



INTERVIEW WITH THE HEAD OF THE OSCE CENTRE IN BISHKEK, AMBASSADOR ANDREW TESORIERE

Alleviating tensions

The OSCE Centre in Bishkek, which has been in operation since 1999, has been at the heart of the OSCE's response to the political crisis in Kyrgyzstan since unrest on 7 April led to the establishment of a new provisional government and ethnic violence broke out in the south of the country in June. In September, Ambassador Tesoriere, who heads the Centre, spoke about his work.

OSCE Magazine: How does a typical day look for you as Head of Centre?

Ambassador Tesoriere: I have no typical day nowadays since the upheavals of April and June. The issues in Kyrgyzstan are not straightforward. Moreover the dangers of Kyrgyzstan's internal difficulties spreading in the sub-region are very real.

Although I must be ready to adapt my day given the fluid political situation, I do observe certain staple daily disciplines. I have to keep apace with what the media is reporting and key statements made by political and civic leaders. I have to take constant soundings through contacts at different levels across national life. I have to ensure the Centre provides a regular and reliable flow of reporting to the 56 participating States. I look to drive my dedicated and multi-skilled team — the Centre has over 100 permanent staff members — to achieve results

from the 200-plus activities we operate at any given time.

On a personal note, I believe self-balance and composure are important in these uncertain times. Making good judgement calls in the heat of a crisis is essential. Taking a long look before work at the perennially snow-capped mountains reminds me there is always a longer-term, bigger dimension to consider than just the rush of daily events and quick-fix decisions.

What makes the work of the Centre different from that of other international organizations, how can they complement each other?

I would make three distinctions, but without in any way detracting from the co-ordinated tripartite approach and joint action plan the OSCE, the United Nations and the European Union have adopted towards Kyrgyzstan in the aftermath of the April crisis.

Firstly, compared with other major international and regional organizations, the OSCE has a distinctive, holistic approach to security, housed under one organizational roof. In practice, this means that in a large field operation like Bishkek, our different teams co-ordinate their activities very closely. For example, our

Ambassador Tesoriere meets with police and prison personnel and NGO partners at Talas pre-detention centre in Western Kyrgyzstan. (OSCE)

work on borders simultaneously addresses border security, trade facilitation, good governance and respect for travellers' rights.

Secondly, unlike the United Nations or European Union agencies, the OSCE does not undertake development or humanitarian work, although we do work to create security conditions that allow economic and humanitarian assistance to take place.

And thirdly, the OSCE's presence in Kyrgyzstan, with its field office in Osh and field representatives in the other five provincial capitals, enjoys a comparative advantage by virtue of its long-standing and extensive network of programmes and contacts throughout the country.

Can you describe some of the long-term activities and achievements of the Centre?

I would highlight our support for building a professional and modern police service; for the judicial system; for the drafting of national legislation compliant with international best practice and Kyrgyzstan's OSCE commitments; the protection of human rights; the encouragement of good governance, transparency and accountability; and the development of a political party-based system which provides for equitable representation and dialogue.

We have newer, large programmes in customs and prison reform, border management and counter-terrorism. We work with many committed national partners to enable women to live lives free of fear or subjugation.

I would also like to mention the OSCE Academy in Bishkek, established in 2002, which delivers a Master's Programme in security studies and has students from all the five Central Asian republics and also Afghanistan.

What measures of emergency response to the present crisis is the Centre undertaking?

The OSCE was quick to respond to both the April and June unrest. The OSCE Chairperson's Special Envoy was on the scene within 48 hours of the 7 April violence, mediating a political way forward throughout the following turbulent week. By late April, the OSCE participating States had already provided a stabilization package of financial support for the Centre, and the Permanent Council supplemented and increased this financial support in July.

In brief, the Centre has worked closely

with the interim government, the provincial authorities and civil society to develop a range of rapid stabilization measures, which support public order, alleviate tensions and address the issues of dialogue and reconciliation. These measures include the use of mediators among the protagonists, the deployment of public order joint civil-police patrols, ways to fill the information vacuum with reliable information and attention to human rights violations.

What role do the media play in a conflict situation? What initiatives has the OSCE Centre in Bishkek undertaken to support free media?

Worldwide, the media fundamentally shapes and conditions public opinion. In times of stress and conflict, it can harden opinions. Media reporting has the power to inform accurately, but equally to misinform, distort facts and fuel prejudices and tension. The risk to life for reporters also increases in conflict, not only from the dangers of the fighting but also from those who wish to muzzle their reporting. Therefore accuracy, a plurality of views and safety become vital ingredients in ensuring the media can play their rightful role.

With this in mind, the Centre quickly embarked on ways to encourage national journalists to remain in the areas of tension by providing them with certain security safeguards and reliable means of communication. The Centre also provided reporters with training in responsible, impartial and accurate reporting in conflict situations. And beyond all this, the Centre, alongside the OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media and the High Commissioner on National Minorities, offered support to create Central Asia's first public broadcasting system in Kyrgyzstan, catering to citizens of all ethnic origins.

How is the Centre supporting preparations for the October 10 parliamentary elections?

The Centre's focus has been to encourage the implementation of OSCE/ODIHR recommendations on past elections, including the recent constitutional referendum of 27 June.

It supported the negotiation process and signature on 11 August of a code of conduct by 26 political parties. It is backing free and equal access of the political parties to the media through TV debates, and working to maximise the participation

of youth, women and the elderly in the national debate and the ballot. The core technical focus of the Centre's electoral support is on the Central Election Commission and its subordinate commissions in the provinces and districts. In addition to supporting the election observation teams from ODIHR and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, the Centre is widening the cadre of trained domestic observers, who rightly bear the main responsibility of observation.

What will be the role of the OSCE Centre in Bishkek in support of the planned deployment of the OSCE Police Advisory Group in Kyrgyzstan?

The Police Advisory Group and the Centre are intertwined and will pursue a co-ordinated approach. I work closely with the newly-appointed Head of the Police Advisory Group, Ambassador Markus Mueller. The three main objectives of the Police Advisory Group — to bolster public order; to foster inter-communal relations; and to enhance the effectiveness of policing and its relationship with the public — will mirror and complement the Centre's wider ongoing efforts in its cross-dimensional Police Reform Programme.

The Centre recently initiated training for Afghan Customs Officers at the Customs Training Facility in Bishkek. How does your experience in Afghanistan help you in your present job?

You are right. I have a long and intimate acquaintance with Afghanistan, its languages and intra-Afghan mediation, spanning over 35 years. This has perhaps given me a heightened sensitivity to the complexities and subtleties of Afghanistan's predicament and to the underlying importance of Afghanistan's good co-operation with its neighbours and near-neighbours in achieving a durable future. These insights, I trust, enrich the OSCE's overall efforts to support Afghanistan's revitalization in the areas of customs, counter-narcotics, border management and conflict prevention training. The Centre is facilitating Afghan customs training as well as Afghan graduates at the OSCE Academy. On a personal note, I hope I shall have a future opportunity to contribute, either on or in Afghanistan, towards peace and development there.