. He underlined that President Nazarbaev and the Kazakh chairmanship "had made every effort to promote a peaceful settlement and supported the Interim Government's steps in this direction".⁴ However, the official launch of the OSCE's engagement in early warning and conflict management took place only on 12 June, when the High Commissioner had already issued an early warning, invoking article 13 of the HCNM mandate. The OSCE then went into action with the aim of stabilizing the situation in the country, thereby unravelling a range of diplomatic interventions. The Chairman-in-Office had a number of telephone talks with the head of the Interim government, Roza Otunbaeva, but also with the un Secretary-General, Ban Ki Moon, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Kathrin Ashton, and the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, Sergey Lavrov. That same day, Saudabaev decided to send his Special Envoy, the experienced diplomat Janybek Karibjanov, to Bishkek, alongside a high-ranking official from the Conflict Prevention Centre.

At the sitting of the OSCE Permanent Council on 14 June 2010, the High Commissioner informed the audience about the situation and the measures taken. He also recommended convening an urgent meeting of the un Security Council, creating an independent international investigation commission, and reaching an agreement on endowing Uzbeks with a fixed quota in political institutions.⁵ The Special Envoy of the un Secretary-General also addressed the meeting, giving details about the agreement reached by the un and the OSCE Secretaries-General and the leadership of the European Union on sending their Special envoys to Kyrgyzstan. This point in time, therefore, saw the creation of a unique, high-level political mechanism for crisis regulation – "troika",

3 OSCE HCNM, Statement by Knut Vollebaek, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, to the 808th Plenary Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council, hcnm.gal/2/10, 4 May 2010.

4 OSCE Press Release, Astana, 11 June 2010. OSCE Chairperson regrets violence in southern Kyrgyzstan, calls for calm and stability. <http://www.osce.org/cio/69410>, last accessed on March 17, 2014.

5 OSCE HCNM, Statement by Knut Vollebaek, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Early warning to the (special) Permanent Council on 14 June 2010, Vienna, 14 June 2010.

which consisted of the UN Secretary-General's Special Envoy (Miroslav Jenča), the OSCE Secretary General's Special Envoy (Janybek Karibjanov), and the EU Representative (Pierre Morel). Strictly speaking, the tripartite commission of the EU, the OSCE and the UN on monitoring and reacting to the situation in Kyrgyzstan was created immediately after the April events in 2010. The fact that the commission was promptly transformed into a "June troika" format testifies to good communication competency and professionalism.

Actually, the international institutionalization of the conflict took place with the creation of the troika, which served as an unprecedented institution of international negotiation and conflict management for Kyrgyzstan. The troika cooperated with other actors, namely the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Conflict institutionalization on the level of international society usually lays the ground for better conflict management and the involvement of donors in the post-conflict rehabilitation process.

OSCE Involvement in Crisis Management

Also, mid-June 2010 saw the end of the conflict's active phase. The next phase of the crisis circle, which is crisis management, started to develop. This process was going on simultaneously with the internal political process of conflict localization. During the very first days of violence, it was evident that the bilateral format of conflict management in the framework of the OSCE dominated the multilateral mode. In other words, a bilateralization of conflict regulation occurred even though the multilateral format of the OSCE does not directly provide for this. The Chairman-in-Office acted actively to settle the crisis even before the High Commissioner actually issued an early warning call. Over the next few days, the Kazakh leadership and the Kyrgyz Interim government engaged mainly in direct, bilateral discussions. The coordination of the conflict cycle once again assumed a multilateral character when the "troika" went into action on 14 June, which was conditioned by the need to secure a wide, legitimate consensus and a better harmonization of international relief efforts.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly was another OSCE institution engaged in diplomatic and political assistance to Kyrgyzstan. The Assembly's Special Envoy, Adil Akhmetov, took part in discussions and negotiations on Kyrgyzstan through various international diplomatic channels. Kimmo Kiljunen, the Assembly's Special Representative, undertook a series of visits to the Kyrgyz Republic, also in his capacity as the head of the independent international commission of inquiry. Regardless of the mixed response that the Commission's report received in Kyrgyzstan, the scope of the work done is very impressive and many of the conclusions continue to be valid.

So, a special meeting of the Permanent Council in Vienna was convened on 15 June, and a Statement on the situation in Kyrgyzstan was adopted. All OSCE member states unanimously called for a rapid return to peace, public security and the rule of law. They also called on all groups in Kyrgyzstan to refrain from violence and to practice restraint. The statement says that regional security is dependent on peace and security in the Kyrgyz Republic:

"OSCE stands ready to assist Kyrgyzstan upon its request in resolving the current crisis, preventing the spillover of tensions in the region, and in promoting postconflict rehabilitation, and to work in close coordination and co-operation in this respect with the UN and other relevant international actors on the ground,

and urges the international community to provide immediate humanitarian aid”⁶

On the next day, 16 June 2010, the “troika” held a press briefing in Bishkek, emphasizing the need for public order, the prevention of any escalation in violence and creating conditions for national reconciliation and reunification. The Special Representatives mentioned the necessity for a rapid arrangement of a humanitarian corridor in the southern regions, as well as a fair distribution of humanitarian aid among the victims. The “troika” was operating until mid2011, conducting several meetings and discussions. Then, it gradually ceded its functions to other existing mechanisms and formats within the framework of the OSCE and other international organizations.

Obviously, humanitarian issues started to come to light in the framework of post-crisis rehabilitation. Thus, during the Permanent Council session on 17 June, the High Commissioner emphasized the necessity of providing humanitarian assistance to those affected by the tragedy, as well as supporting Uzbekistan in its efforts to accommodate tens of thousands of refugees. It must be underlined that the OSCE has no mandate for direct humanitarian assistance to conflict-affected countries. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, humanitarian assistance was handled by the UNHCR, the Red Cross, and the Dutch Interchurch Aid. Russia and Kazakhstan were among the major providers of bilateral aid transfers. Lola Tishabaeva, after analyzing the humanitarian aid distribution after the June tragedy, came to the conclusion that it was hampered by a lack of coordination, an inadequate infrastructure, a lack of an appropriate state system of aid acceptance, inventarisation and distribution, as well as by many cases of aid mismanagement and damage.⁷ There is, likewise, a sensitive political aspect to the humanitarian aid’s speculative channelling towards mostly ethnic Uzbeks, which provoked an outraged reaction from Kyrgyz.⁸ These shortcomings worsened the inter-ethnic situation on the ground, making the overall context for the OSCE action even more complicated.

OSCE Involvement in Post-Conflict Rehabilitation

It is essential to distinguish between three main OSCE activity directions in post-conflict rehabilitation in the south of Kyrgyzstan. First: conducting the constitutional reform by means of organizing a national referendum and parliamentary elections. Second: strengthening the rule of law and public security (the Police Advisory Group and the Community Security Initiative), as well as physical security projects. The third direction is working with the media and local communities in promoting inter-ethnic peace and accord. These directions will now be examined in detail.

Constitutional reform and political institutions. In the aftermath of the April 2010 events, the OSCE Centre in Bishkek assisted the government in elaborating a new draft of the Constitution by supporting public hearings, a national information campaign and providing international legal expertise. In the runup to the referendum and the elections, the Centre also “took part in training election institutions’ staff and civil servants on the election matters, assisted in organizing elections in detention places and provided independent election observation”.⁹ The ODIHR Mission, headed by Boris Frlec, observed that conducting a nationwide referendum

6 OSCE Permanent Council. Statement on the situation in Kyrgyzstan, 15 June 2010. pc.doc/1/10,pc Journal No. 814.

7 Lola Tishabaeva. Provision of Humanitarian Aid in Post-conflict Rehabilitation: The Case Study of Kyrgyzstan. Thesis Presented to the Programme of the OSCE Academy in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Politics and the Security Programme (Central Asia). September 2012.

8 Danish Refugee Council, Annual Report 2010, 6. <<http://www.drc.dk/about-drc/facts-about-drc/annual-reports/>>. This is also the argument of an international political security expert, who chose to remain anonymous, interview on 19 February 2014.

9 OSCE Annual Report 2010, p. 83.

in post-conflict settings is an achievement in itself, despite certain technical irregularities and organizational problems. The parliamentary elections in Kyrgyzstan took place on 10 October 2010, and were positively evaluated by the Chairman-in-Office. As mentioned earlier, the OSCE provided comprehensive expert, information and organizational support to the government of the country during the preparation and the conduct of the elections.

Strengthening communal security and the rule of law. While addressing the Permanent Council on 17 June 2010, the representative of the United States, Ambassador Ian Kelly, voiced the idea of an international police group as an instrument for enhancing community security in Kyrgyzstan:

“An international police task force organized and managed by the OSCE could monitor and mentor Kyrgyzstan’s police forces and support the Kyrgyz authorities in restoring public order, strengthening law-enforcement capacities of local authorities; and, easing interethnic tensions to further political dialogue aimed at finding a long-term solution to the crisis”.¹⁰

This idea was based on positive experience with the OSCE police advisory groups in Croatia (1998 – 2000) and Macedonia (2001 – 2000). Moreover, the initiative was enthusiastically accepted and supported by the Kyrgyz authorities in the course of lengthy consultations between officials in Bishkek and the OSCE. As a result, in the last days of June the Kyrgyz government addressed the OSCE with a request to dispatch a Police Advisory Group to the country. Already on 2 July the Permanent Council expressed its readiness to consider this request pending negotiations with its Kyrgyz counterparts. On 22 July the Permanent Council decided “To authorize the deployment, without delay, of an OSCE Police Advisory Group to assist Kyrgyzstan to reduce inter-ethnic tensions, restore public order and strengthen the capacities of the territorial units of the Ministry of the Interior of the Kyrgyz Republic” .¹¹

However, due to pressure from several political forces, the Police Advisory Group had to be reformatted. Speaking at a session of the Permanent Council on 4 November 2010, the representative of the Kyrgyz Ministry of the Interior, N. Soldashenko, noted, that, due to stabilization in the South, there was no longer any need for a large group of police officers. He suggested that the most suitable form of normalization assistance would be holistic support for police reform. Soldashenko voiced the interest the Kyrgyz counterparts in a project “directed at threat alleviation in the sphere of community security by means of a total respect of human rights by the police, enhancement of administration and police performance in a multi-ethnic environment and development of trust between police and contained communities of citizens”. Thus, a modification of the post-conflict approach by the OSCE had taken place. Instead of PAG, CSI was chosen as a “lighthouse” project, based on the seven-year experience of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek within the realms of police cooperation. Being an integral part of a large-scale Police Reform Assistance Programme, the CSI was aimed at strengthening the protection of and respect for human rights and confidence-building among the police and the communities via the promotion of a multi-ethnic police force. By April 2011, there were 28 police advisors deployed in the Chui, Batken, Osh and Jalal Abad provinces. The officers were tasked with cooperation with the local police, as well as consultations and joint meetings with the communities and non-governmental organizations. To this end, monthly meetings between the Community Security Groups were conducted. Twelve mini-buses, duly equipped, were handed over to Kyrgyzstan in July 2011 to serve as mobile police

10 us Mission to OSCE: Statement on OSCE Role in Kyrgyzstan, as delivered by Ambassador Ian Kelly to the Permanent Council, Vienna, June 17, 2010, pc.del/599/10.

11 OSCE Permanent Council Decision No. 947 (pc.dec/947): OSCE Police Advisory Group to Kyrgyzstan. July 22, 2010.

units for patrolling remote areas. Various sporting events and festivals were held, with a long-term perspective on crime prevention and educational aspects. Video surveillance cameras were installed in pre-detention facilities to ensure transparency and to prevent abuses of power. All these projects were funded via the Community Initiatives Fund.

The Kyrgyz government had requested the OSCE to extend the CSI term until December 2012, which testifies to the success of the project. However, serious problems remain, among them the issue of multi-ethnic police units. A middle-term report on the CSI's evaluation, published in September 2011, states:

“While the security situation has largely stabilized and there is a gradual return to some semblances of a normal life, many tensions still remain. Those are, however, predominantly underlying and dormant. Nevertheless, a small incident has the potential to escalate quickly, particularly if fuelled by agitating rumours, inflammatory political rhetoric and/or provocative journalism.”¹²

A number of experts have critically assessed the political will for police reform in Kyrgyzstan. Among others, Erica Marat writes: the “Kyrgyz Ministry of Interior has been obtaining equipment and participating in OSCE seminars for more than 10 years. But the police was not ready for big changes and transparency increase... Donors' efforts turn out to be vain and costly, as they are targeted at development of police culture in communities, which exist under authoritarianism and weak self-governance”.¹³ Marat, however, admits that the OSCE provides stern support to institutions of civil control as they aspire to instill a culture of democratization within the police.

Another integral part of increasing physical security assistance in Kyrgyzstan is a project on the administration of light weapons and ammunition. This project is based on a request from the Kyrgyz government, which was issued at the Forum for Security and Cooperation in 2008 and 2010. The project has been implemented in the villages of Koy Tash (Chui province), Budjum (Batken province) and Gulcha (Osh province). Three new ammunition dumps were to be constructed, and old dumps were to be refurbished. Further, security systems' infrastructure was to be enhanced in line with OSCE best practices, and training workshops on proper ammunition and arms dump administration was to be conducted.

These programme activities have been given high-level political support and acknowledgement. On 7 February 2014, a memorandum of understanding was signed by the OSCE, the Kyrgyz government and the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces. The subject of the agreement is the creation of situation rooms in administrative buildings for rapid crisis reaction and on-line conferences between local and Bishkek authorities. The main aim of this three-year project is to bolster law and order in the country and to strengthen the government's capacities in crisis prevention and management. Working with the media and local communities in promoting inter-ethnic peace and accordance. It is a well-established fact that engagement in a conflict cycle must be strategic, long-term and consistent. Therefore, high-level dialogue which has been ongoing between the Kyrgyz authorities and the HCNM is noteworthy. Astrid Thors visited Bishkek in the autumn of 2013, and expressed her support for the Action Plan on the Implementation of the Concept of National Unity and Interethnic Relations. Issues of state language and language policy, as well as

12 OSCE, Mid-term Assessment of the OSCE Community Security Initiative in Kyrgyzstan August – September 2011, Key Findings and Recommendations, sec.gal/154/11, 29 September 2011.

13 Erica Marat. OSCE Police Reform in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan: previous difficulties and new perspectives. http://www.eucentralasia.eu/uploads/tx_ictcontent/PB-27-OSCE-Police-Reform-KG-TJ-RU_01.pdf, last accessed on 12 March, 2014.

national language development and language variety in the country were discussed.

Another post-conflict rehabilitation and conflict prevention measure is being implemented by the OSCE Osh Office in cooperation with civil activists from the South. It focuses on enhancing women leaders' potential. A memorandum of understanding was signed in August 2011 between "Initiative Groups of Women", the police, education representatives and medical institutions. Based on this agreement there have been many activities on engaging women in confidence-building measures, with full support from local executives and law enforcement authorities. The scope of the project was comprehensive: representatives of all eleven territorial councils of Osh city took part.

Youth activism was at the centre of two other OSCE projects, "Peace Messengers" and "Youth Councils". Over seven hundred mediators were trained in helping the government to identify and react to potential conflict situations. The mediators were also charged with awareness-raising and police cooperation. To ensure sustainability, the coordination of the project is to be handled by the Osh city administration and local self-government once the OSCE funding ceases.

The "Youth Councils" project focused on creating a number of information, political and discussion platforms on issues of peace-building and interethnic relations for young activists and local authorities. It is noteworthy that Osh city administration has provided a sizeable financial contribution to this endeavour, thus proving the necessary commitment on the side of the state authorities.

The project "Increasing the potential of Government in preventing conflict outbreaks by a reform of the government press service" is based on an understanding that proper, prompt and balanced information, as issued by legitimate institutions of authority, is of primary importance in the prevention of destabilization, violence and hate propaganda. Professional and responsible work by the government press service sends a good signal to society, symbolically positioning the central authority as a guarantee of stability and tranquility.

OSCE Engagement in the Conflict Cycle in Kyrgyzstan: Lessons Learnt

As already mentioned, there has been a certain lack of political will among member states towards dealing with the crisis in Kyrgyzstan. In other words, official declarations were not timely and fully translated into practical actions, as was the case with the consensus on a timely call for early warning. The latter was issued after the culmination of the various events, thus giving the notion of "early warning" something of a derogatory hint, especially for the public at large. The OSCE engagement in regulating the crisis was therefore influenced by a lack of coordination, passiveness and the political weakness of member states in what transpired to be essential issues of the engagement. The technocratic elite of the OSCE were less than successful in mobilizing member states and reaching consensus.


Yet another setback on the organizational level is the prioritization of problem areas, namely the preference given by chairing countries to selected questions of international cooperation. These preferences, as expressed in terms of national interest, define the politics and diplomacy of states. The situation in Kyrgyzstan, despite its seriousness and implications for interethnic peace and stability, was not adequately reflected in the Astana Declaration (December 2010). The Irish Chairmanship in 2012 did not express any interest in visiting Kyrgyzstan; the Ukrainian Chairmanship visited the country only once, towards the end of its term. These are, in my opinion, manifestations of the OSCE political agenda's volatility and a certain degree of opportunism.

Institutional sustainability and high employee turnover are omnipresent hindrances for OSCE field missions. As this article was being completed, there were practically no staff members at the OSCE Centre in Bishkek who were also deployed in the same capacity during the outbreak of the violence in 2010. Hence, the question once again concerns OSCE field missions' institutional memory and continuity.

One of the most vivid lessons of the OSCE post-conflict rehabilitation is an obvious misbalance between the real needs of collective rebuilding on the ground, on the one side, and the peace-building agenda of the organization, on the other. In line with common practices of post-conflict reconciliation and reconstruction, peace-building as a phase starts no earlier than five or seven years after the ending of violence. In the case of Kyrgyzstan, the process was somewhat forcibly accelerated; instead of post-conflict humanitarian relief, the OSCE carried on with a fully-fledged peace-building operation. An external actor's miscalculation with regard to strategy in the context of interethnic conflicts always places the intervening side on dangerous ground. The do-no-harm principle comes to light, and there is a danger of delegitimizing the organization's actions. Conditions on the ground at that time were more favourable to basic, but efficient confidence-building measures. Strictly speaking, in the summer and autumn of 2010, and at the beginning of the 2011, there were very few solid conditions for any other form of intervention in the South. This was mostly due to weakness on the part of the central authorities and a profound distrust among the population towards the government.

The crisis in Kyrgyzstan has vividly revealed problematic points and discrepancies in the OSCE's Central Asian policy. On the one hand, the OSCE once again proved its reputation and demonstrated its extensive diplomatic and negotiation record. Within a limited timeframe, the OSCE had managed to find ways of conflict resolution and to prevent any further escalation and conflict spillover. The OSCE managed to successfully draw on its status on the international arena to bring attention to the tragedy. On the other hand, the way the organization further used its steering capacity was not devoid of political opportunism and strategy miscalculations.

The OSCE is fully capable of strengthening its potential for a better engagement in crisis prevention in Kyrgyzstan. A solid, long-term prioritization of the conflict cycle is needed not only from the OSCE, but also from all other key international actors.



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