



# Transboundary Cooperation: Central Asia and Afghanistan

*Transboundary cooperation is a special form of international economic, environmental, cultural and educational activities in various forms at the regional level. Such cooperation involves shared use of natural resources, addressing environmental security issues, more intensive communication between the populations of neighboring countries and greater pressure on infrastructure (roads, communications, services, warehouses, etc.). Transboundary cooperation is considered a key factor for success in peacebuilding and preventive diplomacy. Political institutionalization is a prerequisite for transboundary cooperation. It is a question of establishing both regional associations to guide this process and a system of specialized international organizations in addition to international institutions.*

## Context: geography, economy, culture

Global and regional developments exposed the special role of border territories in the development of states. This is due to the fact that borders in the modern world are no longer seen as barriers and it turned the border area into a contact zone where nations and peoples, their cultures and economies actively interact. Today, “closeness to border” or remoteness from the center is no longer characterized as a cultural or economic backwardness, but rather as an additional opportunity for economic and sociocultural development.



Today, the concept of “transboundary” oftentimes is used as synonymous to “cross-border cooperation.” Despite the fact that the concept of “transboundary cooperation” is much broader and, in fact, includes “cross-border,” there is no significant difference in definitions of these two concepts as provided in international conventions.

Current developments of regional processes attest to importance of transboundary cooperation. The disputes between scholars and politicians about transboundary cooperation are still in full swing. However, an important conclusion is that cross-border cooperation can always have positive results.

In the same vein, current cross-border cooperation is a joint constructive action aimed at developing relationships between territories or authorities in the jurisdiction of two or more states. In international relations, cross-border cooperation inevitably becomes multilateral, including not just the number of states, but also the diversity of agents of cooperation: firms, banks, communes, ethnicities, etc.



## United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)



Central Asia perhaps is one of the few regions in the world whose countries are very interdependent. Despite the presence of old and new security threats, the Central Asian states have managed to avoid open conflicts among themselves, which indicates the political will for dialogue and conflict prevention. At the beginning of the 21st century, a whole set of problems has emerged in Central Asia that need to be addressed. The states of this region have to face a number of conflictogenic threats: terrorism and extremism, drug trafficking and organized crime. In this context, appealing to “good offices” of the UN has become quite natural given its rich toolkit of

response to such threats and experience in conflict resolution. It is with this goal in mind a new international structure – **the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA)** – has been created in Ashgabat.

In September 2004, Turkmenistan initiated the establishment of the UNRCCA with support from Kazakhstan. After consultations among representatives of all five Central Asian states, the idea was approved and an agreement to locate the Center in the capital of Turkmenistan was reached.

On 7 May 2007, UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon wrote to UN Security Council President Zalmay Khalilzad that in accordance with **the UN Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy** and the recommendations of **the High-Level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change**, he intends to establish the UNRCCA in Ashgabat. The Center has been inaugurated on 10 December 2007.

Common threats and challenges require a joint response and cooperation to maintain regional stability. Therefore, UNRCCA focuses on identifying existing and potential threats and expanding partnerships to counter them among the five Central Asian states and regional and international organizations working there.

The analysis of the situation and consultations with the Central Asian governments identified five priority areas for UNRCCA's work:

- (1) promoting prevention among the governments of Central Asia
- (2) monitoring and early warning
- (3) building partnerships with the states of Central Asia for conflict prevention
- (4) strengthening the UN's preventive activities in the region
- (5) encouraging cooperation and interaction between Central Asia and Afghanistan

As one of the most effective strategies to prevent disputes from escalating into conflicts and the recurrence of conflicts, **preventive diplomacy** involves the use of tools of negotiation, mediation and conciliation. At the same time, early warning is a key component of preventive activities. The UN is closely monitoring developments in the world to identify threats to international peace and security, and therefore holds the Security Council and the Secretary-General accountable for preventive action. The **Department of Political Affairs** (DPA) is the main support structure for these efforts, providing conflict analysis, planning and supporting the work of the Messengers of Peace and leading over a dozen field-based political missions that serve as critical platforms for preventive diplomacy. Of all these missions, regional offices covering Central Africa, West Africa and Central Asia have specific mandates to conduct preventive diplomacy and build the capacity of States and regional actors to address sources of tension by peaceful means. In this way, envoys and special representatives of the Secretary-General provide **mediation and preventive diplomacy** in different regions of the world. In some cases, the presence of a professional envoy alone can prevent the escalation of tensions.