



Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The Secretariat

Conflict Prevention Centre

Main points for the presentation for the 12th Economic Forum in Prague 31 May - 4 June

by Mr. Armands Pupols, Mission Programme Officer, OSCE CPC

WG A Political commitment for institutional development and reform

Session A1: Creating awareness of the value of the environment through education and responsible economic development, including eco-tourism

- Personal Introduction. Since I spent almost three years in CA and am now in my current position as a mission programme officer dealing with CA, I will concentrate in my presentation on examples in this region.
 - **Why has the OSCE started to deal with eco-tourism? This question has been asked often by participating States.**
 - Eco-tourism has several important benefits: it creates additional income for communities, which are in remote places and which don't have other sources of income. Communities get income and it contributes to stability which reduces the possibilities for social tensions, religious extremism, trafficking etc.
 - This year the Bulgarian Chairmanship has been paying particular attention to education. Eco-tourism has a very strong education component both for local communities and visitors. It contributes to the general level of education, particularly covering environmental protection.
 - Many very interesting eco-tourism sites in CA are located in border areas and by developing eco-tourism it is also possible to promote cross border co-operation. Border issue are also getting more attention within the OSCE and by developing eco-tourism it would be possible to contribute to co-operation on border issues among countries in Central Asia.
 - It is also important to mention that the development of eco-tourism does not require such large investments as any other sector of the economy. The majority of investment is required in administrative, educational and promotional tasks, which are more relevant to the OSCE's core competencies. It is low cost and high impact.
-

- **What the OSCE could do in eco-tourism?**

- The OSCE has a very broad spectrum of contacts among state officials (and also local administrations), NGOs and even the business community. It also works with other international organisations in the region. The OSCE also usually has very good contacts with mass media. All these contacts are very important for organising projects and to promote eco-tourism.
 - The OSCE has a high profile in CA, which allows it to approach all levels of local administrations.
 - The OSCE has missions in all five countries of CA, which allows it to continuously collect very comprehensive information about everything, including current and potential areas of eco-tourism development.
 - At the same time the OSCE has international contacts and it could co-operate with eco-tourism experts from many different countries. The OSCE is planning to co-operate with the International Youth Hostel Association.
 - The OSCE has the Academy in Bishkek, which could be used for the training of people working in the eco-tourism sector. This education course could include two main components - management of eco-tourism; and environmental protection. It is possible to bring eco-tourism sector employees from all five CA countries, which then has more regional context.
 - The OSCE has very good experience of organising different kind of training courses and this experience could be used in organising training in eco-tourism.
 - There are border related difficulties. In most cases these are political and administrative questions and the OSCE as a political organisation could play a role in solving administration barriers which are obstacles in many places against the development of eco-tourism.
 - There are a number of examples of border problems effecting eco-tourism in CA, such as one of the main trekking areas are between Almaty in Kazakhstan and the Ysyk Kol lake in Kyrgyzstan. In order to get from Almaty to Ysyk Kol it is necessary to have a visa, yet visa's cannot be issued at the border because there are no checkpoints and tourists might end up in another country illegally. This problem does not require huge investment. An administrative solution can be found where people who are leaving Almaty could get their passports stamped before there are starting trekking.
 - Eco-tourism in order to be self sustainable should be business based and the OSCE, through supporting eco-tourism, is also entering the private business environment with its market rules and here it is necessary to be very careful about what kind of support the organisation should give in order to maintain equal conditions for those involved in this business area.
 - It is important not to create additional competitors. Tenders which combine all objectives of the OSCE could be a solution.
-

- It is important in the development of eco-tourism to work both with NGOs, which can secure larger involvement of the local population, and with professional companies. It is important that those communities who are receiving many eco-tourists have enough knowledge about tourism. If not, a repeat performance might happen like in one potential tourist area of Kazakhstan where local people, in order to show their potential tourist sites, organised 12 hours of almost non-stop horse riding for international donors after which one person was brought immediately to hospital and the rest had serious problems walking for the next couple of days.

Conclusions:

- Development of eco-tourism is relevant to the OSCE because it contributes to co-operation and security.
 - The OSCE could contribute to the development of eco-tourism through training courses and education, involvement of NGO's and local communities, and contribute to the solving of administrative problems in border areas and involving international experts.
-