

Fostering relations with a host country: A case study of the OSCE and Tadjikistan

Kathleen Samuel

Senior Policy Support Officer for Central Asia at the OSCE. She has worked for many years for international organizations and non-governmental organizations in and on issues relating to Central Asia, as well as in the Caucasus and the Baltic countries. The views contained in this article are the author's alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the OSCE.

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A special strength of the OSCE's approach to comprehensive and cooperative security is the network of field operations that it maintains in 16 countries. While the mandate and activities of each mission are specific to the context of the country in which the mission operates, broadly speaking, the field operations support their respective host countries to strengthen regional security and stability through promoting and upholding OSCE commitments and standards. The field operations also serve to link the security in one part of the Organization to other areas, as the security in one country is a matter for all participating States (pS). These field operations apply tools based on the Organization's commitments and standards to promote early warning, conflict prevention, conflict management and post-conflict reconstruction. Field operations perform a delicate balancing act to encourage and, at times, urge host governments into meeting and upholding the standards and values of the Organization that all participating States undertook, when establishing or becoming member, while maintaining good relations with the authorities.

Since becoming a pS in the OSCE, Tajikistan has had a strategic importance as the security situation has implications for the broader OSCE region, both since shortly after having become a member due to its civil war, and today as its neighbour Afghanistan continues to experience instability.

The OSCE in Tajikistan

The OSCE's presence in Tajikistan is the longest-running in Central Asia, and one of the oldest, indeed, of the Organization. At the fourth meeting of the Council of Ministers in 1993 in Rome, it was decided to establish an OSCE presence in Tajikistan.¹ A field operation was deployed in early 1994, when a small Mission to Tajikistan was set up in order to support the UN-led peace process and help build democratic institutions of the fractured country.

In 2002, the Mission in Tajikistan was changed into the Centre in Dushanbe.² While this model of OSCE presences in the other Central Asian countries had proved to be successful, Tajikistan was increasingly dissatisfied. Tajikistan was frustrated with the Organization's reform process that had culminated in 2005.³ By mid-2006 the host country's frustration became focused on the Centre in Dushanbe, when the head of Tajikistan's delegation to the OSCE openly criticized the presence at a PC meeting for a lack of impact of its activities, complaining that the field operation was unable to adapt over time.⁴ This was a wake up call and a process of internal reflection began.

Rebuilding the relationship

The Head of Centre at the time, with the support of the Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre's Mission Programme Support (since renamed Policy Support Service), called a series of internal meetings with units in the Secretariat to reflect on how to respond. At the end of 2006, after the terms of service of the then Head of Centre and Deputy Head of Centre drew to a close, a new Head of Centre and Deputy Head of Centre were appointed. With a new management team in place, and support from the 2007 Spanish Chairmanship and the

1 'CSCE and the New Europe - Our Security is Indivisible: Decisions of the Rome Council Meeting,' Fourth Meeting of the Council of Ministers, Rome, 30 November – 1 December 1993.

2 PC.DEC/500/Corr.1, 31 October 2002.

3 Indeed, the Tajik delegation was reportedly one of the last delegations to join consensus on the PC unified budget decision for activities in 2006.

4 PC.DEL/434/06, 11 May 2006.

CPC, a course of direction based on transparency, dialogue and partnership began to emerge. This process was not without its difficulties. Earlier in the year, the host country had conveyed a number of propositions: it wanted to establish a regional centre on dry land or transportation issues under the auspices of the OSCE, and it wanted to establish a new presence with a new mandate comprised of a project coordination office on its terms.⁵ Based on conversations with official interlocutors from Tajikistan, the host country also appeared to want more transparency and a greater role in the planning and prioritizing of the presence's activities.

At the time, it was not clear whether the Organization could, or even should, deliver on any, let alone, all of these elements together. In order to narrow the gap between what the host country wanted the Organization to do, and what the Organization in practice could do, a proposal was made in the Secretariat's Policy Support Service to organize an 'OSCE — Tajikistan Task Force' in order to discuss the role of the OSCE in Tajikistan and of Tajikistan in the OSCE. This first Task Force, in what has since become an annual event, took place in Dushanbe on 27 March 2007, and was co-chaired by the First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, the Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, and the Head of the OSCE Centre in Dushanbe. A significant number of representatives from the host country's ministries, as well as from the 2007 Spanish Chairmanship and the OSCE's institutions and Secretariat units, participated. First Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Saimumin Yatimov, recognized the Organization as 'an important instrument of assisting Tajikistan in its efforts on providing security...' The Director of the CPC, Ambassador Herbert Salber, emphasized that the OSCE was in a listening mode, and that the Organization was prepared to discuss its support to the host country based on the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.⁶ While there were diverging views on what the OSCE should be doing in Tajikistan, there was a general acknowledgement of the constructive role of the Task Force as a forum for dialogue. A representative of the MFA referred to the meeting as historic.⁷ Concretely, in support of Tajikistan's desire to improve its security and address regional threats and challenges, and of its interest in hosting a regional body under the auspices of the OSCE, a proposal was first made to establish an OSCE-wide Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe.

Building on the positive momentum established at the Task Force, the Head and Deputy Head of the Centre in Dushanbe, Ambassador Vladimir Pryakhin and Klaus Rasmussen, respectively, began to address the challenge of strengthening the presence itself, as well as its relations with the host country. They embarked on a course to improve consultations with the host country, streamline its project activities and restructure the Centre while increasing the role of the economic and environmental dimension but maintaining balance among the baskets. Internally, the management began a process to consolidate project activities and introduced mechanisms to increase transparency and monitor their results. In order to accomplish the restructuring and to strengthen the role of the EED, they needed the support of the Spanish Chairmanship, the Secretariat, and the fifty six participating States. And, they needed especially to build the support of the host country itself. Thus began a process of intense internal reflection and consultations resulting successfully in Tajikistan's support for the Centre's programme and budgetary proposals. The Centre was able to gain support for enhancing many of its activities, including through the establishment of posts of an economic and environmental advisor on issues of regional importance, as well as for a water advisor, both issues being crucial to the country's domestic policy and relations with its neighbours. At the same time, the Centre, together with the CPC's Borders Team, began a process leading to the establishment of an OSCE-wide Border Management

5 Internal communications, January 2007.

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

Staff College, which Tajikistan agreed to host.

In 2007, pS began discussing possible OSCE interaction with Afghanistan due to concerns about the impact of its security situation on the area of the OSCE. After a lively discussion, the Ministerial Council in Madrid made a decision that the OSCE should engage with Afghanistan, and that the Secretary General, Ambassador Marc Perrin De Brichambaut, should examine 'the prospects for intensifying OSCE action to support measures for securing the borders between the Central Asian participating States and Afghanistan.'⁸ Tajikistan, as an OSCE host country bordering with Afghanistan, and the OSCE presence in Tajikistan, would play important roles in the implementation of this decision.

The processes of strengthening the field operation and its relations with the host country proceeded as well during 2007. And, the Centre's role in any activities involving Afghanistan, particularly in the sphere of border management and security, was well established. At the beginning of 2008, however, the question of Tajikistan's proposal to change the mandate remained open. The 2008 Finnish OSCE Chairmanship prepared to tackle this issue.

Tajikistan's proposal to establish a project coordination office would have changed the OSCE's activities from its traditional, political role of promoting comprehensive security through dialogue based on the Organization's commitments. The Finnish Chairmanship conveyed a message that it was prepared to listen to the host country's wishes, but that it had to seek the support of all pS. To begin the process, it started initial consultations in Vienna, and then sent a high level delegation from the capital to Dushanbe in order to participate in the second Joint Task Force and hold consultations with the Foreign Ministry on the draft mandate.

The second annual Joint Task Force took place in February 2008 and continued the dialogue between the host country and the OSCE. Discussions at the second meeting were increasingly concrete and focused particularly on border management and security, including progress on the plans to establish the Border Management Staff College, as well as on engagement with Afghanistan, water management, energy security and transport, democratization, media, and gender awareness activities.⁹ The Finnish Chairmanship announced its strong support for the OSCE's border-related activities. The high level participation of the Chairmanship also conveyed a message to the host country that it was indeed prepared to listen and engage in dialogue on equal footing with the host country. During the mandate discussions a breakthrough subsequently was achieved when agreement was reached to establish an OSCE Office in Tajikistan (OiT). The mandate established a new presence in the country in recognition of the developments since the end of the peace process while maintaining the OSCE's full role. The Chairmanship proposed this mandate to the pS and continued consultations until it was adopted by consensus that June.

¹⁰The third annual Task Force meeting, in February 2009, coincided with the 15th anniversary of an OSCE presence in Tajikistan. By the time of the third task force, representatives from both Tajikistan and the OSCE were praising the event as a forum for constructive dialogue and a model for cooperation. In addition to the

8 'OSCE Engagement with Afghanistan,' MC.DEC/4/07/Corr.1*, 30 November 2007.

9 Press release, 'Border management, economic development focus of OSCE meeting in Dushanbe,' Dushanbe, 25 February 2008, at <http://www.osce.org/item/29828.html>, accessed on 15 August 2009.

10 PC.DEC/852, 19 June 2008.

high level participants from the host country, OSCE and the Greek Chairmanship, representatives of the full OSCE Troika and of the Office's civil society partners also took part. First Deputy Foreign Minister Abdullo Yuldashev warmly appreciated the cooperation with the Organization. The Deputy Head of the OSCE Greek Chairmanship's Task Force, Ambassador Abatis, noted that the Task Force provided 'a unique forum for joint consultations on issues of common concern and hoped that this dialogue would help the OSCE Office in Tajikistan to make further contributions to strengthening political dialogue, democratic institutions and civil society.'¹¹ The participants discussed plans for the remainder of the year, as well as their intentions for 2010. The upcoming launch of the OSCE Border Management Staff College was announced.

In connection with the celebrations of the 15th anniversary of an OSCE presence in Tajikistan, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Hamrokhon Zarifi, personally proposed and oversaw the publication of a book 'Tajikistan – OSCE: Dialogue and Cooperation,' commemorating cooperation over the years, the publication of which was supported by the Office in Tajikistan.¹² In his foreword providing an historical overview of relations between Tajikistan and the OSCE, Minister Zarifi commented on the sometimes difficult relationship between the Organization and the country, but also wrote that the 'experience of the activities of the OSCE field presence in Tajikistan — unique in its own right — could serve as a future role model for decision making in similar situations and in other regions of the world.'¹³

The OSCE Border Management Staff College was launched in Dushanbe on 27 May 2009 after two years of intensive consultations, with the committed support of the host country and of the Greek Chairmanship. Foreign Minister Zarifi applauded its establishment stating that it was an 'important landmark, and a new phase in OSCE — Tajikistan cooperation.'¹⁴ Ambassador Pryakhin recognized the strategic role of the BMSC,¹⁵ and Ambassador Salber, spoke of the BMSC as evidence of the new quality of the relationship between Tajikistan and the OSCE.¹⁶

The event was also attended by a significant number of ambassadors of OSCE participating States to the Permanent Council. During their visit, they were received by President Rakhmon, who highly appreciated the work of the OSCE and of the presence in Tajikistan.¹⁷ The president also announced the appointment of the country's first ombudsman, an issue which the OSCE presence in Tajikistan had been working on since its 1995 tasking by the Permanent Council.

Taking stock

Since the significant PC meeting in May 2006, the relations between the OSCE and Tajikistan had changed

11 Press release, 'Border security, economic development and human rights focus of OSCE- Tajikistan Task Force meeting,' Dushanbe, 20 February 2009, at <http://www.osce.org/item/36374.html>, accessed on 15 August 2009.

12 The book is available in Russian from the OSCE Office in Tajikistan. English and Tojiki versions are forthcoming.

13 'Tajikistan – OSCE: Dialogue and Cooperation,' Irfon, Dushanbe, 2009, p. 31. Unofficial translation by the author.

14 DVD 'Visit of the OSCE Ambassadors to Tajikistan, 26 – 28 May 2009,' produced by the OSCE Office in Tajikistan, available from the OIT.

15 Press release, 'OSCE Launches Border Management College in Dushanbe,' Dushanbe, 27 May 2009, at <http://www.osce.org/item/37864.html>, accessed on 15 August 2009.

16 Information based on discussions with participants in the meeting.

17 Information based on discussions with participants in the meeting.

significantly. Indeed, at a PC meeting in May 2009, the Tajik representative to the OSCE, Ambassador Nuriddin Shamslov, stated that ‘...the OSCE Office in Tajikistan is making positive contributions within its mandate to address current challenges and assist host Government to carry out the prioritized tasks. Tajikistan supports the Office’s meaningful involvement in the Government’s reform process, as well as its initiatives aimed at further strengthening of security and promoting sustainable development.’¹⁸

The response of the OSCE at many levels contributed to the turn around in relations. The leadership of the Secretary General, the Office in Tajikistan, the Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre and several consecutive Chairmanships conveyed consistent messages to the host government that the OSCE is prepared to engage with Tajikistan in dialogue, and in a transparent manner. The annual joint task forces provided a unique forum, which — using project management language — helped turn the host country from that of a ‘beneficiary’ of OSCE support, to that of a partner with the Organization. The task forces also provided a forum in which the OSCE and the host country could sit at the same table and discuss the role of the field presence and its activities. On a practical level, officials and partners of the field operation were informed of its priorities and plans and had a channel to convey their own views and engage the Organization strategically.

The practice of dialogue and partnership also opened the door for tackling more sensitive and complex issues, such as the mandate discussions and the launch of the Border Management Staff College, respectively. The approach of listening and dialogue in partnership contributed to an environment in which a collaborative solution could be found for the mandate. This approach also contributed to the trust and confidence necessary for the launching and hosting of the BMSC. The Chairmanships, Secretary General, D/CPC and leadership of the OiT were also able to help the host country to address its needs and communicate them to participating States in order to build support for the new mandate and the BMSC.

What is next?

While the basis of cooperation — even collaboration — has been strengthened and much has been accomplished, much will remain to be done. The host government has emphasized that the OSCE should support its priorities, while the Organization has conveyed that it is supporting the host country’s needs. One of the main challenges of the field operation will be to narrow the gap between these diverging views. Additionally, the field office will need to continue promoting constructive dialogue in order to engage the host country, and support its ability to uphold its commitments in all three OSCE dimensions, particularly in the human dimension.

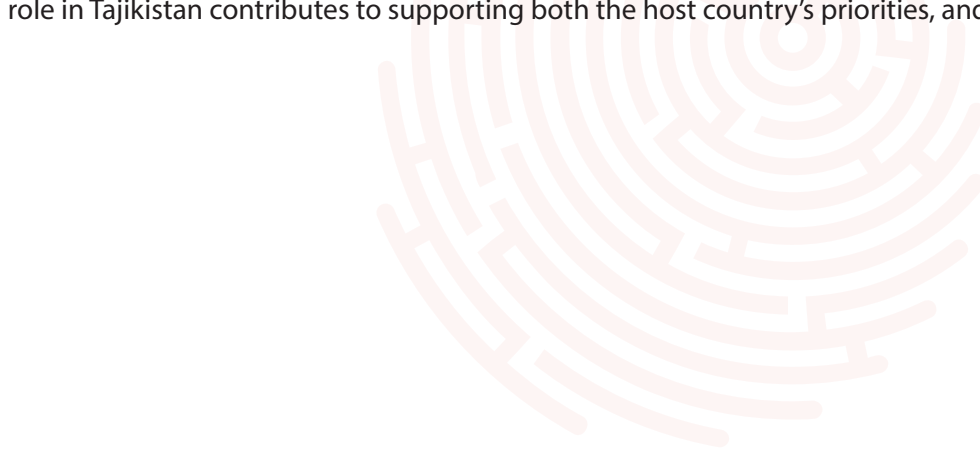
Tajik officials have said on many occasions in OSCE forums that activities in the human dimension are a priority. The Office in Tajikistan will need to engage with, encourage, and — at times — prod the host country into taking concrete steps to narrow the gap between its rhetoric and its actions. The upcoming 2010 parliamentary elections and the recent appointment of an ombudsman are two concrete examples. The host country’s track record on elections has fallen significantly short of its OSCE commitments.¹⁹ At the same time, the president’s positive step to appoint the ombudsperson means that the OSCE can begin its work in supporting the host country, in partnership, with capacity building for this institution. Of course, support in these areas represent only a part of the field operation’s other important work in spheres such as: promoting

18 PC.DEL/365/09, 15 May 2009.

19 See OSCE/ODIHR election reports for the 2000 and 2005 parliamentary elections and the 2006 presidential election at <http://www.osce.org/odihr-elections/14653.html>.

political dialogue and cooperation between the government and civil society; addressing issues potentially leading to violent extremism; supporting the implementation of the national border strategy; supporting the implementation of Tajikistan's commitments related to law enforcement and anti-terrorism; assisting the host country to eliminate land mines and excess small arms and light weapons and conventional ammunition; contributing to the observation of commitments stemming from the Vienna 1999 document; building a favourable climate for small businesses; promoting regional trade and transit; supporting the implementation of sustainable environmental policies and addressing environmental threats to security; addressing water management and energy security; providing assistance in implementing justice sector reforms; raising awareness on human rights and democratization; promoting free media and gender equality and awareness; and combating trafficking in human beings.

Reflecting on the role of the task force, so far, it has been as a forum of discussion about the OSCE and its activities in Tajikistan. The task force was a solution for addressing issues in Tajikistan and adapted the Organization's activity consultation process to meet domestic needs. For the past three years, it has helped strengthen that process and given a greater role to the OiT's partners both within the government and within civil society. Looking ahead, it will continue to be useful to the extent that it is needed to support consultations within the OSCE framework. Perhaps, it will also evolve into a discussion on the policies of the host country to comprehensively promote security. Such a discussion could help make certain that the OSCE's role in Tajikistan contributes to supporting both the host country's priorities, and needs.





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Netherlands Helsinki Committee
Het Nutshuis
Riviermark 4
2513 AM The Hague
The Netherlands

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