

Uzbekistan and the OSCE

The membership of the Central Asian countries in the OSCE is moving ahead step by step. At the present time all of them are displaying a lively interest in cooperation within the OSCE framework, an interest which should be seen as part of their active striving for cooperation and exchange with the countries of Europe.

The OSCE also offers good opportunities for the development of relations with other organizations such as the European Union which, for its part, is currently broadening its own relations with the Central Asian states. In addition, there is the NATO program, "Partnership for Peace", and of course the cooperation within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) as well.

The existence of a number of platforms for cooperation promotes the development of one's own "ego" and thus offers the best opportunity for self-realization. This corresponds perfectly to the OSCE concept of developing relations through a network of organizations and communities rather than focusing on a single one, so as to achieve greater independence.

Uzbekistan is especially concerned to build a society based on the principles of democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, signed the CSCE Final Act of 1975 on 26 February 1992 in the Finnish capital city. As a result of this act Uzbekistan became a participant of the OSCE. By joining the OSCE in 1992, shortly after achieving national independence, Uzbekistan committed itself to observing the accepted norms of international law and to participating in collective measures to strengthen security.

The Uzbek delegation took part in the meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council on 7 and 8 December 1995 in Budapest. Two main issues were discussed in the course of negotiations: solutions for the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Common and Comprehensive Security Model for Europe for the 21st Century - a model which calls for strict observance of the principles and commitments undertaken within the OSCE and for finding solutions to the problems and risks in the realm of security.

In addition, a close cooperative relationship is developing between the parliament of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE. The parliamentary delegation of the Republic, under the leadership of the Chairman of the parliament, participated in the Fourth Annual Meeting of the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly, which took place in Ottawa from 4-8 July 1995. Elections were held in the course of this meeting and the Chairman of the Uzbek parliament, Erkin Khalilov, was elected Vice-Presi-

dent of the Assembly. In January 1996 there was a meeting in Vienna of the Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly in which the Uzbek delegation under the leadership of Erkin Khalilov again took part.

The OSCE Liaison Office for Central Asia was opened in July 1995 in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, providing evidence of the importance which the OSCE attaches to maintaining peace and stability and to the economic and human dimensions in the Central Asian region. This gives Uzbekistan an opportunity to exchange information with other OSCE institutions and to carry on a dialogue on the problems that confront the Central Asian countries, particularly Uzbekistan.

The Uzbek government has supported the work of the OSCE Office from the very beginning. At a meeting with representatives of the diplomatic missions and foreign organizations on 29 December 1995, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, once again emphasized that the Uzbek government will continue to cooperate with the OSCE in all areas of its activity.

It can be assumed with confidence that the words of Islam Karimov will be put into practice. After all, ensuring regional security is one of the most important concerns of the day for Uzbekistan. Based on the concept of comprehensive security and in the conviction that the observance of human rights and the protection of fundamental freedoms as well as the rule of law and the development of democratic institutions serve the cause of preventing conflicts and building the foundations of peace and security, Uzbekistan takes an active part in this process.

Regional Security

Recent years have confirmed that stability and comprehensive security are the most important prerequisites for the attainment of Uzbekistan's strategic goal, namely, full integration into the international community on the basis of equality. For that reason, Uzbekistan also participates actively in the NATO program, "Partnership for Peace".

Uzbekistan's representatives share the view which is supported in many international fora that the path to global security depends on the establishment of durable regional security. Only through mutual understanding and cooperation between the countries in the individual regions, particularly in the smouldering "hot spots", can we achieve peace and stability in the entire world.

Uzbekistan is trying to play its appropriate role in the maintenance of peace and stability in the region and is taking an active part in working out the new Security Model for the 21st Century. One example of this is the consultative

seminar on questions of security and cooperation in Central Asia which was held in Tashkent in September 1994 on the initiative of President Karimov and with the support of the Secretary General of the United Nations, Boutros-Ghali.

The problems discussed at the seminar in Tashkent reflected the main lines of activity of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

Central Asia is confronted with a number of urgent problems at the present time. They call for closer cooperation with those international organizations in which certain mechanisms for ensuring regional security have been worked out. The possibilities which the OSCE offers for establishing the foundations of confidence-building and cooperation are of great value for the countries of this region.

Central Asia has enormous reserves of strategic natural resources and raw materials. In recent years they have become the focal point of geo-political and economic interest and ambition for many different countries. It is thus extraordinarily important that the requirements of national security in the Central Asian countries and the threats to it be jointly and adequately evaluated by all states in the region and that common approaches to the prevention and elimination of these threats be found. And it is no less important that the level of a threat which could trigger global instability be realistically understood throughout the world, including the developed countries.

President Karimov has on a number of occasions called the attention of the international community to the threat represented by the conflict in Afghanistan, which has been going on for many years. The destabilizing potential of that conflict has recently become particularly obvious in Tajikistan. Despite all efforts to maintain peace and stability in Central Asia the situation in Tajikistan represents a real threat to tranquility and harmony in the region.

Uzbekistan proposes forming a conciliation council which, along with others, would include representatives of the UN and the OSCE. The establishment of a Congress of the Peoples of Tajikistan in which not only the government and the opposition but the regions of the country would be represented is without doubt an urgent requirement and might offer a way out of the present situation. These issues were thoroughly discussed at the OSCE Seminar on Confidence Building which was held in the Tajik capital of Dushanbe from 24-26 April 1996.

Holding various symposia and seminars is a very important part of the OSCE's work. In April 1996 the OSCE, together with the government of Uzbekistan, held an important symposium in Tashkent on the subject of "Central Asia: OSCE Comprehensive Security and Regional Challenges" at which issues of regional security were discussed in connection with the OSCE's work on the new Security Model. This forum helped to clarify views on the

creation of a dependable system of regional security in Central Asia and to bring various standpoints closer together.

The Economic Dimension

The OSCE's economic component has attracted more and more attention in recent years. There is a widespread and growing realization that economic factors have real consequences for security and stability in the entire OSCE area.

Working together with the OSCE in the economic dimension could be of great significance for the economic development of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan takes an active part in many economic forums of the OSCE. At the third meeting of the OSCE Economic Forum in Prague in 1995 the Uzbek delegation took an initiative, which received strong support, to improve the work of the OSCE in the economic dimension. Under the leadership of the Uzbek Ambassador to the OSCE, Mr. A. Shaikhov, the Uzbek delegation also took an active part in the fourth Economic Forum of the OSCE, which was held from 27-29 March 1996, once again in Prague. In the course of the Forum the participants agreed that the OSCE, as an organization that concerns itself with a wide range of problems, can play the role of a coordinating body for the maintenance of security on the basis of a social system that enjoys broad support.

The Uzbek representatives believe it is necessary to develop closer cooperation between the OSCE and the international economic and financial organizations in the OSCE region. They are interested in expanding economic relations with other OSCE participating States on a bilateral basis. Relations between Uzbekistan and the European Union are undergoing a dynamic development which helps to strengthen integrative relations with the European countries. At the present time Uzbekistan is one of the European Union's largest trade and economic partners in Central Asia. On 29 April 1996 there was a second round of negotiations in Tashkent between the European Union and Uzbekistan as a result of which both sides initialed an Agreement on Cooperation and Partnership.

Integration processes in the Central Asian region have also picked up speed recently. The Uzbek position on the future of this process is that integration should not put limits on freedom of action and contacts with potential partners, regardless of their ideology and their geographic location. A prerequisite is that states act voluntarily and on a basis of equality and that the reforms undertaken in the individual countries have the same tendency and a comparable character, in accordance with their own potential.

Ecological security is today an important issue for the world public. Ecology has become a priority field for Uzbekistan in its cooperation with the OSCE. The danger that the Aral Sea might disappear entirely occasions special concern in the Central Asian region. The Aral Sea catastrophe could lead to a global ecological crisis whose consequences would affect all who live on the continent.

The international Seminar on Rehabilitating the Environment which the OSCE held in Uzbekistan in October 1995 demonstrated the Organization's interest in solving the ecological problems that confront the Central Asian states.

Uzbekistan welcomes and values the OSCE's efforts aimed at solving the ecological problems of the region and is prepared this year to continue the work of the seminar on restoring the environment, whose efforts should be focused on the economic and legal issues involved.

The Human Dimension

To create a firmer foundation for the constitutional rights and fundamental freedoms of Uzbekistan's citizens, the position of Plenipotentiary for Human Rights was created in the Uzbek parliament in February 1995 and later supplemented by a Commission for the Observance of Constitutional Rights and Fundamental Freedoms of Citizens.

It should be stressed that Uzbekistan is cooperating actively in this area with the OSCE and other international organizations. In February 1996 a human rights delegation from the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), led by Ambassador I. Popesku, visited Uzbekistan. In the course of three weeks the UNDP experts, along with experts from the OSCE, had more than 50 meetings and discussions with representatives of various state and social organizations, offices, political parties, international institutions and foreign embassies. As a result, the conclusions and recommendations of the delegation reflected various views and estimates of the present situation in Uzbekistan. The UNDP mission's final report concluded that the basic democratic institutions needed to realize the rights and freedoms of the citizens had been created in Uzbekistan within a short time, that the most important international agreements had been ratified and that the structures of a civil society were beginning to develop. The effective functioning of the democratic institutions remains an important question as does the task of further perfecting the legal system in Uzbekistan.

The most urgent problems, in the view of the mission, are a lack of information on legal issues and of relevant documentation, along with an inadequate knowledge of international practice and of the activities of comparable insti-

tutions in foreign countries. The program proposed for dealing with these problems is to be implemented in two stages. The first is to run from summer of this year until June 1997 and will be directed first and foremost toward technical assistance to the state organs for administration and justice: courts, public prosecutors, ministries and parliamentary commissions. The employees of these institutions need both specialized training and retraining and their technical equipment needs to be improved.

The second phase is to run until the year 2000 and foresees the establishment of a number of new offices; of particular importance is a Special Center for Human Rights which in time is to serve the whole Central Asian region. Another office will be called the "Center for Democratic Administration"; its purpose will be to give all state institutions and entities a publicly responsible and accountable character in order to ensure the realization and observance of the rights of citizens. This center will also have an advisory function vis-a-vis state and non-governmental organizations. It can be said that the value of this program, in keeping with its concrete and goal-oriented character, is of a long-term kind.

At the end of February a delegation of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) led by Ambassador Audry Glover visited Uzbekistan. In his meeting with Ambassador Glover, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan emphasized the continuity in relations between Uzbekistan and the OSCE. He stressed Uzbekistan's desire to continue working with the ODIHR because extensive political and social reforms are already being carried out in Uzbekistan and the experience of the OSCE is very useful in this connection.

The delegation of the ODIHR used the occasion of their stay in Uzbekistan to familiarize themselves with the activities of the organizations and institutions which deal with human rights there and came to the conclusion that Uzbekistan needs assistance in the area of the human dimension. They expressed their willingness to develop further the cooperation in this field. The OSCE Seminar on National Human Rights Institutions, which is to take place in Tashkent in September 1996, can play an important role in this connection.

Conclusion

The multilateral dialogue within the OSCE framework provides the new states, among them Uzbekistan, with great opportunities to share the experience which has been gathered by the OSCE and will pave the way for progress through building a democratic society and economic reforms.

The path Uzbekistan has chosen to build an independent, stable and democratic society is the right one, but it is a difficult path which will take a lot of time to traverse. Uzbekistan is at the start of this path; but thanks to active cooperation with the OSCE and other international organizations it can achieve the goals that have been set and make its contribution to strengthening regional security, developing economic cooperation, and ensuring human rights and fundamental freedoms.