

OCTOBER-NOVEMBER 2007



The Environment and Security Initiative:
From analysis to action

“Exemplary” Skopje-OSCE partnership
reaches 15-year milestone

Commemorating 15 years of the
Forum for Security Co-operation

Finding solutions for a threatened planet





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The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe works for stability, prosperity and democracy in 56 States through political dialogue about shared values and through practical work that makes a lasting difference.

OSCE Chairmanship 2007: Spain

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- Forum for Security Co-operation, *Vienna*
- Secretariat, *Vienna*
- OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media, *Vienna*
- Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *Warsaw*
- High Commissioner on National Minorities, *The Hague*
- OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, *Copenhagen*

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- OSCE Office in Yerevan
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- OSCE Mission in Kosovo
- OSCE Mission to Montenegro
- OSCE Mission to Serbia
- OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje

Message from the Head of Spain's OSCE Chairmanship Task Force

The OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Madrid is within sight and getting closer every day. The time has come for all of us — the Chairmanship, institutions and participating States — to pull together to ensure the event's successful outcome. Indeed, the next few weeks look set to be the year's most demanding and challenging. The clock is running fast and much of the important work is yet to be done.



OSCE/MIKHAL EVSTAFIEV

More than nine months ago, Spain assumed the tasks of the OSCE Chairmanship. We were determined to develop and further consolidate this Organization, which we consider so vital to our shared security. At the same time, our idealism was tempered by realism. We knew full well that, in a political organization that is based on the rule of consensus, any desired achievement would depend on a genuine and open dialogue and on the political will of every one of its members.

At a recent meeting of the United Nations Security Council in New York, the Chairman-in-Office, Foreign Minister Miguel Ángel Moratinos, summed up 2007 as a year of challenges for the OSCE. "It is necessary to reiterate the call to participating States to work together to overcome difficulties, with the aim of bringing positions closer together and leaving space for a constructive consensus," he said.

He was referring to the unresolved conflicts; the decision on the OSCE Chairmanship for 2009; the ongoing stalemate regarding the future implementation of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE); the future role of the OSCE in dealing with threats to environmental security; the fight against terrorism, intolerance and discrimination; and the further modernization of our structures and institutions.

These are just a few among a vast array of difficult issues that we will have to confront at the Madrid Ministerial Council. The way we address them will not only determine the meeting's outcome, but will also set the OSCE's agenda for the coming year — and way beyond, into the twenty-first century.

This is not meant to belittle the dedicated hard work that is being carried out every day across all the dimensions of the Organization's activities. The cover story of this issue of the *OSCE Magazine* on seeking co-operative solutions in the environmental area explores an issue close to the Spanish Chairmanship's heart. The rest of the publication's contents, too, reveal the extent of our commitment to strengthening the OSCE and raising its profile. The articles leave no doubt that, whatever we set out to do, our primary goal is to achieve greater inclusiveness, consistency and coherence.

Ambassador José Ángel López Jorrín
 Madrid, 10 October 2007

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Front and back covers: “Living on the seabed”, a series on the Aral Sea by Kazakh photographer Shamil Zhumatov, won first prize in the OSCE’s first photo competition, sponsored by the Spanish Chairmanship. (See page 7.)

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The Environment and Security Initiative: From analysis to action

At first glance, destroying left-over pesticides in Moldova, investigating the impact of wildland fires in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region, and promoting best practices in closing down mines in south-eastern Europe appear to share little in common. But a closer look reveals that all three activities involve battling human-induced environmental hazards that have the potential of wreaking havoc on local communities and their neighbours.

BY DAVID SWALLEY

Keeping these threats from spilling across national boundaries and transforming them instead into opportunities for building confidence between States is the ambitious task that the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) has set for itself. Launched in 2003, this unique interagency partnership draws on the

- Eastern Europe**
- Environment and security priority areas
 - Areas under environmental stress
 - Areas contaminated by the Chernobyl explosion
 - Strongly polluted coastal areas
 - Important nature: near-border protected areas and transboundary regions of high ecological importance
 - Nuclear power plants (operating / closed)
 - Past / current (frozen) conflicts
- Land and territorial disputes**
- Inter-state disputes in the process of international or bilateral resolution
 - Inter-ethnic disputes

strengths and resources of the OSCE and UNEP, UNDP, UNECE and the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC). The Security through Science Programme of NATO's Public Diplomacy Division joined as an associate partner in 2004.

Starting with an on-site examination of "at risk" areas and culminating in a structured work programme, the six partners work closely with governments and tap local knowledge and expertise in Central Asia, the South Caucasus, south-eastern Europe and Eastern Europe. These collective efforts have resulted in several regional environmental assessments that have, in turn, led to the development of more than 70 projects so far. The focus is on building skills, strengthening institutions, developing policies, raising awareness and applying practical measures to remedy specific environmental problems.

With its comprehensive view of security, the OSCE injects valuable assets into the ENVSEC Initiative: its network of field offices as well as its wide-ranging contacts with national authorities, local environmental experts and NGOs active in environmental issues.

"Perhaps the OSCE's most important contribution to the Initiative lies in placing the most pressing environmental concerns higher on the political agenda of participating States in Vienna and in other capitals," says Bernard Snoy, Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities. "Countries are afforded the opportunity to engage in a dialogue and to co-operate with one another to come up with sustainable solutions before insecurity breeds confrontation or fans the flames of existing conflicts."

SOUTH CAUCASUS

This early-warning principle underpins the work of ENVSEC in the South Caucasus, where long-simmering tensions have given rise to additional pressure on the shared ecosystem of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia. Responding to a request from the three governments, the ENVSEC partners analysed the condition of transboundary natural resources, including the quality and quantity of water in the Kura-Araks/Aras River Basin, which is a prime source of fresh water in the three countries and in their frozen-conflict zones.

The OSCE's partners in the Environment and Security Initiative are:

UNDP *United Nations Development Programme*
UNEP *United Nations Environment Programme*
NATO *North Atlantic Treaty Organization*
UNECE *United Nations Economic Commission for Europe*
REC *Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe*

www.envsec.org • www.osce.org/eea

"ENVSEC has been playing a useful role in bringing people together from both sides of the conflict in the South Ossetian region through mutually beneficial environmental projects," says Zaal Lomtadze, Georgia's Deputy Minister for the Environment.

Other OSCE-led projects within the ENVSEC Initiative seek to fill gaps identified during the priority-setting process: training judges to understand multilateral environmental agreements, establishing environmental information centres for the public and working with mayors' offices to develop action plans on urban environmental issues.

EASTERN EUROPE

How does ENVSEC go about translating its underlying philosophy into action? The environmental assessment focusing on Eastern Europe, completed just last May, illustrates how prime goals and activities are propelled by a strong sense of national and regional ownership.

Responding to requests from the Governments of Belarus, Moldova and Ukraine, and following reports by their environmental ministries, ENVSEC held extensive consultations with a diverse group of national representatives — government officials, scientists and members of environmental NGOs. Their most critical concerns were summarized and published in a comprehensive, 100-page regional report in English and Russian, including maps highlighting environmental issues that pose the greatest risk to security and stability.

The wealth of data assembled lays a solid groundwork for multi-year work programmes, comprising practical projects that are jointly developed with participating countries. Working in tandem with national focal



OSCE-led environmental assessment mission to fire-affected territories in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region

Large wildland fires were the focus of this activity in October 2006, supported by a core financial contribution from ENVSEC. An international team worked alongside local experts from both sides of the Line of Contact to study the extent of the fires' impact on the environment. They also drew up recommendations to combat the detrimental consequences of the fires and to enhance national capacities to prevent and control similar incidents in the future.



PHILIP PECKLUND UNIVERSITY

Best practices in closing down mining sites in south-eastern Europe

The cyanide spill from a mining tailing dam at Romania's Rosia Montana in 2000 was a grim reminder of the disastrous effects that a mining catastrophe can have on transboundary waterways and marine life. ENVSEC co-ordinated an assessment of the most vulnerable mining sites in south-eastern Europe. Local communities have teamed up with ENVSEC to carry out a number of demonstration projects aimed at rehabilitating abandoned mines and developing home-grown expertise.

points appointed by environmental and foreign ministries, ENVSEC partners are reassured that project design and implementation are on track and enjoy the backing of host governments.

Project activities under the 2007 work programme in Eastern Europe are already well under way. In Moldova, chemical wastes and pesticides are being collected and disposed of safely. Joint monitoring of the Dniester and Prut rivers — major shared sources of drinking water and irrigation, fishing and energy production — is being heavily promoted and encouraged.

“The destruction of dangerous chemicals and obsolete pesticides is an excellent example of how international organizations can contribute to solving ecological problems for the benefit of the people of Moldova,” says Emil Druc, National Focal Point of the ENVSEC Initiative, who is based in Chisinau.

Other planned activities in Eastern Europe later in 2007 and next year will zero in on environmental and security risks stemming from industrial and mining waste and the legacy of the Chernobyl disaster.

CENTRAL ASIA

In the Ferghana Valley, ENVSEC is looking into abandoned Soviet-era uranium mines and pesticide dumps and the grave danger they pose to people's health and livelihood. Because the region is also prone to earthquakes, landslides, floods, droughts and deforestation, ENVSEC partners are assisting local communities to

prepare co-ordinated responses to natural disasters and emergencies. Recently, ENVSEC launched assessment activities focusing on environmental risks in the East Caspian region and the Amu-Darya river basin, affecting Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan.

NEW AWARENESS

As the worldwide effects of climate change continue to shape a new public awareness regarding the environment, policymakers and communities are realizing the urgency of developing more thoughtful ways of managing and monitoring their natural resources.

For large swathes of the OSCE area that are already vulnerable to desertification, forest fires and flooding, the challenge is unprecedented: Global warming is likely to worsen their environmental plight, potentially leading to adverse consequences reaching across borders as States grapple with water and energy shortages and a host of socio-economic issues related to migration.

With an eye towards the planet's fragile ecological balance, ENVSEC is truly an initiative whose time has come, making it possible for OSCE participating States to tackle the by now undeniable interdependence between the environment and security in a co-ordinated and co-operative fashion.

David Swalley is the Head of the Environmental Security and Co-operation Unit in the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA).



OSCEKILIAN STRAUSS

Destruction of dangerous chemicals in Moldova

Obsolete chemical pesticides throughout Moldova are hazardous to human health. The first phase of the project, completed in June 2007, was jointly implemented within ENVSEC by the OSCE Mission to Moldova and the NATO Maintenance and Supply Agency. Following a laboratory analysis, 1,200 tonnes of chemicals and pesticides were repackaged and collected in warehouses.

Empowering the Environment and Security Initiative



Nagorno-Karabakh region. Experts in the OSCE-led environmental assessment mission return from an inspection site.

The ENVSEC Initiative is made possible through voluntary contributions from, among others, Austria, Belgium, Canada, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United States.

The Initiative owes a special debt of gratitude to the

Government of Canada, whose generous contributions have enabled activities to flourish. Recently, an independent evaluation of the Initiative, funded by the Canadian International Development Agency, led the Government to infuse €2.9 million into ENVSEC for 2007-2009.

"It's clear why Canada is so strongly committed to the ENVSEC Initiative," says Ambassador Barbara Gibson, Head of the Canadian Delegation to the OSCE. "Reducing potential threats to the environment goes a long way towards fulfilling the OSCE mandate of early warning, conflict-prevention, conflict-resolution and post-conflict rehabilitation."

Furthermore, the ENVSEC approach is consistent with Canada's efforts in promoting environmental security, especially the Initiative's use of science-based methodology, its emphasis on fostering co-operation among States to overcome tensions, and its efforts to develop capacity and institutions.

"For example, the environmental assessment mission to the fire-affected areas in and around the Nagorno-Karabakh region is significant in that it brought people together to co-operate on a non-political problem of mutual interest," says Ambassador Gibson.

"Canada would like to encourage the OSCE to continue to be on the lookout for similar opportunities to promote peace and stability through environmental co-operation."

About the cover: Living on a seabed

"I have never won anything before this," Shamil Zhumatov says from his office at the Reuters bureau in Almaty, Kazakhstan. "The top prize in the OSCE photo competition was the first ever in my career. Apart from the fact that it came with a Canon EOS-30D — the first camera I've owned in a long time — the recognition means a lot to me."

The 36-year-old journalism graduate — "the only one in a big family of 12 doctors" — explains that he has been too caught up in his work as a Reuters photographer since 1994 to pay much heed to photo competitions.

"I like what I do every day — depicting the news in images in the countries of Central Asia," he says. "It's my contribution towards a better understanding of the challenges in the region."

Whenever he can, he likes to slip away from the fast pace of breaking news. For the first OSCE photo contest, which was sponsored by the Spanish Chairmanship, Mr. Zhumatov submitted a reflective series of pictures which he took in the Kazakh fishing villages of Karateren and Zhalanash, and the regional centre of Aralsk.

"That was in April 2001 and I have not been back since then, as it is hard to organize such a long trip," he says. "I hear that life is getting slightly better, but it is still quite a long way from being paradise."

"The story of the Aral Sea has been told many times but the photos of Shamil Zhumatov not only show the despair of the people living in the area, but also reflect some of the positive changes," said Carlos Sánchez de Boado y de la Válgoma, Head of the Spanish Delegation to the OSCE, when he announced the contest winners last May.

"It shrank to less than half its original size and turned salty as diversion for irrigation slowly drained what was once one of the world's largest inland bodies of water. After a new dam and other projects in the northern part of the Aral were completed, fresh water is coming back."

The theme of the first OSCE photo contest was "Land and water, protecting our fragile environment". It attracted hundreds of entries,

comprising nearly 2,000 images, from 36 of the Organization's 56 participating States.

The winning images are featured on the OSCE website. They were also exhibited at the fifteenth OSCE Economic and Environmental Forum from 21 to 23 May 2007. Held in Prague, the event's theme focused on land degradation, soil contamination and water management.



In 2006, the *New York Times* illustrated its article on the Aral Sea with this photograph of fishermen near Karateren by Shamil Zhumatov.



Shamil Zhumatov



PHOTO COURTESY OF FAKTI NEWSPAPER

INTERVIEW WITH SVETLANA GELEVA

“Exemplary” Skopje-OSCE partnership reaches 15-year milestone

Perhaps no other official in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is more familiar with the work of the OSCE than Svetlana Geleva. As Director for Multilateral Affairs at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, she is the prime official contact for the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, the Organization’s oldest field presence. On the occasion of the Mission’s fifteenth year of operations, Ms. Geleva traces its achievements, alongside those of the country’s leaders and citizens, especially after the crisis of 2001. In an interview with Sarah Broughton for the *OSCE Magazine*, she says that “the most evident demonstration of the Mission’s success will be when its assistance is no longer needed”.

Sarah Broughton: What are your earliest memories of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission?

Svetlana Geleva: They go back to the second half of 1992, when I started working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. At that time, the OSCE Mission was being established as the first international presence in Macedonia. There was a lot of excitement about it, as we had been campaigning for international recognition and membership in the OSCE and other organizations.

At the end of June 1996, I was transferred to the Ministry’s OSCE Department as a desk officer and my contacts with the Mission intensified. In addition to its monitoring mandate — which was difficult to carry out properly because of the Mission’s small size at that time — it focused on political reporting and made its good offices available in a number of delicate situa-

tions involving minority issues. Ever since then, I have been involved in OSCE matters generally, and in co-operation with the Mission specifically.

How would you characterize relations between the Foreign Ministry and the OSCE Mission over the past 15 years?

Since the start of the Mission, the Foreign Ministry has acted as its focal point and channel for liaison with other ministries and institutions. At times, for various reasons, we had difficulties managing the process of co-ordination. Sometimes it was because of a lack of experience or will on the part of some Mission members, and sometimes it was a lack of understanding of the Mission’s role on the part of some Macedonian institutions.

However, we have always managed to resolve our differences by working to improve co-ordination and by trying to understand one another better. Our co-operation during the crisis in 2001 was exemplary. The Mission’s successive enlargements in 2001 were all undertaken in close co-ordination with the Ministry, acting on behalf of the Government.

The Mission and the Foreign Ministry would meet to assess the situation on the ground on the basis of information provided by representatives of relevant ministries.

Lake Ohrid, 13 August 2001. Macedonian President Boris Trajkovski (who died in a plane crash in February 2004) delivers remarks on the occasion of the signing of the Ohrid Framework Agreement. Ethnic Macedonian and ethnic Albanian signatories to the agreement, as well as senior OSCE, EU and NATO representatives, took part in the ceremony.

We would also discuss what personnel were needed to carry out the Mission's mandate and its additional assigned tasks. Naturally, we had some differences of opinion, but we all worked hard under the pressure and fear of possible negative developments in the country and managed to find common ground on which to tackle the challenges ahead.

I believe this is the way missions should work. If they are to capitalize on the strengths of the Organization, they should act in good faith in the best interests both of the host country and of OSCE field operations.

On a more personal note, through this close communication and co-operation, I made lifelong friendships with a lot of people who fell in love with Macedonia and its people, and who were genuinely committed to making a contribution.

What have been the Mission's most important achievements so far?

There are many, but I believe they cannot be seen separately from the achievements of our own citizens and leaders. After all, the main task of the OSCE's international presence is to assist a participating State's national authorities in confronting a broad range of serious challenges.

You will recall that the Mission was not directly involved in the negotiations of the Ohrid Framework Agreement of 2001. However, the OSCE was represented by Max van der Stoep, special envoy of the Chairman-in-Office, and the Mission was given important assignments under the Agreement's Annex C, relating to confidence-building measures, police development and other matters.

I remember well a meeting at the Foreign Ministry to discuss the return of regular police patrols to the regions where fighting had taken place during the conflict. Along with OSCE Head of Mission Craig Jenness and his police experts, Interior Ministry officials were trying to determine the personnel required to accompany police patrols through the villages, and their redeployment timetable.

Ambassador Jenness said that the police would return to Shipkovicica — the former site of the headquarters of the [ethnic Albanian] National Liberation Army — and would be able to cover the entire territory in two months. Although I had always been an optimist even at the peak of the crisis, I challenged this estimate and we made a bet. The estimate turned out to be correct — a formidable achievement on the part of the Mission, our police and our citizens. I was happy I lost the bet.



Svetlana Geleva

Originally from Podgorica, Montenegro, Svetlana Geleva moved to Skopje after finishing a philology degree at the University of Belgrade. She is a member of several national commissions dealing with human rights and security issues and publishes occasional analytical pieces on international relations issues affecting her adopted home.

How do you see the difference between the role of the OSCE Mission and that of other international organizations?

One of the main strengths of the OSCE is its flexibility. This is reflected in its prompt decision-making, especially in times of crisis — as seen, for example, in the quick reaction of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to the events of 2001. The Organization's comparative advantage lies in its ability to focus on new priorities quickly. Its added value is that it operates effectively but with a low profile in various fields of expertise.

At the same time, I fully agree with the view that OSCE field operations are particularly well suited to crisis management and conflict prevention, and to a lesser degree to long-term institution-building, especially in south-eastern Europe, where the EU and NATO accession processes are the strongest tools driving reforms.

What do you expect from the Mission in the future?

I believe that the Mission should continue scaling down as discussed with the Government. The down-sizing projections are based on a full assessment of ongoing projects and of the assistance needed by Macedonian authorities.

I don't think, for example, that there is any need for two field stations. Kumanovo should complete its operations at the end of the year, and Tetovo some time in 2008. The Mission's support for the decentralization of authority from national to local government is also expected to end once the second phase of the process is over.

The focus should remain on the rule of law, especially judicial reforms. At an appropriate time, we should also start discussing an exit strategy, because in the long run the most evident demonstration of the Mission's success will be the fact that its assistance is no longer needed.

What is your vision for the OSCE in general and what role do you see your country playing?

Macedonia greatly values the OSCE's unique role as a forum for political dialogue. Its geographical coverage, diverse membership, wide-ranging approach, flexibility and ability to change and respond to new challenges are all elements that make the OSCE a unique and constantly relevant organization.

We have benefited from our participation in the OSCE on various levels. In addition to the Mission's activities, the deep involvement of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities led to several initiatives. One of these was the creation of South East Europe University with the aim of expanding higher education opportunities in minority languages. We have used the expertise of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) in drafting the electoral law and various other pieces of legislation. The recommendations of ODIHR observation missions have helped improve our electoral process.

Now the time has come for our country to make a larger contribution. For one thing, Ambassador Arsim Zekolli, who heads our delegation to the OSCE, chairs the Permanent Council's Economic and Environmental Committee. The issues it is addressing are, we believe, crucial to the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security.

We are also working with the Mission to enable successful models and best practices from Macedonia to be transferred to other participating States. Just to give you one example, I remember that when the idea of developing a community policing model was first presented to high-level representatives of the Interior and Foreign Ministries, they were slightly sceptical but did agree to

its implementation. As a result, the Mission and the two ministries started developing the concept in late 2002.

After just a few years, various groups started coming to Macedonia to see how the concept was working in practice so that they could apply it in other situations. Most recently, Norwegian police visited, and one of our experts from the Interior Ministry went to Georgia to conduct training in community policing.

The Mission's original mandate was to monitor a possible spillover of tensions from your neighbouring countries into your border areas. Now, once again, the eyes of the international community are on any potential conflict related to Kosovo's final status. What are your thoughts on this?

It's true that the Kosovo issue continues to be the focus of attention in the region and beyond. No matter how difficult the recent past has been, our region and its individual countries have advanced substantially in all spheres, so we are, of course, keen that the final settlement should contribute to regional stability and should not undermine our own achievements.

Our country supported United Nations envoy Martti Ahtisaari's proposal as a good basis for a final settlement. Among other things, it deals appropriately with border demarcation, which is of great significance to Macedonia. We hope that the parties will approach renewed talks in good faith and in line with the basic principles of the Contact Group. This will take courage and wisdom, but these qualities are what make the difference.

I believe that the region's European and Euro-Atlantic perspectives are a strong motivation for further progress and lasting stability, and that we should all devote 100 per cent of our energy to these inter-related processes. There simply is no alternative.

Sarah Broughton is Head of Media Development as well as being Spokesperson of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission in Skopje.



OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission in Skopje

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Ambassador Giorgio Radicati, Head of Mission (centre), and some of his staff pose for an anniversary picture on the rooftop of the mission's headquarters.

"You are the driving force and public face of the Organization. It's an honour to work with you," said OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, paying tribute to the mission's 188 national and 68 international staff members.

Skopje and the OSCE: The lessons of partnership

We witnessed an exemplary co-operation between the OSCE, the EU, NATO and the Council of Europe during the security crisis of 2001. Their concerted efforts helped us to surmount the difficulties we were confronted with and to accomplish a remarkable amount of progress within a short period of time. This, of course, would not have been possible if the political will and determination to embark on a phase of intensive democratic development in Macedonian society had been lacking.

The results, taking the form of broad administrative, legislative and judicial reforms, were achieved thanks to the effective co-operation between these international

entities and the Macedonian authorities.

This has proved to be a workable recipe for a successful democratic transition. The present engagement of these organizations in the fulfillment of our priority foreign policy goal, namely, full integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures, is a testimony to their ability to adapt to the country's needs. Strengthening of complementarity, avoidance of duplication, strategic planning and good co-ordination among them are not just slogans pronounced at international conferences — they are actually being realized in practice. The Macedonian example shows that this is happening on the ground. **Antonio Milošoski, Macedonian Minister for Foreign Affairs**



In the early 1990s, we, the leaders, were quite frustrated in dealing with our country's internal problems. We were concerned that if our oil supply were cut off, our economy would collapse within a matter of days. We had an influx of 65,000 refugees from Bosnia and Herzegovina. Domestic unrest was escalating.

While seeking to meet the essential needs of the population and maintain stability, we kept an uneasy eye on Kosovo, as we were convinced that an outbreak of conflict there would quickly spill over into our Republic and lead inexorably to another Balkan war. To help us to preserve our "oasis of peace", we requested assistance from the United Nations, the European Commission and the OSCE. **Kiro Gligorov, first president of the State, serving two terms (January 1991 to November 1999)**



Anniversaries afford opportunities to cast our thoughts forward and look to the future. No doubt, many challenges still lie ahead.

Having worked closely with the authorities for 15 years, the OSCE is deeply committed to continuing its support to the country for implementing key laws and for building the productive political climate that is so essential to enable it to move closer to OSCE standards.

As we consider the future, let us recall the vital lesson learned from 15 years of experience. This is the lesson of partnership — partnership between the OSCE and the host Government, between the OSCE and the wider society, and between all the major actors involved in the complex process of transformation.

Partnership lies at the heart of everything this country has achieved, and everything that the OSCE has had the honour of supporting. Careful co-ordination and joint efforts are vital to ensuring an effective use of resources and the achievement of maximum results.

The OSCE has been woven into this country's history for the last 15 years, as has the country's history into that of the Organization. This is not just because of the presence of the Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje. It is also because the country itself grew from having observer status to become a full and very active participating State of the Organization.



Skopje, 1 October, at a special event to mark the fifteenth anniversary of the OSCE Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje. Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski (centre) with OSCE Ambassador Giorgio Radicati, Head of the Spillover Monitor Mission to Skopje, and the OSCE Secretary General.

Your commitment to the OSCE ideals and to the comprehensive approach to security is evident in your continued constructive role and positive engagement with your political counterparts in the region. **OSCE Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, in Skopje**



ODIHR AND OSCE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Managing the mechanics of election-monitoring

The long and short of it in Kazakhstan

**BY KLAS BERGMAN AND
URDUR GUNNARSDOTTIR**

It's 18 August, Saturday, shortly before polling station no. 78 in Astana, the Kazakh capital, opens its doors at 7.00 a.m. School principal Ludmila Alexandrovna Sainova is a tall and commanding figure as she gives last-minute instructions to her eight colleagues on the polling station commission.

The almost all-women team — the exception being one lone male — has seen to it that everything is in order, including the electronic voting system introduced in 2004. Hand on hearts, they stand and sing the national anthem. And voting for seats in the *Majilis*, the lower house of Kazakhstan's parliament, is off to a flying start.

Many of the precinct's just over 2,000 registered voters have been waiting since the break of dawn to be first in line. Gifts for the early birds beckon: electric irons, tea kettles and alarm clocks. A television set is reserved for the precinct's oldest voter.

The opening of hundreds of polling stations throughout Kazakhstan marks the culmination of a pre-election process that has been followed closely for more than a month by long-term election experts from the Office for Democratic Institutions and

Human Rights (ODIHR). Boosting this force shortly before election day is a large contingent of almost 400 short-term observers and 57 parliamentarians from OSCE participating States. Together with five observers from the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), they make up the International Election Observation Mission.

The commitments signed up to by participating States in the Copenhagen Document of 1990 set out the principles underlying a genuinely democratic electoral system. Aimed at improving the polling process, election observation is underpinned by two premises: firstly, that host governments have committed themselves to holding democratic elections, and secondly, that observers are just observers and no more — neutral and process-oriented.

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has monitored about 90 elections since 1993, while the OSCE/ODIHR has monitored more than 150 elections, including local ones, since 1996. Some 56 of these have been ODIHR-Parliamentary Assembly collaborations, including two earlier this year, in Serbia and Armenia, and Ukraine on 30 September. Since 1997, these joint operations have been governed by a co-operation

Astana, Kazakhstan.
The ODIHR statistics team
processes some 2,000
forms from short-term
observers.
Photo: ODIHR/Urdur
Gunnarsdottir



Ludmila Alexandrovna Sainova oversees a polling station.



In the village of Karaotkel, voters have their names verified.



Gifts for the early-birds beckon.

agreement, signed by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office and the President of the Parliamentary Assembly.

In Kazakhstan, this is how the ODIHR-OSCE PA partnership fell into place:

17 July, Friday. With one month's head start, the OSCE/ODIHR election observation mission, led by Ambassador Lubomir Kopaj from Slovakia, sets up operations in Kazakhstan. Comprising a 19-member core team and 36 long-term observers from 18 countries, the mission's tasks are wide-ranging and straightforward: Besides paving the way and preparing for the arrival of nearly 400 short-term observers, its members are to survey and analyse the political landscape, campaign activities, the work of the election administration and relevant governmental bodies, election-related legislation and its implementation, and the media environment.

To cover as much of this vast land as possible — Kazakhstan is the world's ninth largest country in terms of sheer area — the long-term observers divide themselves into 18 pairs.

9 August, Thursday. The head of the staff of the Parliamentary Assembly election team, Ambassador Andreas Nothelle, who is the Vienna-based special representative of the OSCE PA, arrives in Astana. He immediately establishes contact with the OSCE/ODIHR core team, starting intensive communication and co-ordination.

11 August, Saturday. Eight staff members from the Parliamentary Assembly's International Secretariat in Copenhagen, who have

been monitoring developments in Kazakhstan through the Internet and the media since the beginning of the campaign, arrive in Astana and Almaty. They are instantly thrown into frenzied preparations for the arrivals of parliamentarians from OSCE countries. Details of hotel bookings, flight schedules, briefings, deployment on election day, and de-briefing the next day are ironed out and co-ordinated.

13 August, Monday. The short-term observers start trickling in: 390 from 45 countries plus 57 members of the OSCE PA representing 18 countries. Leading these two groups is Canadian Senator Consiglio Di Nino, appointed Special Co-ordinator by the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Spanish Foreign Minister Miguel Angel Moratinos. Senator Di Nino is responsible for delivering the post-election statement on 19 August on behalf of the OSCE and the International Election Observation Mission.

As the voting draws nearer, one event follows another and every day stretches late into the night.

15 August, Wednesday. A full day of briefings is held at Congress Hall, one of the few places in Astana spacious enough to accommodate the 390 short-term observers. Despite the many serious cases of jet lag, the observers are keen to absorb as much background information as they can from the OSCE/ODIHR team on the results of its long-term observation activities, including advice on practical matters such as security.

The excitement in the hall is palpable as the observers, expected to work in teams of two, find out where they will be sent for the next three days and who they will be paired with. The guiding rule is that partners should not share the same nationality and an experienced observer should be assigned with a newcomer.

From such exotic-sounding places as Tushchikudyk, Bozanbai and Kyzylorda, the



Senator Consiglio Di Nino, OSCE Special Co-ordinator (right), and Vice-Speaker of the Russian State Duma, Vladimir Pekhtin, who led the observers of the CIS Interparliamentary Assembly, discuss the elections.

observers are to scrutinize the election process, write reports on each polling station and fax them to the ODIHR statistics team in Astana.

16 August, Thursday morning. Observers board planes and buses taking them to destinations near and far. Upon arrival, they waste no time familiarizing themselves with their assigned areas and preparing for what will undoubtedly be a long election day and night ahead.

16 August, Thursday afternoon, and 17 August, Friday morning. In the meantime, back in Astana, another round of briefings is taking place, this time for the parliamentarians. Among those taking part are members of the OSCE/ODIHR core team and representatives of national media, the competing political parties, and Kazakh NGOs.

Each of the 28 two-member teams from the Parliamentary Assembly meets with an assigned interpreter and driver to go over planned activities on election day in Astana and Almaty and — going beyond the two biggest cities — Karagandy and Chimkent as well. In Astana, each parliamentary team ensures that its coverage also includes one small village outside the city.

18 August, Saturday, election day. Guided by a lengthy checklist, 450 observers visit some 2,000 polling stations throughout the country and report their impressions and on-site findings to the OSCE/ODIHR core team. Along with those from long-term observers, each report from short-term observers plays a key role in the main message of the joint post-election statement, in the preliminary findings and in the final report, which is expected two to three months after the election.

19 August, Sunday. Lengthy and sometimes contentious discussions take place,

involving the leadership of the International Election Observation Mission. The OSCE Chairman-in-Office's special representative, Spanish Ambassador Eugenio Bregolat, listens and watches attentively.

They agree on the post-election statement, which Senator Di Nino delivers at 4.00 p.m. in the ballroom of Hotel Rixos in Astana, flanked by British MP David Wilshire from PACE and Ambassador Lubomir Kopaj representing OSCE/ODIHR.

The following is an excerpt from the statement:

“While these elections reflected welcome progress in the pre-election process during the conduct of the vote, a number of OSCE commitments and Council of Europe standards were not met, in particular with regard to elements of the new legal framework and to the vote count. ...

“There was an increased ability for political parties to convey their messages to voters, including through the media, and the central election administration worked transparently. However, a number of the new legal provisions conflict with OSCE commitments. ...

“Voting was conducted in a calm atmosphere and observers assessed the conduct of voting positively at 95 per cent of the polling stations they visited ... The counting of votes was not conducted transparently, and the counting process was assessed negatively in 43 per cent of polling stations visited.”

The hectic pace of the past few days draws to a close. Preparations for the press conference in Astana, chaired by the Parliamentary Assembly spokesperson, are completed only minutes before the room fills up with journalists. The post-election message goes out to the media, in spite of an unco-operative sound-system and other logistical problems.

The observers return to Astana to be debriefed and to enjoy *plov* and a variety of mutton dishes before catching up on sleep and heading home. The OSCE PA's small hotel-office empties. Over at the ODIHR quarters, meanwhile, calm and quiet prevail, a welcome respite for members of the core team who stay on for another week.

After all, an election is not over until every vote has been counted, the last complaints resolved and the final numbers published.

Klas Bergman is Director of Communications and Spokesperson of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Urdur Gunnarsdottir is Spokesperson of the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

OSCE PAVLAS BERGMAN

Integration and diversity

Applying the same formula across the OSCE area



HCNM/WERNER LEUKER

Part philosopher, part political scientist and part psychologist, but mostly a quiet diplomat who stays out of the headlines: that's how Rolf Ekéus describes his role during the past six years as High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). In an interview with Virginie Coulloudon for the *OSCE Magazine* on 28 June, just before his final address to the Permanent Council, the distinguished Swedish diplomat reaffirms his conviction that States can only develop in peace and security if they advocate integration policies that do not deprive minority populations of the richness of their culture and identity. Ambassador Ekéus describes the continuing relevance of the HCNM's work to today's world and explains why an enlarging Europe, with its growing diversity, would do well to follow the principles that it is promoting in the rest of the OSCE area.

Virginie Coulloudon: "Quiet diplomacy" is a hallmark of the High Commissioner's work. Does this serve as a help or a hindrance?

Ambassador Rolf Ekéus: One of the most acute problems we face in dealing with inter-ethnic tensions is that minority issues fall under countries' internal affairs. The 1945 Charter of the United Nations emphasizes territorial integrity and national sovereignty for all. The HCNM post, created by participating States at the Helsinki Summit of the CSCE in 1992, challenges this philosophy because the High Commissioner needs

to operate inside countries.

Quiet diplomacy solves the dilemma. The mandate stipulates that the HCNM is to act in a confidential and discreet manner. Confidentiality means building mutual trust with representatives both of minorities and of the State. I try to put myself in other people's shoes to understand the factors that have shaped their sense of self. My task is to persuade those in power — whether these are a country's highest authorities or its community leaders — to listen to their rational selves, and not to their self-interest, so that they may change their attitudes.

If I were to make public denunciations, I would defeat the whole HCNM idea of reconciliation and living together. So I find it more useful to identify the points of potential conflict and hatred, rather than simply accusing or criticizing.

Of course I can think of instances where it would have been helpful to mobilize public opinion, but trust is so fragile that one cannot use a "name-and-shame-policy" without putting negotiations at risk. You have to be disciplined enough not to do any grandstanding.

Speaking of points of tension, language comes to mind ...

For the majority population, the State language is a key element in building a nation-State. We support authorities in their efforts to promote integration and build a cohesive State through educational policies aimed at improving the ability of every citizen to use and speak the State language.

But we also hold the view that integration should respect diversity — otherwise there is a risk of disintegration and violence. For ethnic groups and minorities, the mother tongue is a sensitive matter. We continuously stress the importance of preserving the full richness of any given minority's identity and of not robbing people of their access to their mother tongue, their culture and their history.

You have also been actively involved in "kin States" issues. Why is this crucial to your work?

Kin States — which are usually neighbouring States — are often the driving force behind ethnic conflicts. For example, a particular State can be tempted to grant

The Hague, 18 July.
Ambassador Rolf Ekéus
(right) and his successor,
Ambassador Knut Vollebaek,
in front of the office of the
High Commissioner on
National Minorities.

Rolf Ekéus headed the Swedish delegation to the CSCE (1988-1992), playing a key role in drafting the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe*. He was Ambassador to the United States from 1997 to 2000.

Looking back on decades of bilateral and multilateral diplo-

macy, he considers the period 1991 to 1997, when he was Executive Chairman of UNSCOM (United Nations Special Commission on Iraq) as his "most formative years" preparatory to taking up the position of High Commissioner on National Minorities in July 2001. When

leading weapons inspectors, "I learned how to deal with people who had to cope with extremely dangerous and complex situations," he recalls.

"But actually, there's nothing like the HCNM job," he adds. "You go right into the very core of civilization."



HCNM/WERNER LEUKER

citizenship to communities next door with whom they share an ethnic identity as a way of protecting them, but this can cause complications and lead to an international crisis and even to violence.

I believe I have been tough and clear about this: Caring for the well-being of an ethnic group should be the responsibility and obligation of the country where the group lives, and any kin State should respect that State's sovereignty.

To ensure that this norm is upheld in a responsible manner, we help States to draw up bilateral treaties and arrangements based on a system that the HCNM developed. This system has worked wonderfully despite great difficulties.

In co-operation with the Council of Europe, we engaged in a joint Romania-Ukraine monitoring commission to deal with the situation of Romanians in Ukraine and vice versa. We hope it sets an example in Europe. In Hungary, Romania and Slovakia, leaders have shown great maturity by agreeing to co-operate on minority issues under highly sensitive political circumstances.

You have also been concerned about "new minorities" and their right not to be discriminated against. How exactly does this relate to the OSCE area?

For some time now, many western countries in the OSCE area have been experiencing slow and sometimes negative population growth rates. Now they are trying to deal with complex issues related to their new minorities — people who have come mainly for work and economic reasons. Although it is a fact that these migrants have a separate identity, increasingly they also wish to take part in the society they live in.

After 9/11, even Europe's leading intellectuals started giving up on the idea of integration of diversity, calling instead for much stronger assimilation efforts. I am not against this, but I am firmly against anything that is forced. The West should apply the same principle as it is promoting in the rest of the OSCE area: integration, with respect for diversity.

Increasingly, I have been urging caution

and watchfulness regarding discriminatory practices against new migrants in our western societies. The series of highly regarded and politically weighty Recommendations developed under the HCNM's aegis concerning minority rights in such matters as education, language, participation in public life, broadcasting and policing are, to some degree, also applicable to "non-traditional" minorities in the West.

Indeed, growing diversity is becoming a fact of life in an enlarging Europe, and therefore in the OSCE area as a whole. How does this affect the HCNM's agenda?

I started discussions with the EU on bringing minority rights into the European normative framework, and I have been supported by Hungary and Romania. The 1993 Copenhagen Criteria for accession to the EU say that candidate countries should respect minority rights. However, nowhere in the existing EU norm is it mentioned that present EU States also have an obligation to respect minority rights. There is something intellectually wrong with that.

This is why in 2004 I tried hard to have the EU Constitutional Treaty enshrine minority rights as an integral part of human rights. I succeeded with the help of the Irish Presidency. I will appeal to the EU to retain that clause in the new and simplified Reform Treaty.

Your work often took you to Central Asia. What is your preferred approach to addressing inter-ethnic relations in this important part of the OSCE area?

Remember that historically the Ferghana Valley [encompassing areas in Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan] is a highly complex area; it is where the most violent incidents have taken place.

When some of the leaders asked me to engage in resolving ethnic-related bilateral problems between their States, I took up the new challenge immediately.

We found that initiatives in education would be the best instrument. Education is among the most sensitive issues in inter-ethnic relations. Nothing makes parents more bitter, angry and threatened than when

their children are denied the right to the kind of education they feel they deserve.

In November 2006, after year-long preparations we organized a meeting in Tashkent, where we launched a structured process for upgrading minority education in the region through practical measures. [See page 18.] It was a remarkable breakthrough: Everyone accepted our invitation to sit at the same table. We now work directly with each of the five Central Asian States.

You have also visited Kosovo many times. Was the HCNM able to contribute at all towards the search for a solution to the status issue?

Initially, my predecessor, Max van der Stoep, and I kept ourselves out of the status process; we could not see what else we could bring to the issue. But we kept seeing gaps related to the continuing hatred and suffering there.

In 2004, when violence broke out, I felt we had an obligation to get involved. So we worked with UN Special Envoy Martti Ahtisaari on minority rights concerns and helped him with the section of his final report that is devoted to the rights and protection of communities.

Incidentally, the HCNM is the only institution in the international community that has been working on reconciliation between Kosovo Serbs and Kosovo Albanians. We have engaged persons involved in the Truth and

Reconciliation Commission in South Africa to join us and share their expertise. I believe we are making a real difference on the ground. I am convinced that this work will continue under my successor as there is also a conflict prevention element in conciliation.

What do you think should be the main qualities of a High Commissioner?

I would say age is the main one! [laughs]. Seriously, patience and a certain philosophical attitude are key to being effective. One needs to come up with new ideas all the time. And when these are rejected, you come up with others that are slightly modified. Take time to talk and to listen.

I was involved when we decided that the duration of service of OSCE officials should never be too long. I sometimes regretted this on a personal level, but I knew it was an important decision as far as the HCNM institution was concerned. Change brings fresh ideas.

I know that the new High Commissioner will bring new energy to the extremely complex issues of national minorities. I am very proud of HCNM. It is a magnificent institution, absolutely unique in its approach.

Virginie Coulloudon is a Senior Press and Public Information Officer and Deputy Spokesperson in the Secretariat.

Norway's Knut Vollebaek is the new High Commissioner on National Minorities

Knut Vollebaek, a former Foreign Minister of Norway, has been appointed **OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities**, succeeding Rolf Ekeus of Sweden. Prior to his assuming the post in July for a three-year term, he had been serving as his country's Ambassador to the United States since 2001.

Ambassador Vollebaek is an internationally eminent advocate for human rights, peace and security, and conflict prevention and resolution. These have been constant themes running through his diplomatic career at home and abroad, notably in countries of the former Yugoslavia and in Sri Lanka and Guatemala.

As Norway's Foreign Minister from 1997 to 2000, he was Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE under the Norwegian Chairmanship in 1999, presiding over the summit of OSCE Heads of State in Istanbul.

"It was a time when crises fuelled by inter-ethnic tension erupted with remarkable speed and force in the region," Ambassador Vollebaek says. At the helm of the Organization, he played a key role in seeking a peaceful solution to the Kosovo crisis in the run-up to the war and, later, in assisting in its reconstruction and rehabilitation through the establishment of an OSCE presence.



Belgrade, 10 September 2007. On his first official visit to Serbia since he was appointed High Commissioner on National Minorities, Ambassador Knut Vollebaek meets Rasim Ljajić, President of the Co-ordinating Body for Southern Serbia.

Ambassador Vollebaek's earlier international postings include India, Spain, Zimbabwe and Costa Rica, his base as Norway's Ambassador to the Central American States.

Born in Oslo in 1946, Ambassador Vollebaek holds a master's degree in economics from the Norwegian School of Economics and Business Administration in Bergen. He also studied political science at the University of Oslo and the University of California in Santa Barbara.



Kyrgyzstan's schools boast a rich mix of ethnic groups.
Photos: HCNM/Vladimir Kiryusha

Central Asia

Upgrading education for a palette of cultures

BY DMITRI ALECHKEVITCH

“Can you imagine waking up one day and finding yourself in the educational system of another State?” exclaims Elmira Imanaliyeva, Kyrgyz Deputy Education and Science Minister. “Right after independence, we had to undertake the demanding task of integrating schools that teach in Kyrgyz with those that teach in minority languages. We have achieved a lot in our efforts to put together a single, manageable and coherent system, but we are still confronting the consequences of the collapse.”

Kyrgyzstan's educators are not alone. Their counterparts throughout Central Asia are also looking for feasible solutions to the education dilemma they found themselves in after countries in the Soviet Union went their separate ways. Under the former system, minority-language schools in one republic were usually managed by the education authorities of its kin republic — who also provided textbooks, teachers and training. Just about the only items supplied by the republic of residence were the desks and chairs.

However, the challenges posed by the disintegration of the Soviet educational system go far beyond mere technical matters. Education is, after all, widely recognized as a potentially powerful tool for fostering integration in multi-ethnic societies. Only through carefully crafted education policies do children of various ethnic backgrounds gain mastery of the State or official language and learn the nation's historical narrative while preserving their mother tongue and maintaining their national identity and culture.

“The previous system was primarily oriented towards

offering education for different ethnic groups on a segregated basis,” Ms. Imanaliyeva says. “One cannot build a cohesive society using this approach.”

Since the Kyrgyz language and Kyrgyz literature, history and geography were ignored in the republic's minority-language schools at that time, “we now have to find ways to introduce these subjects in these same schools, while trying to respect the languages and cultures of our minority communities,” she adds. “It's not easy to strike a balance, so we — educators in Central Asia — need to build on our joint achievements and learn from each other's mistakes.”

REBUILDING TIES

As Central Asian countries go about setting up their national education systems, they often encounter identical issues, especially in minority education: What is the best approach to helping teachers improve their skills in teaching minority students their mother tongue? And how does one ensure that students from ethnic communities attain sufficient proficiency in the State language? What elements go into the making of a good literature textbook? How can information technology and the Internet make it easier to teach a language or write a textbook? These are just a few of the host of complex issues that education ministries in Central Asia are looking into.

Besides facing similar tasks, each State in the region boasts a different citizenry. A national minority (for example, ethnic Tajiks in Kyrgyzstan) often shares the same ethnic identity with the majority population of another State (Tajikistan) — a so-called kin State. This opens up shared windows of opportunities to bring the quality of education several notches higher.



Educators Elmira Imanaliyeva of Kyrgyzstan and Mukhtar Aktayev of Kazakhstan: "We need to build on our joint achievements and learn from each other's mistakes."

"It's only natural that Central Asians co-operate with each other in the area of national minority education," the new High Commission on National Minorities Knut Vollebaek says. "Although the protection of minority rights is the responsibility of the State where the ethnic community resides, cross-border co-operation offers great promise for higher academic achievement throughout the region."

PRACTICAL DEEDS

Judging from the supportive stance of the region's key educators regarding a dialogue on national minority education, an initiative of previous High Commissioner Rolf Ekéus, there is reason to be optimistic.

For a start, a ministerial conference in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, jointly organized by the HCNM and Uzbek authorities in November 2006, explored the "Challenge of Educational Reform in Multi-ethnic Central Asia". Some 70 participants agreed to translate co-operation and mutual assistance from mere words into practical deeds within a more structured setting through four working groups focusing on:

- teacher education and in-service training;
- language teaching;
- curriculum and textbook development; and
- information technology and distance learning

"At the conference in Tashkent, we immediately saw the value of supporting each other," says Mukhtar Aktayev, Deputy Head of the Education Department of South Kazakhstan Region, which has a large Uzbek population. "Several Tajik-language schools in my area of responsibility have had no textbooks or training for teachers since the early 1990s. Recently, our colleagues from Tajikistan conducted training in our Tajik-language schools and provided manuals. Our department and the schools look forward to broadening these sorts of activities with our Tajik friends."

Two out of the four working groups that were formed have met: one on teacher education and in-service training, in Astana, Kazakhstan (February 2007), and another on language teaching, in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan (June 2007). These have led to a number of concrete measures. Representing every Central Asian country, educators agreed to give each other support by pro-

viding professional development courses for mother-tongue teachers, arranging an exchange of linguistic experts to ensure that teachers' skills are up to date, and examining the benefits of bilingual and multilingual education. The aim is to encourage minority students to attain proficiency in both native and State languages.

SPRIT OF COLLEGIALITY

The next round of brainstorming on how to tackle national minority education in Central Asia will be held in Tashkent in November this year. It will be devoted to what is arguably the most delicate and pressing issue of all — school curricula and textbooks. Despite the fact that each country has its own standards, its own historical perspective and its own vision of education, the region's educators are hoping that the spirit of collegiality that they have managed to forge among themselves will lead to tangible progress even in the most complex of areas.

"We know each other's problems well, and this gives me every reason to believe that my friends and neighbours will propose ideas that are worth considering by my country, and that the delegates from Kazakhstan can, in turn, suggest specific matters of interest to them," Mr. Aktayev says. "We all share one ultimate goal: to make high-quality education available to children of all ethnic backgrounds."

Dmitri Alechkevitch is the Political Adviser to the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities.



Central Asian educators: "We know each other's problems well."



JAAKKO AVIKAINEN/LEHTI KUVA/PICTUREDESK.COM

Summit of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, Helsinki, 10 July 1992. The landmark gathering created the Forum for Security Co-operation, the office of the High Commissioner on National Minorities and the Economic Forum. Among the Heads of State or Government who attended were: Alija Izetbegović, (Bosnia and Herzegovina), Saparmurad Niyazov (Turkmenistan), Suleiman Demirel (Turkey), Franjo Tudjman (Croatia), Rahmon Nabiev (Tajikistan), George H.W. Bush (United States), François Mitterrand (France) and Mauno Koivisto (Finland).

Slowly but surely, co-operative security emerges

Rising to the challenges of change

The establishment of the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC) in 1992 was hailed as a major breakthrough in the political-military sphere of security. Now made up of delegates from the OSCE's 56 participating States, this decision-making body has lost none of its uniqueness and continues to rise to the challenges posed by new security threats.

The wide-ranging documents and measures that have been adopted at the Forum through the years after countless hours of negotiations have proved to be politically significant, goal-oriented, practical in their application — and well appreciated by the general public. The *Vienna Document*, for example, is considered to be the most comprehensive politically binding agreement on confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) in Europe.

Ambassador Barbara Gibson, Chairperson of the FSC when it marked its 500th meeting in November last year, and three key representatives who have been present at most of the weekly FSC discussions at the Hofburg for the past 15 years, trace the Forum's evolution into a major mechanism for putting the OSCE's norms of openness and transparency into practice.

BY AMBASSADOR BARBARA GIBSON

On 22 September 1992, the CSCE delegations gathered for the first plenary meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation, chaired by Austria. In his opening statement, Werner Fasslabend, Austria's Federal Minister of Defence, underlined changes in the security situation in Europe.

"At a time when East-West confrontation has been overcome and the Warsaw Pact has been dissolved, negotiations on military parity between groups of States whose armed forces used to exercise an immediate influence on the security system in Europe have become redundant," he said.

"Today, wars are more often being fought between peoples rather than nations, a fact that needs to be taken into consideration ... From now on, all participating States will be equal partners in negotiations on security and stability, and collective as well as individual security interests will be weighed equally."

Established by the CSCE Summit in Helsinki in July 1992, the Forum was designed precisely to take security relations among participating States to a new level — based on common and co-operative approaches. Determined to build upon unprecedented achievements in arms control, disarmament, and confidence-and security- building measures, participating States decided to launch new negotiations in this arena.

Chapter V of the *Helsinki Document of 1992* (“The Challenges of Change”) assigned the FSC three key roles:

- Firstly, the Forum was to negotiate concrete, militarily significant measures to reduce conventional armed forces in the OSCE area and keep them at a minimum level.
- Secondly — and this role was more innovative — the Forum was to carry out a “goal-oriented continuing dialogue” among participating States. This started the tradition of the Security Dialogues, one of the central building blocks of our work today. Launching this dialogue stemmed from the perception that security was no longer a privilege of individual States and could only be ensured through the collective responsibility of all States, regardless of size.
- Thirdly, the FSC was to reduce the risk of armed conflict between States — a role that proved to be the source of the most contentious debates of the negotiations related to the Forum’s mandate.

The FSC of 1992 looked quite different from the FSC of today. In 1992, there were only 52 participating States around the table, the Chairmanship rotated weekly, and the only Partner for Co-operation was Japan.

After its establishment, the Forum immediately set to work. By 1993, we had already adopted five major documents, all of which are still central to our work:

- *Vienna Document 1992*
- *Stabilizing Measures for Localized Crisis Situations*
- *Principles Governing Conventional Arms Transfers*
- *Programme of Military Contacts and Co-operation*
- *Defence Planning*

In 1994, the FSC adopted four more documents, the last two of which were included in the *Budapest Summit Document of 1994*:

- *Vienna Document 1994*
- *Global Exchange of Military Information*
- *Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security*
- *Principles Governing Non-Proliferation*

The Forum’s activities were further

reflected in the Lisbon Summit of 1996, which, building on the 1994 agenda, approved the following:

- *Framework for Arms Control*
- *Development of the Agenda of the Forum for Security Co-operation*

These documents paved the way for the *Vienna Document 1999* adopted by the FSC at the Istanbul Summit that year.

The FSC has responded to new security challenges by adopting new landmark documents:

- *OSCE Document on Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) (2000)*
- *OSCE Document on Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition (2003)*

Through their implementation, the FSC addresses crucial security risks posed by surplus stocks and the trafficking of SALW and conventional ammunition. Our assistance to participating States through a number of projects in this area has begun to yield initial positive results. There is no doubt that our growing experience in this key area is being recognized globally.

Today, the FSC remains an important and active negotiating body within the OSCE. Obviously, it has further potential. In the meantime, it has stayed abreast of the ever-changing security agenda. New developments in the European and global security landscape have forced us to set priorities and focus on threats that are common to all or that pose regional risks.

This does not necessarily mean that the era of major “traditional” arms control and disarmament agreements is over. The implementation of existing CSBMs set out in the *Vienna Document 1999* will remain a crucial element in the OSCE security architecture. In combination with new FSC and OSCE responses to security challenges, these will continue to provide the OSCE region with a solid basis for stability, peace and prosperity.

Ambassador Barbara Gibson heads the Delegation of Canada to the OSCE. A career diplomat, she has served in Washington, D.C., and New York. She was Director of her Foreign Ministry’s Middle East Division before taking up her OSCE assignment in 2004. This article is based on her remarks at the 500th plenary of the FSC in Vienna on 29 November 2006, when Canada held the FSC Chairmanship.



Ambassador Gibson with Danish Ambassador John H. Bernhard, who is the current FSC Chairperson.

Negotiating dreams, from the Atlantic to the Urals

By Pierpaolo Tempesta



OSCE/REGISTRY/HILL

When I joined the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in 1987, the delegations had just returned from Stockholm, where the new spirit of openness ushered in by *glasnost* had enabled them to work out a system of confidence- and security-building measures. These CSBMs were aimed at dispelling the security concerns of participating States through enhanced transparency and predictability in military activities.

The measures were applicable from the Atlantic to the Urals and prescribed — along with stringent notification and observation parameters — a verification regime of on-site inspections without a right of refusal.

But the international situation was still evolving, as recognized by meetings in Vienna between 1986 and 1989, where participating States were asked to “build upon and expand the results achieved in Stockholm”.

This was to lead to the development of the *Vienna Document 1990* (since updated several times), which introduced several significant features consolidating various commitments of participating States to refrain from the use of force: an enhanced exchange of military information, evaluation visits, military contacts, procedures for risk reduction through consultation and co-operation, and a dedicated communications network. It also established the Conflict Prevention Centre. These fundamental elements still exist today.

With the adoption of the *Charter of Paris for a New Europe* in 1990, participating States were again asked to negotiate a new set of CSBMs to take into account the new security environment and emerging challenges in the OSCE area. This resulted in the *Vienna Document 1992*, which further strengthened the CSBMs and extended them to the new States of Central Asia. It marked the beginning of a new era in comprehensive and co-operative security, soon to be reflected in the decisions of the Helsinki Summit of July 1992.



OSCE/VIHIL KRYVONOS

Arys Central Arsenal, near Chimkent, Kazakhstan, June 2005. Under the FSC assistance mechanism, OSCE international experts examine conventional ammunition designated for disposal.

In many ways, the event was a landmark summit as far as the politico-military dimension was concerned: It established the Forum for Security Co-operation as an autonomous decision-making body in the politico-military field and launched a Programme for Immediate Action, which was to produce the *Vienna Document 1994* and a series of norm-setting documents. Notable among these was the *Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security*, which laid down principles guiding the role of armed forces in democratic societies.

Many observers believe that it was at this gathering that the CSCE/OSCE reached its creative peak in the politico-military dimension. The *Vienna Document 1994* actually only introduced refinements to the existing CSBMs, although the successful implementation of CSBMs in Bosnia and Herzegovina under Article II of the Dayton Accords had borrowed successfully from it, contributing considerably to the region’s military stability.

The Budapest Summit of 1994 endorsed the achievements under the Programme for Immediate Action but, noting that the *Vienna Document* had introduced relatively minor enhancements to the existing measures, decided that negotiations on CSBMs should continue.

Intensive work got under way in 1996 after the adoption of two documents, the *Framework for Arms Control* and the *Development of the Agenda of the FSC*, which laid down negotiating principles to be followed and priorities to be addressed, particularly the development of CSBMs tailored to specific regional needs.

In 1997, with Andorra as the newest participating State, the FSC set out to do its work with enthusiasm. More than 100 new proposals were drafted and put together in what negotiators called the “dream book”.

Participating States had high expectations. They hoped to be able to build significantly upon the *Vienna Document 1994*. They wanted to lower the thresholds for military activities that would be subject to notification and observation and introduce new types of military activities subject to verifications aimed at increasing transparency.

Unfortunately, after three years of intensive negotiations, the only result achieved was the introduction of the prescribed chapter on regional CSBMs. This was by no means negligible, however, as demonstrated by the large number of voluntary CSBMs agreed by neighbouring participating States. The current *Vienna Document 1999* was produced and signed at the Istanbul Summit.

If more substantial progress could not be made, it was certainly not for lack of dedication by those involved in the negotiations. Indeed, when participating States have displayed the necessary political will, the FSC has always been able to react promptly to new threats, as was the case with the uncontroversial adoption of the *Documents on Small Arms and Light Weapons* and on *Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition*, as well as the contribution to the fight against terrorism.

Throughout the negotiating history of the FSC, the relations among delegates have always been based on deep mutual respect, on an understanding of each other’s positions and on a readiness to consider compromise solutions in a positive manner. Such an ethos has greatly contributed to the friendly atmosphere so characteristic of our Organization.

Brigadier General (ret.) Pierpaolo Tempesta, a former military pilot, served as military adviser in the Italian Delegation from 1987 to 1991 and rejoined in 1993 as adviser. He has been a member of the Permanent Mission of the Holy See since 2004.

Norm-setting and beyond: Creating a forum for common concerns

By Donna Phelan



OSCE/GREGORY HILL

Fifteen years ago, I was among those taking part in the very first meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation. After months of working on a mandate for the Forum during the OSCE Review Conference in Helsinki in 1992, we really had no idea how things would work out. I believe that having reached the milestone of 500 plenary meetings in November 2006 is a clear indication of the Forum's success as a body in which we can address common concerns in the political-military dimension.

So, what was it like in the FSC at the beginning? From a personal perspective, it was a bit confusing since it coincided with a re-organization of the U.S. delegation. Up until that time, the U.S. had maintained two arms control delegations in Vienna: one worked on the CFE Treaty and related issues, while the other worked on confidence- and security-building measures under the *Vienna Document*.

I recall that we were all warmly welcomed to the opening plenary on 22 September 1992 by our first Chairperson, Austrian Ambassador Martin Vukovich. After the Austrian Defence Minister Werner Fasslabend had delivered the opening statement, Ambassador Vukovich invited us to begin our work — which is precisely what we did.

We had completed the *Vienna Document 1992* early that year, so the Forum started with no leftover items on its agenda. Instead, we turned our attention to the document's Programme for Immediate Action, which laid out the areas we had agreed to act on. These ranged from conducting negotiations on arms control, disarmament, and confidence- and security-building to engaging in goal-oriented dialogue on proposals for security enhancement and co-operation.

This situation was both a plus and a minus because the Forum would only become what we made of it. However, this early in its existence, people were not sure what they wanted it to become. And so it took a while to get into a regular routine.

Before we could begin any serious work, we first, in true OSCE fashion, had to worry about the process — yes, we had to work out the organizational “modalities” for the Forum.

We started with the basics, such as assigning the chairmanship and determining how to address proposals. At the beginning, the chairmanship rotated each week, so co-ordinators were designated to provide continuity for the negotiation of particular proposals. In the course of time, however, we recognized the value of prolonging the duration of the chairmanship, first to a month (in 1995) and then to an entire working session (in 2001), leading to the present “trimester” arrangement.

The current practice of working within the FSC troika — a new chair every four months — is so effective that even our smaller delegations are able to take their turn successfully. Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria and Canada formed the troika in 2006. This year, following Cyprus and Croatia, Denmark took over the helm in September.

Over the years, discussions in the Forum have sometimes been intense and at other times fairly quiet. Like most of my colleagues, I look forward to attending the meetings when I know there is something of substance on the agenda, and I drag my feet when I think we will just be sitting politely as the Chair takes us through each item with no one having anything to say.

But overall, I look at our work as a reflection of the rhythm of our lives — and I certainly can't survive operating at high intensity all the time. The reality is that we live in a world of highs and lows.

It seems to me that developing specific norm-setting documents is the easy part of our business. By this I do not mean that the task itself is without complications or is of little importance. What I mean is that when 56 States meet to discuss politico-military concerns, it always helps when we can sharpen our focus.

And while the list of documents completed by the Forum is in itself quite impressive, only those of us who have spent countless hours at the Hofburg — and other places where we have conducted our business over the years — truly appreciate the fact that these documents represent only part of the Forum's achievements.

We also recognize the importance of our willingness to continue to meet and talk even when we have no particular proposals on our negotiating agenda. I am confident that we will persist in pursuing goal-oriented dialogue and co-operation while promoting consultation and co-operation concerning security challenges stemming from outside the OSCE area.

Donna A. Phelan has been commuting between Washington, D.C., and Vienna for more than 16 years. She is a Foreign Affairs Officer in the Office of Chemical and Conventional Weapons Affairs, Bureau of Verification, Compliance and Implementation, in the U.S. State Department. She retired from active service with the U.S. Army in 1997.



OSCE/MILOSLAV FROKOSI

Dedoplistskaro military base in Georgia, March 2007. As part of an FSC programme to dispose of obsolete munitions, OSCE and national experts examine a bomb before smelting out its TNT.

Remembering the twists and turns on the FSC path

By **Andrei I. Vorobiev**



Back in 1992, we were young and steadfast believers in the possibilities that life had to offer. After consultations in Vienna, our delegations had moved to the Finnish capital for a summit of Heads of State or Government. As we strolled along the streets of Helsinki, eager to unwind after the decisive meetings that carved out the future of

the Forum for Security Co-operation, few of us could have predicted how things would unfold.

The CSCE participating States realized that it was crucial to capitalize on the new momentum and to react swiftly. They were inspired both by the success of the Stockholm process in the mid-1980s, which had strengthened confidence- and security-building measures, and by the lightning speed with which the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe had been drafted, and then signed in 1990. These events were in stark contrast to the 13 years of painful talks between NATO and the Warsaw Pact on mutual and balanced force reductions.

We all felt we were about to witness the emergence of something new, powerful and ambitious, though we knew we would not be presented with ready-made solutions. But first, we had to go through a menu of incoherent proposals that needed to be pieced together into a meaningful whole.

This task was carried out brilliantly by members of the Bulgarian Delegation, who submitted a draft package incorporating the merits

The OSCE Secretariat's Forum for Security Co-operation Support Section. Standing: Mark Werth, Anton Martynyuk, Glenn Sibbitt, Yuri Kryvonos and Ergin Karazincir. Seated: Elli Kytömäki and Maria Brandstetter.



OSCE/GREGORY.HIU

of all the papers. This served as a launching pad for our efforts to define the Forum's precise role, which was finally laid down in Chapter V of *The Challenges of Change*, the Helsinki Document of 1992.

I could tell countless stories from those days, as the negotiations were full of unexpected twists and turns. But what stands out is the spirit in which they took place — a spirit akin to the music of the 1930s and 1940s, an acoustic embodiment of vibrancy, energy and optimism. The special atmosphere of the CSCE talks was created by the collective desire of the participating States to see the Helsinki process make significant strides forward. A new security architecture was being reshaped, deliberately designed for the post-Cold War era.

Heads of delegation were the prime generators of ideas and engines of progress. This era in the Forum's history groomed an entire generation of disarmament negotiators. Many were to become ambassadors, having withstood trial by fire in the heat of the Forum's debates. Young diplomats like myself — I was a Second Secretary in our Foreign Ministry's Multilateral Disarmament Division at the time — were lucky to have these young men and women as role models. We learned so much from their negotiating skills, their commitment to precision of wording, and, most importantly, the intense passion that informed their drafting efforts.

Success was to come fairly soon. By the time of the CSCE Summit in Budapest in 1994, the Forum had prepared several major norm-setting documents that, to this day, are considered the jewels in the crown of European security.

I am not claiming that the FSC of the first half of the 1990s was a picture of serenity — far from it. Discussions were sometimes tense. On more than one occasion, colleagues slammed the door as they walked out in frustration for lack of any additional argument to prove their point. But I can still hear, resounding in my ears, the words of German Ambassador Rüdiger Hartmann: "Weiter, weiter, weiter!" — a motto that discouraged delegates from indulging in complacency after some major hurdles had been overcome.

I have drawn one important conclusion from my many years with the Forum: Work runs smoothly when it is backed by political support from the highest levels, as was the case with the CFE Treaty. That said, it is the situations in which political will is lacking that spur us to the highest levels of diplomacy, craftsmanship and, yes, courage.

Blaring out the absence of consensus into a microphone is easy to do, but the Forum has never favoured this approach. Our sense of professional honour wins out: It inspires us to seek other ways of helping States reach agreement and understand each other better in the sensitive realm of military security and stability.

I believe this option is becoming even more relevant now, when monologues prevail and each new day offers fresh evidence that the culture of dialogue is in decline. The maturity of human societies is to be judged by their ability to live in peace with one another and accommodate each other's security interests.

Andrei I. Vorobiev is Principal Counsellor in the Department for Security and Disarmament Affairs of the Russian Foreign Ministry. He has contributed to 18 years of CSCE/OSCE negotiations and has come to Vienna almost every year since 1990.



FIELD SECURITY TRAINING

Expecting the unexpected

“I acknowledge explicitly that the participation in the course is at my own risk, take full responsibility in respect of any injury or damage arising, am liable for myself and am advised to arrange my own insurance coverage...”

BY MIKHAIL EVSTAFIEV

As we approach Hammelburg, a small town city in Bavaria, after a ten-hour bus ride, I think about the piece of paper I signed back in Vienna. We're here for a four-day course, organized by the Berlin-based Centre for International Peace Operations (ZIF), which helps prepare civilian personnel from the United Nations, OSCE, European Union and other international organizations, for peacekeeping and field missions. Occasionally, the OSCE also provides trainers in various areas.

I console myself with the thought that at least we are not conscripts and don't have to wear military fatigues, be barked at, scrub floors and toilets, or run five kilometres every morning. But once we are in the barracks, we live according to military rules: We make our own beds, have fixed meal times, share toilets and shower rooms, and have to wake up shortly after 5.00 a.m. if we want to have a proper breakfast.

Hammelburg, otherwise known as “Franconia's oldest wine town”, served as a prisoner of war camp and hospital during the Second World War. Its most famous prison-

ers were Major Jacob Dzhugashvili, son of Soviet leader Josef Stalin, and Col. John K. Waters, son-in-law of U.S. General George S. Patton.

On 27 March 1945, General Patton attempted to liberate the camp's American prisoners of war but his armoured force was wiped out. When the war was over, the Americans set up an internment camp for National Socialists there and Hammelburg remained a U.S. military installation until 1956, when the camp and training area were handed over to the *Bundeswehr*.

After breakfast at the mess, all 21 participants — eight from the OSCE — get our own Kevlar flak jackets. I remember that when I was covering the siege of Sarajevo, we could not get on a UN flight to the city without one. They can't really stop a bullet but they might protect you from shrapnel.

Lt. Col. Mutafoff welcomes us to our first course, saying that the job of his staff is to make us more aware of self-protection and to improve our behaviour under dangerous conditions. “We're not able to offer you solutions but we can give you a mosaic of guidelines from which you can learn,” he says.

“Always expect the unexpected,” he repeats over and over, although none of us knows exactly what he is hinting at.

Sgt. Cieski tells us that worldwide, up to 20,000 people are maimed or killed by anti-

Photo coverage:
OSCE/Mikhail Evstafiev



personnel landmines and unexploded ordnance each year. There are usually no maps or documents to suggest where the 60 to 100 million landmines that are still “alive” have been planted and many still date back to the First and Second World Wars.

Out in the open fields where the beautiful landscape is reminiscent of Bosnia, we gain further insight into the potential threat of deadly devices in a conflict zone. Always check the ground you are stepping on, we are told, sometimes even with the use of field binoculars. If someone steps on a mine, don’t rush to help: the chances are that you yourself will get hurt or killed. Remain where you are and wait for qualified personnel to retrieve the victim.

The instructors tell us that “butterfly” mines were used by the Soviet army against children, “in order to eliminate a new generation of Afghan fighters”. Having served in Afghanistan for two years during the Soviet war in the 1980s, I can’t help but refute this myth of the Cold War era. My point is well taken, with our instructors admitting that their claim is “undocumented”.

“It takes a very evil mind to create some of the booby-traps you are about to see,” warns Sgt. Maj. Markota. Explosive devices can be hidden practically anywhere: under the door, within a sofa, between books — and then activated by sound, light or pressure. Even a toilet — such as the one we see as part of an exhibit — can contain an explosive. Once you flush it, “you are history”, so think twice before entering an abandoned house in a conflict zone.

ANOTHER ONE BITES THE DUST

The sun is at its zenith as we walk through the town of Bonnland. It feels eerily abandoned, and it is: In 1938, the few remaining villagers were settled elsewhere and the local community ceased to exist. Later, the town was converted into one of several major training premises for the German army.

Suddenly, several friendly and not-so-friendly “locals” come out of houses or appear from around the corner. The men ask us for cigarettes, the women, in blue *burkhas*, for medicine. We immediately look around, sensing danger, but we are not sure how to respond. Sure enough, there is gunfire. The strange characters run for cover, with some of us following them into their houses.

“Hit the ground first, then see what’s going on around

you,” says Sgt. Maj. Stieg, as we try to figure out how to escape. We literally walk into a gun battle between “police” and some “rebels”. We can’t understand exactly what is happening, and we all literally hit the ground as we’re still running. We get scratches on our hands and we’re covered in dust.

More explosions lie ahead, and more gunfire. A simulated car bomb blast takes many of us by surprise. “If this were a real situation, you would all be fog in the air,” Sgt. Maj. Stieg says, with just a hint of a smile.

TALKING TO PAPA

The following day, feeling achey and sun-burned, we make our way through the fields to learn how to use maps and compasses and how to orient ourselves with the help of azimuth. Little by little, as we go through actual assignments, it all begins to make sense. We also learn about communications, which can be a matter of life and death. We report to our HQ or “Papa”, using the NATO alphabet. To say we are in Bonnland, we say: “Papa, I am in **Bravo-Oscar-November-November-Lima-Alpha-November-Delta**. Over.”

We disperse into groups and get into assigned vans, armed with maps and instructions on where to go and what to do. We drive for about 15 minutes, “expecting the unexpected”, but nothing happens. Then a road-block comes into view, guarded by heavily armed people in uniforms. They do not seem to be in a good mood. They search us one by one, take our IDs away, and tell us to stand behind barbed wire. Our group leader is interrogated by the mean-looking checkpoint chief, a role brilliantly performed by a familiar face — Sgt. Maj. Stieg.

Things do not go well at all. The chief yells and curses. He is not convinced by our leader’s explanation that we are neutral international observers. We are accused of being spies and aiding the rebels.

Just as the chief tells us we can leave, we find ourselves caught in crossfire. This time there are several “casualties” and the chief is furious. He grabs one of our colleagues, forces him to kneel, points a gun to his head and threatens to shoot him in five seconds if we do not come to the immediate aid of his injured men.

Our misfortunes are far from over. As we drive off, we are accosted by armed bandits. If we thought the previous folks were rude, these guys are downright vicious. They make us kneel, hands behind our necks.



We are in the middle of a forest, with no hope of getting out unscathed. Our leader pleads for our lives, but this is not the Permanent Council — the bandits are not interested in reaching a consensus. They want our vehicles, they want our money and supplies, and much more.

KEEPING YOUR COOL

This feels painfully real: I recall similar situations in Bosnia during the 1990s war. On one occasion, several aid workers were gunned down and robbed as they were delivering supplies.

Starting out the next morning, I warn everyone that if we are detained again, I would pretend to be a Russian journalist who does not know any English. This is my way of getting back at the bad guys.

Sure enough, the worst is yet to come. Masked “gunmen” intercept our bus and take us, blindfolded, to an undisclosed location. My group ends up in a room with deafeningly loud music. Still blindfolded, we are perspiring heavily, thirsty, tired and sore. We are shouted at and again forced to kneel. What do you do if you are taken hostage? Rule number one: Keep your cool and cooperate with your captors.

I decide to use the Stanislavsky acting method and quickly immerse myself into the role. My notebook, which I flash at my captors, reads: “I am a journalist. Do not shoot M.E.”

One at a time, we cough, which gives us an idea of how many there are of us in the room. Perhaps someone will come to our rescue, perhaps we can negotiate a release. But when and how? After I complain of dehydration for the umpteenth time, in Russian, my captors yell at me and decide to take me away to a separate building.

From now on, it is just me and a couple of guards, who are changed regularly. Despite my attempts to explain in broken English that I am in pain and would like a drink of water, they force me to kneel on the

floor. I am taken out several times for interrogation and am accused of being a spy. My captors don’t seem to know how to handle a journalist who does not speak or understand anything but Russian.

Time drags on. When kneeling becomes unbearable, I am allowed to sit or stand up, to my great relief. I offer praise to my captors for this gesture, but in Russian. This makes them even angrier, and they force me to go on my knees again.

At last, after nearly four hours, we are led outdoors, our hands are untied, and we can take off our blindfolds. It takes a while to get used to the bright daylight. For the first time, we can see our captors. We share a warm meal with them on the back of an army truck. Water and juice overflow. Ah, the simple things in life!

Later, I discover that my theatrical performance was considered irresponsible. “You could have had us all killed,” a member of my group protests.

I explain that in desperate situations, people adopt their own methods for staying sane. Mine was acting. Besides, my “unexpected” behaviour also gave us extra time and confused my captors.

I must note with admiration that everything possible was done to ensure our safety and well-being during the final dramatic exercise: On-site medics and psychologists were ready to come to the rescue in the event of anyone finding it all a bit too much.

Mikhael Evstafiev is a Press Officer in the Secretariat’s Press and Public Information Section.





“Living on the seabed”, by Kazakh photographer Shamil Zhumatov: The fishing villages surrounding the Aral Sea, site of one of the region’s greatest ecological disasters, are hoping for better times.

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