



United States Mission to the OSCE

Challenges and Opportunities in Border Security and Management

Ambassador Julie Finley
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Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak today on an extremely important challenge to security in the OSCE region, namely weak and porous borders and insufficient systems and organizations to secure and manage these borders. Nowhere is this more evident than in the Central Asian region, including Afghanistan.

Weak border institutions, when combined with high levels of demand and supply of illicit goods across the Eurasian landmass, create a multi-faceted security threat. OSCE participating States and Asian partners alike are affected. Trafficking in persons, small arms and light weapons, nuclear and chemical weapon components, as well as the cross-border movement of criminals and terrorists are all issues with which you are all too familiar.

It is the issue of narcotics trafficking, though, that likely presents the primary cross-border threat in OSCE's Asian region. This trafficking is not one-directional, either. Central Asia's porous borders with China and Afghanistan make it highly vulnerable to trafficking of precursor chemicals. Although these chemicals are not manufactured in Afghanistan, 70% of all Afghan opium is converted into heroin within Afghanistan because of precursor trafficking from Central Asia, much originating in China. This Afghan heroin then finds its way across these same poorly managed borders to the streets of every capital city of every OSCE participating State and partner state.

The Central Asian region, which logically includes Afghanistan, is characterized by a lack of resources, equipment, and most of all training provided to border management institutions. The OSCE has the mandate, capability and expertise to make a difference in addressing these challenges and in shaping the future of border management in Central Asia, including Afghanistan. Whether it has the political will to do so is still an open question.

Addressing these border management issues requires a comprehensive, coordinated, and regional approach. Working to improve all the institutions that are involved in border management, to include border guards and customs officials is critical. We are gratified that the OSCE Borders Team has taken a leading role in including customs agencies in its recent work in Central Asia. This is very important, as improved customs procedures can be both a goal in itself to increase national revenue, and can serve as a tool to interdict illicit, cross-border trafficking, particularly in narcotics.

In this way, a focus on efficient and effective customs procedures is unique in cutting across all three OSCE dimensions. With the interdiction of illicit goods at perhaps the most

vulnerable point in the trafficking flow, the contribution to the Security Dimension is self-evident. With a balanced approach that appreciates the need to encourage the timely flow of legal goods, and engenders cross-border trust and confidence, significant contributions are made in the Economic Dimension. With improved governance and a reduction in cross-border human trafficking, Human Dimension aspects are addressed more effectively.

The OSCE's efforts thus far in Central Asia, although modest, offer a good start. Several national assessments have been made and a handful of training programs have been developed. We are gratified that construction will soon begin on the Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe. The College will educate the most senior regional border security officials to promote cross-border and inter-agency cooperation. It will include a "lessons learned" center and will serve to harmonize border standards regionally. This is all good, and we encourage the strengthening of the OSCE's network of border management programs in Central Asia.

However, one important member of the region, Afghanistan, recently requested assistance in these same fields of border security and management. The security of this state is unquestionably linked to the security of the entire OSCE region, so a prompt and positive decision could have been expected.

The OSCE Secretariat responded admirably in presenting a program of projects to meet Afghanistan's request for assistance, and the organization made a commitment in Madrid to address this request. The Secretariat's response included two substantial programs along Afghanistan's northern border that would have made a true impact. Unfortunately, because only a couple of the 56 participating States objected, the OSCE failed to meet its commitments. It is more than a bit disappointing to see negotiations in Vienna break down on a commitment undertaken by our Ministers last year. As a result, the OSCE is constrained to an unbalanced approach that only looks at one side of the critical Afghanistan border. We have lost time, momentum, and credibility.

We now look forward to pressing forward with border management and customs efforts in Central Asia. Improved customs management efforts in OSCE Central Asian countries will begin to address security threats along much, but not all, of the region's trafficking routes. Afghan participants should be included wherever possible to facilitate confidence-building and to begin to tear down the artificial barriers and mind-set that limit the OSCE's approach from being truly regional.

The OSCE is well situated to be a leader in facilitating improved regional border management. It is gratifying to see the foundation becoming stronger with the establishment of the Border Management Staff College and additional needed programs. Sooner or later, however, the critical needs and situation of Afghanistan must be meaningfully addressed within this regional approach.

We look forward to helping OSCE's programs in Central Asia mature. We then look forward to readdressing the organization's failure to meet head-on the Afghan government's request for meaningful and substantial OSCE assistance in border security and management. Only then can a balanced, comprehensive, and regional approach to border management be truly realized.

Thank you Mr. Chairman.