

Activities of the OSCE Office in Baku: Moving Forward with a Common Aim

The OSCE team in Azerbaijan, this fast-developing, energy-rich southern Caucasus country, has six international experts in human rights law, rule of law, economics, and media. This core is supported by its twelve locally hired members, who bring in-depth expertise to the broad range of tasks outlined in the Office's mandate. Together, the team has the resources to support the host nation, Azerbaijan, in its quest to implement the principles and commitments prescribed for participating States of the OSCE. The Office is relatively young, having been established only some six years ago, and has been in a state of flux almost since its opening. This year has been no exception and can be described, without doubt, as having been by far the busiest, but also the most successful year so far.

In fulfilling its mandate to promote the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments in all dimensions, the Office has made rule of law and good governance its overall priorities. It has closely followed developments related to compliance with OSCE principles and commitments, commented on them, and maintained throughout a close and meaningful dialogue with relevant authorities.

The OSCE Office has striven to support implementation of those commitments by facilitating and co-ordinating activities, arranging pertinent events, and, most importantly, developing and implementing projects and working with the authorities to formulate concrete action plans specific.

From judicial reform, via diversification of the economy, civil society development, police education, environmental strategies, and gender equality, to support for the electoral process and addressing the threat of terrorism, the Office has offered its fullest support to Azerbaijan and developed a partnership which is proving its worth.

The Politico-Military Dimension

Support for Police Development

In many countries and regions, including the Caucasus, criminal networks, corruption, and intimidation continue to obstruct progress in political and economic development. The new states have created new borders, but have not affected the ability of crime syndicates to engage in transnational criminal activity. The countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus are, to differing degrees, all confronted by the burgeoning global threats posed by drugs, trans-

national crime, and terrorism and their police services must be provided with internationally co-ordinated means of addressing them in an environment free from corruption.

Since 2003, the OSCE Office in Baku has been implementing its Police Assistance Programme, based on expert recommendations generated in the process of a comprehensive needs assessment.

In consultations with the Ministry of Interior of Azerbaijan, the Police School was selected as a main beneficiary of the Police Assistance Programme. The Police School is responsible for providing induction training to newly recruited police non-commissioned officers. It consists of four months of academic instruction and two months of on-the-job training at the police station, to which the recruit will, in most cases, subsequently be assigned. While the role of non-commissioned officers is mostly limited to neighbourhood foot patrol duty for crime prevention and criminal deterrence purposes, they are the ones who have the most exposure and daily contact with the public. The academic component covers 16 main areas of police work and runs for 588 academic hours. The professional staff of the Police School includes 49 police officers, instructors, and administrative staff, who annually provide induction training for up to 1,200 new recruits.

Police School facilities include 15 standard classrooms and six specialist classrooms, a gym, conference hall, library, and a separate dormitory building for the accommodation of cadets, as well as indoor and outdoor shooting ranges. When the programme first began, the main building was in an extreme state of disrepair. Concrete walls had large cracks, wooden floors were warped, staircases were crumbling, and ceilings showed extensive water damage, raising questions about their strength. Only a few classrooms had electrical outlets, and all were grim and poorly lit. There was neither heating nor air-conditioning in the classrooms and dormitories, which created a challenging environment given the local weather conditions (up to 40° C in the summer and as low as 0° C with 90 per cent humidity in the winter).

Provision of any technical support in terms of computers or other equipment or visual teaching aids did not make any sense until the more basic need for furniture was met, which, in turn, could only take place after at least minimal refurbishment and renovation of the premises and the creation of humane conditions for training and accommodation.

In an effort to convert the Police School into a functional institution with a modern and effective approach to training, the OSCE Office sponsored the most basic refurbishment and renovation of the premises, including a new roof, replacement of the heating system, provision of two portable wash-rooms for the sports area, together with the complete renovation of two floors in the teaching block of the school.

The renovation work was carried out during 2004 and 2005. Today, the school has furniture in all classrooms and, despite the continuing lack of

dormitory accommodation for students, teaching can now be undertaken in an atmosphere conducive to achieving good results.

The Office has already provided over 2,000 books, computers, and other equipment for the library at the heart of the new school.

A curriculum, based on modern principles of community policing, has been agreed upon with police officials. Teachers from the school also attended the first formal teacher-training course, run by the National Academies of the Czech Republic, which brought Azerbaijan's provision of police training up to European standards. Whilst this has been happening, the new course for induction training has been transformed into lesson plans and will be delivered by the newly-qualified school teaching staff, mentored by police trainers from the Czech Republic, in the summer of 2006.

Assistance has been provided to the City of Baku in the form of a project to install a central server and computer links to the central database, enabling officers from urban police stations to register and research crimes quickly and efficiently. This project is supplemented by a website for the public, which provides access to information about police services, the rights of the individual, and advice on a range of police-related topics. This service, the first of its kind, will be extended to rural districts as public access via internet cafes expands.

Destruction of Toxic Missile Fuel and Remediation of Storage Sites

Melange is not just a kind of milky Viennese coffee but also a highly unstable and explosive missile fuel component that urgently requires neutralization. After the collapse of the USSR, large stocks were left on the territory of the former Soviet republics. Azerbaijan, like many other OSCE participating States, is unable to solve this problem alone due to a lack of the necessary technical, material, and financial resources. In order to eliminate the potential threat to human health and the environment posed by *melange*, the Office supported the launch of a project aimed at providing technical and financial assistance for the remediation of two storage sites in Azerbaijan. An international expert group has visited Azerbaijan to identify a suitable way to resolve the problem of the sites and to determine the technical and financial requirements. The process will commence in July 2006.

The Fight Against Terrorism

The year 2005 saw the official launch of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. This event coincided with the launch of the Office's project support the training of the staff of the Pipeline Protection Department by making them aware of the legal basis of their role and their responsibilities under international law. Similar rights and responsibilities training has also been pro-

vided as part of the municipality programme in rural centres throughout the country.

Rule of Law and Human Rights

Trial Monitoring

In order to enhance implementation of human rights and the rule of law, OSCE participating States have committed themselves to opening their trials to international observers. With this in mind, a Trial Monitoring Programme for Azerbaijan was implemented jointly by the OSCE/ODIHR and the OSCE Office in Baku between November 2003 and November 2004. The programme also served as a follow-up activity to the presidential election of October 2003. That election sparked violent clashes in Baku between groups of demonstrators protesting election fraud. The violence led to some 600 detentions. Eventually, 125 persons, including many prominent leaders of opposition political parties, were brought to trial on criminal charges in connection with the violence. All of the trials were observed under the programme to assess their compliance with national law and international obligations. Azeri law grants the rights and protections required for the conduct of fair trials in compliance with international standards. However, the actual legal proceedings in these cases were not always conducted in a manner that would guarantee the implementation of these rights.

At the beginning of February, during the visit of Ambassador Christian Strohal, Director of ODIHR, to Baku, the findings of the programme – the *Trial Monitoring Report* – were presented to the government of Azerbaijan. During the discussions, a proposed agenda of dialogue between the OSCE and Azerbaijani authorities was agreed upon. It aimed at increasing co-operation on judicial and legal reform, and, in particular, at providing assistance in implementing recommendations made in the Trial Monitoring Report. The Office also participated in talks with senior government officials to discuss steps which might be taken to address issues raised by the report.

In the second phase of the Trial Monitoring Programme, the Office, in co-operation with ODIHR, conducted negotiations with government officials in Warsaw about the findings of the Trial Monitoring Report and the implementation of its recommendations.

Support and Development of the Constitutional Court of Azerbaijan

The OSCE Office continued to assist the court in developing rules of procedure for court management and administration after having supported it in 2004 in improving case administration related to individual constitutional complaints.

During the latter part of April and early May, the Office commissioned Judge Jakob Möller, former Secretary of the UN Commission on Human Rights and President of the Human Rights Commission within the Constitutional Court for Bosnia and Herzegovina, to carry out a two-week programme to assist the Constitutional Court of Azerbaijan in developing effective rules of procedure and to improve case administration related to individual constitutional complaints.

The Office also launched a wide-reaching and carefully structured educational programme designed to increase the ability of individuals to understand the process and independently make appeals to the Constitutional Court. Since the enactment, earlier in 2005, of legislative amendments that permit individuals to appeal directly to the Constitutional Court, a lack of public education in the regions on the process has left this course of action virtually unused. The Office, together with the Constitutional Court and a domestic implementing partner, commenced a programme that will empower members of the public to file individual complaints. The programme, consisting of a series of lectures and practical lessons, ran in all areas of the country. Additionally, a booklet outlining the particular requirements for constitutional complaints was prepared by local lawyers commissioned by the Office. This project was made possible thanks to extra-budgetary pledges from Germany.

Professional Development of Judges and Prosecutors

In April 2005, the OSCE Office organized three seminars for judges, prosecutors and defence counsels on “Challenges facing Transitional Societies in Implementing Fair Trial Standards”. Each group of legal practitioners was equally represented in the seminars, including senior lawyers and the newly appointed chairman of the Supreme Court. Two experts from the Legal System Monitoring Section of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo presented their experience drawn from the monitoring of the Kosovo justice system. The purpose of the seminars was to familiarize legal practitioners with the challenges encountered within Kosovo in meeting international fair trial standards, which may also be applicable in Azerbaijan. A further objective was to enable the participants to discuss the process of reforming the justice system in Azerbaijan and compare it with other countries or regions, such as those undergoing transition and reform in South-Eastern Europe.

Transparency of the Activity of the Newly Established Bar Association

The Office monitors the activity of the new Bar Association and the admission procedure for new members. It lobbied for the opening of the bar to allow admission of those lawyers who had been denied membership.

On 14 March 2005, the Office, together with the Baku office of the American Bar Association's Central European and Eurasian Law Initiative (CEELI), released a joint "Report on the Situation of the Lawyers in Azerbaijan". It highlights the critical situation of the legal profession in Azerbaijan, stresses the importance of the matter, and requests the government of Azerbaijan to address the issues.

The Office, together with CEELI, gave recommendations on the most serious issues requiring improvement, which included opening the Azerbaijani Collegium of Advocates to all practising lawyers, and allowing the repetition of the bar exam, particularly for those applicants who were prevented from participating because of unreasonable bureaucratic obstacles. The Office has expressed similar concerns to government officials many times in discussions, press statements, and in the above-mentioned Trial Monitoring Report. With this report, the Office provided a guide on how to significantly improve the situation of the legal profession within a short time.

On 16 and 17 June 2005, the Office hosted a well-attended conference, widely covered by the media, entitled "Advocacy: International Standards and Realities", on the workings of the Collegium and best practices in other European countries. Azerbaijani lawyers discussed shortcomings of the setup of the national bar, including admission procedures, and consulted participating heads of bar association from France, Georgia, Russia, Turkey, and Ukraine about their practices in addressing commonly shared problems.

The Presidential Administration submitted amendments to the Law on Advocates to the *Milli Majlis* (parliament) that were passed and went into effect on 6 August 2005. In short, all licensed lawyers whose rights to be a member of the Collegium have not been recognized, were accepted as members of the new Collegium by the Qualifications Commission without passing an examination. Although many problems remain, supporting a reform of the bar association had tangible success.

Prison Monitoring

The Office supported prison reform in the Republic of Azerbaijan by developing a monitoring mechanism and building the capacity of NGOs to carry out effective monitoring. It has also organized several prison visits, cooperating with other diplomatic missions, in particular, to assess the conditions of several prominent opposition leaders in prison, as well as following up other cases of concern.

NGO Advocacy Training Programme

The OSCE Office developed a programme designed to reach a broad audience of NGO staff members through workshop-style training. These training courses focused on a wide variety of advocacy skills and concepts including

how to conduct public advocacy campaigns and use strategic negotiation skills in national and international settings.

The Office supported a national NGO forum to conduct training courses in the regions within the framework of the broader project “Negotiation Skills for Political Managers”. The objective of the project was to build sustainable dialogue and collaboration among leading political actors in Azerbaijani society and to improve their skills in consensus building and conflict management. The project was carried out against the background of an apparent lack of ability of various political actors in Azerbaijan to conduct constructive dialogue and to reach a consensus on issues of particular importance for the society.

The training courses in the regions have been conducted by a group of trainers who themselves had been trained by the Consensus Building Institute of the United States. Each course is attended by around 20 representatives of political parties (including opposition and governing party representatives), NGO and community leaders, municipality officials, and local executive government employees. They receive training in negotiation, consensus building, team building, and conflict management skills through exposure to various interactive methods and role play simulations.

Report on the NGO Registration Process

On 11 May 2005, the OSCE Office released a report, prepared in co-operation with a domestic NGO, on the registration process of non-governmental organizations in Azerbaijan. The report identifies the difficulties applicants face in the NGO registration procedure, among them the worrying rejection of registration on irrelevant grounds, the occasional misinterpretation of legal provisions, the prolongation of the processing times without proper grounds, and the hampering of the registration process as a result of its centralization. The report offers concrete recommendations, including simplifying the registration procedure by limiting the number of documents required. It also recommends providing the applicants with broader opportunities to rectify shortcomings identified in their submissions during the registration process and suggests that the Ministry of Justice prepare a handout to describe the basic requirements for NGO registration.

The Ministry of Justice promised instant action to address the problems described in the report. The Office has observed that, since the publication of the report, most of the applicants mentioned in it and many others have been registered. One may therefore conclude that there has been gradual success in removing arbitrary obstacles blocking NGO activities.

Survey on Juvenile Justice

On 28 June 2005, the NGO Alliance for Children's Rights released its report "Juvenile Justice in Azerbaijan". This is the first comprehensive publication written in Azerbaijan solely on the subject of juvenile justice. The report revealed that a confrontation with law enforcement and the justice system may have serious, negative, and unintentional consequences for children and their families. Its findings and recommendations provide a basis for the authorities to systematically address the shortcomings of the justice system in its treatment of juveniles. The OSCE Office commenced discussions with UNICEF, government officials, and the Alliance to initiate follow up activities on the recommendations of the report. Government officials have already declared their intention of considering the findings of the report in an effort to identify means of improving the treatment of children who are detained or are alleged to have committed offences.

Support for Setting up a Civil Registry

In July and August 2005, an international expert, commissioned by the OSCE Office, made an assessment on the work needed by the authorities to set up a nationwide civil registry in Azerbaijan. The assessment entails data collection, situation analysis, data collation from existing equipment and service providers, and discussion of alternatives with the Ministry of Justice. The expert's work was considered necessary to help the authorities identify the financial and technical implications of the creation of the civil registry for next year's national budget. It is envisaged that the civil registry will become the main source of information for the voters' list and also serve as the primary demographic statistics authority for economic and policy decisions.

The Office has also produced a report outlining the basic requirements envisaged for such a system to be developed and specifies the main tasks which will be necessary for state agencies to undertake to establish the National Civil Registry and make it effective. The registry will be a major tool in maintaining demographic records for such things as personal identification and travel documentation, electoral rolls, and voter lists.

Co-organization of International Human Rights Defenders Meeting

The Office co-funded and co-organized an international network meeting of Human Rights House in Baku, which took place from 7-9 September. Representatives from each of the eleven current member countries of Human Rights House met to determine strategies and priorities for the coming year. The aim was to enhance co-operation and collaboration amongst human rights oriented organizations, both governmental and non-governmental, and to strengthen the level of support and solidarity among them. The Azerbaijan

Human Rights House has been operating with a number of domestic NGOs for just over one year, making it one of the most recent members of the organization. Twenty-eight other human rights organizations from Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Belarus, and across Africa participated in the event, which was opened by the UN Special Representative on Human Rights Defenders, Hina Jilani. The event provided a platform for increasing awareness of the human rights issues in advance of Azerbaijan's parliamentary elections in November.

Second International Conference for Young Lawyers

The OSCE Office co-funded the Second International Conference of Young Lawyers to be held in Azerbaijan, which took place from 10-12 September. Representatives of legal education societies and rule-of-law-oriented organizations from Belgium, Azerbaijan, the USA, Brazil, Cameroon, Italy, Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Iran, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Pakistan, Turkey, and Tajikistan were present. They gathered to discuss issues about the role of young lawyers and ways to improve the existing mechanisms for human rights protection. An additional aim of the conference was to build relationships among young lawyers from the countries represented and to promote a broader level of discussion on ways to enhance the professional development of legal practitioners and to disseminate good practice principles. The conference delegates supported the full integration of young Azerbaijani lawyers into the international community, a move which is designed to benefit the continuing development of the legal profession and to enhance international understanding.

Democratization

During 2005, the OSCE Office in Baku highlighted four priority areas in its democratization portfolio: anti-trafficking activities, political dialogue between the ruling and opposition parties, the November parliamentary elections, and gender issues.

Political Dialogue

In the priority area of support for further talks between the authorities and the opposition parties, the Office brought together members of political parties representing both the government and the opposition in May at a seminar entitled "Politics into the Future – Democracy in Azerbaijan" to discuss the basic values of democracy. The event marked the first in a series of "dialogue" meetings, introducing the prerequisites of a functioning democratic system and the definition of fundamental rules of democracy. All of the par-

ticipants agreed on a nine-point framework for the conduct of political parties. The second dialogue, entitled “Political Parties and Executive Authorities on Freedom of Assembly”, was held on 12 September. Senior representatives of eleven political parties, representing government as well as opposition views, together with six leaders of regional executive committees, and three high level representatives of the police and internal troops discussed issues such as locations for demonstrations and pickets in Baku and in the regions, and assemblies in the Autonomous Republic of Nakhichevan and in remote villages in Azerbaijan. The seminar concluded with three recommendations: (1) to develop a “culture of demonstration” and seek dialogue among all involved parties, including a representative of the OSCE in an advisory capacity, preferably before, during, and after every public event; (2) to draft a specific agreement before every meeting or picket, describing who will participate, where it will take place, how it will be managed, and when; (3) to hand over a list to the authorities with further suggestions for possible locations in Baku and the regions that correspond to the Law of the Republic of Azerbaijan on Freedom of Assembly. A follow-up meeting of the second dialogue between the authorities and the representatives of the *Azadliq* (Freedom) bloc on 29 September failed due to the government’s refusal to negotiate alternative locations for demonstrations and mass meetings in Baku. The OSCE Office will continue its dialogue efforts provided that the sides are willing to begin a constructive dialogue without preconditions.

The Parliamentary Elections of 6 November

During the course of 2005, the Office also paid much attention to the priority area of parliamentary elections. It supported the implementation of the revisions and specific recommendations to the Electoral Code and further reform of the legal framework for elections. Over the course of the year, the OSCE hosted several co-ordination meetings with the aim of co-ordinating activities to support the election process for the parliamentary elections. Participants representing participating States resident in Baku, the Council of Europe, and the International Foundation for Electoral Systems (IFES) discussed priorities that included voter education, candidate and political party training, and the need to support the establishment of a uniformly well trained observer group formed from the domestic NGO community. The latter would have required changes in current legislation precluding the participation of NGOs that receive more than 30 per cent of their funding from foreign sources. Yet this law was changed only a week before the Election Day.

In its efforts to educate voters on voter registration, checking voter lists, and taking part in the elections, the Office supported radio and TV spots produced by the Election Monitoring Centre. It also advocated freedom of speech and the use of live televised debates during the campaign period, which were periodically forbidden by the Central Election Commission on

spurious administrative grounds. With the aim of facilitating a genuinely transparent and free electoral process, the Office met with representatives of political parties and NGOs across the political spectrum and advocated implementing the Joint Recommendations on the Electoral Law and the Electoral Administration in Azerbaijan prepared by ODIHR and the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. In 2006, the Office has worked to encourage parliamentarians to respect the rule of law and follow accountable legislative practices, support the development of parliamentary networks that share expertise and dialogue on legislative policy and practices, as well as build capacity for parliamentarians, political parties, and other political leaders on legislative processes.

Gender Issues

Another focus during 2005 was the increase in participation of women in the parliamentary elections as voters, activists, observers, and candidates. In cooperation with the media NGO *Internews*, the Office produced a set of feature stories and debates under the title “Women and Elections”, broadcast throughout the country until Election Day. The Office also started promoting gender-related laws, such as the law on domestic violence and the law on equality between men and women. This third priority area falls within the mandate of the Office to support the Government of Azerbaijan’s National Action Plan on Gender Equality. During the year, the Office hosted several gender round tables for international organizations, donors, and embassies in the areas of gender mainstreaming, gender balance, and relevant laws to coordinate efforts, share information, and prevent duplication. In 2006 and after the parliamentary elections, the Office has stated to create communication mechanisms for the activities of women parliamentarians, to network with gender-sensitive parliamentarians, and to foster dialogue on issues related to the advancement of women in order to promote gender equity, and ensure that both women and men parliamentarians take into consideration the rights and demands of women, based on a human rights perspective.

Anti-Trafficking

Trafficking in human beings is one of the most pressing and complex issues in the OSCE region and beyond. Every year, hundreds of thousands of women, children, and men are trafficked into conditions amounting to slavery. The illegal selling of and trafficking in organs is another growing problem.

Azerbaijan is primarily a country of origin and transit for women and children trafficked for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Internal trafficking of women and girls appears to be an increasing problem too. The OSCE Office supports the government of Azerbaijan in its effort to address this mod-

ern type of slavery by facilitating discussions and designing and implementing concrete projects.

Before the frosts of the harsh winter of 2005 had gone, the northern town of Guba was busy preparing itself for the opening of the first training centre for at-risk women, designed and funded by the Office. The project was unique in that it was specifically designed for young women from the rural villages in the area whose opportunities for advancement were slim. The Office, in its research of the phenomenon of trafficking in human beings, had determined that such women formed one of the most at-risk groups. Men from the rural villages have, over several years, been forced to seek work in the larger towns, leaving whole communities populated, for protracted periods, only by women. The traffickers find such situations easy to exploit but, by training those at risk in typing and secretarial skills, and with the active support of local municipal government, work can be provided and the threat reduced.

With the adoption of a new law on trafficking in human beings and amendments to the criminal code, the task of implementing the National Action Plan, which was adopted in 2004 with support from the Office, could commence in earnest. By October 2005, a building had been identified, situated within easy reach of the airport, which was designated for the purpose as the country's first secure accommodation for victims of trafficking and those at risk of being trafficked. The building's complete refurbishment, supported financially by the Ministry of Internal Affairs and the OSCE Office, was very near to completion by the end of the year. And together with partners from the IOM and the US Embassy, preparations have been made to train selected volunteers to work in the secure accommodation and on the country's toll free help line.

The Economic and Environmental Dimension

SME and Regional Economic Development

Among the key challenges for the development of small and medium enterprises (SME) in the regions of Azerbaijan are the lack of access to business training and micro-finance loans. Women, in particular, face significant obstacles in obtaining business training and microloans, which impacts negatively on their ability to launch and increase business activity. For this reason, the Office has continued its focus on entrepreneurial training for women in the rural regions of Azerbaijan. Beginning in January, the Office funded the German Agency for Technical Co-operation (*Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit*, GTZ) to provide entrepreneurial training to over 200 women in five districts of Azerbaijan. The training focused, in particular, on the creation of legal entities, overcoming problems associated with entrepre-

neurial activity in the country, and practical knowledge on managing businesses, obtaining credits and loans, accounting, and tax procedures.

Moreover, recognizing the lack of access to start-up capital for women in these regions, the Office further co-operated with GTZ to organize a business plan competition for the women who have successfully completed training courses over the past years. Prospective candidates, who have taken part in a series of training courses on developing business plans in accordance with the economic opportunities in their respective communities, gradually refine their business plans for the competition. Winners of the business plan competition received start-up money from a revolving fund to help facilitate the realization of their business plans.

Good Governance/Anti-Corruption

Allegedly, one of the key obstacles to the liberalization of a market economy and regional economic development in Azerbaijan is the pervasiveness of corruption throughout the country. The presence of corruption threatens the continued development of the Azerbaijani economy at a particularly critical juncture, with the expectation that large-scale revenues from the oil and gas sector will soon be realized. In support of the government's recently adopted programme to combat corruption, the Office sponsored a series of public awareness round tables and conferences with extra-budgetary financing from the permanent representation of France. In early 2005, the OSCE Office in Baku, in co-operation with the Azerbaijani Young Lawyers Union, began a series of public round tables in Baku and several regions to promote the new anti-corruption laws. A broad selection of representatives from government, civil society, and the business community participated in the round tables. The Office also organized a Conference on Best Practices on Combating Corruption with the participation of international experts from the Lithuanian Special Investigation Services and the Bulgarian Ministry of Internal Affairs. Jointly sponsored by the French and US Embassies, USAID, and CEELI, the conference highlighted a number of instruments including ministerial hot-lines, codes of conducts for ministries, freedom of access to information, and anti-corruption commissions. The Office also published and distributed an Azerbaijani-language version of the OSCE Handbook for Best Practices in Combating Corruption.

Beyond awareness building, the Office continued to assist the government in preparing key effective legislative and other measures to combat corruption, notably as a member of the Legislative Working Group of the Anti-Corruption Commission. The purpose of the Legislative Working Group is to draft new anti-corruption laws and to amend Azerbaijan's current laws to more effectively combat corruption. In particular, the Office worked on amending the ethics law to comply with international standards, and the drafting of a new conflicts of interest law and a corporate criminal liability law. Once these key

pieces of legislation have been adopted by parliament, they should significantly reduce the scope for corruption and improve possibilities for admonishing bad governance and corrupt practices.

Environmental Public Awareness

The Office continued its co-operation with the Aarhus Public Environmental Information Centre and the Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources in Baku. Consisting of a library, internet, and conference room facilities, the Aarhus Centre provides equal and open access to any citizen or organization with an interest in environmental affairs. During 2005, the Aarhus Centre continued to be a hub of environmental NGO activity in Azerbaijan with an average of 75 visitors a week to the library and over 50 public meetings held in the conference room during this time. The Office also began preparations to establish a second Aarhus Centre in Ganja. This new centre will provide an important networking link on environmental affairs between the capital Baku and more remote, yet environmentally sensitive, regions of the country.

The Office recently began a year-long programme to develop the Green Pack multi-media environmental education programme for schoolchildren in Azerbaijan, which is co-sponsored by BP. The Office will work to develop learning modules for the Azerbaijan environmental context in the Azerbaijani language. The Office has continued to support the project in 2006 as project implementers train teachers and community leaders on how to integrate Green Pack¹ materials into the school curriculum and use them in their teaching.

The Office, in co-operation with BP, the International Finance Corporation, and the Eurasia Foundation continued its support of the Energy Bus initiative which raised public awareness of energy conservation and practical alternative energy solutions in rural communities in Azerbaijan during 2005. Despite its significant oil and gas reserves, which are currently under development, Azerbaijan still experiences chronic energy deficits in its rural regions, and this impacts upon sustained economic development and deforestation in these areas. Supporting the government of Azerbaijan's goals of promoting the use of renewable energy to address energy security needs, the Energy Bus uses a mobile truck and trailer containing models and information pertaining to energy conservation and low-cost alternative and renewable energy solutions for rural communities. Over the course of 2005, the Energy Bus visited approximately 150 villages and trained local communities on energy conservation and low-cost renewable energy technologies.

Finally, the OSCE Office continued its joint support for the OSCE/NATO South Caucasus River Monitoring Programme. Its purpose is to collect, analyse, and disseminate information on the fragile ecological state of water re-

¹ The green Pack is a multi-media environmental education curriculum developed by the Regional Environmental Centre for Central and Eastern Europe (REC).

sources of the Kura-Araks system. Another key objective is to allow for the early detection of possible polluting agents and thereby serve as a de-escalation tool for tensions that might arise between bordering populations in the case of intentional or accidental pollution. In 2006, the Office contributed to the Project through the upgrading of the equipment of the "AzEcoLab" Physical Environment Research Centre. This has increased the capability of the local implementing partner to perform measurements of a wider range of pollutants and with an increased precision.

Outlook

Since regaining independence almost 15 years ago, Azerbaijan has made an incomplete transition to democracy and market economics. The democratic process is nominally in place, but the cultural and institutional supports are still being developed. Democratic development is one of the main commitments Azerbaijan made to the OSCE and the international community in general. However, if the democratic reforms are to be successful, they should go hand in hand with economic reform. 2006 is the first year in which the real oil money is flowing into the State coffers. Properly used, petroleum funds can finance Azerbaijan's development. If the country's economic potential can be activated, ample public sector resources and strong economic opportunities can facilitate solutions to social problems and provide an economic underpinning to a viable democracy. The promotion of democratic principles, as well as greater transparency and participation, will be of decisive importance in ensuring the sustainability of Azerbaijan's transformation into a genuine democratic state. These issues will form the basis for the OSCE Office's activities in the years to come: supporting Azerbaijan in further promoting the implementation of OSCE principles and commitments by co-ordinating and organizing relevant events and by developing and carrying out corresponding projects.