

**REPORT BY THE
CHAIRPERSON OF THE CONTACT GROUP WITH THE ASIAN
PARTNERS FOR CO-OPERATION TO THE EIGHTEENTH MEETING
OF THE MINISTERIAL COUNCIL**

Events in both the Asian and the Mediterranean regions in 2011 underscored the importance of the fact that the security of the OSCE region is “inextricably linked” to security in neighbouring regions, which the OSCE participating States acknowledged at the Summit meeting in Astana in December 2010. The “Arab Spring” in the southern Mediterranean region, the disasters that struck Japan in March 2011, as well as the ongoing challenges arising from transnational threats such as trafficking in illicit drugs, all brought this connection to the fore.

The OSCE Asian Contact Group continues to play a very active role in ensuring that the Asian Partners for Co-operation contribute to the OSCE dialogue and participate in OSCE activities. In its six meetings in 2011, the Contact Group discussed a wide range of security issues. The Contact Group meetings also provided an opportunity for briefings on OSCE activities in areas of particular relevance to the Asian Partners in all three dimensions.

At the first meeting of the Contact Group (21 February 2011), a representative of the Lithuanian Chairmanship presented the priorities and plans of the Chairman-in-Office for the year in areas of special relevance to the Asian Partners. The Contact Group Chairperson presented the Group’s work plan for 2011 and highlighted the importance of the Partnership Fund, which enables Partners for Co-operation to participate in OSCE activities and also supports specific projects. The Group was briefed on the OSCE Border Security and Management National Focal Points Network, and the Partner States were encouraged to express an interest in participating in the Network. The Group was also briefed on OSCE field operations in Central Asia.

The second meeting (18 March 2011) was principally devoted to the cross-dimensional issue of transnational threats. An adviser to the Secretary General provided an overview of OSCE activities in these areas and pointed out that the participating States shared the view that OSCE efforts to combat transnational threats should involve the Partners more closely through dialogue, participation in activities and exchange of information and best practices. A representative of the Lithuanian Chairmanship discussed the recent visits of the Lithuanian Foreign Minister and the OSCE Chairman-in-Office to Central Asia and the Caucasus, as well as OSCE initiatives related to the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation.

At its third meeting (1 April 2011), the Asian Contact Group welcomed presentations on ASEAN and its plans to create a community based on politico-security, economic and socio-cultural pillars (ASEAN Connectivity); and on the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). A representative of the Office of the Co-

ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities briefed the Group on its activities in Central Asia in the economic and environmental dimension, including the Environment and Security Initiative (ENVSEC) and its work in the area of water management; co-operation on transport, good governance and migration management; and support for efforts to combat money-laundering and the financing of terrorism.

At the Contact Group's fourth meeting (1 July 2011), the Chairmanship informed the participants about the special session of the 2011 Annual Security Review Conference devoted to the Partners for Co-operation, which had emphasized the necessity of establishing a multilateral mechanism to help Afghanistan achieve a democratic form of governance. The Contact Group discussed the outcomes of and follow-up to the OSCE-Mongolia Conference, which had featured intensive engagement and exchange of views on ways of strengthening joint efforts to respond to transnational threats, intensify economic co-operation and enhance the role of human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law in promoting comprehensive security. The Group appreciated a briefing on Mongolia's adoption of the ninth United Nations Millennium Development Goal (guaranteeing human rights and strengthening democratic governance) and Mongolia's unique 130 democratic governance indicators and its self-assessment tool for measuring its progress toward achieving that goal. The Group also appreciated a presentation on the ODIHR's support for participating States in implementing their commitments to human rights, elections, democracy and the rule of law. The Asian Partners were encouraged to take advantage of the ODIHR's depth of experience to further strengthen their voluntary commitments to OSCE norms and principles.

The Group's fifth meeting (20 September 2011) focused on Afghanistan. The meeting included presentations on OSCE activities related to Afghanistan, which had concentrated on three main tracks: election support for presidential and parliamentary elections; Partnership Fund support for Afghan participation in OSCE activities across the three dimensions, including the sponsorship of some specific projects; and a package of 16 concrete assistance projects aimed at strengthening the capacity of Afghan border, customs and counter-narcotics agencies. Of the package of projects, 11 had been successfully launched, and ten had been completed by the end of 2011. However, three projects had not been launched because of a lack of funding, and it had not been possible to start two border-related projects that implied OSCE engagement on Afghan territory because of a lack of consensus among participating States.

At the Contact Group's sixth meeting (1 November 2011), a representative of the OSCE Chairmanship informed the participants about an informal briefing on OSCE engagement in Afghanistan on 5 October that had reviewed the achievements and lessons learned from the first package of assistance projects. A presentation by the Ambassador for International Security Affairs of the Republic of Korea on promoting co-operative security in Northeast Asia sparked a discussion of security issues in that region. The Group also welcomed a presentation by an independent expert on the development of security co-operation in Europe and the manner in which that experience was relevant to security co-operation in other regions.

The last meeting of the Asian Contact Group focused on non-proliferation issues, with a presentation by Australia on the situation in the Asia-Pacific region and by the CTBTO on its activities. Kazakhstan, as Chair of the FSC, presented OSCE-related activities. The presentations and ensuing discussions proved once more the commonality of interests and the potential for fruitful exchanges and co-operation between the OSCE and its Asian Partners.

The annual joint meeting of the Asian and Mediterranean Contact Groups (21 July 2011) provided an opportunity for a broader exchange of views on developments in regions bordering the OSCE area, including the southern Mediterranean, as well as updates on recent OSCE events, such as the annual session of the Parliamentary Assembly. It also included a discussion of OSCE activities in the areas of police reform, good governance and freedom and reform of the media.

The 2011 OSCE-Mongolia Conference, held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, on 23 and 24 May 2011, focused on enhancing OSCE co-operation with the Asian Partners in addressing common challenges through a comprehensive approach to security. The Conference explored ways to promote comprehensive security by strengthening joint efforts to confront transnational threats, enhance economic co-operation and strengthen human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law.

The Conference session devoted to the politico-military dimension focused on strengthening synergies in responding to transnational threats, and particularly combating trafficking in illicit drugs originating in Afghanistan; and enhancing multilateral security co-operation and military transparency in East Asia. The participants recognized that rapid changes taking place in Asia were creating both opportunities and challenges, increasing the incentives for strengthening regional co-operation. It was noted that civilian control was critical to enhancing military transparency, and that solving territorial disputes would pave the way for greater co-operation. Moreover, disaster relief deserved increased attention in addition to traditional security issues. Although there were significant differences between the history and security needs of the OSCE region and Asia, it was broadly acknowledged that the OSCE and its approach to dialogue and confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) could provide inspiration to the Asian Partners, and that there was significant scope for co-operation based on common interests.

The session on economic and environmental security challenges focused on transport and energy security issues, devoting special attention to customs and cross-border operations as a means to promote secure borders and economic development. Co-operation on second-dimension issues produced mutual benefits, including increased security, economic growth, environmental protection and energy security. A representative of the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities emphasized that strengthening engagement in the economy and in the environmental sector directly correlated with enhanced democracy and security in the OSCE region and beyond. Co-operation and a comprehensive approach were essential to sustainable transportation options and energy security to help ensure sustainable development and integrate environmental and social considerations. In the area of energy security, stability, predictability and respect for the rule of law were critical factors to attract investment as well as to ensure energy security.

The session devoted to the third dimension recognized that democracy was not simply a goal, but was also a process that embodied the will of the people. Thus, both civil society and independent media played a crucial role in countries in transition. Successes as well as failures would occur on the road to democracy, but mistakes should not discourage a country in transition from pursuing the goal. The Asian Partners themselves had a wealth of experience in building democracy, thanks to the enormous efforts that had been expended by their people as well as their governments. It was also pointed out that, in the areas in which

the ODIHR operated, election observation remained the most important activity in which the Partners for Co-operation could participate.

The OSCE Partnership Fund makes possible the participation of Partner States in relevant OSCE activities and supports specific projects. In 2011, the Asian Contact Group drew on the resources of the Partnership Fund to promote comprehensive security in the region. For example, a side event at the OSCE-Mongolia Conference on “Afghanistan Capacity Building: Strengthening the Diplomatic Service”, sponsored by Mongolia and financially supported also by Kazakhstan, identified specific needs and possible approaches to enhance the capacity of the Afghan diplomatic corps. Transparency and openness in diplomatic relations can help a State undergoing a transition to gain the trust and support of other countries, which will in turn help to attract aid and investment. During the side event, Mongolia proposed a training initiative to build the capacity of Afghan diplomats. This training workshop is planned to take place in Ulaanbaatar in 2012 with support from the OSCE Partnership Fund. It will support the Afghan Ministry of Foreign Affairs in strengthening its diplomatic service by sharing experience and exchanging knowledge about international relations, foreign economic and trade policy (including energy security), and environmental diplomacy and communicating with larger neighbours.

The Partnership Fund has also agreed to support a seminar on co-operation for security and development in Northeast Asia and the OSCE experience, jointly organized by the Austrian centre for International Studies (ACIS), the Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship, the Kazakh Chair of the Asian Contact Group and the Government of Mongolia. This seminar will build on a series of meetings on the relevance of the OSCE experience to multilateral security co-operation in Northeast Asia that have been convened since 2006. Its purpose is to develop concrete principles, goals and measures to initiate a mechanism for multilateral security co-operation in Northeast Asia, including CSBMs, to prevent, mitigate or resolve maritime conflicts and disputes in the region. It will develop recommendations for a road map for the Six-Party Talks covering such issues as denuclearization, security guarantees and a peace treaty. The seminar will also examine how nuclear-weapon-free zones can enhance regional stability and security, and explore possible ways to enhance economic co-operation in the region. Originally scheduled to take place in Vienna in November 2011, the seminar has been postponed to 2012 to allow for meaningful contributions from all the major actors in the Six-Party Talks.

The Permanent Council also authorized (by PC.DEC/1003) the use of the Partnership Fund for the sponsoring of a Workshop on Promoting Security through a Comprehensive Approach to Development in Border Areas: A Capacity Building Programme According to Thai Experience, to be hosted by Thailand in 2012. The Workshop, in follow-up to a similar successful initiative in 2010, will focus on strengthening joint efforts to combat transnational threats posed by illicit crop cultivation and drug trafficking, by sharing experiences and best practices on ways of converting underdeveloped and unstable border areas into secure and prosperous regions through a comprehensive approach that includes alternative livelihoods.

The Kazakh Chairmanship of the Asian Contact Group would like to express its satisfaction at the results achieved in the dialogue and co-operation with the Asian Partners. The Asian Partners are to be praised for their vital participation and contributions. Our gratitude goes also to the 2011 OSCE Lithuanian Chairmanship for its leadership and support, as well as to the Secretary General and the External Co-operation Section for the constant assistance provided.