



STRATEGIC DIALOGUE

ROLE OF
PARLIAMENTS
IN ENGAGING
AFGHANISTAN
IN CENTRAL ASIAN
COOPERATION
FRAMEWORKS
THROUGH
PREVENTIVE
DIPLOMACY

Tashkent, Uzbekistan – 2018

DISCLAIMER

Publication «Strategic Dialogue: Role of Parliaments in engaging Afghanistan in Central Asian cooperation frameworks through preventive diplomacy»

The publication represents a compilation of materials of the regional seminar «Role of Parliaments in engaging Afghanistan in Central Asian cooperation frameworks through preventive diplomacy», organized by the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) in Tashkent, Republic of Uzbekistan, on 11–12 September 2018.

The event was organized as a part of series of strategic dialogues conducted by the United Nations Regional Centre with the international and regional experts.

Seminar participants discussed the important role of parliamentarians in conflict prevention and peacebuilding, regional practice of parliamentary engagement with Afghanistan, the efforts of Central Asian parliaments in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the important role of female parliamentarians in mediation and negotiation.

The Publication includes a final report prepared by UNRCCA and the texts of the speeches and presentations of the participants. Materials are published without changes under the authors' responsibilities.

Opinions expressed in the publication do not necessary reflect the views of UNRCCA.

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T A B L E O F C O N T E N T

- 6. NATALIA GHERMAN
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
for Central Asia, Head of UNRCCA
- 8. ALISHER KURMANOV
Deputy of the Oliy Majlis of the
Republic of Uzbekistan
- 11. ANITRA JANCEVICA
UNRCCA Leading Expert
- 15. NURLAN ZHAZYLBEKOV
Independent Expert,
Republic of Kazakhstan
- 22. ELVIRA SURABALDIYEVA
Deputy of the Jogorku Kenesh,
Kyrgyz Republic
- 28. SERDAR ORAZOV
Deputy of the Mejlis, Turkmenistan
- 32. MOHAMMAD IBRAHIM GHAFOORI
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic
Republic of Afghanistan
- 36. DOINA GIMICHI
UNDP Bangkok Regional Hub

- 
- 
- 45. JUMAGUL BEKETAEVA
National Institute for Strategic Studies
of the Kyrgyz Republic
 - 49. DILOROM FAYZIEVA
Deputy of the Legislative Chamber
of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan
 - 54. ABDYVAKHAP NURBAEV
Deputy of the Jogorku Kenesh,
Kyrgyz Republic
 - 60. ALI YILDIZ
Deputy Secretary General of the Parliamentary
Assembly of the Turkic Speaking Countries
 - 64. AZAY GULIYEV
Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly
 - 70. TALATBEK MAASADYKOV
Expert on Afghanistan and Central Asia
 - 74. RAVSHAN RAJABOV
Deputy of the Majlisi Namoyandagon,
Republic of Tajikistan
 - 79. KERIMGULY GELDIYEV
Deputy of the Mejlis, Turkmenistan

83. ABDUSAMAT KHAYDAROV
Expert on Afghanistan and Central Asia
88. SABIR BARYA
Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan
92. SAYORA KHOJAEVA
Member of the Advisory Council under the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan
Director of the Institute for Democracy and Human Rights
102. ZHANAR SANKHAYEVA
Senior research associate
Kazakhstan Institute of Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan
108. CAVID VELIEV
Center for Strategic Studies under the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan
114. TEMURI YAKOBASHVILI
President, New International Leadership Institute (Washington DC)

117. LOLA SAIDOVA
Chair of the Center for Vocational Training of Lawyers
under the Ministry of Justice of the
Republic of Uzbekistan
122. IRINA GUKASOVA
Institute of Strategic and Sustainable Development,
Turkmenistan
130. RUSTAM KHURAMOV
Institute for Strategic and Regional Studies, Republic
of Uzbekistan
137. ABDUL BASIR AZIMI
Afghan Institute of Strategic Studies
142. FINAL REPORT
156. LETTER OF SALAHUDDIN RABBANI
Minister of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan

Natalia GHERMAN

Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General, Head of UNRCCA



OPENING REMARKS

*Your Excellency, Alisher Kurmanov.
Members of Parliament,
Ladies and gentlemen,*

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to Tashkent to participate in the annual Strategic Dialogue meeting of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia.

I would like to express our most sincere gratitude to the Uzbek side for its hospitality and the support provided to today's event.

This is our tenth Strategic Dialogue meeting since the series was inaugurated in 2009. Traditionally, the series has been aimed at discussing key issues in the region and ways to solve them. Today and tomorrow, we will engage in such an exercise on a topic that is extremely timely: the role of Parliaments in engaging Afghanistan into Central Asian cooperation frameworks through preventive diplomacy.

In recent years, we have witnessed significant political changes and rapprochements among the countries of the region. Simultaneously, we have also begun to see the Central Asian States take a new approach towards Afghanistan. We have witnessed exchanges and the inaugurations of ambitious development projects. We are also witnessing the Central Asian States actively engaging in the search for peace in Afghanistan.

Against this backdrop, the increasingly active positions being taken by the legislatures of the five regional states and the growing level of inter-parliamentary relations with Afghan colleagues has become a key means for the countries of the region and Afghanistan to jointly work to improve security and economic cooperation throughout Central Asia.

At today's seminar, we will look at prevention from a historical point of view as well as the current situation in the region. We will also examine ways for

parliamentarians of the Central Asian countries and Afghanistan to interact as well as the prospects for inter-parliamentary activity using the tools of preventive diplomacy. For this purpose, we have invited parliamentarians and experts who will share their experiences.

Preventive diplomacy has long been a priority of the United Nations Secretariat and the United Nations Security Council has emphasized its importance during my regular reports. The importance of preventive diplomacy for Central Asia as it engages Afghanistan was also reflected in the Final Document of the high-level thematic briefing to the Security Council on Central Asia and Afghanistan that took place on 18 January 2018 in New York under the Kazakh chairmanship.

Further, the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan entitled «Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity,» held in March this year, proved once more the importance of preventive diplomacy for the Central Asian States as they engage Afghanistan into regional processes.

Dear colleagues,

As you all know very well, the main task of Members of Parliament is to fulfill their legislative functions, represent the interests of their constituents, act as a check and balance for the other branches of Government and also provide a platform for oftentimes lively debate of the most critical issues on the national agenda.

At the same time, in the context of globalization and regional integration, Members of Parliament are increasingly looking abroad for inspiration, best practices and possible solutions to their countries' challenges. Inter-parliamentary cooperation is increasing, and Members of Parliament are engaging with the wider world in new ways.

Greater interaction among Members of Parliament in the region and around the world not only contributes to improvements in political, economic and social relations within and between countries but also strengthens trust and understanding between peoples.

I would like to conclude my brief remarks by mentioning that UNRCCA will prepare a report containing the recommendations and conclusions we reach during this seminar, along with presentations of individual participants. We will distribute this publication to parliaments, strategic research institutes, governmental agencies and academia in Central Asia and beyond. I am sure that it will be a valuable resource for the future.

Thank you for attention, and I wish you all the best in your deliberations! ■

Alisher KURMANOV

Chairman of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

Senate Committee of on international relations, foreign economic relations, foreign investments and tourism



OPENING REMARKS

Dear parliamentary colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome all the participants of today's seminar to the bountiful Uzbek land both personally and on behalf of the Senate of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan.

I would also like to take the opportunity to express sincere gratitude to Ms. Gherman, and in her person to all the staff of the Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, for the outstanding organization of this forum and the provision for the participation of such representative delegations.

Dear friends,

I believe everyone would agree with the fact that the organization of this meeting is timely and relevant.

Today we bear witness to the rebirth of the Central Asian region as a whole. It is a region that has played, is currently playing and will continue to play an important role at the crossroads of Asia and Europe.

The integration policy implemented by Uzbekistan in the last two years has left a tangible imprint on the overall dynamics of the region. In the words of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan, esteemed Shavkat Miromonovich Mirziyoyev, «A new page has been opened today in the age-long chronicle of friendship, good-neighbourliness, mutual support and cooperation of the peoples of Central Asia.»

Today there are barely any outstanding issues left between Central Asian states in the classic sense of the term. The policy of «reasonable compromises» conducted by the President of Uzbekistan has become an important factor for the transformation of the region into an area of stability, sustainable development and good-neighborliness.

At the same time, we are very well aware that the perspectives of the stable and sustainable development of Central Asia are hinged upon the achievement of peace in neighboring Afghanistan.

The early signs of Afghanistan's integration into the regional economic processes should grow into a steady trend, yet this remains out of the question until a peaceful settlement of the situation in the country is reached.

Esteemed seminar participants,

Today we witness the consolidation of the international community's efforts to regulate the situation in Afghanistan.

A series of international events devoted to the topic of long-suffering Afghanistan took place recently, and I am positive that many of those present have taken an active part in those events.

From my side I would like to highlight that the most important of these events – the international conference on Afghanistan, titled «Peace process, security



“A new page has been opened today in the age-long chronicle of friendship, good-neighbourliness, mutual support and cooperation of the peoples of Central Asia.”

cooperation and regional connectivity» took place in Tashkent this March. The Tashkent Declaration adopted as a result of the conference became a sort of a «roadmap» for the participant countries on the main principles of achieving peace in the country by the Afghans themselves, without preconditions and with an active UN role.

At the same time, duly noting the efforts of many governments of the world on achieving peace in Afghanistan, in my opinion, the mechanisms of parliamentary diplomacy are not being fully utilized. In that context, we should be grateful to the UNRCCA for the organization of today's discussion on the role of the parliamentarians in the further integration of Afghanistan into the Central Asian cooperation framework.

Thanks to the well-thought-out action strategy of Uzbekistan's development for 2017–2021 initiated by the Head of the State, Uzbekistan has significantly increased the capacity of inter-parliamentary cooperation with the countries both near and far abroad. The participation of our country in such representative parliamentary forums as the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the IPA CIS, and the OSCE PA has been restored; opinions are regularly exchanged with the colleagues from

the neighboring fraternal states on the topic of further rapprochement of our countries and peoples.

At the same time, one has to admit that the issue of further cooperation with Afghanistan is not so often to be the topic of bilateral parliamentary dialogue, even though nobody denies the fact that parliamentary cooperation significantly contributes to maintaining trustful relations and dialogue even on those problematic issues where the positions of the states are radically different.

In this regard, I would like to express my hope that today's seminar will result in our ability to work out an understanding and common approaches for the parliamentarians of the region to consolidate efforts on integrating Afghanistan into the Central Asian cooperation framework.

From my side, I would like to assure you that the Republic of Uzbekistan shall continue to take active part in the economical restoration of the neighboring country, the development of the transport and energy infrastructure and the training of domestic labor.

In conclusion of this welcome speech, I would like to wish all the participants fruitful work and a pleasant stay in Uzbekistan. ■

Anitra JANKEVICA

UNRCCA Lead Expert

GENERAL INTRODUCTION ON THE CONCEPT OF PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to participate in this seminar in the ancient city of Tashkent on the Great Silk Road.

My colleague from the UNRCCA already spoke about the general concept of preventive diplomacy, as it was proposed by Dag Hammarskjöld, the UN Secretary General at the time. Let me say a few words about the role of parliaments in preventive diplomacy.

Parliaments have a critical role to play in regional conflict prevention and peacebuilding initiatives. Because they are natural places for mediation, where diversity is represented, and dialogue can build consensus. Legislatures must engage actively in parliamentary diplomacy, both on a country-to-country basis and within their own communities, to promote a peaceful co-existence. As representatives of the people, parliamentarians ought to be more involved in processes that result in regional agreements between States.

More often than not, such agreements are signed without the involvement of parliaments: in many cases, parliaments have just a “rubber stamping” role. Additionally, parliamentarians can play useful conflict prevention and resolution roles through regional parliamentary forums by, for example organizing fact-finding missions to conflict areas. Parliamentary forums also provide a useful venue for dealing with conflict related cross-border issues such as refugees, arms smuggling and other war related criminal activity. Around the world,

parliamentary diplomacy is playing an increasingly important role in peace initiatives and conflict prevention efforts. A growing number of such forums are advancing parliamentarians' roles in peacebuilding and conflict resolution.

For example, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has been active in the CIS states, including Central Asia, and we are very lucky to have with us the Vice President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Dr. Azay Guliyev, who will speak in detail about it tomorrow.

Bilateral parliamentary contacts are also useful in situations where governmental initiatives have not succeeded. This is where the parliamentary friendship groups can play a role. Such groups are also established in the parliaments of Central Asia and Afghanistan. The potential of parliamentary friendship groups is largely unexploited. In Friendship groups, members voluntarily organize themselves to promote parliamentary relations between their own Parliament and another country's parliament, and, in a broader scope, to foster the bilateral relations between both countries. This should involve exchanges of information and opinions. The groups can also organize meetings with government and civil-society representatives and seek to meet with politicians from their partner state to discuss topics and problems in which they share a common interest as well as sensitive issues, and address the root causes of the tension. Such meetings also enable parliamentarians to explain and communicate their positions. The Friendship groups can act as a platform for the organization of seminars, hearings and other meetings on issues of mutual concern, e.g. energy policy, intercultural dialogue, commercial and trade relations, transport policy and so on. Even individual members can engage in parliamentary diplomacy by complementing the bilateral relations through contacts with their colleagues in other parliaments. The parliaments can also appoint individual members who have particular knowledge and capacity to undertake missions of inquiry on certain aspects of conflict. And last, but not least, we must not forget the potential of female parliamentarians. Evidence-based research indicates that women's participation in conflict prevention and resolution advances security interests. Analysis of different peace processes suggests that women's participation increases the likelihood of an agreement because women often take a collaborative approach to peace-making and organize across cultural and sectarian divides. Numerous case studies from different countries, including Afghanistan, have documented instances where women built coalitions across ethnic, political, religious, and sectarian divides. Women's participation in formal peace processes also contributes to the achievement and longevity of peace agreements.

Women bring alternative perspectives to conflict prevention which are more focused on the grass-roots and community levels.

The parliaments should make more effort in involving female members in regional cooperation and preventive diplomacy by increasing the percentage of women in delegations to regional and international meetings and conferences.

Ladies and gentlemen,

to finish, let me remind you the conclusions of the previous UNRCCA seminar on the role of parliaments in preventive diplomacy, which took place in December 2016 in Almaty. Because preventive diplomacy is, most often, a step by step undertaking, in which one initial meeting leads to a series of fruitful discussions. And so, the parliamentarians, experts from academia and diplomats agreed that the regional cooperation would be especially beneficial on the following issues:

- the management of water and energy resources;
- inter-state border conflicts;
- threats of religious extremism and terrorism;
- trans-border crime;
- labor migration;
- unorganized/ marginalized youth;
- fight against drug trafficking and;
- developing of an early warning system.

Even though Afghanistan was not part of that seminar, it was mentioned by many speakers. The various problems in Afghanistan, from security to economics, are often acknowledged as having a regional component. For example, for Afghanistan, agriculture and rural development, which can sustain the livelihood of the majority of the population, are crucial. Such projects can, on the one hand, provide a major opportunity for local employment but, on the other, instigate conflict with neighboring countries that share either the water resources or outflows. Water is a source of tension in the whole region and it will require diplomatic efforts.

Parliamentarians can and should play a role in this process, paving the road to regional economic cooperation and a political process towards lasting peace and reconciliation.

I am positive that we will have a fruitful discussion and, by the end of tomorrow, also concrete ideas on how the parliaments of Central Asia and Afghanistan can engage on more frequent basis on issues of common interest, and contribute to the conflict prevention, in support of other branches of Government. ■

Nurlan ZHAZYLBEKOV

Deputy of the Fifth Convocation of the Mazhilis
of the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan

HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE OF COOPERATION WITH AFGHANISTAN

Good day dear colleagues and seminar participants!

I would like to thank our UN organizers for the invitation to such an important event, where we shall discuss issues related to stability in Central Asia and in the world. As you know, Kazakhstan has always tried to use its friendly and peaceful approach to help facilitate solving conflict situations in the world. The deputies of the Kazakhstani parliament take part in this. By using its credentials, the parliament of Kazakhstan participates in inter-parliamentary initiatives related to neighboring countries, including Afghanistan, and by doing so we make our important contribution to preventive diplomacy on national, regional and international levels.

The Afghanistan issue is one of the main issues for the security of Central Asia and the national security of Kazakhstan. We should always be aware and understand the strategy and plans of other countries in relation to Afghanistan as it represents a source of military, political, religious and narcotic threats. In the geopolitical context Afghanistan affects the security of an extensive region which includes South Asia, the Middle and the Near East, CIS and China.

The instability and unsafe situation in Afghanistan have led to the parliamentarians becoming important participants in the prevention of conflict, peacekeeping, post conflict reconstruction and reconciliation, as parliaments are at the very foundation of key political, economic and social economic reforms which influence the stability of countries. The latest changes to the foreign policies of Central Asian countries in relation to Afghanistan have strengthened inter-parliamentary cooperation in the region which has led to the initiation of regional development projects with Afghanistan's full-fledged participation in this cooperation.

One of the key tasks of the participating states is the domestic political stability in Afghanistan. Considering its geographical location, a troubled domestic political situation and profound involvement in the global shadow economy, in the beginning of the 21st century Afghanistan still finds itself to be in the midst of a complex intertwining of interests of many countries and non-governmental powers.

The Republic of Kazakhstan has a rather proactive position in relation to Afghanistan. If one is to review the historical experience of cooperation, you may remember when at the 2006 International conference on Afghanistan in London Astana has supported the Afghanistan Agreement between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the international community, which allowed to define the prospects and the timeframe of restoring the Afghan economy, a list of social and economic projects and relevant regional security issues, incl. the issue of combating drugs.

Kazakhstan's diplomatic relationship with Afghanistan was established on February 12, 1992. Kazakhstan's former diplomatic mission which was operating in Kabul since 2002 was reformed to the Embassy in 2003.

The former president of Afghanistan H. Karzai visited Kazakhstan numerous times:

- To discuss topics of cooperation in combating terrorism and the drug business, ways for Kazakhstani companies to enter the Afghani market and the participation of Kazakhstani business in the restoration of Afghanistan's economy;
- President H. Karzai also participated in all three CICA summits in Kazakhstan, and as former president he also participated in the 13th Eurasian Media Forum in Astana;

Kazakhstan's Parliament delegation headed by the chairman of the International Affairs, Defense and Security Committee of the Mazhilis M. Ashimbayev has visited Afghanistan and held meetings with the heads of the Lower Chamber of the Parliament, the Advisor of the President for Security R. Spanta, the Foreign Affairs Minister Z. Rasul as well as with the representatives of the Ministries of Internal Affairs, Defense, Agriculture, Counter-narcotics, the Disaster Management Agency, National Security Bodies and international diplomats accredited in Afghanistan;

Also by invitation of the leadership of the Mazhilis of Kazakhstan Wolesi Jirga's (Lower Chamber of the Parliament) Afghan delegation visited Kazakhstan (Almaty and Astana) headed by the second Vice-Speaker of the Lower Chamber of

the Parliament S. Saljuki. In 2015 Afghanistan supported Kazakhstan's initiative on the adoption by the UN of the Universal Declaration on the Achievement of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World and the declaration on transforming the CICA into the Asian Development and Security Organization, which also accommodates to Kabul's interests in the region); In 2014 Afghanistan supported Kazakhstan's candidacy as nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council for 2017–2018 (on June 28, 2016 Afghanistan voted in support of our country at the voting at the UN headquarters);

— Having noted that since January 1, 2017 Kazakhstan officially entered into its rights of nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council, on February 1, 2018 Kazakhstan concluded its authority as the Chairman of the UNSC, our country has actively worked and continues to work on promoting the interests of all the countries in the region to facilitate stability and security, to strengthen cooperation and aid growth and development in the region.

— Without having solved the Afghan issue, without having integrated this country into the regional processes in Central Asia it is impossible to provide for sustainable stability in the region. The UNSC ministerial debates on «Building Regional Partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a Model to Link Security and Development» chaired by Kazakhstan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Kairat Adrakhmanov held January 19 have become the key event. Another major event was the visit of the UNSC delegation to Ka-

bul on January 12–15 organized by the Kazakhstani office. In the course of the event meetings were held with the senior-most officials, representatives of political parties and the civil society. During the visit, the efforts of the Afghan government on solving a wide array of interrelated issues were considered. Also it was defined how the Security Council could be of additional support to the efforts in the field.

In 2015 Afghanistan supported Kazakhstan's initiative on the adoption by the UN of the Universal Declaration on the Achievement of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free World and the declaration on transforming the CICA into the Asian Development and Security Organization, which also accommodates to Kabul's interests in the region); In 2014 Afghanistan supported Kazakhstan's candidacy as nonpermanent member of the UN Security Council for 2017-2018 (on June 28, 2016 Afghanistan voted in support of our country at the voting at the UN headquarters)

The Kazakh-Afghan Intergovernmental commission on trade and economic cooperation plays an important role in the development of trade and economic relations.

The UNSC ministerial debates on “Building Regional Partnership in Afghanistan and Central Asia as a Model to Link Security and Development” chaired by Kazakhstan’s Minister of Foreign Affairs Kairat Adrakhmanov held January 19 have become the key event. Another major event was the visit of the UNSC delegation to Kabul on January 12-15 organized by the Kazakhstani office.

In the fulfillment of the order of the government of Kazakhstan, affected ministries and agencies in the country are conducting work on extending the trade and economic cooperation with Afghanistan. In 2016 in Kabul the «Business to Business» business forum was held, Kazakhstan’s trading house was opened, and measures were taken on extending export into Afghani-

stan of Kazakhstani grain crops and flour, support is rendered to Kazakhstani business structures on their participation in Afghan investment projects.

Upon the initiative of the Head of state, since 2009 the Kazakh-Afghan state education program on educating 1,000 Afghan students in educational establishments of our country is being implemented with 50 mln USD invested into the program.

In July 2016 another 100 Afghan students were selected for the program (in 2015 a group of border guard students have concluded their course in Kazakhstan. In 2016 a group of medical students finalized their course).

Kazakhstan provides humanitarian aid to Afghanistan in foodstuffs and essential goods. Kazakhstan donated 2,38 mln USD to the construction of a school in the Samangan province, a hospital in the Bamian province and to the repair of the Talukan-Kunduz-Shirhan-Bandar asphalt road (1,65 mln USD).

Kazakhstan has also transferred approximately 1,5 mln USD to the special account of the Ministry of Finance of Afghanistan for the construction of 4 bridges in the town of Aybak and for the coastal protection of the Aybak river in the Samangan province.

In October, 2016 the Kazakh government allocated 2 mln USD to the trust fund of the Afghan army (ANATF) to support Afghanistan's national army.

Afghanistan will soon receive the first delivery of Kazakh power converters for the improvement of the water supply system. An agreement on cooperation was signed between the Afghan company Bahezad Rashed Trading Company and the Kazakhstani electrical engineering holding Alageum Electric. Based on this agreement a delivery of transformers to the amount of approximately 10 mln USD is expected by the end of the year. Currently a new type of transformer specially designed for Afghanistan is being tested. With the support of the Kazakhstani Ministry for Investments and Development a sizeable delegation of Afghan entrepreneurs headed by the minister of industry and trade Humayoon Rasaw visited Astana.

The event was attended by over 40 representatives of the business community over 20 of who represented Afghan business.

During the visit the Vice Minister for Investment and Development of Kazakhstan met with the Afghan delegation. A series of B2B meetings between Kazakh and Afghan business representatives also took place. The meeting was attended by such large-scale Kazakh national companies as «Kazakh-Invest», «KTZ», «Kazgeology», «Kazakh-Export» and the foreign trade chamber of Kazakhstan.

During the visit the parties discussed the current state of affairs and the prospects of developing Kazakh-Afghan relations in various industries including trade and investment, agriculture, land and air transport as well as geology and mineral resources.

Meetings with Kazakh small and medium enterprises in such industries as agriculture, transport and logistics were arranged on the platform of the foreign trade chamber of Kazakhstan.

It is especially worthy to note the fact that this event has triggered genuine interest with the representatives of the public sector as well as the business community of both countries, which has in turn conducted to a fruitful discussion of the key topics of bilateral cooperation in terms of trade and economic relations.

The goods turnover between Kazakhstan and Afghanistan in the period of January-April 2018 has amounted to 180,2 mln USD, which is 19,3% more than that of the same period in the previous year (151,1 mln USD).

As of June 1, 2018, 272 legal entities and representative offices with Afghan participation were registered in Kazakhstan, 119 of which remain active.

Kazakhstan's parliament has approved the ratification of the protocol on amendments to the agreement between Kazakhstan and the USA on delivering commercial railway transit of special cargo through the territory of Kazakhstan related to the US participation in the efforts to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan.

The protocol stipulates including the Aktay and Kuryk ports into the special cargo transit route which would enable railway transit to Afghanistan through the Caspian Sea and back. «This is done with full respect to Kazakhstan's interests as a strategic partner of the USA, which strives to maintain peace and stability in neighbouring Afghanistan». According to the resolution of the committee the new special cargo transit route stretches from Georgia to Azerbaijan and through the Caspian Sea to Kazakhstan and further by rail through the Saryagash, Keles and Beineu-Karakalpakia stations to Uzbekistan and then to Afghanistan.

Dear seminar participants! The activity of Kazakhstan's parliament is mainly directed towards providing legislative support to the political course set forth by the president of our country Nursultan Nazarbayev to strengthen peace and regional and global security. Our country was one of the first in the region to adopt such signature laws as the law on «Official Development Assistance» and on «Peacekeeping». At the same time new global challenges to security in the world and particularly in the Central Asian region demand the scrupulous attention of the parliamentarians of CSTO member countries.

The serious security threats in the region include the spread of religious extremism and terrorism, illicit drug trafficking and illegal migration. These threats and challenges are common for all the countries in the region and they bring to the foreground the need for closer cooperation on consolidating the political and economic potential of the countries in the region in order to solve key issues and deliver stability in Central Asia.

In order to successfully overcome all these threats, the parliamentarians should unite their efforts to make the best of inter-parliamentary cooperation and ensure the security, stability and economic development of the countries in the region.

Kazakhstan's parliament ratified 38 international agreements within the CSTO framework, 17 within the SCO framework and 3 international agreements within the framework of the CICA.

Parliamentary diplomacy enables to advance countries' positions on many international issues, to influence the content of the documents that affect the parties' interests. We should understand the importance of joint cooperation and leveraging our available experience in combating the drug threat, human trafficking, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and nowadays also cybercrime.

All of this poses a great difficulty and requires the mobilization of immense resources as well as mutual understanding between all of the stakeholders... If we unite our resources and our powers to avert the threat for our people, we shall definitely succeed. The role of parliaments is important not only from the standpoint of legislatively securing the rights of all nations and cultures, but also in terms of hardening the norms of punishment for incitement of ethnic and religious conflict.

As to our event today – I would like to once again thank the organizers for providing the opportunity to get acquainted with the tools and methods of preventive diplomacy, especially in relation to the efforts in extending the cooperation with Afghanistan. We are certain that the topics discussed at the workshop will comprehensively contribute to regional capacity building initiatives in advocating the principles of conflict prevention as well as building consequence mitigation and conflict resolution skills to engage Afghanistan in cooperation. ■

Elvira SURABALDIYEVA

Deputy of the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of the Kyrgyz Republic (The Social Democratic Party of Kyrgyzstan (SDPK))

Head of the Friendship Group of the Jogorku Kenesh on cooperation with the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, Member of the Kyrgyz delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Member of the Economic and Fiscal Policy Committee of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic

HISTORY OF PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICE

IN COOPERATION WITH AFGHANISTAN

Dear participants of today's seminar.

Allow me to welcome you and congratulate the representatives of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan with the recent national holiday – the Independence Day! I'd like to wish our brotherly people prosperity and well-being! Also I'd like to voice words of condolence in regard to the recent passing of the former UN Secretary General Kofi Annan – a peacemaker whose contribution to strengthening peace and developing the cooperation of nations is invaluable.

Dear ladies and gentlemen,

Since the day of obtaining its independence, the Kyrgyz Republic has consistently supported relationships of friendship and strategic partnership with its neighbours and all of the global community.

Since the establishing of the diplomatic relations between the Kyrgyz Republic and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the relationship between our two countries has been developing consequently and is of friendly nature.

Embassies of our countries were established on each other's territories. These diplomatic missions are the immediate links between the highest authorities of our states, and with assistance and personal participation of diplomats, meetings with representatives of the parliaments and other government authorities are also held.

Central Asia, as a region of strategic importance, may carry both positive and negative potential for the cooperation of the region's countries and their partners. Understanding the importance of friendly and productive relations between Central Asian countries and the involvement of Afghanistan into this cooperation, I would like to mention the contribution of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic in establishing cooperation.

As we know, the issues of security and narcotics are especially important in the cooperation with Afghanistan. Also trade and economic and social-humanitarian relations have lately been on the rise.

Expressing concern over the revitalization of terrorist and extremist forces in Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan supports the efforts of the country's government and of the global community which are aimed at stabilizing the situation and the hopefully early reconstruction of Afghanistan and its integration into global and regional processes.

Kyrgyzstan fully supports the A/60/228 (2006) resolution on the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy and the Action Plan, as part of which the member states condemn terrorism in all of its forms and aspects. This resolution is aimed at practical steps on regional cooperation in the Afghan region in security and combating terrorism, which is a necessary factor for the development of regional stability and economic development. The specified forms of cooperation in combating terrorism are also discussed by the Central Asian countries in a different format which does not exclude Afghanistan's participation. As we all know, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (PA of the CSTO) has gathered part of the Central Asian countries on its platform, and also Afghanistan in the role of observer.

The fact, of the actual presence of the representatives of Afghanistan's National Assembly in the discussion and the resolving of security issues in CSTO member states and their immediate borders is important to note.

The series of seminars of the Rose-Roth Program, conducted by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly serve as an additional cooperation platform. The 84th seminar of the Rose-Roth Program on the topic of «The future of Afghanistan and the Central Asian region»: global cooperation», organized by the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic in fall of 2013 in Bishkek has clearly demonstrated the interest of Kyrgyzstan and the global community in the peaceful development of modern day Afghanistan and the well-being of the region as a whole. The Rose-Roth seminar platform helps to openly exchange opinions on relevant international topics on the level of deputies and experts from NATO-member states. This approach facilitates the strengthening of inter-parliamentary cooperation and building a mutual understanding on topics relevant to the countries.

During the above mentioned events, meetings of the leaders of Jogorku Kenesh with the Wolesi Jirga (lower chamber) of Afghanistan's National Assembly also took place, where topics of further development of inter-parliamentary relations and cooperation in the fields of culture and education were discussed.

Owing to the understanding of the importance of mutual relations in culture and education, currently around 300 Afghan students are studying at prestigious Kyrgyz higher education institutions. Some of the students are receiving scholarships and special benefits supported by international programs and donors.

Another important aspect of the cooperation of the Kyrgyz and Afghan parliaments is the issue of the ethnic Kyrgyz population of Little and Great Pamir. Parliamentary meetings, held during multilateral cooperation events, as well as individual Kyrgyz-Afghan meetings, Kyrgyz officials have recurrently brought up the issue of rendering assistance to the Kyrgyz population living in Afghanistan, whose total number is currently under 2000 people.

With assistance from involved governmental authorities in the Kyrgyz Republic the «Kayrilman» Program for rendering assistance to the migrants during the period of 2017–2022 was developed and adopted in 2016. The program is aimed at creating favorable conditions for the social and economic integration of the ethnic Kyrgyz population, who have returned to the Kyrgyz Republic. By conducting negotiations and with the support of the Afghan government, some of the Kyrgyz natives have received Afghan citizenship and passports which, in turn, facilitates the positive development of mutual respect between the nations and cultures.

The trade and economic relations between Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan are improving. The main aspects of these relations are agricultural products

(rice, apricot, nuts) and the re-export of fuel and energy products from Kyrgyzstan. In order to invigorate their trade and economic relations, the two countries are poised to sign the Agreement on establishing an interstate committee on developing mutual cooperation. Kyrgyzstan has initiated the founding of a trilateral agro-industrial consortium with Tajikistan and Afghanistan. The parties have signed the corresponding protocol under the support of the UNDP.

The recent meeting of the deputies of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic with the Extraordinary and Authorized Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan to the Kyrgyz Republic Mohammed Isa Mesbaham is evidence that the Kyrgyz parliament is ready to cooperate with Afghanistan in expanding trade and economic relations. The potential for cooperation of Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan's customs services may serve as additional support in the reinforcement of mutual relations in this field. The Kyrgyz Republic together with the OSCE in 2011–2013 has successfully implemented a vocational training project for Afghan customs officers. More than 50 Afghan customs officers have been trained as part of this project. Considering the positive experience of the cooperation of the Kyrgyz Republic, the OSCE and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Kyrgyz side proposes to recommence this project and create a regional vocational training center for Afghan government officials.

The economic growth of all the countries in the region depends on the development of interstate infrastructure. The key projects for Afghanistan's development that Kyrgyzstan is taking part in are the «North-South» automobile road construction project and the CASA-1000 energy project, the implementation of which will stimulate sustainable development, economic growth and mutually beneficial cooperation between all the participants of the project. Kyrgyzstan has almost finished all of its engineering and technical preparations for this project and is ready to supply its electrical energy to Afghanistan and Pakistan. The implementation of this project will facilitate the inclusion of Afghanistan into the unified energy system of the region which shall give additional impetus to the country's economic development and will solve a series of social and economic issues.

The Kyrgyz Republic also partakes in regular meetings with the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan at meetings and summits of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO). It is frequently mentioned that the institutionalization of parliamentary cooperation of SCO member and observer states would have positive impact on the mutual relations of the member states. In the meantime, with the support

of the People's Republic of China, forums of SCO member states' political parties are held where we have an additional opportunity to communicate with each other. One of these forums in May of this year was attended by all deputies of all the political parties of the Kyrgyz Republic.

Currently, Kyrgyzstan is actively promoting the initiative of creating an International Center for Afghan Studies in Bishkek. The establishing of this center would serve as a unique regional platform to exchange opinions on relevant cooperation issues of Afghanistan and the «Heart of Asia» region.

Dear participants of the seminar,

We are gathered here today with the support of the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia. Over the time of the existence of this organization and with its support many meetings were held on both the multilateral and bilateral levels. The representatives of our parliaments, as well as scientific and expert communities are able to express their vision on the situation in the region and to discuss topics relevant to our countries.

One of the most important cooperation issues for Central Asian countries and Afghanistan is the use of water resources of the Syr Darya and Amu Darya river basins. I would like to point out that the use of the water resources of the river basins should be managed with consideration for the interests of each and every country as well as the water and energy potential.

One of the most important cooperation issues for Central Asian countries and Afghanistan is the use of water resources of the Syr Darya and Amu Darya river basins. I would like to point out that the use of the water resources of the river basins should be managed with consideration for the interests of each and every country as well as the water and energy potential.

The initiatives developed by the UNRCCA should be coordinated and discussed by all the involved stakeholders. Only in this way will we be able to win the trust of our partners.

In conclusion of my speech, I'd like to mention that in spring of this year, the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic, as part of its international activity, has created a Friendship Group with the Islamic Republic of

Afghanistan which previously united several countries. This demonstrates that in the development of interstate relations, the Jogorku Kenesh is putting special emphasis on the Afghan-Kyrgyz relations.

Currently, alongside the existing legal framework of the Afghan-Kyrgyz relations, a series of projects are being designed in trade and international logistics, taxation, security, combating illicit drug trafficking and other fields. I would like to express my hope that the parliaments of our countries provide their support in advancing and signing these agreements.

To conclude my speech, I would like to express my hope that the upcoming elections of deputies to the National Assembly of the IRA in October of this year are conducted on lawful terms and that the parliaments of our countries with the updated staff of the Wolesi Jirga (Lower chamber of the National Assemble) recommence their activities in bilateral cooperation. ■

Serdar ORAZOV

Deputy of the Mejlis (Parliament)
of Turkmenistan

Member of the Committee on Economic issues

HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE OF TURKMENISTAN'S PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION PRACTICES WITH AFGHANISTAN

Dear friends!

First of all, let me welcome you, and extend my gratitude to the seminar organizers for the cordial reception and the high level of organization of this event. I would also like to congratulate our Uzbek friends on the 27th anniversary of the country's independence and wish further prosperity to Uzbekistan.

Esteemed seminar participants!

Being located at the crossroads of the Asian and European continents, Turkmenistan is one of the important regions of economic growth. Our country pursues friendly, peace-loving policy based on the principles of peace, good-neighbourliness and all-embracing cooperation with all the countries and peoples of the world.

The convenient geographical, geopolitical and geoeconomical location of our country presents significant opportunities for the development of a transit transport corridor network. Currently, a logistics strategy is being implemented through the commissioning of large-scale projects, such as an international airport in Ashgabat, an international seaport in the city of Tuskmenbashi, an international airport in the city of Turkmenabad, as well as the new motorways, railroads and bridges.

The standard of living of the population has been steadily growing, guided by the principles of the positive neutrality status and ensuring full political unity in the country.

Under the leadership of the Esteemed President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov our country is an effective and reliable partner of the United Nations in such key areas as the facilitation of peaceful and constructive development of Afghanistan.

A special role in the implementation of these tasks belongs to the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, headquartered in Ashgabat. Founded in 2007 with the support of all the states of the region, it is a testament to the fact that Turkmenistan is a reliable partner of the UN in maintaining political stability in the region, development of the good-neighbourliness, friendship and cooperation by diplomatic means.

Turkmenistan established diplomatic relations with Afghanistan over a quarter of a century ago, on February 21, 1992. In the last 10 years the Turkmen-Afghan relations have broken new ground, which is signified by state, official and working visits of the Heads of the States, ministry delegations and the deputies of the Mejlis (the Parliament) of Turkmenistan.

According to the Statement of the President of Turkmenistan, our country supports and shall continue to support Afghanistan in building social infrastructure, supplying electricity, training staff and other areas. A testament to that is the construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline, as well as the Kerky-Imamnazar-Akina railway, which is the starting segment of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan rail corridor, power lines and optic fiber communications. The TAPI project is not only an achievement in regional cooperation and integration, but it also lays the groundwork of the long-conceived plan on fostering Afghanistan's economic self-sufficiency.

It was noted in the results of the Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VII), which took place on November 14–15 last year in Ashgabat, the international community should direct its' efforts towards strenghtening the regional economic cooperation process, including measures for the facilitation and development of regional means of communication, trade and transit, as well as creating jobs in Afghanistan. In this regard, as our esteemed President noted: «Turkmenistan is a paradigm example of a reliable and responsible partner and a true friend of the Afghan people.»

The increase of material well-being, as well as the level of education and culture of the people reflect favorably on the political situation in the country.

Turkmenistan is in the process of constant cooperation with the neighbouring fraternal country in the humanitarian area to deliver the objectives of providing for a peaceful life in Afghanistan. In some localities of Afghanistan power lines, schools, health facilities have been commissioned, assistance is provided in staff training and other areas. The practical implementation of action plans and cooperation will allow many Afghan provinces to be supplied with natural gas, power and other resources, and will create thousands of workplaces for Afghan specialists. Turkmenistan is a country possessing unique experience of creating, developing and operating a national legislation that reflects the mentality of the Turkmen people and corresponds to the best international practices.

A special place in the work of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan is given to the inter-parliamentary relations that are meant to facilitate the development of friendly relations between peoples, the strengthening and development of cooperation in politics, economics, sociocultural events, as well as building mutual understanding and all-encompassing cooperation between countries and peoples.

One of the methods of establishing and developing inter-parliamentary cooperation in the Mejlis of Turkmenistan is the creation of inter-parliamentary friendship groups with parliaments of other countries. Currently, Turkmenistan's Mejlis has established dozens of friendship groups with many parliaments across the world, including the Friendship Group of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan with the Wolesi Jirga of the National Assembly of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

By Resolution of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan, the Treaty on friendship and cooperation between Turkmenistan and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan was ratified and signed on May 28, 2011 in the city of Ashgabat.

Preventive diplomacy is an effective instrument for the early prevention of conflicts and peaceful mediation of disputes, strengthening good relations between countries, providing for regional and international development, as well as economic cooperation of countries in the face of modern challenges. In this regard a great deal of work was done by the Mejlis of Turkmenistan on improving the national legislation, in particular on cooperation in the fields of developing foreign economic and trade relations, building a railway network of transit transport corridors, as well as environmental protection, energy and food security, strategies on combating terrorism and drugs, organized crime and others.

Concluding my talk, I would like to express my desire and confidence that the relations between our countries will continue to grow stronger and expand in all areas – political, trade, economic and cultural – all based on traditions of friendship and good-neighbourliness.

I would like to once again extend my gratitude to the organizers of the seminar, the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia, for being invited to such a high-level seminar, and to express a wish for the seminar to yield all expected results, provide to parliamentarians and law enforcement a deeper understanding of the tools and methods of preventive diplomacy, as well as strengthen inter-parliamentary cooperation. ■

Mohammad Ibrahim GHAFOORI

Deputy Head of the UN and International
Conferences Department

Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic
of Afghanistan

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by extending to all of you my warmest greetings and good wishes of the people of Afghanistan. It is indeed an honor to be among this august gathering the theme of which is highly important to the whole region and in particular to my country Afghanistan.

I would like to extend my appreciation to the government of Uzbekistan for hosting this event and my thanks go to UNCCR for facilitating and organizing this seminar.

I am confident that this timely event will engender an effective machoism to promote greater interaction and contact among the Parliamentarians of our region which is in dire need of it.

Distinguished participants ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of the Seminar has verily a deep resonance for Afghanistan, where the country has experienced four decades of war and destruction, involving displacement, disruption of public administration, loss of lives and untold other sufferings.

As the destructive conflict is still lingering, my country faces immense challenges of rebuilding infrastructure, safeguarding our national security, territorial integrity and national sovereignty against acts of wanton forces of terrorism and extremism.

Our new constitution which came into force in 2004, a liberal constitution that is the outcome of an intense and democratic effort by the national leadership,

embodying the hopes and aspiration of the Afghan people, promising a bright future for our nation.

Our national assembly was constituted on December 19, 2005, is new among other regional parliaments and needs more expertise to deal with the developing circumstances, in particular peace, security and reconciliation.

However, since its inception and full functioning, the existence of the parliament and the operation of its oversight powers and functions have had a profound effect in different spheres of the government activities, as well as among public.

We believe that the real foundation and strength of Parliamentary democracy is not merely the functioning of the constitutional machinery at the national level, but the real function and strength of Parliamentary democracy is institutionalizing the basic natural democratic urges, tradition, and aspirations of the people in all levels.

Afghanistan has a long tradition of Shura system, which is an ancient mechanism, which takes decisions on issues of public concern and importance. Shura which is another name of our parliament, has resolved highly critical and contentious issues among different tribes and ethnics and the Afghan traditional elders' gathering, known as Loya Girga, has been taking important decision concerning our national sovereignty and territorial integrity, among other highly critical National issues.

This system reflects a basic and natural preference of the masses, as an aspect of the genius of the people, for democratic processes and practices.

For the purpose of outreaching to civil society and interlinking with public institutions, and function as an institution across the nation, a democratic mechanism being developed.

As a new parliament to implement its democratic mechanisms properly and in a better way, the Afghan parliament needs the experiences of other countries, which will look to take note of best practices and adapt these to suit our won systems.

The continues and constant exchange of views, ideas and sharing experiences among parliamentarians of different countries will continue to be a valuable source of strength and support for stakeholders.

It would be of immense benefit, I feel, if there be a common platform for experience-sharing, orientation and capacity enhancement for parliamentarians as well as officials of the participating countries.

Afghanistan's experience of Parliamentary Democracy is very brief but highly educative, as the representatives and democratic institution of the Parliament has been carefully nurtured and encouraged to grow.

As per the constitution, there is Parliamentary oversight and control over the whole of the Executive and the function of this oversight is performed with a vigor and thoroughness which is noticeable in day to day work.

On the peace building and reconciliation processes, our parliament had effective contribution along with other institutions, through participating in Jakarta peace conference on Afghanistan and the Jeddah International Ulama Conference on peace and security in Afghanistan, which were held to consider peace and reconciliation with armed oppositions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

As we are in the 21st Century, the world stands at the cross roads facing many critical challenges, starting from poverty, unemployment, corruption, drug trafficking, trafficking in person, regional rivalries, conflicts, extremism and terrorism.

These are starkly daunting challenges, as dealing with them is not an easy task and no single country can properly handle it alone without joint efforts and initiatives of governments on the regional level.

Amongst these challenges, terrorism and extremism is a serious threat, dealing with that must be a priority for every government.

In order to rescue the region from the threats of terrorism and extremism, I propose that the parliaments of our region start working on a mechanism and policy, which will study thoroughly the root causes of the emergence of terrorism, and create suitable means and policies to effectively deal with these threats.

Parliaments can contribute in meeting these daunting challenges at this very critical time, if these challenges are not contained now through joint initiatives, tomorrow will be too late.

Distinguished participants, ladies and gentlemen,

Parliaments' mandate is not confined in passing legislations and providing oversight over executive and other institutions, but it goes beyond that limitation to exercise their critical responsibilities, in particular at this very challenging circumstance, to present the interests of their constituents in conflict resolution and peace-building.

This lofty goal can't be achieved overnight and without skill and proficiency on the matter, but through taking part in regional and international professional conferences, seminars and forums, where they learn through exchange of expertise and sharing their national experiences on how to initiate a dialogue and embark upon building confidence and achieving peace and stability.

Parliaments should utilize their powers and functions in a harmonized and effective manner towards regional integration for achieving objectives under the given mandate.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our stance and views that without sincere regional cooperation among parliaments of the region in various important matter, we can't overcome current regional challenges, most critical among them, the threats of terrorism and extremism, and building peace and stability. ■

Tashkent,
11-12 September
2018



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Resilient nations.*

Doina GHIMICI

UNDP

PDF Presentation

KEY MESSAGES

- The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 SDGs aim to transform our world
- Parliaments are key to attaining the SDGs
- Parliaments can be important actors in conflict prevention, peace-building, sustaining peace
- Inter-parliamentary cooperation and preventive diplomacy can help integrate Afghanistan into Central Asia's cooperation frameworks and promote prosperity, peace and sustainable development – both in Afghanistan and in the whole Central Asia region



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OUTLINE

- Parliament and CGFs
 - Development trends in Asia
 - Governance, prosperity and development
 - The 2030 Agenda, SDG16
 - Role of Parliament in implementing the SDGs
 - Governance and Peace
 - Conflict prevention, sustaining peace and the role of Parliament
 - Parliamentary diplomacy
-

PARLIAMENT AND CGFS

HYPOTHESIS:

Parliaments increasingly active in conflict prevention, peace building, post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation – influence people's trust in government

- Restoration of core government functions (CGFs) post conflict – UN priority
 - Parliamentary development – enabling oversight on CGFs (including policy formulation and PFM) by a representative body – UNDP priority
 - Parliaments have key roles re essential governance elements influencing peace and stability.
-

DEVELOPMENT TRENDS IN ASIA

- Interconnected, complex, trans-border
- Poverty persists despite impressive progress
- Widening inequality
- Climate change, raising sea levels, disasters, scarcity of resources
- Plateauing youth bulge, rapid aging
- Exacerbating risks including political unrest, instability, migration, violent conflict



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GOVERNANCE AND PROSPERITY/DEVELOPMENT

- MDGs' implementation highlighted the importance of the quality of governance for developing and implementing policies, and the delivery of quality services linked to prosperity.
- Democratic, effective and efficient governance helps reduce inequalities, realize human rights and achieve sustained economic growth and sustainable development.
- Correlation between voice and accountability; rule of law; political stability and the absence of violence (on the one hand); and development (on the other hand) is even stronger in middle and higher income countries*.
- Poor governance is a factor contributing to raising inequality and unequal development in Asia** (e.g. corruption, illegal financial flows).



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GOVERNANCE ON AGENDA 2030

- Centrality of governance for achieving the three strands of sustainable development
-  SDG16
 1. aims to strengthening: institutions of governance; justice; rule of law; accountability; and inclusion, in order to foster peace and sustainable development
 2. acknowledges the direct link between sustainable development and peaceful and inclusive societies
 3. is both a distinct goal and an enabler

SDG16 AND PROSPERITY/ COMBATING POVERTY

SDG16

- Calls for access to justice for all
- Responds to people's aspirations for a just society, which cannot be achieved without combating poverty*
- Calls for building effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels



Accountable, inclusive and transparent public sector institutions = drivers of poverty reduction and inclusive growth

17 SDGS AND PARLIAMENTS I

- ***Parliaments are key to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda and attainment of all SDGs – based on their core functions:***

- *Legislation, constitutions*
- *Budget scrutiny*
- *Oversight*
- *Representation and leadership*

- ***How?***

- *Urge the Government to ensure that...*
- *Use own powers to ensure that...*



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17 SDGS AND PARLIAMENTS II

ROLES RE:

- Development of visions and strategic plans – mainstreaming Agenda's principles and the SDGs;
- Priorities setting – preserving integrity, maximizing synergies, minimizing trade offs;
- Establishing an enabling legislative environment for implementation;
- Ensuring vertical and horizontal policy coordination and coherence;
- Ensuring adequate financing for SDGs;
- Broad partnerships, consultations, contributions;





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- Overseeing the implementation;
- Ensuring there is adequate monitoring, reporting

SDGS FOCAL POINT, CUSTODIAN

INSTITUTIONS, TOOLS



- SDG Focal Point at the center of government – over-all coordination
- Custodian ministry/institution for each SDG
- Parliament – most suitable custodian of SDG16
- As a governance institution key to democracy, Parliament must lead by example in its own institutional development.
- Tools to guide Parliaments' involvement with the SDGs

GOVERNANCE AND PEACE

- Multiple and profound linkages
- Regional progress and opportunities coupled with new challenges, technological disruption, transnational threats and national vulnerabilities
- Rising expectations of a more educated and better informed population

- Public participation in decision-making – increasing accountability and sharing risk
- Gap between people's expectations and institutional capacities to respond to them
- New forms of instability and mistrust between governments and citizens



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SUSTAINING PEACE

- UN SG emphasis on conflict prevention
- Peace-building goes beyond the strict limitation to post-conflict contexts
- New sustaining peace agenda
- Equitable development brings essential contribution to conflict prevention while conflict prevention and sustaining peace are preconditions for sustainable prosperity
- SDG16 - part of the efforts to integrate conflict prevention, governance, development and human rights approaches

CONFLICT PREVENTION AND THE ROLE OF PARLIAMENT

- Constituency relations enabling early warning



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- Opportunity to help research and address the causes of social tension and conflict
 - Committees: hearings, analysis, debate, recommendations
 - Plenary: questions and interpellations (caution: avoid fueling tensions)
 - Parliamentary diplomacy
-

PARLIAMENTARY DIPLOMACY

- Parliaments' increasing role in society, greater involvement with foreign affairs and international relations
 - Inter-parliamentary cooperation
 - Parliamentary input into international deliberations, decisions that better reflect people's interests and concerns
 - Exercising adaptive leadership, embracing innovations to become future fit and help close the public trust gap
-

CONCLUSION

- Global trends, challenges and disruptions render all types of boundaries increasingly vulnerable and call for increased regional and global cooperation/collaboration.
-

- Inter-dependencies should be recognized and used constructively to produce systemic positive changes that benefit everyone.
- Isolation is not an option in the era of 4IR while regional integration is the trend.
- Inter-parliamentary cooperation play an important role. ■



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Jumagul BEKETAEVA

Research Fellow

National Institute for Strategic Studies of the
Kyrgyz Republic

«PROSPECTS OF PARLIAMENTARY

COOPERATION BETWEEN CENTRAL

ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN»

1. The 21st century is the time of change in all of the existing patterns: in economics, politics, security and other fields. The situation in the world is changing dynamically. The speed and direction of such changes vary by country and region, and Central Asia is no exception to this trend. In recent years there have been certain changes in the Central Asian region (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan), and the consequences can be positive or negative in nature.

- Enhanced regional cooperation. The most important event in this area was the meeting of the heads of Central Asian states this March in Astana. Some experts called this a historic moment. At the very least, one can note the importance of that meeting as a sign of invigorating regional cooperation. Economic cooperation is growing, and cultural and humanitarian ties are being strengthened.
- Uzbekistan's openness/liberalization policy. This factor has influenced the first point significantly, being a kind of an impulse for the neighboring states. In recent years Uzbekistan has not only declared but is also actively implementing the policy of openness in its foreign policy; relations with our neighbors in the region are among the policy's priorities. Certain results

have been achieved as of today in regard to Kyrgyzstan; for example, one could note the signing of the border treaty during the visit last year of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev to Bishkek. The treaty was later ratified by the Parliaments of both countries.

- The stabilization of the foreign policy course of major regional actors. Presidential elections were held in Russia and Turkey, the 19th Communist party Congress took place in China, etc. – this implies certain predictability of the foreign policy course for the nearest future.
- The trend of radicalization persists: conflicts in Syria, a generally tense situation in the Middle East. The return of Central Asian citizens who took part in these military conflicts is a cause of concern; it is feared that a spread of radical ideas may follow. There are two points of view on this issue in the KR: 1) the one mostly maintained by the state authorities is that all of these returnees are potential threats as a source of radical ideas. 2) the one mostly prevalent in expert academic circles is that the threat of radicalization is exaggerated by law enforcement agencies.
- Growing Islamization in the region.
- Digitalization process. All countries in the region are introducing new technology into their governance processes.

These trends bring varying consequences as both new opportunities and threats arise:

☑ The migration trends are maintained. Due to the high average population growth rate, unemployment and insufficiency of land, the trend for emigration of the youth is still present while migration of skilled labour can be seen as a future threat.

☑ The raw resource orientation of the states in the region is maintained.

☑ The unstable situation in Afghanistan is continued.

☑ Transit potential.

2. The countries of the region are united by their geographical location. The happenings in any of the countries in the region will have direct influence on the other countries. Thus, the countries in the region are interested

in maintaining stability and security, and therefore the processes in Afghanistan are certainly a matter of concern for its neighboring countries.

Stable peace and sustainable development are a precondition to the common future of the region and the world as a whole. Not the last place in that belongs to the parliaments of the countries.

The parliamentarians can serve as a vital link between voters and the public authorities, ratify and promote legislation and policies, as well as ensuring that the most important affairs in the life of the state have been thoroughly discussed and that decisions have been made on them. Parliaments are also vested with a highly important role of developing and conducting state policies.

Ideas for closer cooperation in Central Asia are being voiced on different platforms. The states of the region have different points of view on these processes due to differing strategic and national priorities, their level of development varying vision of the future. But in general, there is an understanding that such cooperation is needed. And that is why conditions must be created for the regional cooperation process to take its course in a more dynamic and continuous manner.

Since positive dynamics are observed in the region at the moment, the parliaments of the countries in the region must also intensify their work in that field. It could be said that the Central Asian parliaments are jointly responsible for the future of the whole region.

One of the fields where close cooperation remains possible is the issue of security. As a part of their activities, the parliaments of Central Asia and Afghanistan could discuss and resolve the issues of security, combating international terrorism, drug trafficking and so on in depth. This would foster the improvement of mutual understanding to enable more balanced decisions. Half of the countries in the region border Afghanistan, and this fact guarantees a high level of interest in stabilizing the situation and in the economic development of Afghanistan.

3. Kyrgyzstan, just like the other countries of the region, actively supports the efforts of the international community on the peaceful restoration of Afghanistan. This topic is being widely discussed at various international platforms, including the regional integration structures.

Speaking of the prospects of cooperation, one could highlight the experience exchange between the parliaments of the region and Afghanistan:

- The Parliament of KR together with their colleagues from the neighboring states seek to better utilize their bilateral and multilateral relations with the neighboring states in the region (Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and others) in search of ways to possibly influence the participants of the political process in Afghanistan.
- At the moment cooperation between the parliaments of Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan is non-systemic. Permanent professional dialogue on economics, politics, security and culture should be established.
- Friendship Groups of the Jogorku Kenesh (Kyrgyz Parliament) on cooperation with Afghanistan should be used more effectively and to better results.
- Kyrgyzstan has introduced such modern technology as digital identification of voters during its elections.
- The Afghan Studies Center. ■

Dilorom FAYZIEVA

Deputy of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy
Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan

17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for the transformation of our world: inter-parliamentary cooperation as the most important factor in supporting sustainable development in Central Asia and Afghanistan

The Republic of Uzbekistan actively participates in implementing the Global Vision for 2030, the route to the implementation of which lies through the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Despite significant challenges and tests, Uzbekistan today is turning into a sustainably and stably developing country with a modern multi-branch economy. The Republic is turning its efforts towards a massive growth of welfare and the standard of living of the population, and confident advancement on its way to democratic renovation and modernization.

A reliable platform Uzbekistan's achieving of the Sustainable Development Goals is the Strategy of Action in five priority areas of development for 2017–2021.

Great importance is attached today to creating decent living conditions for the population, providing access to household services and utilities as well social and market infrastructure services, as highlighted by the above-mentioned document. The implementation of the unique comprehensive program on building comfortable and affordable housing continues as well. The construction of said housing not only serves as a qualitative improvement of the people's living conditions, but also makes a tremendous impact on their lifestyle and views; all of this makes a tangible contribution to human development.

Serving its purpose, the Oliy Majlis exercises legislative support of newly introduced reforms, the implementation of the Strategy of Action as well as its over-

sight functions. It should be noted that particular importance today is attached to bilateral and multilateral cooperation with foreign parliaments.

Speaking of inter-parliamentary cooperation as an important factor of supporting sustainable development in Central Asia and Afghanistan, I would like to quote some of the main theses from the speech of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev at last year's international conference in Samarkand, «Central Asia: One Past and a Common Future, Cooperation for Sustainable Development and Mutual Prosperity».

The President noted the following, «The peoples of our region are bound by thousand-year-old ties of brotherhood and good neighborliness. We are united by common history, religion, culture and tradition». «The future of our region with the population of over 70 million people is being formed by each of the states in Central Asia. The readiness and sincere desire for cooperation, as well as the responsibility of all the Central Asian states for the common future, serve as the guarantees and foundation for sustainable development.»

«Uzbekistan supports an expedient resolution of the present disputes and the strengthening of mutual trust. Guided by the principles of good-neighborliness and mutually beneficial partnership, our states could unlock their potential in trade and economy, transport and communications, culture and humanitarian fields, as well as affairs of security and stability.

Our main goal is to use joint efforts to turn Central Asia into a stable, economically developed and prosperous region. In order to do this, we need to work together to correct the reasons and conditions fueling the potential for conflict and provide for the synthesis of national development perspectives with regional priorities. Being aware of our common development priorities, today we are seeking reasonable compromises in such sensitive issues as borders, water use, transport and trade.»

Obviously, the resolution of the current issues in Central Asia is only possible through joint efforts of our countries guided by the principle of shared responsibility.

Expressing the will of the people of Uzbekistan, the Head of our State highlighted the following urgent tasks for delivering a decent future. Those are:

- Developing trade and economic connections and creating favorable conditions for the turnover of goods, as well as strengthening the cooperation and

creating an open platform for direct dialogue between business communities with substantive discussion of specific trade and economy, investment and innovation projects;

- Using the transit and logistics potential of the region more effectively and proactively developing the transport infrastructure;
- Deepening practical cooperation on providing security and stability in Central Asia, effectively counteracting the threats of terrorism, religious extremism, transnational crime and drug trafficking in the framework of practical cooperation between the countries of the region;
- Expedient and final delimitation and demarcation of state borders;
- Expedient resolution to the issues of equitable water use in the region, based on international legal norms and considering the interests of all the states in the region within the framework of UN water use conventions. Joining efforts on solving the most urgent issues related to the Aral Sea environmental crisis. In this regard the invigoration of efforts of all the Central Asian states is required to resolve the problems of the Aral region;
- Strengthening culture and humanitarian ties, relationships of friendship and good-neighbourliness between our states and peoples, as well as actively exercising «people's diplomacy» principles.

The region currently feels a real need in finding joint ways of resolving regional issues, which is facilitated by parliamentary cooperation of the Central Asian republics.

Certainly, the implementation of the aforementioned tasks is being contributed by the parliamentary interaction of the Central Asian countries. Feeling an urgent need to develop inter-parliamentary cooperation at the regional level, friendship and cooperation groups with the parliaments of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan have been set up in the parliament of Uzbekistan.

A significant place in solving issues of regional security, especially in the context of using the preventive diplomacy tools, belongs to the United Nations. Strengthening cooperation in the frameworks of the CIS, the SOC and the OSCE is also highly important today. Acknowledging this reality, the parliament of Uzbekistan is aiming at cooperation with inter-parliamentary organizations of these and other authoritative international and regional structures, and is taking the necessary steps in this direction.

It is an obvious fact that the prospects of stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are inextricably linked to the achievement of peace in neighboring Afghanistan. One of the priority tasks is the all-encompassing support for the integration of Afghanistan into the regional economic processes, which is considered to be a major factor in establishing peace in Afghanistan. Uzbekistan continues to take an active part in the economic reconstruction of the neighboring country, the development of its power and transport infrastructure and training the local work force. It should be noted that another priority in providing stable and sustainable development in Central Asia is counteracting the extremist ideologies which mostly affect young people on the brink of adulthood. This indicates a need to conduct inter-parliamentary activities aimed at the prevention of this phenomenon on both the regional and the international scale.

In conclusion, being the chairperson of the Commission on women and family in the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, I would like briefly to go over the issues implementing the 5th Sustainable Development Goal, which is devoted to

«achieving gender equality» in Uzbekistan and the region at large. The fourth priority of developing the social sphere as part of the Strategy of Action envisages increasing women's capacity for social and political activity, strengthening their role in the state administration, providing for the employment of women and female vocational school graduates, women's widespread involvement in entrepreneurial activities and further strengthening the foundations of the family institute. These tasks imply the need to deliver a legislation enabling gender equality. At the moment, the laws «On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for women and men», «On prevention of domestic violence» – developed as part of the Strategy of Action – have been drafted and are being prepared for discus-

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sion. This is an illustrative example of the parliament's work in the implementation of the SDGs and also serves as a good basis for future cooperation between Central Asian parliaments and Afghanistan. The need for such cooperation has been highlighted at the recent conference devoted to empowering the women of Afghanistan, which took place in Astana on September 5 of this year and gathered prominent women-politicians from all the countries in the region. In our view, this conference was momentous in unifying the efforts of women-parliamentarians in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in the region.

Central Asia is indeed a region of unique opportunities and great untapped potential. Ensuring sustainable development, stability and prosperity in the region is our common goal, and, one should mention, a quite attainable one.

No doubt, today's conference shall serve as one more step towards achieving this noble goal while fostering the practical solution of key tasks and spearheading relevant new ideas and proposals aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals in Central Asia and Afghanistan. ■

Abdyvakhap NURBAEV

Deputy of the Jogorku Kenesh (Parliament) of
the Kyrgyz Republic

Chairman of the working group for monitoring of
legislation on the implementation of Sustainable

Development Goals in the Kyrgyz Republic

ON IMPLEMENTING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS IN THE KYRGYZ REPUBLIC

*Dear ladies and gentlemen,
Dear participants,*

In September 2015, Kyrgyzstan, along with other countries, has made a commitment to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's) by 2030, adopted by the leaders of over 188 countries in September 2015 during the 70th session of the United Nations General Assembly.

In order to further adaptation and implementation of the Goals by 2030, the Kyrgyz Republic within the framework of policy documents for the country's development, the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic made the decision to improve the existing coordination mechanism of the lessons learned during the implementation of the previous global agenda – the Millennium Development Goals by 2015.

To accomplish it, the Coordination committee on adaptation, implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the Kyrgyz Republic was created by the decision of the Government of the Kyrgyz Republic in December 2015 (KR Government Order No. 867 dated 22.12.2015). The staff of the coordination committee chaired by the Prime Minister was appointed in order to facilitate the systematic accomplishment of the Sustainable Development Goals. The commit-

tee includes representatives of the legislative branch, the ministries and agencies, UN organizations, international and non-governmental organizations.

As part of the adaptation of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and the implementation of the first stage of putting in place the monitoring system, the Kyrgyz Republic has developed a matrix of national analog-indicators based on global SDG indicators as well as additional indicators characteristic to the Kyrgyz Republic which were submitted to the secretariat of the Coordination committee on adaptation, implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 in the Kyrgyz Republic for further management. This indicator matrix will subsequently serve as a set of key indicators used for decision making during the creation or adjustment of development policies on a national as well as industrial levels.

The majority of the set tasks and indicators are interagency by nature and for each of them the corresponding government bodies were defined, which will be responsible for the implementation policies, data collection and further improvement of certain indicators.

Currently the Kyrgyz Republic has adopted a long-term National Development Strategy of the Kyrgyz Republic for 2018–2040. Social, economic and environmental aspects of development are combined taking account of the Sustainable Development Goals principle. At the same time the top priority development objectives defined in the long term development vision of the country should be noted as well, which include:

- Healthy nation
- Robust and sustainable state
- Peaceful and harmonious society
- Fair and corruption-free state institutions
- Developed and successful regions
- High Quality and relevant knowledge
- Fair and transparent elections
- Fair and just courts
- Well-being of the Kyrgyz people

In order to gradually and consecutively implement the above strategy by 2040 the President of the Kyrgyz Republic will be developing five-year development programs for the top priority development aspects every five years.

Based on the country's long-term vision by 2040 the following mid-term priority development areas for the period of 2018–2023 were designed for the Kyrgyz Republic (note: extract from the 2018–2023 Priorities for the Kyrgyz Republic).

- At the centre of all the development policies is the individual person, and the task is to create a favorable environment for the individual person's comfortable daily life activities and further all-round development. The state policy should be in accordance with the interests of all the citizens of the country
- It is necessary to direct government efforts towards creating the image of a "modern Kyrgyz citizen" to build a strong and developed state with a tolerant society free from regionalism, tribalism and nationalism. The division of society by any factors including clan, territorial, confessional, material or other criteria is unacceptable.
- It is necessary to confidently implement government policies protecting the people's human, political, economic, social, cultural and environmental rights as well as the right to a dignified life.
- Dignified, safe and productive labor, adequate remuneration for it, fairness in access to public education and healthcare are the cornerstone of the government's social policy.
- It is necessary to achieve the provision of equal opportunities for citizens to develop their potential irrespective of their material wealth, social status, place of residence, ethnicity, religion, gender, health conditions or other differences.
- The task ahead is to clear the way for talented, responsible and educated people to enable their constructive, political, economic and creative activities.
- Creating a favorable business environment and fair competition, equal rights of access to financial, material, administrative and other resources distributed by the government. The government should incentivize the development of entrepreneurial activity and market mechanisms and only retain the function of defining the common rules for all.

- Creating a state and municipal governing system that can listen to and hear its citizens as well as persuade, guide and teach them to make fair and informed decisions with consideration for the civil society's suggestions, the capabilities of the regions and national interests.
- The government has to develop and implement principles of constructive interaction, mechanisms for civil society organizations to engage in dialogue and cooperate with government institutions and business. In regards to this, it is necessary to develop a program of government support for civil society organizations which would exercise the concept of public co-funding and the government's active engagement in assisting civil society organizations in setting goals and tasks that would benefit the development of the country.

In order to implement the long-term vision by 2040 and the Development Priorities of the Kyrgyz Republic by 2018–2023, end of April 2018 the government of the Kyrgyz Republic has adopted the Kyrgyz Republic Development Program – Unity, Trust and Creation which serves as the first step to implementing the 2040 strategy.

The program adopted by the government is closely intertwined with the Sustainable Development Goals where every section is related to a certain SDG. The tasks set forth in the Government Program have similar wording and around 70% of the objectives have been aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. The Government Development Program is closely related to the following SDG's:

Goal.1. Eradication of poverty

Goal.2. Ending hunger

Goal.3. Health and well-being

Goal.4. Quality education

Goal.7. Affordable and clean energy

Goal.8. Dignified work and economic growth

Goal.9. Industrialization, innovation and infrastructure.

Goal.11. Sustainable cities and settlements

Goal.16. Peace, justice and effective institutions

This link between the midterm Development Program and the Sustainable Development Goals was also pointed out in the preliminary review of the MAPS mission (Mainstreaming, Acceleration, Policy Support) which visited Kyrgyzstan in June of this year to render support in reinforcing the work on achieving the SDG's and solve adaptation issues. Our country was chosen as the pilot country based on the comprehensive assessment and support in implementing the 2030 agenda.

We are hoping the cooperation with MAPS will enable us to develop cross-sector solutions, identify bottle-necks hindering progress and define accelerating factors which should assist in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals by the Kyrgyz Republic.

Dear ladies and gentlemen!

The Jogorku Kenesh – the Parliament of the Kyrgyz Republic – is the highest representative body executing legislative power and oversight functions within the scope of its authority.

In this regard the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic is the key element in the development and adoption of the country's long-term and midterm strategic development documents, including the adaptation of global development documents adopted by the UN member states. The Jogorku Kenesh also plays a key role in their implementation by practicing its oversight functions.

With the view of successfully implementing the Sustainable Development Goals in the country, the Committee on international affairs, defense and security of the Jogorku Kenesh of the Kyrgyz Republic has decided to create a working group on overseeing the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goal legislation in the Kyrgyz Republic. The group is staffed by 12 Parliament deputies representing various parties and factions.

Currently the said working group on behalf of the whole Jogorku Kenesh is conducting active cooperation with the UN system on further strengthening sustainable development with focus on Kyrgyzstan's national priorities and the accomplishment of tasks and indicators set forth in the global Development Agenda by 2030. It is worth noting that the foundation for this cooperation is the United Nations Development Assistance Framework (2018–2022) signed mid-2017.

The Development Assistance Framework for 2018–2022 is well aligned with such development priorities of the country as governance and peaceful development,

e-Government, sustainable economic development, promotion of democracy, improvement of healthcare service quality, education, preservation of invaluable natural resources and the environment, and we believe that the UNDAF will give an additional push to the development of these aspects. ■

Ali YILDIZ

Deputy Secretary General

Parliamentary Assembly of the Turkic Speaking
Countries (TURKPA)

**THE ROLE AND VALUE ADDED
OF EXISTING REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY FRAMEWORKS
AND THEIR POTENTIAL IN PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY
IN ENGAGEMENT OF AFGHANISTAN
IN THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA**

*Distinguished participants
Ladies and Gentlemen,*

At the beginning of my introduction, I would like to extend my gratitude to Special Representative and the Head of the Centre Ms. Natalia Gherman for inviting us to attend this meeting and giving me an opportunity to chair this session in front of this honourable audience.

When I received the invitation letter and the draft program, first thing I have looked at quite naturally was what we understand from the term ‘preventive diplomacy’. UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali defined preventive diplomacy as «action to prevent disputes from arising between parties, to prevent existing disputes from escalating into conflicts and to limit the spread of the latter when they occur.»

Established in 2007 in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan upon the initiative of the five Central Asian states, The United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) has been showing a great performance

for more than ten years in fulfilling the tasks assigned i.e. identifying and addressing existing and potential threats to regional stability and facilitating partnerships between the governments of Central Asia in cooperation with regional and international organizations.

I want to underline the importance of the «Istanbul Process» where fourteen countries involved in Afghanistan, including Central Asian states, have come together and agreed on specific measures for the realization of regional security cooperation on 2 November 2011 in Istanbul. I can gladly say that this process so far yielded productive results and gives us great confidence in achieving our common goal of integration of Afghanistan into the Central Asian cooperation framework.

Taking this opportunity and with your permission, I would like to inform you shortly on the scope of the cooperation within the Turkic world in general and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Turkic Speaking Countries (TURKPA) in particular.

Turkic speaking countries have been enjoying a high and well-developed level of cooperation within different platforms. We have Turkic Council, International Organization of Turkic Culture, International Turkic Academy and Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation operating in different fields at their headquarters in various member countries. Where we locate TURKPA in this big family? TURKPA is the parliamentary dimension of cooperation within the Turkic world. TURKPA was established by the Istanbul Agreement signed on 21st of November 2008 at the Dolmabahçe Palace in Istanbul by the Heads of Parliaments of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyz Republic and the Republic of Turkey. We will be celebrating the 10th anniversary of our organization this year in November in İzmir with special events together with the 8th Plenary Session.

International Secretariat of TURKPA is located in Baku, capital of Azerbaijan and thanks to the generous hospitality of the Republic of Azerbaijan we are undertaking our duties in a detached building constructed anew as the premises of our institution. The Secretariat is headed by a Secretary General and assisted by three Deputy Secretary Generals nominated by four member countries and elected at the General Assembly of TURKPA by the Speakers of Parliaments.

When we look at the mission of TURKPA we see that our primary goal is to render assistance in further development of political dialogue among the countries bound by ethnic, cultural and historical ties within the Turkic world and create a favourable condition for elaboration and implementation of different initiatives

having the purpose of maintaining regional and global security by means of parliamentary diplomacy. One of the main tasks of TURKPA is the establishment of new relations and development of existing ones with other national parliaments and international organizations in the region and all over the world. Such activities represent particular importance for all parliaments and international organisations, as it turns our focus towards the result-oriented approach and achieving practical results stemming from the activities of institutions we represent.

TURKPA has four committees i.e. Committee on Legal Affairs and International Relations, Committee on Economic Cooperation, Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and the Committee on Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Affairs. We have been undertaking regular committee meetings with the participation of MPs from respective parliaments as well as workshops, seminars and conferences on different issues of interest for the Turkic world. In order to give you an idea on our activities, I can mention the parliamentary workshop

on Waste Management and Genetically Modified Organisms which was held in April in Istanbul within the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. Two days later we have the annual meeting of our Committee on Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Affairs in Bishkek together with a workshop on Cinema and Animation followed by Turkic Cinema Days. These committee meetings and workshops bring together parliamentarians and experts and provide an excellent platform in order to discuss issues of common interest.

At this particular session, we will concentrate on what can regional parliamentary organizations do in the sense that providing different platforms for engaging law-makers from Afghanistan. As far as TURKPA is concerned, workshops can provide a convenient platform to bring parliamentarians from Afghanistan as guest participants and give them an opportunity to get acquainted with the work of our organization. Furthermore, our guests from Afghanistan can learn



«TURKPA has four committees i.e. Committee on Legal Affairs and International Relations, Committee on Economic Cooperation, Committee on Environment and Natural Resources and the Committee on Social, Cultural and Humanitarian Affairs. We have been undertaking regular committee meetings with the participation of MPs from respective parliaments as well as workshops, seminars and conferences on different issues of interest for the Turkic world. In order to give you an idea on our activities, I can mention the parliamentary workshop on Waste Management and Genetically Modified Organisms which was held in April in Istanbul within the Committee on Environment and Natural Resources. »

from experiences of TURKPA member parliaments and have an idea to transfer best practices in different areas in the future. I want to add that participation of guests at our meetings naturally depends on an application in this regard and approval of the General Assembly of TURKPA.

I'm sure that through our joint efforts as regional parliamentary organizations together with the UN Regional Centre, Afghanistan will be another success story of preventive diplomacy as was the case in different parts of the world such as Lebanon, Nigeria, Malawi, Yemen, South Sudan and Guinea.

Now I want to introduce the panellists in this session and give the floor to them for their presentations. I'm sure that each and every organization has different strengths and will give us an insight into what we can do different for Afghanistan as far as regional parliamentary cooperation is concerned. ■

Azay GULIYEV

Vice-President of the OSCE Parliamentary
Assembly

Deputy of the Parliament of the
Republic of Azerbaijan

THE ROLE OF THE CURRENT REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AND THE ROLE OF AFGHANISTAN IN THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA

*Dear Mr. President,
Dear Ladies and Gentleman,*

- It is a pleasure for me to be in Uzbekistan and to represent the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly on behalf of President George Tsereteli.
- I wish to thank the organisers, the Government and Parliament of Uzbekistan, the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA), for this opportunity to highlight the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in the region and its use of parliamentary diplomacy to increase dialogue and co-operation with the countries of Central Asia and also with Afghanistan.
- The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is well positioned to exert preventive diplomacy as it is a flexible organization with a variety of instruments at its disposal to increase engagement with particular countries or regions and to promote parliamentarism.
- What can Member of Parliaments do?
- MPs have specific leverages, ways and means to address the various types of crises and to contribute to post-conflict rebuilding.

- MPs can open doors which only politicians can open and which professional diplomats or governmental representatives cannot. MPs also enjoy a greater degree of freedom to launch public debates or make public statements on sensitive topics, thus testing public opinion and leading the way, before governments are ready to take an official stance.
- MPs can also pave the way for negotiations and they can promote political dialogue at the level of parliaments, political parties and civil society.
- MPs can also promote democracy by election monitoring.
- The role of the OSCE PA in Preventive Diplomacy in Central and Eastern Asia
- All five Central Asian countries are members of the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Afghanistan has been an Asian Partner for Co-operation of the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly since 2003 and borders three OSCE participating States (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan). Partners for Co-operation can participate in a variety of OSCE PA activities such as statutory meetings, election observation missions, etc.
- MPs from Central Asian countries, especially Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, have actively participated in OSCE PA activities. In recent years the delegations of Uzbekistan and also Turkmenistan have also been regularly attending OSCE PA statutory meetings.
- A number of Presidential visits have also been organized to countries of Central Asia. In May 2017, then OSCE PA President Christine Muttonen visited Tashkent with the aim to encourage ongoing reforms and potential areas for co-operation with the OSCE PA. This was the first visit to Uzbekistan by a President of the OSCE PA in more than a decade and was intended as a follow-up to the participation for the first time since 2002 of a delegation from Uzbekistan in the OSCE PA Winter Meeting in February 2017 in Vienna.

Special Representatives/Ad Hoc Groups

- The OSCE PA has established a number of Special Representatives or ad hoc groups with a thematic or a regional focus which have played an important early warning as well as post-conflict rehabilitation role.
- Some of these groups/representatives have particularly made use of the quasi-official status of parliamentary diplomacy. For example, the Parliamentary

Team on Moldova a number of years ago was able to organize seminars engaging elected Members from both sides of the Dniester river, helping to establish constructive ties between Chisinau and Tiraspol.

- In 2007 the OSCE PA established a Special Representative for Central and Eastern Asia (formerly Special Representative for Central Asia). The current mandate of the Special Representative is defined as follows:
 - Encourage active participation by parliamentarians from Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), as well as Mongolia, in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to strengthen parliamentarism in the region;
 - Liaise and support the work of the OSCE field missions in the region, as well as relevant OSCE institutions, international and regional organizations and diplomatic missions;
 - Encourage closer contacts between the parliaments in the region to promote greater intra-regional cooperation in all three OSCE dimensions;
 - Promote knowledge of the OSCE and its core principles in the OSCE Asian partner for co-operation countries, notably through building inter-parliamentary ties;
 - Report to the President of the Assembly on developments in the region, including opportunities for enhanced parliamentary dialogue and further inter-parliamentary co-operation among the Central Asian states and Mongolia, as well as with Eastern Asia.
- From 2008 to 2016, the OSCE PA had a Special Representative on Afghanistan, whose mandate was to report on the security and humanitarian situation in Afghanistan; explore the ways in which the OSCE and the PA can enhance their contribution to the stabilization of the situation in the country; and sustain the development of dialogue with MPs from Afghanistan.
- One of the achievements of the Special Representative was the sponsoring of a Resolution on the OSCE's Further Engagement with Afghanistan which was adopted at the Annual Session in Baku in 2014
- The OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committees on Countering Terrorism and on Migration are another potential instrument for preventive diplomacy as well as a

forum for further engagement by MPs from Central and Eastern Asia and for parliamentary exchange on issues of common concern. While there are currently no members from the region in the two Committees, field visits and membership are being considered.

Election Observation

- The OSCE PA regularly sends teams of parliamentarians to observe elections in different countries. These missions contribute to democracy in the country being observed, and enable parliamentarians from other countries to learn about different approaches. A number of MPs from Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) have participated in election observation missions.
- I have also personally led such missions in other countries including last presidential election in Kirgizstan. It is an enriching experience, and encourages us parliamentarians to think about some of the fundamental elements of democracy.

Special Debates at OSCE PA Meetings

- Special debates are usually organized at the Winter Meetings held every year in February in Vienna. These are usually thematic (although a special debate on Afghanistan was held in 2010 – see below)
- While there is currently no dedicated forum on Central Asia, the OSCE PA Autumn Meetings such as the one held in Ulaanbaatar in 2015 and the upcoming meeting in Bishkek in October 2018 provide the opportunity to highlight issues of concern to the region and but which also have relevance for the rest of the participating States and serve to identify areas for enhanced regional co-operation.

Dear Ladies and Gentleman,

Let me say a few words about the OSCE and OSCE PA engagement with Afghanistan specifically.

In 2003, Afghanistan became an Asian Partner for Co-operation of the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly.

In 2007, acknowledging the impact of the situation in Afghanistan on security in the OSCE area, and underscoring the importance of long-term security and

stability in Afghanistan for the OSCE region, in particular for Central Asia, the OSCE decided to strengthen its engagement with Afghanistan. Responding to a request from the Afghan Government, the OSCE agreed to provide assistance in the fields of border security, police training and combating drug trafficking.

Furthermore, in 2011, the OSCE agreed to widen its engagement with Afghanistan, from the politico-military dimension to also include the economic and environmental dimension and the human dimension. OSCE participating States also underlined the importance of regional co-operation between Afghanistan and OSCE member States in Central Asia, and of the essential role of these Central Asian countries in helping to promote long-term security and stability in Afghanistan.

Afghanistan has participated in a number of statutory meetings of the OSCE PA, starting in 2009 at the 18th OSCE PA Annual Session in Vilnius. It has also sent delegations from both chambers of the Afghan parliament, including female MPs, to the 2015 Autumn Meeting in Ulaan Baatar, and the Winter Meetings in Vienna in February 2016 and 2017.

The OSCE PA has adopted a number of resolutions highlighting the impact of the situation in Afghanistan for the security of the Central Asian region and the OSCE region more generally and the importance of promoting stability in Afghanistan. The OSCE PA has also consistently underlined the need to strengthen women's political participation.

Resolutions

In 2012 at the Annual Session in Monaco, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution calling for OSCE participating States to increase their contributions toward OSCE activities related to border security, civil policing training, and combating illegal forms of trafficking in Afghanistan. The resolution also called for the Afghan government to hold credible and inclusive elections and ensure respect for human rights, including women's rights. It encourages Afghan officials and civil society to be more involved in OSCE activities.

The 2014 Baku Declaration included a Resolution on the OSCE's Further Engagement with Afghanistan, which proposed a number of specific actions in the areas of border control, combating terrorism and transnational crime.

It also called upon the OSCE participating States and Partners for Co-operation to increase their contributions in all three dimensions of the OSCE as well as in cross-dimensional issues, to serve the well-being, peace and prosperity

of the Afghan people, and for the promotion of OSCE values, standards and commitments.

The OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights has also sent elections experts to Afghanistan in various years from 2004 to 2014 to support the country's democratic development.

In conclusion, let me re-assure all of you that the entire OSCE family stands ready to continue its support in promoting greater cooperation and integration among the countries of Central Asia and Afghanistan which have common geography and history, as well as strong cultural ties and enormous economic potential for mutually beneficial joint projects toward achieving the goals of peace, sustainable development, stability and security. ■

Taalatbek MASADYKOV

Expert on Afghanistan and Central Asia

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN IMPLEMENTING PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY IN THE MODERN AGE AND AFGHANISTAN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF CENTRAL ASIA

Dear organizers of this important conference, allow me to thank you for the invitation and the opportunity to speak to you today.

We all understand very well that the entire Central Asian region – which includes not only five of the former Soviet republics, which are nowadays five independent Central Asian states, but also Afghanistan – is right now undergoing complex establishment and development processes. This has to do with almost all the fields in these countries: independence, statehood, social and economic development and security. Of course, this also touches upon issues of the parliamentary system and its role in government and society.

The parliaments in these six states are also undergoing their establishment stage. The role of parliaments in society and government is quite significant but the degree of development of these parliaments is different from one another. Almost all of our countries have presidential government and only in Kyrgyzstan we call it presidential-parliamentary although it actually bears little difference to the pure presidential one. In Kyrgyzstan some political powers are still striving for the government to become purely parliamentary, but this process shall apparently take up some time.

There are some relatively strong parliaments that are trying to significantly influence the executive branch, but there are also some parliaments which carry out

their parliamentary functions but are actually exercising the role of the head of state – the president.

I will not talk about these topics in great detail as all of us here today have their own opinion and these opinions may greatly differ from one another, while at the same time each of these opinions may be correct in its own way.

As for the cooperation between the parliaments of our six states, it is worth noting that there is a trend to develop this cooperation. Is the cooperation we have now sufficient? I can confidently state that the answer is no. I mean formal parliamentary visits, political discussions and signing of agreements do take place but how efficient are the results of these trips, discussions and protocols?

There are still many unresolved issues in Central Asia. These are issues related to country borders, security, land and water – all of these unresolved issues may easily become detonators for potential minor or major conflicts. This is especially true considering that war has been going on in Afghanistan for almost the last 40 years.

What is the role of regional parliamentary cooperation in implementing preventive diplomacy? Of course, the role of this is significant even in spite of the fact that parliaments in some countries are not strong enough to influence the executive authority.

Regional parliamentary cooperation is a type of diplomacy. For instance, even in local cross-border conflicts the role of parliamentary deputies of the conflicting parties is very important for successful peace-building. Sometimes minor conflicts can be solved with the help of parliamentarians without the necessity to resort to violence or escalate the issue to the level of the parties' supreme authorities.

Afghanistan's participation in the political life of the five post-soviet Central Asian countries was almost non-existent in the past. This had to do not only with issues of security, but also with the lack of readiness of the leadership of these countries to work with Afghanistan more closely.

Trade and economic relations between our countries and Afghanistan were always in place and are still developing currently, but the relationship levels between now and the past are different.

- Countries bordering Afghanistan: Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan
- Countries with no border to Afghanistan: Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan

Nowadays the most acute issues for Central Asian countries are related to security.

Of course, it is worth noting that currently, when the world has pretty much reverted back to the Cold War times and the strife between the USA with the bloc of Western countries on the one side and Russia and its allies on the other, has intensified; this is bound to influence the relationships between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan.

- Afghanistan and the USA/NATO
- CA countries and the EEU and the CSTO
- CA countries and Russia
- CA countries and China
- CA countries and Iran
- Afghanistan and CA countries

The world is on the brink of a big war. The superpowers are conducting so called «proxy» wars on the territories of other countries. That is why today we need close cooperation in security between our states more than ever before.

- The Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- ISIS in Afghanistan and Pakistan
- The spread of ISIS in CA countries

The USA and Russia are openly competing for influence on Central Asian countries. China is also trying to use its investments to gain influence over countries in Central Asia.

Central Asian countries need to work even more closely with each other and with Afghanistan. Peace, security, stability and prosperity in the Central Asian region depend firstly on the cooperation between our countries. This is why our countries should not sit and wait until the world powers have solved their issues.

Central Asian countries could serve as the platform for solving conflict situations both for the region, as well as between the major world powers.

- Turkmenistan: positive neutrality, negotiations with the Taliban
- Kazakhstan: the Astana Process on Syria
- Uzbekistan: the latest initiatives on the 2017 Afghanistan peace process

Afghanistan is part of Central Asia. Common or similar cultures, history, languages and religions unite the Central Asian countries.

Peace and stability in Afghanistan mean peace and stability in all of Central Asia. ■

Ravshan RAJABOV

Deputy of the Majilisi Namoyandagon of the
Republic of Tajikistan

Deputy Chairman of the Committee on social,
family and healthcare affairs

THE ROLE OF REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN IMPLEMENTING PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AT THE PRESENT STAGE AND AFGHANISTAN'S PARTICIPATION IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF CENTRAL ASIA

Dear seminar participants,

First of all, allow me to welcome you on behalf of the Chairman of the Majilisi Namoyandagon Majilisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan and express my sincere appreciation to the Organizers of the Tashkent International Seminar for the kind invitation and for creating the most favorable conditions for conducting our Seminar.

Afghanistan, regional security

- The Republic of Tajikistan, along with the global community, is constantly following the development of the situation in the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and considering the length of our national border, which is around 1400 km, finds itself on the frontline of combating terrorist and extremist groups as well as illicit drug

trafficking. In this regard, we believe delivering security in this country to be the key factor of assuring our own security, regional security as well as peace and stability.

- Tajikistan supports the strategy of comprehensive solution and postwar reconstruction in Afghanistan. That is why, we deem it important to render timely assistance to the Government of Afghanistan, in particularly, during the ten-year transition period (2015–2024).
- Engaging Afghanistan in the regional integration process by reinforcing trade and economic relations with our neighboring country is an important factor in this aspect, but the development of the military-political situation in Afghanistan remains a matter of concern.
- The Taliban and militants from various terrorist groups are expanding their pool of activities on a regular basis, and this is why the situation in this neighboring country of ours is intensifying day by day. Taliban militants and other terrorist groups are active in all of the provinces bordering Central Asian countries.
- The prevalence of a significant amount of militants in the northern part of this country, which borders Tajikistan, is evidence of the fact that the situation in the provinces of Badakhshan, Tahir and Kunduz is to remain unstable in the near future. Reportedly, there is a large amount of militants from the «Taliban», «Ansarullah», the «Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan» and the «Islamic Movement of Turkestan» fighting in the Badakhshan province. Recently we received reports of a reinvigoration of ISIS militants in this region. While the Taliban denies expansion of its activity in the north in the direction of Central Asian countries, the so called «Islamic» militants consider Afghanistan to be the platform for the expansion of their sphere of influence to countries of Central Asia and beyond. According to reports, the total amount of «Islamic State» militants in Afghanistan is several thousand people.
- Another issue which is a matter of concern for the region and the whole world – and is intertwined with the issue characteristic of Afghanistan – is illicit drug trafficking. Illicit drug trafficking has obviously become one of the main sources of financing for terrorism across the globe. Considering the current military-political situation in Afghanistan we believe it important to take the necessary measures in combating terrorist groups and illicit drug trafficking.

- We support expanding measures of targeted assistance to Afghanistan with the purpose of economic reconstruction, strengthening the social sphere and creating new jobs in this country. We are prepared to contribute to rebuilding the social economic infrastructure of Afghanistan by connecting the traffic arteries of the two countries, implementing transport and communication projects, building railroads and the CASA-1000 energy network as well as training specialists in various fields.
- Regional cooperation is an important element of establishing stability in Afghanistan and in the region as a whole. Developing economic cooperation is also listed in the key priorities of the Republic of Tajikistan. Considering Afghanistan's transit potential and its geographical location, Tajikistan welcomes Afghanistan to partake in the regional integration process.

Combating illicit drug trafficking

- One important field that requires joint effort and measures by the world community is the prevention of illicit trafficking of drugs. It is imperative for the international community within the framework of the international anti-narcotics strategy to join forces in the fight to diminish the demand and offer of narcotic substances which are being distributed on a national level.
- The Republic of Tajikistan developed its own national strategy of combating illicit drug trafficking for 2013–2020, which includes a mid- and long-term plan of action and cooperation based on bilateral, regional and multilateral relations.

Combating terrorism

- The reaction to the growing threat of terrorism and extremism, that is nowadays considered a global problem, should be comprehensive, thorough and considering of the UN's key role in this process.
- The UN's global anti-terrorism strategy, resolutions of the General Assembly, the UN Security Council and UN anti-terrorist conventions are the foundation for the joint combat with terrorism. The efforts should be aimed at destroying international terrorist groups' military infrastructure, eliminating ways of its political, military and financial

support, preventing use of the Internet for the terrorist purposes of recruitment and propaganda of extremist and violent views.

- The Republic of Tajikistan supports constructive cooperation with all organizations and countries in the field of combating terrorism. In this regard we have established cooperation with countries, international and regional organizations, including the UN, SCO, CSTO and OSCE.
- In order to maintain peace and stability within the country and contribute to coping with contemporary threats and challenges, including terrorism and extremism we have adopted the national strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on combating terrorism and extremism for 2016–2020 and its action plan with 12 subject points which should be taken into account during the combatting and prevention of terrorism and extremism.
- Moreover, in order to develop a general approach to delivering sustainable security, preventing the growing threat of terrorism, extremism and other challenges of the modern world, strengthening the close cooperation with international and regional organizations and partner-states as well as advancement of the subjects listed in the national strategy of the Republic of Tajikistan on combating terrorism and extremism for 2016–2020, the Government of Tajikistan in cooperation with the UN, OSCE, and the EU, held the international high level conference «Preventing Terrorism and Countering Violent Extremism» in Dushanbe on May 3–4, 2018.

We support expanding measures of targeted assistance to Afghanistan with the purpose of economic reconstruction, strengthening the social sphere and creating new jobs in this country.

We are prepared to contribute to rebuilding the social economic infrastructure of Afghanistan by connecting the traffic arteries of the two countries, implementing transport and communication projects, building railroads and the CASA-1000 energy network as well as training specialists in various fields.

- The participants of the Dushanbe security conference discussed priority aspects of international and regional security cooperation, addressed issues related to the current state and the prospects of cooperation between countries and international organizations, stressed the importance of uniting and invigorating efforts in combating security threats, namely terrorism, extremism and radicalism.

Distinguished Chairman,

Once again, from me personally, and on behalf of the Chairman of the Majilisi Namoyandagoni Majilisi Oli of the Republic of Tajikistan I would like to wish you and all the participants of the Tashkent seminar fruitful work. I am certain that your ideas and initiatives, along with ours, shall reach practical implementation in real actions and projects and will facilitate the building of confidence, mutual understanding and good-neighbourly relations between our people. ■

Kerimguly GELDIYEV

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Member of the Committee on international and
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THE ROLE OF THE CURRENT REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AND THE ROLE OF AFGHANISTAN IN THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA

Your Excellences,

At the beginning of my speech, I would like to thank to the hosts and all participants for making this event a reality. I wish success to participants of this seminar and believe that it will bring fruitful results for our cooperation agenda.

First, I would like to briefly describe the core values of Turkmenistan's foreign policy. Turkmenistan pursues peaceful foreign policy, builds its relations with other states on the principles of equality of rights, mutual respect and non-interference in internal affairs of other states. Turkmenistan does not participate in military alliances, interstate associations with collective obligations or responsibilities of the parties. But it is important to clearly state that Turkmenistan actively participates in international and regional cooperation. In practice, Neutrality status of Turkmenistan made it a very active participant of international affairs.

The Parliament of Turkmenistan has been an active institution in realizing Turkmenistan's peaceful foreign policy in the region. The national parliament re-

mained a strong institution from the very first days of independence and created a constructive legislative framework for not only domestic development but for international cooperation. From 1990 to 1994, the last convocation of the Supreme Council of the Soviet Turkmenistan completed its work. Active work of that parliament brought its fruits. Turkmenistan was accepted as a member of the United Nations in 1992. In 1995, Turkmenistan was recognized as a permanently neutral country. Positive Neutral status of Turkmenistan has provided vast possibilities to create good cooperation and governance in the region. The establishment of United Nations Regional Center for Preventive diplomacy in Central Asia in the Ashgabat can be given as a positive outcome of the neutrality policy.

Parliamentary diplomacy is a new tendency for our geography. Parliaments have been a feature of domestic politics, as a part of legislative branch or parliamentarians as representatives of the people. In fact, as a result of globalization and digitalization, today's Parliaments are linked to not only domestic politics but also to international affairs, especially regarding international organizations and foreign countries. Parliamentary institutions engage in international affairs in three major ways:

1. By influencing foreign policy through national parliaments;
2. By conducting parallel diplomatic relations with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs which is known as parliamentary diplomacy;
3. By establishing inter-parliamentary organization and empowering national parliaments at the international level.

The first is a classical function of parliaments and implies no policy-making innovation, although the degree to which parliaments do so varies from one democracy to another. The second function is more recent and has focused mainly on peace-building and conflict-prevention activities. The third is a relatively new phenomenon for the countries of the region and is ideally oriented towards discovering new forms of partnership and cooperation.

The first elections to the Parliament of Independent Turkmenistan took place in 1994. The First Parliament worked comprehensively and adopted new Laws that created legislation infrastructure of the new Independent country. Turkmenistan has joined the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic relations in 1996. The first official visit of parliamentary delegation in the region was made to the neighboring countries. Turkmenistan has friendship and cooperation agreements with all central Asian countries, as well as with the countries with which it has borders,

such as the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. Turkmenistan has a practice of good cooperation with all its neighbor countries.

If we look at the specific case of Turkmen-Afghan cooperation, Turkmenistan's position is that reconstruction and development of Afghanistan is important for region and the world. To contribute to this process of reconstruction, Turkmenistan creates all opportunities for close cooperation with the brotherly nation of Afghanistan. In 2011, Mejlis of Turkmenistan has ratified an Agreement on Friendship and cooperation between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan. Diplomatic cooperation under the umbrella of the United Nations, opening of trade houses, cooperation in the field of education, counter terrorism cooperation, cultural fields are the main areas of cooperation. There are historical links, commonality of cultural heritage between our nations which facilitates our cooperation.

The international organizations actively support this position. It is clearly stated for example in the United Nations Security Council Declaration. It supports Central Asian states' efforts toward advancing the peace process and socio – economic development of Afghanistan, and their involvement in regional political and economic processes. The extension of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan was welcomed by the government of Turkmenistan. The support of international community for this process is very important for all regional countries.

Cooperation with Afghanistan is based on large-scale projects and is realized together with international organizations and regional partners. As shown in the Declaration of the seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, Turkmenistan has big investments for normalization in Afghanistan in the sphere of energy, transport and other fields. Chairman of committee on economic issues of Parliament has attended to Rabatkashan-Kalaynau electric station opening ceremony. Region's countries have geographic limits as landlocked countries. In the year of Turkmenistan – the Heart of the Great Silk Road, Lapis Lazuli project gives an opportunity to become land-linked countries. Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline project needs new Laws to regulate construction, sharing revenues, and other legal issues between the partner countries.

Parliamentary diplomacy is a new practice for our region. Inter-Parliamentary Union, Parliamentary Union of the OIC member states, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, European Parliament Assembly, Parliament Union of Commonwealth of Independent States memberships are useful platforms for active parliamentary diplomacy. In the Mejlis of Turkmenistan, the first Friendship

group for foreign countries was created in 2008. Today, the national parliament has 38 friendship groups. These groups give opportunities to develop parliamentary diplomacy. I am also a proud member of the friendship group of Parliament of Turkmenistan and Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

Turkmenistan actively engages with inter-parliamentary organizations to promote the agenda of regional development. For instance, Inter-Parliamentary Union's Secretary General His Excellency Martin Chungong has visited our country in June 2018. He had many proposals about active participation in the field of gender equality in parliament, young parliamentarian education, organizing meeting of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in Ashgabat. Delegates of Turkmen Parliament, including Her Excellences 'Speaker of the Mejlis of Turkmenistan, will participate to 139th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union in the next month.

What is our agenda for the future of our cooperation? Conferences and trainings are the platform to share experiences between parliaments to create new strategies to solve problems such as poverty, unemployment, and inequalities. Elected Deputies are the bridge between the government and citizens. As public servants, they contribute to state policy-making, at the same time; they have responsibilities to citizens as electors. They actively participate not only in legislative work, but also in policy-making. This is best exemplified in the motto «The State is for people» declared in Turkmenistan. Because of the nature of their close work with citizens of their countries, parliament members are good candidates for people-to-people connections.

The Parliament of Turkmenistan will be active in the future as well. The Committee on international and inter parliament relations is working on new laws to regulate new directions of foreign policy. The plan includes Law on Preventive Diplomacy. Draft of this Law aims to build strong foundations for security by using preventive diplomacy instruments.

All these examples show us that preventive diplomacy, peace through development policy have a sustainable and long run benefits to the countries and citizens. Expanding parliament diplomacy is giving vast possibilities to widening cooperation. We would like to assure you that the Parliament of Turkmenistan will always be open to cooperation and new projects aimed at the prosperity of our region. ■

Abdusamat KHAYDAROV

Expert on Afghanistan and Central Asia

CURRENT SITUATION IN CA AND THE OBJECTIVE

NEED FOR COOPERATION

The relevance of the topic of regional parliamentary cooperation at the current stage is dictated by the problems that have been amassed in the interstate relations of the countries in the region from the time when they first declared their independence in 1991. Unresolved issues of borders, enclaves and water resource distribution have been hampering the development of interstate relations in Central Asia.

The course of regional political processes has always been and is still influenced today by the relative proximity to the forty-years-long Afghan conflict.

Despite the attempts of the international community to resolve this conflict, the situation in Afghanistan now is far from stable. The issues of combating international terrorism, production and trafficking of drugs, illicit sale of firearms and fighting ISIS remain crucial for the Afghan government.

According to General John W. Nicholson, Commander of the NATO Resolute Support Mission and U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, «Of the 98 U.S. designated terrorist groups globally, 20 are in the AF/PAK region. This is the highest concentration anywhere in the world. « These problems are relevant for all Central Asian countries without exception.

Afghanistan doesn't have the best of images at the moment, although it could become a successful country like some of the SEA states (South Korea, Thailand, etc.) Afghanistan has vast natural resources and is well-placed at the heart of Eurasia. If the conflict were to be resolved, the country would become one of the major international hubs connecting Europe, Western and Central Asia

to Southern and South-Eastern Asia. For the majority of the landlocked Central Asian states the shortest transport corridor to the shores of the Indian Ocean is through Afghanistan. This puts revitalizing regional cooperation to facilitate the reconstruction of Afghanistan on the agenda.

Detailed analysis of the whole array of border and territory related issues, as well as the influence of the Afghan situation on Central Asian security shows that all of these have a profound destabilizing impact on the situation in the region. Even the newly-emerging so-called «non-traditional» challenges and threats – such as the increasing spread of radical Islam and the increase in scale of the drug aggression – have not prompted the states to collectively resist these issues.

Thus, the countries of the region face a dire need to coordinate efforts in resolving a series of problems.

The stabilizing of the situation in Afghanistan would also make way for the implementation of a number of energy projects such as the pipelines and electricity lines from Central Asia to South Asian countries, like the TAPI and CASA 1000 projects. The geopolitical significance of Afghanistan is apparent. As the President of Uzbekistan rightfully noted, «Today the perspectives of stable and sustainable development in Central Asia are inextricably bound to the achievement of peace in neighboring Afghanistan.»

Preventive diplomacy opportunities to engage Afghanistan in the Central Asian cooperation process.

In the current circumstances of Central Asia, where tensions permanently existing between the states of the region are sometimes augmented to a state of crisis, the implementation of basically the whole spectrum of methodology of preventive diplomacy has become an imperative of time. During the first years of independence of the Central Asian countries the UN and its special missions have assisted in decreasing the level of conflict in the region and preventing the escalation and spread of the Tajik civil war of 1992 – 1997 to the other counties of Central Asia.

Significant dissent and relationship issues between the Central Asian countries have been in the UN field of view from the very beginning and required the creation of a regional organization dedicated to preventive activity.

The first such experience for the Central Asian countries was the establishment of the United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) in 2007, headquartered in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan). The UNRCCA

has been organizing meetings of Deputy Foreign Ministers every year since 2008. At the first of these meetings held on October 23, 2008, issues of combating terrorism and drug trafficking were discussed, as well as the rational use of water resources.ⁱ As of today, the UNRCCA has established and maintains relations with international and regional organizations active in Central Asia – the European Union, the OSCE, the SCO, NATO, the CIS, the CSTO, and the EurAsEC.

On November 17, 2017, at the 55th plenary meeting of the 72nd UN General Assembly session the Resolution for «The Role of the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia» was adopted. 57 UN member states participated in developing this resolution.

Now the Centre is tasked with implementing general initiatives aimed at resolving regional tasks on peace, security and development in the framework of the three-year Action Programs developed in consultation with Central Asian governments. The Program of Action for 2018–2020 concentrates on five key directions according to the Centre's mandate:

- Promoting preventive diplomacy in relations with the governments of the countries in the region;
- Monitoring and early prevention;
- Building partnerships to prevent conflicts;
- Strengthening the UN's preventive role in the region;
- Promoting cooperation and interaction between Central Asian countries and Afghanistan.

The development and strengthening of cooperation in the last two years between Central Asian countries at the Presidential level has certainly invigorated inter-parliamentary cooperation as well, which undoubtedly needed improvement. A powerful push for both interstate and inter-parliamentary relations in Central Asia came from the efforts of the Uzbek government to create a new political atmosphere in the region based on mutual trust and good-neighbourliness. Within a short amount of time Uzbekistan managed to resolve a number of issues with its neighbours in the region which remained outstanding for years. By proposing to develop joint approaches to the common use of transboundary rivers, to integrate regional economies and to develop regional trade, Uzbekistan is hoping to build a new format of cooperation in the region, where mutual economic prosperity will rule the day.

Central Asia has become the main priority of Uzbekistani foreign policy. In September 2017, Sh. Mirziyoyev declared the creation of a new political atmosphere in the region from the high rostrum of the UN, and called for regular consultative meetings of the heads of Central Asian states. The implementation of this concept could become a significant step towards coordinating the countries of the region in resolving the remaining issues.

In November 2017, regional issues were discussed at the UN international conference in Samarkand. Uzbekistan's current view on Afghanistan does not imply seeing it solely as a threat to regional security, but also as an important neighbor and partner. Uzbekistan deems it very important to integrate Afghanistan and Central Asian economies through broadening cooperation, in particular, through the implementation of regional infrastructure, trading, investment, transit and transport projects. Uzbekistan is interested in an expedient resolution of the Afghan conflict. A new perception of the Afghan problem has been formed, and this is the result of Tashkent's preventive diplomacy.

In December 2017, during the visit of the President of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani to Uzbekistan more than 40 export contracts were signed totaling over 500 million USD. The agreements are aimed at further strengthening the relations in economics, transit, security, energy, agriculture, healthcare, education and science, among other things. The improvement of the cooperation with Afghanistan aimed at putting the country back on peaceful track is the objective of Uzbekistan's economic diplomacy aimed at involving our neighbouring state in the region's multi-faceted relations.

The March 2018 international conference on Afghanistan in Tashkent «Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity» became a tangible contribution of the international community to resolving the Afghan conflict. The Declaration adopted at the conference reflects the need for joint efforts aimed at bringing peace and stability to Afghanistan.

Strengthening the role of parliamentary diplomacy in the region

The above-mentioned successes of preventive diplomacy were mostly achieved by the efforts of executive bodies. It seems that today in the region the potential of parliamentary cooperation is not fully utilized despite its being an effective mechanism of promoting national interests in the global community, considering that at the moment Central Asian states are closely integrated into a system of bilateral and multilateral relations. Inter-parliamentary cooperation in the region is exercised through preventive diplomacy which implies the implementation of actions aimed at «preventing the emergence of disputes between the parties,

preventing the escalation of existing disputes into conflicts and limiting the scale of conflicts after they arise». Studying the experience of developed countries' parliaments in inter-parliamentary cooperation, the need to improve the efficiency of inter-parliamentary relations, the support given to the development of the sociopolitical, trade and economic, cultural and other directions of cooperation on a bilateral and multilateral basis has become one of the priority tasks for Central Asian countries.

As it is seen, the efficiency of parliamentary cooperation in preventive diplomacy requires implementing a number of actions on building a trust environment. These would include:

- Systematic parliamentary group exchange;
- Creating a systematic exchange of information between the relevant committees of the parliaments;
- Experience exchange in legislation and conducting international events;
- Overseeing bilateral, regional and international treaties;
- Broadening the scope and scale of public awareness about parliamentary cooperation in order to increase the level of public consciousness and support the process of cooperation;
- The step-by-step formation of the legal framework governing inter-parliamentary cooperation.

The implementation of these suggestions could significantly increase the level of involvement and the role of regional parliaments in decision-making at all levels. Parliamentary diplomacy could become an important tool for increasing the efficiency of international cooperation at the regional level.

The Central Asian region, as it is, requires reaching reasonable compromises on all issues to create a comprehensive environment for sustainable development. To that end, creating inter-parliamentary unions and associations could be a promising direction of cooperation in the region.

Generally, in our opinion it is necessary to more fully use the untapped and unused potential of parliamentary cooperation to maintain peace and security and effectively prevent conflicts, seeing preventive diplomacy as an instrument of influencing the external environment to help resolve crises and restore stability. ■

Sabir BARYA

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THE ROLE OF THE CURRENT REGIONAL PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION IN IMPLEMENTATION OF PREVENTIVE DIPLOMACY AND THE ROLE OF AFGHANISTAN IN THE POLITICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA

Ladies and gentlemen,

First let me to thank the facilitators of this Seminar for inviting the Afghan Delegates.

Mr. Chairman,

The culture of consultation among Afghans has a long history in our society and all the conflicts and disputes have been solved via elder meetings or local council (Jirga) and also all the issues at the national or regional level have been settled in these meetings or assemblies.

Usually the Jirgas have been held by the people's initiative when there was the risk of collapse of government, or a king quit, or when the nation was in war with the enemy. Although the number of participants were few and there was no protocol for these meetings, but very important and vital decisions have been made in these meetings or Jirgas. For example, in 1748, through a national big assembly (Loya Jirga) in Sher Sorkh of Kandahar Province, Ahmad Shah Durani has been elected as the king of Afghanistan.

During peace, other Jirgas have been held by decrees or invitation to decide on some important national issues or to approve constitution.

The idea of establishment of parliament or national assembly as a key institution started in the beginning of twentieth century, during the kingdom of Amir Habibullah Khan.

King Amanullah Khan, who replaced his father Amir Habibullah Khan, named his epoch as the era of constitution and parliament. He took important steps toward the conditional democracy and established the first parliament in 1920 and prepared Afghanistan new constitution that was similar of Turkey and Napoleonic Code. It was called Neizam Nama of Afghanistan Government. From history point of view, this was the first modern constitution which reflects its cultural, social and political achievements and approved in 1923 Loya Jirga, while in 1928 a lot of changes have been made in parliamentary system of Afghanistan.

As the result of his trip to Iran, Turkey and different European countries, King Amanullah Khan wanted to use the experience from parliaments of these countries. Therefore, in five-day Loya Jirga, a great deal of amendments have been brought to constitution and instead of Government Assembly, 150 people have been elected as the parliament members for three years.

King Nader Shah (1929), the person who had the experience of democracy from East and west, India and France, approved the Constitution in Loya Jirga of 1930 which had 302 members out of which 111 persons have been elected as parliament members.

King Zahir Shah, who succeeded his father King Nadir Shah, approved the constitution in Loya Jirga that was held in 1964.

According to this constitution, a parliament of two houses has been established.

Mr. Chairman,

The record of people cooperation on solving the mutual regional problems is more than what the memory of history could keep. For the time being, our region faces with serious threats. The Daish (Islamic State of Iraq and the Syria-ISIS) has focused their swords toward our region, and if the Al-Qaeda, Daish and Taliban who misuse and abuse the Islam, get together, they will destabilize the Asia.

And if they are fighting with each other for the control of caliphate, manslaughter or a real massacre will happen. This threat really spread its shadow everywhere

and for the time being it is the responsibility of Asian countries to coordinate a joined unified combat against the drug smuggling which is one of the income source of terrorists and fundamentalists.

We should not forget that strategic position of Afghanistan is very important for the fundamentalist and terrorist groups, thus, the above-mentioned threats require the cooperation of all countries in the region. Therefore, it is necessary that the parliaments of these countries to initiate the regular dialogues on these threats and the ways of cooperation on different aspects of solving the mutual problems of the region and to hold regional conferences in order to find the ways of fighting against the inauspicious phenomena of terrorism, fundamentalism and drug.

Settling down the problem of terrorism, fundamentalism and drug and economic cooperation in the region requires the cooperation of regional parliaments. If we don't combat against this danger sincerely, it will devour more victims and will spread furthermore and tomorrow it will be too late to prevent it.

In order to rescue the region from threats of terrorism which all countries of the region is burning in its fire, I strongly propose that the parliaments of the region start working on a mechanism in order find the roots of terrorism and to analyze it and finally to find a mechanism to fight against this threat.

For example, if a person suffers from the pain and doesn't know from where it comes and what the reason is, so he refers to a doctor to diagnose the disease. After the diagnosing the disease, the doctor starts its treatment by recommending medicine, and if he doesn't get well, the doctor will recommend to operate the patient. The parliament mechanism should also diagnose the disease and reason of suffering and should start its treatment. By using the following methods, the parliaments can find some solutions for the serious problems:

- Passing the unified restricted laws in the region for eradicating terrorism, fundamentalism and drug.
- Serious monitoring of implementation of the enforced laws and the measures of governments on combating against the above mentioned problems and threats.
- conceptualization of fighting against the drug, terrorism and fundamentalism.

The role of Loya Jirga was important and that was the symbol of Afghan democracy, therefore, the western experts recommend «Loya Jirga Democracy» for

Afghanistan. Emergency Loya Jirga or Constitution Loya Jirga that have been held in the beginning of twenty first century, are the examples.

Now, the Parliament of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan established friendship committees with the parliaments of Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Czech Republic, Poland, Canada, Iran, Ukraine, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan and they are working to establish good relationships with the parliament of other countries as well as Parliament institutions such as:

- Inter-parliamentary Union (IPU);
- Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA);
- Parliamentary Association of ECO member states (PAECO);
- Parliamentary Union of Islamic countries (PULC);\
- Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE;
- Parliamentary Assembly of NATO;
- European Parliament (EP)

Mr. Chairman!

The parliaments of regional countries that consist of elected representatives, have a vital role in settling down the disputes and play the main role in promoting regional trust and economic development. Based on this viewpoint, the parliament of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has sent a message to the parliaments of neighboring countries and asked them to hold an inter-parliamentarian dialogue in order to fight against terrorism, fundamentalism and drug and to find effective ways to fight against these inauspicious phenomena. I hope that the parliaments of regional countries accept the initiative of Afghan Parliament and to take important steps toward eradicating terrorism, fundamentalism and drug in the region and all over the world. ■

Sayora KHOJAEVA

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and Human Rights

THE ROLE OF WOMEN-DEPUTIES OF THE PARLIAMENT IN INTER-PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION ON PEACEFUL MEDIATION AND SETTLEMENT OF LOCAL CONFLICTS

Please allow me to express my deep gratitude for the organization of this extremely relevant forum for the Central Asian region, and for the chance to speak.

More and more points of conflict and instability arise worldwide every year, and all the efforts of the international community have not yet been able to turn this trend around. There are also the long-running conflicts of those territories where the bloodshed has been going on for years, if not decades. A typical example of such a hotspot is Afghanistan. Peace has abandoned this mountainous country over thirty years ago, and now there is no hope in sight for the expedient resolution of the conflict, if you forgive my pessimism.

Aside from the Taliban movement, there are over 20 different rebel and terrorist networks active in Afghanistan at the moment, making Afghanistan the region with the highest concentration of extremist and terrorist groups in the world.

Today, whenever one speaks of Afghanistan, we are immediately confronted with an image of a heavily armed Mujahedeen, a fully enclosed woman and the disfigured face of Bibi Aisha. If you recall, in 2010 the world was shocked by the photo of a 19-year-old Aisha Mohammadzai on the cover of the Time magazine. The girl had neither her nose nor her ears. Her husband had cut them off as punishment for running away from home.

Information sources tell us that 85% of Afghan women are illiterate, just 20% of the girls go to primary school and only 5% go to secondary school. Only 12% of girls over 15 can read and write.

According to UNICEF, in 57% of the marriages the bride was under 16, and 80% of the marriages are either forced or shotgun marriages, which are made to resolve debt obligations or to put an end to disputes and blood feud hostilities. Rural population considers the age of 8 to 10 to be the proper age for marriage. The level of maternal and child mortality remains one of the highest in the world – 1600 deaths per 100,000 births, 280 out of a thousand children die before reaching the age of five. Afghanistan is one of the few countries where women's life expectancy is lower than men's and stands at a mere 44 years, which is one of the lowest numbers worldwide.

And all of that is happening right next to us; not far away, but in some dozens of kilometers away just over the Amu Darya river. The active part of the female society of Uzbekistan and I personally are constantly gnawed by the thought, and I ask myself the question – what could be done to help the country, how to stop this 30-year-long chaos, and whether the international community is indeed so powerless to stop this senseless bloodshed.

Going into the history of Afghanistan, one can note that the relations between men and women in the country have been fairly standard for Asian Islamic states for centuries. The first talk of the status of the fairer sex in the Afghan society began in the second half of the XIX century, and in 1919 the female residents of the country were granted the right to vote. In the middle of the last century the women were able to lose the hijab, and the Constitution of 1960 postulated gender equality for the first time.

But the instability and the civil war crossed out all of these positive changes. Fighting, poverty, a lack of social and legal security, widows and orphans – all of that made Afghan women dependable on men. The ascent of the Taliban to power made their position even worse, corrupting not only the relations between men and women, but also the foundations of Islam.

Ahmet Rashid, a prominent Pakistani international journalist well-known for his book "Taliban", quotes some of the Taliban decrees of 1996 "on women and other cultural issues", signed by their leader Mullah Muhammad Omar and issued after the seizure of Kabul. One is more absurd than the other. For example, during a medical examination both female patient and male doctor had to wear hijab; sewing women's clothes and taking measurements of the female body was prohibited, and

if fashion magazines were found in the shop, the tailor would be arrested; music and dancing during wedding ceremonies were prohibited, and so on.

Even today, so many years after the fall of the radical Islam regime of the Taliban, the position of women in the country is still lamentable. Most women are excluded from all of the social processes.

Article 23 of the new Constitution of Afghanistan adopted in 2004 states that men and women “have same rights and obligations before the law”, and that any and all forms of discrimination in the country are prohibited. Still, Umaira Rassuli, the director of Medica Afghanistan charitable organization, says, “... the provisions of the Constitution are not a part of the daily life of Afghan women.” And furthermore, according to her, “Women play no role in the Afghan society. Their rights as citizens are not recognized and are not respected. “

Amnesty International echoes the argument, saying that “the life of Afghan women, who were granted wide social rights by the Constitution, has basically only changed on paper.”

Since achieving independence, The Republic of Uzbekistan and its first President I.A. Karimov have put forward initiatives on stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan from the highest of rostrums. We have a saying, “Kushning tinch, sent inch”, which means “If all is quiet at your neighbor’s place, then it is quiet at your place as well”.

A meeting of the “6+2” Contact group was convened in Tashkent in 1999 by the initiative of the Uzbek side. The meeting was held at the level of foreign affairs deputy ministers of the neighbouring states of Afghanistan, as well as the US and Russia, with the participation of the opposing parties’ representatives including the Taliban. The Tashkent Declaration on Fundamental Principles for a Peaceful Settlement of the Conflict in Afghanistan was adopted as a result.

Yet as time has shown, the geopolitical interests of the superpowers proved to be higher than the interests of this long-suffering land, and little has changed to this day.

Continuing the course of the former President, the current President of Uzbekistan Sh. M. Mirziyoyev has not only voiced his vision of the settlement of the Afghan issue but has also begun to put his words into action. According to the Concept of Foreign Policy of the Republic of Uzbekistan, the resolution of the situation, achieving peace and stability in Afghanistan are some of the main priorities.

The connections between our countries are being strengthened and gradually developed in all areas. The recent two years' large-scale work and the role and importance of the upcoming political action in Tashkent were discussed on the eve of the Tashkent conference on Afghanistan titled "Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity" at the Panel session on cultural, humanitarian and educational cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan. The deputies of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan took part in it along with representatives of the ministries and agencies, as well as the other public and analytical institutions.

In October 2017 a delegation headed by the special representative of the President of Uzbekistan on Afghanistan I. Irgashev visited the city of Ghazna and discussed the issues of restoration of the mausoleum of Abu Raikhon Beruni, a great scientist.

In line with the governmental decree, a special educational center for the training of Afghan national specialists was created in the city of Termez, Surxondaryo province, in November 2017.

The main task of the center is training staff in different fields, as well as retraining and vocational training of Afghan specialists.

The center's official opening ceremony was held in January 2018, and the first 96 Afghan citizens arrived to Surxondaryo province for training.

Representative of Afghanistan are taking an active part in various international scientific, practical and cultural events conducted in our country.

An international conference "Peace Process Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity" was held on March 26 and 27 in Tashkent. The conference was convened at the initiative of Sh. M. Mirziyoyev and caused a great deal of interest with the international community. It was attended by the President of Afghanistan Mohammad Ashraf Ghani, the Special UN Representative in Afghanistan Tadamiti Yamamoto, as well as the leaders of the foreign affairs agencies from the USA, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, India, Iran, China, Pakistan, Russia, France, Turkey, Central Asian countries and many others.

The Tashkent Declaration adopted at the conference specifically highlights the following: "Stress the importance of women's full and meaningful participation in Afghan reconciliation, security and economy, pledge continued support for international efforts aimed at Afghan women's empowerment and remain fully

committed to support the implementation of Afghanistan's National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security”.

In light of the Tashkent Declaration statements, to provide support and help for the women of Afghanistan, all of us – the women of Central Asia and beyond – must make use of all the available opportunities to restore peace and stability, and first of all to use the potential of women which is represented at the highest level in Afghanistan.

These are the women working in public authorities, in the government, as well as deputies of Parliament. According to information sources, 5 ministries and 6 embassies are currently headed by women, and 25% of the parliamentarians are women as well, even though the final number after the elections on October 20, 2018, is yet to be seen.

Our Institute for Democracy and Human Rights is a non-governmental organization which brings together prominent female scientists of the country. Being deeply concerned by our neighbour's situation, remaining dedicated to the ideas of full empowerment of women in the context of human rights, realizing that women and children suffer the most in modern conditions of war; we have initiated an Appeal to the mothers of Afghanistan.

In the Appeal we call upon the whole women's community of Afghanistan to unite against the war and to leave behind a prosperous and a civilized country to their children and grandchildren. And not only do we call for that, but also suggest a practical measure – the creation of special courses, held quarterly at the very least, for women aimed at educating women. The course shall be based on the Termez Center with participation of international donors. There is a saying, “When you teach a man, you only teach one person; when you teach a woman, you teach a nation”. Aside from that, it is difficult to say it better than the great French writer Honoré de Balzac: “The future of a nation lies in the hands of mothers”.

Research shows that the peace processes with women's participation lead to a more stable peace. Yet at the moment women only comprise 7.5% of the participants of peacemaking processes, and even those “have forced their own way to the negotiation table”, the experts say.

As was noted at the international Tashkent conference, significant progress can be observed in Afghanistan at the moment. Thanks to cooperation with partners, the necessary infrastructure is being constructed there, including railroads.

Special attention is paid to the education of the Afghani youth with some being educated in Uzbekistan as mentioned.

In that vein, the initiative on establishing inter-parliamentary cooperation on peaceful mediation and local conflict settlement between women-deputies of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan is very timely.

Currently our two-chamber Parliament, the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan, has sufficient experience in bilateral relations with many neighboring states.

Women-deputies comprise 16% of the total number of deputies. Aside from the Parliament, our women are also represented in the authorities, the education system, agriculture and law enforcement agencies. As mentioned before, a sufficient number of women were also present in Afghanistan state authorities and the Medjles-e-Melli. Out of the 249 deputies in the Parliament of Afghanistan, 25% of the seats belong to women, and another 17% in the Senate.

At the same time, it should be noted that the establishment of inter-parliamentary cooperation on peaceful mediation and local conflict settlement is going to be a new experience for the women-deputies of the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan. A lack of experience and skills in this field is probably going to show. And therefore, the special training titled “Principles of preventive methods in mediation and conflict resolution for members of Parliaments of Central Asian countries and Afghanistan” is very timely.

Aside from that, the next year of 2019 is the election year for the Oliy Majlis of the Republic of Uzbekistan and the local representative bodies – Kengashi of people’s deputies. Our Institute, supported by the OSCE and the Small Grants Program team of the US Embassy, is holding a series of training seminars for the future deputies on the improvement of their political and legal culture in the lead-up to the election. The materials of this seminar are certainly going to be brought to the attention of the target group.

In our opinion, inter-parliamentary cooperation on peaceful mediation and local conflict settlement should not only imply cooperation between the parliamentarians of both countries, but also between the deputies of the local representative bodies as well as meetings of the women-deputies.

The establishment of regional relations between the women-deputies of the local representative bodies according to the geographical principle seems a wise measure.

For example, in the Central Asian region three countries bordering Afghanistan are the most influenced by it – Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. First of all, this is caused by the length of the borders. Afghanistan's border with Tajikistan (Khatlon province) stretches for 1309 kilometers, the border with Uzbekistan (Balkh province) is 156 kilometers, and the border with Turkmenistan in the provinces of Herat, Badghis, Faryab and Dzhaudzh is 854 kilometers long.

The second point defining the proximity of the mentioned Central Asian states to their southern neighbor is the fact that the border separates fraternal peoples. The valleys of Panjshir and Salang rivers in the north-eastern part of Afghanistan are populated by the second largest ethnic group of the country – the Tajik people.

Central parts of Northern Afghanistan (Balkh province) along the Uzbek border are populated by 1.5–2 million of ethnic Uzbeks (about 9% of Afghanistan's total population), and the north-western part by border to Turkmenistan is home to up to 500,000 Turkmens.

Hence, the historical, cultural and linguistic commonalities of the peoples across the border and the maintained family ties facilitate that as well. About 0.5 million residents of Eastern Bukhara fled to Afghanistan in the 1920s, and that is why by 1970s there were 250,000 emigrants from Soviet Central Asia and their descendants among the Uzbeks alone.

These are precisely the factors that could be used in the establishment of close contacts and cultural and humanitarian ties between the regions.

As for cooperation between women-deputies, experience exchange on legal framework reforms and the improvement of social legislation could be practiced.

Due to the growth of the number of non-governmental organizations both in Afghanistan and in the neighbouring countries, exchange of experience in improving legislation on non-governmental organizations and other civil society institutes could be useful, as well as on lobbying the Law "On Domestic Violence" and extra privileges for women.

In general, the idea voiced at the seminar on creating the Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the peoples of Central Asia is very timely.

Yet prior to discussing any cooperation with Afghanistan, the safety of the participants of events has to be ensured. The unabated conflict in Afghanistan creates

two types of threats for the Central Asian region, including Uzbekistan: terror attacks and drug trafficking, and evident growth is displayed in both of every year.

One thing has to be said and understood here. While there are still attacks carried out on the border posts and until a relative lull in the fighting is achieved, all of our proposals are going to remain just that – a Declaration, for no country would want to sacrifice its citizens even for the highest of ideals.

The complicated military and political situation in Afghanistan is one of the main barriers on the path to its regional integration and the implementation of the Central Asian states' top priority joint interest: to deliver alternative and mutually complementing transport communications. Finally, it should be acknowledged that the Afghan problem has no military solution. In our opinion, it is the Shanghai Organization for Cooperation (hereinafter the SOC) that should convince everyone of this, being a regional interstate organization, whose members are most interested in the expedient stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan.

The support of the SOC could become a significant factor in the establishment of the permanent negotiations process aimed at ending the fighting and transforming the political system in accordance with the interests of all the groups and strata of the Afghan society. Each subject of contemporary Afghan politics must take part in this, including state authorities, political parties, regional and tribal representatives and religious figures. The participation of the SOC in the Afghan settlement is of particular importance precisely because the only real chance of solving the Afghan problem is to create a healthy economic situation in the country.

It appears, we could go on forever talking about improving the situation in Afghanistan, but first of all we must realize that we are standing on the brink of a historic moment for Afghanistan. And that historic moment hinges on the wishes and actions of the Afghans themselves, their responsibility for the future generations and the future of their country; the Afghan people must express their firm will, their desire and their position.

As mentioned, the resolution of the Afghan issue by military means is considered to be unproductive and dead-end. Therefore, finding the specific international legal mechanisms for the implementation of legal policy is of immediate interest.

In that context, the policy of national reconciliation remains currently central for Afghanistan. The policy of national reconciliation as the most important way of

conflict settlement should be compromise-based and conducted under the leadership of the legitimate government.

The preamble of the UN Charter states: “WE THE PEOPLES OF THE UNITED NATIONS DETERMINED to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights”

The Astana Declaration of 09/05/2018 on the empowerment of women in Afghanistan stressed “the importance of full and meaningful engagement of women in the national reconciliation process, as well as in the social and economic life of Afghanistan.”

Women’s organizations significantly contribute to the peace process acting as its advocates both in society and in their families. Educational work is important to achieve lasting peace. It should be propagating the kind of peace culture wherein fairness and tolerance are ensured, especially in relation to women and girls. It is impossible to live in a country and not be aware of its political processes, for they affect every woman. It is important to engage women in various social and political processes. It is obvious that the conflicts cannot be settled at once, but teaching how to behave properly in conflict situations, for instance, how to resolve the situation with minimal harm, is the main thing. Women can play a major role in peace-building not only in the region, but in the entire world.

A great example of a cooperation symbiosis between the public authorities, non-governmental organizations and international organizations would be to adopt a Concept for combining the efforts of women in the region – “Family. Society. Peace.” It should be promoting the idea of elevating a woman’s status within the family, increasing their education level and preventing conflicts.

A comprehensive analysis of the situation and an integrated Action Plan on stabilizing Afghanistan for the next 5 to 10 years are required. But for that, above all else, the country needs peace.

As the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Ms. Federica Mogherini rightly noted at the Tashkent conference: “Establishing peace in Afghanistan is going to create great opportunities not only for the Afghan people, but also for the peoples of Central Asia”. Uzbekistan as Afghanistan’s closest neighbor is, of course, genuinely interested in that.

In conclusion I would like to once again thank the UN Regional Center for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia and the Special Representative of the UN Secretary General, Ms. Natalia Gherman, as well as the whole team, for the outstanding organization of such an impressive forum.

We hope, the suggestions and the initiatives put forward here will be heard, and, in case they are implemented, that they will serve towards the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan, as well as the strengthening of peace, friendship and cooperation in the entire region. ■

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PROSPECTS OF INTER-PARLIAMENTARY COOPERATION OF FEMALE MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT: CENTRAL ASIA AND AFGHANISTAN

Introduction

Ensuring gender equality is one of the most important aspects of government policy in many countries in the world. It is a trend in Kazakhstan as well, which ratified the international treaties on non-discrimination of women. Moreover, having implemented the gender equality strategy of 2006–2016, Kazakhstan has continued its updated program on ensuring gender equality as part of the adopted concept of family and gender policy in the Republic of Kazakhstan by 2030, where one of the objectives is to «expand women's participation in ensuring peace and security».

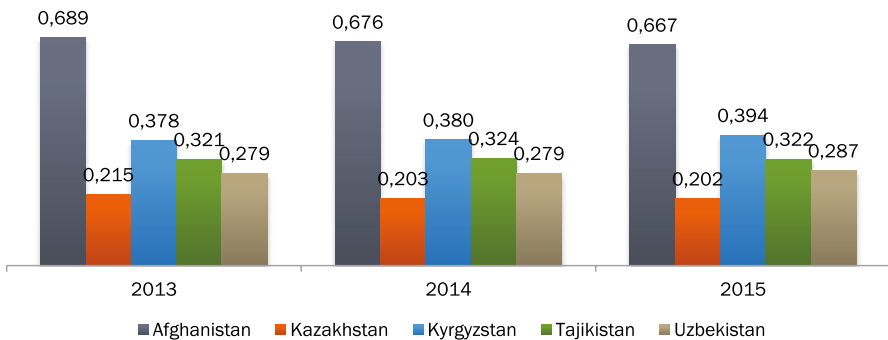
In this regard, it becomes relevant to research the potential and the possibilities for the women-deputies of Kazakhstan's Parliament in inter-parliamentary cooperation on peace mediation and resolving local conflicts which may be positively influenced by the following factors:

- A substantial representation of women-deputies in legislative authorities of Central Asia and Afghanistan;
- The currently existing practice of inter-parliamentary cooperation

- The friendly intent of mentioned countries on building up cooperation of women-deputies.

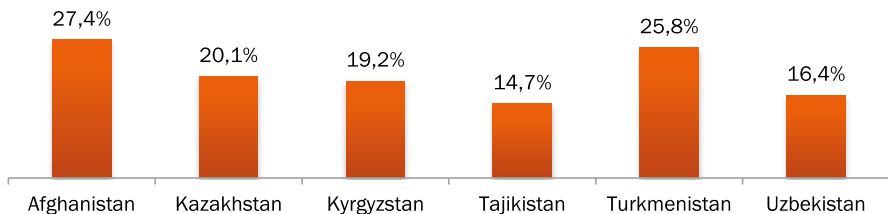
Representation of women-deputies in Central Asia and Afghanistan

According to the latest data of the Gender Inequality Index of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in 2013–2015 countries in the region are displaying relatively stable dynamics in gender equality. That said, a relatively favorable situation is evolving in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which in turn, indicates the existing potential for exchanging experience and good practice of women-politicians from these countries with the women-politicians of Afghanistan where the above mentioned index score is much lower.



Gender Inequality Index of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP)

According to the UNDP Gender Inequality Index data of 2015 which examines the male/female representation ratio in legislative authorities, a relatively high representation rate of women was seen in Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, where the rate of representation was over 20 %.



Representation of women in legislative authorities according to UNDP data of 2015

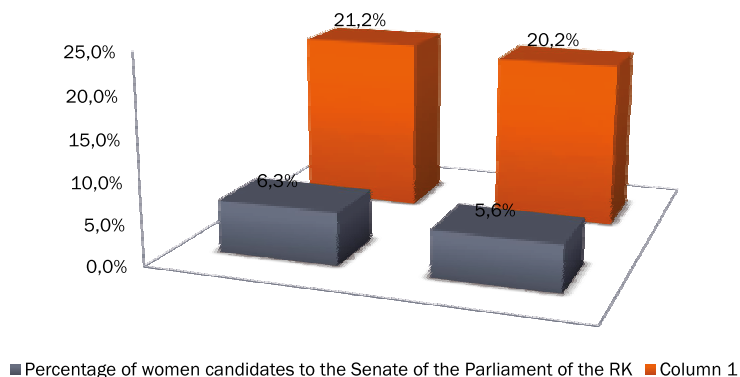
Thus, the numbers shown, display that in Central Asian countries and Afghanistan women occupy firm positions in deputy corps, which in turn, indicates significant prospects for the establishment of inter-parliamentary cooperation between women-deputies in the region.

Representation of women in legislative authorities in the Republic of Kazakhstan

As for Kazakhstan, data from the first quarter of 2018 shows the following representation statistics of women in legislative authorities.

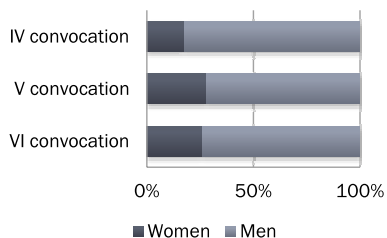
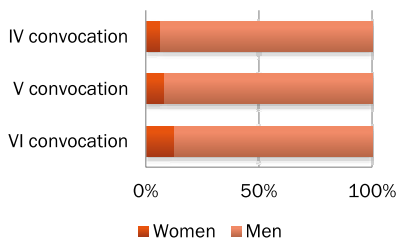
According to materials of Kazakhstan's Central Electoral Commission, the dynamic of women's nomination during the latest two electoral campaigns to the Parliament of the Republic of Kazakhstan shows an insignificant decrease in women's activity over the election period. In this way, the share of women-candidates to the Senate of the Parliament of the RK has decreased by 0.7 % compared to the earlier period. At the same time, the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the RK has seen 1 % fewer women-candidates.

In addition, the number of women-candidates to the Senate is several times less than the number of women-candidates to the Mazhilis.



Dynamics of nomination of women-candidates during the past two elections to the Parliament

The pre-election situation that has formed is reflected on the gender composition of the Parliament of the RK. The Senate is seeing insignificant growth of the number of women over the past three convocations while the share of women in the VI (latest) convocation of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of RK has decreased from 28 % to 26.2 %.



Representation of women in the latest three convocations of the Senate of the Parliament of the RK

Representation of women in the latest three convocations of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the RK

At the same time, the percentage of women in the Parliament of the RK is considerably less. Currently, of the 107 Mazhilis deputies 28 are women, while the Senate is composed of 6 women versus 41 men. Thus, while the Mazhilis is represented by 26.2% women which is in line with global practice where the average indicator is 23.4%, the percentage of women in the Senate of the Parliament of the RK is only 12.8% of the total number of the chamber's deputies. That said, the average global indicator of women-deputies in the higher chamber of parliament, amounting to 22.9%, is almost twice higher than the Kazakhstani number.

A favorable situation is evolving among the Senate and Mazhilis committee chairmen with 5 women of the total 13 committee heads of both chambers.

	Total	Men	Women	% of women
Committee chairmen of the Senate of the Parliament of the RK	6	3	3	50%
Committee chairmen of the Mazhilis of the Parliament of the RK	7	5	2	28,6%

Percentage of women among senior executives of the Parliament of the RK, VI convocation

At the same time, it is necessary to note that the Committee on International Relations, Defense and Security of the Parliament of RK is headed by a woman, which implies favorable conditions on expanding the cooperation of women in peace mediation in the region.

In general, upon a closer look at Kazakhstan's experience in the modern stage, a rather positive situation is evolving in ensuring gender equality, which is a positive factor for the further development of mechanisms of inter-parliamentary cooperation of Kazakhstani women-deputies with women-deputies of other countries.

The existing practice of inter-parliamentary cooperation of Kazakhstan with countries of the Central Asian region and Afghanistan

The existing inter-parliamentary relations can be divided into multilateral and bilateral.

Currently the bilateral inter-parliamentary cooperation of Kazakhstan with other countries has its characteristic features, however some common features can be noted:

- ☑ Institutionalization of existing relations by creating dedicated councils, parliament groups and other associations. For instance, in 2015 the legislative authorities of Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan have created an inter-parliamentary cooperation council. In order to strengthen the relations of Kazakhstan's Parliament with the Mejlis of Turkmenistan parliamentary friendship groups were created. Similar groups were established by the parliaments of Kazakhstan and Afghanistan. In 2017 by a joint decision of the two chambers of the Oliy Majlis of Uzbekistan an inter-parliamentary group on cooperation with the Republic of Kazakhstan was created;
- ☑ Wide range of cooperation aspects. Aspects of trade and economic, cultural-humanitarian and water management cooperation are the key topics. High importance is also placed on developing recommendations on converging and bringing congruence to national legislations, as well as experience exchange between parliamentarians.

Multilateral relations are maintained within the frameworks of international parliamentary organizations. There are slightly under 10 organizations where Central Asian countries and Afghanistan are represented. These can be divided into international parliamentary organizations with «full» and «partial» representation of the region. However for today's session the most relevant topic is the inclusion of special committees, groups or other institutions on gender equality into the orbit of international parliamentary organizations. As we can see, of the 8 mentioned international institutions only 2 are lacking specialized associations for gender issues.

Organization	Institution on gender policy issues
Full representation	
Parliamentary Union of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation	Standing Specialized Committee on Human Rights, Women and Family
Inter-Parliamentary Union	Forum of Women Parliamentarians
Bureau of Women Parliamentarians	
Partial representation	Специальный представитель по гендерным вопросам
Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe	Special Representative on Gender Issues
Межпарламентская Ассамблея государств-участников Содружества Независимых Государств	Inter-Parliamentary Assembly of the Commonwealth of Independent States
Parliamentary Assembly of the Collective Security Treaty Organization	—
Asian Parliamentary Assembly	Session of the General Assembly on the Status of Women and Children
Asian Forum of Parliamentarians on Population and Development	Standing Committee on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
Group for cooperation with the countries of South and Central Asia and the Caucasus	—

Thus, the existing practice of inter-parliamentary cooperation has unlimited potential for providing effective platforms for women-deputies' participation in inter-parliamentary cooperation on peace mediation and resolving local conflicts.

Conclusion

Based on the above, it can be noted that Central Asian countries and Afghanistan possess a series of factors enabling the creation and promotion of relations between women-deputies in the region. In general, when given a platform to exchange information, women-deputies will be able to obtain practical experience and knowledge to develop concrete recommendations and proposals on delivering gender-sensitive legislation in Central Asian countries and Afghanistan in order to aid gender equality and improve the status of women in the region. ■

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THE PREVENTIVE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ARMENIA-AZERBAIJAN NAGORNO-KARABAKH CONFLICT

Introduction

Albeit the historical roots of this conflict goes back to many years ago, it was transformed into an armed conflict after 1988 lasting until 1994. Thus, as a result of Armenian aggression against Azerbaijan, 20 % of Azerbaijan territories were occupied by the Republic of Armenia that left around 22,000–25,000 people killed. According to UNDP studies of 2007, about 100,000 people were injured and 50,000 people were disabled as a result of the war. 4,471 citizens of Azerbaijan were declared missing, out of which 278 were women. A total of 1,391 people were released from Armenian captivity, out of which 343 were women. The Internally Displaced People (IDP) are more or less equally divided between women (50.4 %) and men (46.6 %),

In 1993, the UN Security Council adopted 4 resolution regarding the conflict and demanded the immediate withdrawal of Armenian military forces from Azerbaijan's occupied territories. For instance, the Resolutions number 822, 853, 874 and 884 call on immediate withdrawal of Armenian troops from Azerbaijan's Kelbajar, Aghdam, Fizuly, Jabrayil, Gubadly and Zangilan districts which were occupied in 1993.

In 1996, in the Lisbon Summit, OSCE member states (except Armenia) adopted and signed a final declaration which was also related to Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. According to that declaration, Nagorno-Karabakh conflict should be resolved under the territorial integrity of the Azerbaijan Republic; legal status of

Nagorno-Karabakh should be defined in an agreement based on self-determination which confers on Nagorno-Karabakh the highest degree of self-rule within Azerbaijan; the guaranteed security for Nagorno-Karabakh and its whole population, including mutual obligations to ensure compliance by all the Parties with the provisions of the settlement.

Parliamentary Assembly of Council of Europe (PACE) in 2005 reiterated that “considerable parts of the territory of Azerbaijan are still occupied by Armenian forces, and separatist forces are still in control of the Nagorno-Karabakh region.” PACE therefore, “Recalled Resolutions of the UN Security Council and urged the parties concerned to comply with them, in particular by withdrawing military forces from any occupied territories”.

Except the UN, OSCE and PACE, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation, Non-alignment movement have adopted a number of resolutions demanding to resolve the conflict in the framework of Azerbaijan’s territorial integrity and sovereignty.

Women for Conflict Prevention and Peace-building in the South Caucasus

In 2000, the UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 recognised, as a matter of international peace and security, the urgent need to address women’s participation in peace processes and peace building, as well as the need to protect women and girls from egregious violations of their rights during and after violent conflict.

Resolution 1325 urges all actors to increase the participation of women and incorporate gender perspectives in all United Nations peace and security efforts. It also calls on all parties to conflict to take special measures to protect women and girls from gender-based violence, particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, in situations of armed conflict. The resolution provides a number of important operational mandates, with implications for Member States and the entities of the United Nations system.

Since then a lot of networking activities, projects, conferences, etc. from grassroots to governmental level have been took place. Women in Azerbaijan are actively included in promoting peace at the national, regional, and international levels. In accordance with the provisions of Resolution 1325 of the UN Security Council, United Nations Development Fund for Women UNIFEM in 2001 started a project initiative “Women for Conflict Prevention and Peace-building in the Southern Caucasus”, which was carried out in two phases (phase I: 2001–2004; phase II: 2004–2007). One of the most important outcomes of this project was the establishment of the women’s group “Coa-

lition 1325” working on the peace process in line of the principles of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

Coalition 1325

The “Coalition 1325,” uniting women from various parties as well as social, scientific, and academic institutions, and directed at propagating ideas that are reflected in Resolution 1325 (2000) of the UNSC.

On September 6, 2002, in the framework of this initiative, 24 women from Parliament, state agencies, the NGO community, political parties and mass media, gathered at the UN House in Azerbaijan to set up a women’s coalition in support of Resolution 1325 called “Coalition 1325.”

The main aim of coalition is to ensure women’s involvement and active participation in conflict prevention and resolution within the framework of national, regional and international institutions in Azerbaijan; to establish relations and to achieve close co-operation with women’s organizations active in various countries; to make every effort to prevent any conflicts arising on ethnic and religious grounds; to engage refugee and IDP women more closely in peace-building.

From the moment of its foundation, the Coalition was invited to participate in various projects, that increased the available information for Azerbaijani society regarding the contents of Resolution 1325, emphasizing the importance of the active participation of women in decision-making processes, and supporting the role of women in actions designed to help building a peace. Participants in the Coalition conducted twelve training sessions on the topic of “Promoting gender equality in the processes of building peace,” which was conducted in various regions of Azerbaijan, and two roundtable discussions on the topic of “Participation of Azerbaijani women in decision-making processes at the national and international levels.”

The Network for Caucasian Women; Peace starts at home

That initiative was created in parallel to the official peace process, The Network united women from Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia, who were trained on women’s rights. The UNSC Resolution 1325 provided an opportunity to discuss what the peace process means to them and how women in general could participate.

Women divided into groups, and one of the groups was working on contacts with the Minsk Group. The subject of training was about the place of women in the conflict solution and post-conflict rehabilitation/reconstruction once the peace agreement were signed.

Women Connect Across Conflicts:

Since its creation, the national coalition has carried out a number of initiatives in the field of women's participation in peace-building. Starting from 2010, the UN Women with support of the European Union has been implementing another cross-regional programme titled "Women Connect Across Conflicts: Building Accountability for Implementation of UN SCR 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889" that aims to enhance the capacity of Women's human rights activists and gender equality advocates, and their networks to effectively and meaningfully engage, influence, and mobilize for dialogues on security and peace issues at various levels (nationally and regionally) in the South Asia (Pakistan and Afghanistan), the South Caucasus (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) and the Central Asia/Fergana Valley (Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan). On May 2011, a meeting took place to define ways and format for the involvement of women into peace dialogues within across-region, particularly focused on Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Representatives of women NGOs and networks from Armenia, Azerbaijan and women from the Women Peace Corps participated therein.

As a result of the meeting the participants outlined inter alia the following challenges and opportunities for women's participation in the peace processes:

1. Lack of exchange of information on peace activities
2. Lack of cooperation with various political groups
3. Non-existence of common understanding of the "Peace" concept
4. Non-involvement of youth in the peace-building processes
5. Lack of clear demand from the society (activities of women organizations and networks should be demand-driven and based on opinions, needs and requirement of the society).

Woman to woman

It is a Kvinna till Kvinna Foundation initiative in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 1325. The Armenian and Azerbaijani women activists (who include Armenian women from Nagorno-Karabakh region as well as Azerbaijani women from Karabakh who are IDPs) organized meetings and trainings for women in their local communities. Together, they tried to build links between the women in divided communities and strengthen their NGO cooperation through joint meetings.

This initiative, part of the EPNK-2 phase, includes the Armenian organisations Democracy Today and the Women's Resource Centre, along with the Azerbaijani organisations the Association for Protection of Women's Rights and Yuva

Humanitarian Centre. The groups educate women on human rights and public participation, as well as helping to combat violence against women, empower young women and encourage feminist activity.

The Armenian and Azerbaijani women activists (who include Armenian women from Nagorno-Karabakh as well as Azerbaijani women from Karabakh who are internally displaced persons (IDPs)) organise meetings and trainings for women in their local communities. Together, they try to build links between the women in divided communities and strengthen their NGO cooperation in joint meetings.

Strengthening Women's Capacity for Peace-building in the South Caucasus Region

Another example of an extensive initiative aimed at supporting women's participation in peace processes is the project: "Strengthening Women's Capacity for Peace-building in the South Caucasus Region", which is carried out by CARE Austria and financed by the EU. In February 2010, CARE International in the Caucasus together with 6 partner organizations launched a three-year project of "Strengthening Women's Capacity for Peace-building in the South Caucasus". The specific women's related areas of concern are identified, and the elements of advocacy and lobbying for policy makers on the local, national and international level were developed in order to facilitate women's participation for peace-building processes.

The project's objective is to support partner NGOs from across the South Caucasus to create an enabling environment where marginalized women from conflict-affected communities can protect their rights and take active part in decision-making. Alongside increasing the capacity of the partner NGOs, the project aims to benefit 1500–2000 marginalized women in 20–24 conflict-affected communities in Armenia, Azerbaijan proper, Nagorno Karabakh, Georgia proper and Abkhazia.

The project activities are built around tailor-made capacity building workshops for the partner organizations, information meetings in 35 conflict-affected communities, trainings in 20–24 target communities, further capacity building of core activists and provision of local expertise to them, local community mobilization/advocacy initiatives to increase gender equality as well as media outreach aimed at raising broader awareness among stakeholders about women's right and gender equality concerns in relation to peace-building in the South Caucasus. The project also envisages production of a report assessing key aspects of the realization of the UNSCR 1325 and the UNSCR 1820 in the South Caucasus, including analysis of actions required and ways forward.

Conclusion

Women bring alternative perspectives to conflict prevention which is more focused on the grass-roots and community levels. Women can play a particularly important role in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, and appreciates the positive contribution women can make in post-conflict reconstruction and peace consolidation.

During the war and in the years just after it, some women contributed to and participated in peace negotiations. Women refer to this period as 'the golden years for women's participation'. Female parliamentarians from both sides participated in peace negotiations.

Women play a vital role in the peace-process related to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict on a rather informal level, as they are not involved in any official decision-making processes towards the peaceful resolution of the conflict. Obviously, there is no woman in the official negotiation process on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, neither from conflicting parties, nor from the OSCE "Minsk Group" mission.

Throughout the peace negotiation period, no women were included in the Minsk Group, neither as a co-chair nor as a special representative of the OSCE's Chairman-in-Office on the conflict. Whereas, the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 played a positive role and women from both side contributed to the negotiation process. The EU also tried to make a positive contribution for women role in this conflict.

Over the almost last 20 years, a lot of meeting and negotiations between high representatives of Azerbaijan and Armenia have took place, but a comprehensive peace agreement is not expected in the near future. Because the basic principles has not yet agreed upon. Only after the final agreement, people to people contact may be successful. ■

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PERSPECTIVES FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN CENTRAL ASIAN AND AFGHAN PARLIAMENTS

For the last couple of years, watchers of the Eurasian region have noticed significant paradigm shift: notion of so called AfPac (Afghanistan/Pakistan) is steadily disappearing, and increasing number of international and regional actors consider the Afghan affairs as an integral part of larger Central Asian region. This paradigm shift has inherent logic: historically, economically, and culturally Afghanistan always had strong connections with other ethnic groups and landlocked states of the Central Asia. Political divisions that arose from the Imperial World Order and the Cold War period, as well as the War on Terror, significantly impacted these relations but natural equilibrium took its course and Afghanistan is gravitating toward rediscovering its place in the Greater Central Asian region.

Paradigm shifts mentioned above manifested themselves through increasing economic cooperation which, while still far from the desired level, is on a clearly encouraging trajectory. During my recent interactions with the Afghan minister of telecommunications, I was told that due to the reached agreement with the Uzbek government, price of internet services in Afghanistan decreased by half! This is only one of many other examples of mutually benefitting cooperation.

With such background, security concerns are not forgotten or swept under the carpet, but rather no longer represent majority of agenda. Diversification of agenda by itself requires engagement on behalf of multiple agencies and state institutions. Certainly, Parliaments of the respective countries should be focal actors in this process.

While all countries of the Greater Central Asian Region are presidential republics with strong heads of state, the role of legislative bodies in interstate relations cannot be undermined. While executive authorities will be preoccupied by current

challenges, parliaments of respective countries can foster longer term visions. They can synchronize legislation to promote interstate economic relations, to create enabling environment for major regional projects related to infrastructure, energy, etc. Understandably, interparliamentary relations will create very robust network for exchanging ideas and best practices as well as an efficient space for addressing challenging issues.

To achieve a functional and beneficial cooperation between parliaments in the region, mere establishment of so called «friendship groups» is not enough. Practice and history have demonstrated that such groups represent a good initiative but never yield significant results unless they are supported by proactive secretariat. Like any regional initiative, it requires centralized managing office in one of the host countries and allocated funds for cooperative efforts.

There are number of successful examples of how this cooperation can be organized and deployed. In my humble opinion, it is good time to consider creation of the Parliamentary Assembly of Greater Central Asia (PACA), which, besides 5 Central Asian Republics, should include Afghanistan and, probably, Mongolia. While one obvious common denominator is the landlocked nature of all states, regional socio-economic, infrastructural and other projects can drastically improve regional cooperation and well-being of all the actors involved.

For organizational purposes, it is worthwhile to examine an example of other regional parliamentary assembly, namely the Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean (PAM). According to the official website, The Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean is the principal forum where the national Parliaments of the Euro-Mediterranean region deliberate to reach strategic objectives that work towards the creation of the best political, social, economic and cultural environment and conditions for the fellow citizens of the member states.

PAM is an international organization, an Observer at the General Assembly of the United Nations, with a specific international juridical status. The Assembly plays a fundamental role as the inter-parliamentary organization whose activities are firmly rooted as the instrument of parliamentary diplomacy to support the work of other international bodies entrusted with the responsibility to foster security, stability and peace in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Over the years, PAM has established itself as the main actor within parliamentary diplomacy in the Euro-Mediterranean region, and its commitment to the founding principles and its Charter, is guaranteed by the continued support of all its member parliaments.

Through PAM, political dialogue and understanding between its Member States and their citizens is strengthened; notably, this is achieved through:

- Fostering and building confidence among Euro-Mediterranean States;
- Guaranteeing regional security, stability;
- Promoting peace;
- Consolidating the endeavors of Euro-Mediterranean States;
- Presenting opinions and recommendations to national parliaments and governments, regional organizations and international fora.

As we can see, these basic ideas, principles, and concepts are very much applicable to the Greater Central Asian region. It would be plausible to actually model PACA after PAM and launch an initiative which will allow transfer of knowledge and practices. Without a doubt, every region has its own priorities, hence, with this, we are not attempting to carbon copy everything from PAM but rather, we would like to use PAM as an operational model for creating a unique regional organization, best fitted for needs of people and countries of the Greater Central Asia.

Creation of PACA represents a rare opportunity for international and regional actors to proactively support development of regional structures. Initial donors, beside member states, can be the UN and/or the EU. Preparatory period should not take more than a year and member states can agree on the capital that will house the initiative. For greater buy-in, it might be plausible to house specific committees in other member states.

I call upon organizers of this forum and our gracious hosts, the parliament of Uzbekistan to spearhead this initiative. ■

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PROSPECTS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN PARLIAMENTS OF AFGHANISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

The parliament of any country serves as the key representative and legislative body of modern states. The parliament is also the indicator of democratic rule in a state where each representative of the people can and should be heard.

Undoubtedly, the resolving of all important political and social and economic issues of society and the government should fall under parliamentary scrutiny and should be under the control of the people's representatives. The meaning and the foundation of any parliament is exactly this. Over the past 50 years the global trend of parliamentary diplomacy has grown significantly. All parliaments in the world currently contain bodies that interact with the parliaments of other countries as well as international parliamentary bodies. This interaction is beneficial for the development of the parliamentary system and the professional growth of parliaments and their members, especially those of young developing countries.

Which fields of cooperation are, in our opinion, promising for parliamentarians of Central Asian states in cooperating with Afghanistan in current conditions?

First of all, it is necessary to stem from the Afghan situation. The country has plenty of ethnic, tribal and religious conflict. Historic prejudice also remains to this day. The economy and social infrastructure are significantly impaired by destructive forces, military operations and the Taliban's destructive activity over

the period of several decades. The efforts of the government, the international community and the group of countries that are interested in peace and security in Afghanistan are, unfortunately, not bringing about adequate results on restoring peace and overcoming conflicts to deliver stability.

This means that all the efforts of Afghanistan's parliament deputies should be focused on returning to peaceful life and the nationwide reconciliation of the fighting fundamentalist and terrorist groups in Afghanistan. The growing threat of the Taliban movement threatens the security of neighbouring Central Asian states. In our opinion, Afghan and Central Asian MP's need to cooperate and invest effort into this issue as it affects the long-term interests of Afghanistan and all of Central Asia.

The development and adoption of a sophisticated and rational state strategic program on forming a new «multi-ethnic, united people» identity of the population would aid in consolidating society and resolving the military conflict. This identity would shape nationwide Afghan solidarity as opposed to the current mostly ethnic and tribal identification of the country's population. It would contribute to the creation of a multi-ethnic and multi-religious society, the striving to receive education, and would enable personal growth for every Afghan citizen with the help of government programs. It appears relevant to develop special educational programs to train Afghan religious leaders who would advocate tolerance, humaneness and the true ideology of Islam.

Uzbekistan, for instance, is a multiethnic and multi-religious country home to over 130 ethnic groups, the majority of which have their own cultural publications. Media materials are published in dozens of languages.

In our country the representatives of 14 religious confessions have coexisted for thousands of years. Tolerance towards diverse races, ethnicities and religions is an achievement of our society.

Solving this complex issue would facilitate the centralization of government reign and benefit effective governance in Afghanistan.

Achieving goals of restoring and stabilizing peace is a difficult journey that requires time, patience, political will and mutual compromises between the conflicting parties on key issues that currently divide the country.

Members of the parliaments of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries could cooperate in this important aspect as these countries have developed a

positive experience of interethnic and inter-religious communication and dialogue over the period of their independence.

The second direction that we regard as promising is the cooperation in rebuilding Afghanistan's economy by sharing experience and adopting laws that would beneficially impact the development of the country's economy. Central Asian countries have gone through a certain journey of economic development. The development model of Central Asian states' economies is based on the laws adopted by the parliaments of Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries.

The third promising aspect for parliamentary cooperation could be the ban and eradication of drug production and fighting against this evil in Afghanistan. If we consider that drug production proceeds are the source of financing for the Taliban and Islamist radicals, then creating a robust legal framework banning production and sale of drugs and increasing legal liability for these actions would significantly contribute to the stabilization of the situation in Afghanistan.

Protecting women's rights in Afghanistan is an important issue on the agenda. The longtime war and destruction have directly impacted the position of women in this country. Parliamentary cooperation in issues of protecting the rights and empowering women is seen by us as promising and mutually beneficial for the parliaments of Afghanistan and all the Central Asian states.

In this regard, we as the activists of the Institute of Democracy and Human Rights in Uzbekistan intend to address the women of Afghanistan urging them to join efforts to aid the peace process and to peacefully resolve the conflict in this country. At this point, we would like to discuss these issues with female leaders and Afghan public activists to design recommendations on rendering effective assistance in order to put a stop to the confrontation in this long-suffering country.

In our opinion sharing experience on parliamentary oversight – the most important function of parliament – between the parliaments of Afghanistan and Central Asian states is another promising aspect of cooperation. Developing recommendations on optimal parliamentary oversight over management authorities and the government will enable to strengthen the position of centralized and localized representative power in Afghanistan and other Central Asian states.

Uzbekistan is interested in and is contributing to the reconstruction of Afghanistan's infrastructure destroyed by war. The construction of the Hairatan –

Mazari-Sharif railroad 75 km in length was finished in early 2011. It is currently planned to finish the construction of the railroad to the city of Herat in the West of Afghanistan. In 2017 the roadmap on further development and full-scale cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan was signed. The document stipulates political, trade and economic and transport-transit measures as well as revitalizing cooperation in the energy, mining, oil and gas, agriculture, healthcare and pharmaceutical industries.

Uzbekistan's trading house was opened in Kabul. The Afghan parliament could also consider requesting from the government a report on the current state of the approved bilateral documents on extending cooperation. Such parliamentary oversight could also be exercised by the parliaments of Central Asian states to good results.

In order to implement such parliamentary cooperation between Central Asian states and Afghanistan, a permanent platform for communication, creating joint projects and sharing information between parliaments is needed. «The Central Asia-Afghanistan parliamentary dialogue group» could regularly serve as such a platform. Therefore, we propose to create an initiative group of Afghan and Central Asian Deputies to further coordinate cooperation efforts with consideration for the interests and benefits of all the countries in the region, which will undoubtedly contribute to the reinforcement of peace, security and prosperity in our region.

A positive outcome for the stabilization of the Afghanistan situation for Central Asian countries would be to ensure regional security and expand the possibilities of multilateral political, economic, humanitarian and other cooperation.

Meanwhile due to the complex situation in Afghanistan, there are threats to Central Asian countries, Uzbekistan in particular, stemming from Afghanistan:

- spread of Islamic radicalism and fundamentalism;
- activity of terrorist groups in Afghanistan;
- drug trafficking and its devastating consequences;
- terrorist groups including the so called «Turkestan Islamic Movement»
- and other separatists based in Afghanistan and using its territory to train terrorists.

The «Turkestan Islamic Movement has de facto broken down into several separate groups incapable of large-scale warfare. However, their potential threat should still be considered in the event of them recovering their former power.

Afghanistan is a country that is tied to Central Asia by bonds of friendship and good-neighbourly relations based on common history culture, traditions and values. This is why, as the president of Uzbekistan Sh. Mirziyoyev has pointed out – «Uzbekistan shall conduct a good-neighbourly and friendly policy towards Afghanistan». ■

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PROSPECTS OF COOPERATION BETWEEN PARLIAMENTS OF AFGHANISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA

Turkmenistan continues to successfully implement the strategy of extensive co-operation with all interested states in the world by actively developing constructive political dialogue and creating value with trade and economic and cultural-humanitarian relations. One of the priorities of Turkmenistan's foreign policy strategy is to develop close multilateral relations with its nearest neighbours.

Our country's regional strategy is based on the sustainable development objectives of maintaining and strengthening peace and security in Central Asia, comprehensively facilitating the creation of favorable geopolitical and economic conditions in the region as well as resolving important issues of extensive international cooperation.

Turkmenistan is devoting special attention to enhancing the dialogue with neighbouring Afghanistan, with which diplomatic relations were established 26 years ago. In this aspect the Turkmen-Afghan cooperation should be contemplated within the intrinsic context of extensive international cooperation.

During the past years we have managed to create a reliable legal framework of international relations which are successfully developing in bilateral in multilateral formats. Turkmenistan's position is based on the desire for engagement of our Southern neighbour into the region-wide integration and its participation in var-

ious projects, which, in turn, should create the conditions for rebuilding peace in Afghanistan.

As legitimate and active participants of the modern system of international relations as well as immediate neighbors, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan are demonstrating a good example of friendship and good-neighborliness, mutual understanding and brotherly mutual support, effective cooperation not only in bilateral relations, but also as part of reputed international organizations, first and foremost, the United Nations.

Our country assumes an active position in relation to rebuilding Afghanistan and developing its economy. Turkmenistan's proposals are aimed at developing mutually coordinated approaches to resolving the Afghan problem, in particular, by providing its own political space to conduct negotiations. In this regard, Turkmenistan has proposed initiatives including from the high tribune of the United Nations to combine efforts in developing completely new mechanisms of stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan. Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov confirms in his foreign policy course the devotion of our country to be an effective and reliable partner to the UN in peacemaking in Afghanistan. This is displayed by the fact that the UN Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for Central Asia (UNRCCA) is headquartered in Ashgabat.

Over the past 25 years our countries have accumulated ample positive experience of beneficial partnership on a wide scope of bilateral relations. Turkmenistan is doing its utmost to assist the restoration of peace and prosperity for our southern neighbor Afghanistan. All this reflects our country's actual actions aimed at supporting stabilization processes in Afghanistan, stimulating the growth of its economy and carrying out new industrial and transport investment projects by engaging the system of regional relations.

Turkmenistan is taking specific steps to facilitate Afghanistan's effective integration into international economic processes and initiating significant regional-scale energy and transport projects, the execution of which will have positive impact on rebuilding the Afghan economy and social infrastructure.

During the past years, the Turkmen-Afghan cooperation has entered a new level of development. Over the period of 2007–2017 the trade volume between our countries has grown more than 3,3 times. Turkmenistan exports electricity, oil and gas products, building materials, foodstuffs and other industrial products to Afghanistan.

One of the directions of strategic partnership is the field of energy. In this context the main priority of development for Turkmenistan's energy industry is diversifying the export of energy resources and creating a multi-branched versatile pipeline system.

Possessing an extensive energy resource base, Turkmenistan has become the initiator of large-scale international projects. Currently, the Turkmenistan-Iran and Turkmenistan-China gas pipelines are already built and in use. One of the promising vectors of diversifying natural gas supply is the construction of a transnational Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline over 1800 km in length, which started in 2015.

The raw materials for the TAPI pipeline will be sourced from the natural gas deposits of Galkynysh – the largest deposit in Turkmenistan located in the Mary velayat. The nominal capacity of this pipeline is designed to transport 33 bln cubic meters of commercial-grade gas per year.

In order to establish transmission of all types of data it is planned to lay an optical fiber cable line along the pipeline 814 km in length from the Turkmen-Afghan border to Pakistan.

To externally power the TAPI gas pipeline facilities, it is planned to additionally lay a 500 kW power transmission line.

On February 23, 2018, with the participation of heads of the states and governments of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India in the Mary Velayat and the Afghan city of Herat the projects of building the Afghan part of the TAPI pipeline, the power transmission line and the optical fiber line on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan stretch (TAP) were started. This event has clearly demonstrated that the states in the region have started implementing global scale projects. This project is of huge importance for the development of cooperation in the field of energy in the Central Asian area.

When Turkmenistan initiates energy projects, this is based on understanding the necessity of integrating neighboring countries into the new energy supply architecture on the continent. In addition to increased cooperation between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, the TAPI gas pipeline will be of social and economic significance for this country as well. As a result, the transited gas, energy, delivered industrial goods and exchange in information technology will enable additional significant annual budget revenue for Afghanistan. The conditions for the creation of 12,000 new jobs will be put in place. Apart from the direct econom-

ic benefits, this project will also conduce the strengthening of good-neighbourly relations and become one of the indicators of the stability of the participating states' economies. In general, there are 1,5 bln people populating the countries that are engaged in this project, who will benefit from TAPI.

Nowadays, in Turkmenistan, a phase-based project is taking place on adapting 17 Sustainable Development Goals on the most relevant economic, social, environmental and management issues of modern time. As we know, these goals were unanimously adopted in the new Agenda on September 25, 2015 in New York by 193 UN member states. Officially, the agenda came into effect on January 1, 2016 and will be valid until 2030 in relation to all countries. These goals have the objectives of eradication of poverty, conservation of the planet's natural resources and ensuring equality and well-being for all. To achieve these Sustainable Development Goals, the efforts of the countries worldwide are required, and in particular, those of the Central Asian region as well.

Within the context of the global Agenda the construction of the TAPI pipeline will significantly promote the implementation of a series of other Sustainable Development Goals and objectives in the region. In particular, as Goal 7 (ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all) stipulates the growth of Turkmenistan's fuel and energy industry, the expansion and diversification of its gas pipeline network are aimed at the sustainable development of the countries in the region and ensuring access to affordable, reliable and modern energy and services.

As part of the practical implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals adopted by the UN in the new Agenda and in search of effective ways of achieving them, the «Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Gas Pipeline: A new energy Great Silk Road to provide access to reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all» conference was organized at the headquarters of the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) July 18, 2018 in New York. The presentation was organized by Turkmenistan's Permanent Mission to the UN alongside the Permanent UN Missions of Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. This presentation served as a clear demonstration of the success of the phase-based project implementation and Turkmenistan's successful activity on promoting TAPI as a new energy route.

Another vector of Turkmenistan's economic cooperation in the energy field is supplying power to the Republic of Afghanistan. Currently, Turkmen electrical energy is supplied to Afghanistan mostly at reduced rates in two directions: the Imamnazar-Andhoi and the Serhetabat-Herat power transmission lines. This has facilitated the improvement of social conditions of Afghan consumers, the opening of new enterprises and the creation of jobs.

Afghanistan's demand for electricity is growing year by year. Due to this, in order to increase the volume of exported electrical energy to Afghanistan, our country is expanding the capacities of domestic electrical energy enterprises and building new power plants and power transmission lines. This was displayed by the opening on July 26 of this year in the Mary velayat of the new Rabat-Kashan-Kalainau power transmission line to our neighboring country with 100 kW capacity and 112 km in length.

As we know, the year 2018 has been given the theme of «Turkmenistan – the heart of the Great Silk Road». In this context the new power transmission line, stretching from the ancient Merv to the south, towards the ancient Afghan cities of Balkh and Herat, has become symbolic in reviving the routes of this historic road. The commissioning of the new power transmission line will give impetus to the economic development of the Badkhyz velayat and the neighbouring country's regions in close vicinity. It will promote the construction of residential and social infrastructure, the creation of jobs and will generally aid the improvement of the quality of life of the Afghan population.

During the opening ceremony of the new Rabat-Kashan-Kalainau power transmission line, the «Protocol of intent between the Ministry of Energy of Turkmenistan and the Ministry of Energy and water resources of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the construction of the Kerki-Hamyap-Garkyn border power transmission line» was signed. According to this document, the construction of one more 110 kW power transmission line is planned from the Turkmen border to the Hamyap district in Afghanistan, and from there on to Garkyn district, as well as two 110 kW electric substations with one for Hamyap and one for the Garkyn district.

During the meeting of Turkmenistan's president Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedow with the Special Envoy of the President of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan for the Commonwealth of Independent States Mohammad Shaker Kargar in May 2015, the Ministry of Energy of Turkmenistan and the Ministry of Energy and water resources of Afghanistan signed a protocol on supplying electrical energy from Turkmenistan in the period of 2018–2027 and increasing the volume of supply by 4 times during this period. In confirmation of this, the construction of the new Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAPI) gas pipeline will also bring certain benefits to our countries. The power transmission line will be supplying electrical energy to the facilities along the route of the TAPI gas pipeline and will also create the opportunity for Turkmenistan to export electricity via Afghanistan to Pakistan and Southeast Asian countries.

The power industry potential that our country has created, allows us to not only increase the volume of our electricity supplies to Afghanistan but also opens up

new export opportunities. Due to this, Turkmenistan is conducting practical work on implementing the new international project on exporting electrical energy on the Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Tajikistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan (TUT-AP) route. Thus, the implementation of this project will mean the transition of Afghanistan from a recipient of electrical energy to a transit country in this chain and a first-hand participant of the regional energy cycle with all the ensuing positive consequences.

The mutual interests of Turkmenistan and Afghanistan enable further development of the transport infrastructure which connects our two countries and has imposing potential. This refers to the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Tajikistan international transport corridor project which was started in 2013. During the first stage in November 2016, with the participation of Turkmenistan's president Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedow and Afghanistan's president Mohammad Ashraf Ghani the first main railway line on the Atamyrat-Imamnazar-Akin route was commissioned. Over the long term, this railroad is planned to be extended to the border of Tajikistan, making it part of the Asian International Railway Transport Corridor. The Turkmen side will also be conducting the construction of the extension of this railway stretch to the Afghan city of Andkhoy. This project aims to integrate Afghanistan as an integral part of the international transport infrastructure with possible access to the Asia-Pacific countries. Thereby, Afghanistan will have a real opportunity to become an important element of the international transport corridors spreading across Central Asia in both the North-South and the East-West directions, as well as to become part of the formation of the optimal combined system of transport communication on the whole of the Eurasian continent.

In the context of implementing new directions in railway transit – as part of the start of the construction of the Afghan part of the TAPI gas pipeline – the Serhetabat-Turgundi railway connection was fully rebuilt and put into operation in February 2018. The construction and commissioning of this railway line is clear evidence of the good-neighbourly Turkmen-Afghan relations and Turkmenistan's practical contribution to peaceful development in Afghanistan, the reconstruction of its social and economic infrastructure and integrating our neighbor state into the modern system of regional and global economic cooperation. The costs for the construction of the new Turkmen-Afghan railroad are assumed in full by Turkmenistan, delivering comprehensive support and assistance to the Afghan people. The necessity for the new railroad is obvious, as it is meant to expand with new territories, projects and logistics patterns connecting to it in the future.

In order to develop coordinated approaches to resolving the Afghan problem, end of 2017, a series of working group meetings took place in the Turkmen

capital during the Seventh Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan (RECCA-VII) and the ministerial meeting of the Ashgabat forum, where a wide scope of topics related to the Afghan problem were discussed along with topics related to promoting regional economic integration on a regional and trans-regional scale. In this context, the creation of the new Afghanistan-Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan-Georgia-Turkey transport corridor is seen as promising. During the RECCA ministerial meeting the Pentalateral Transport and Transit Trade Agreement between Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkey and Turkmenistan was signed to facilitate cooperation on the «Lapis Lazuli» corridor. Within the framework of this project, railway lines and highways are to connect the town of Turgundi in the Afghan province of Herat with Ashgabat and the Caspian port Turkmenbashi. The corridor will stretch to Baku, then via Tbilisi in the direction of Ankara, branching out in Poti and Batumi, and then from Ankara to Istanbul. The project is designed with the objective of increasing the region's economic integration and trade and freight volumes on said route. At the same time, this transport corridor will conduce the strengthening of cooperation on the broad geo-economical area which includes Central and South Asia as well as the Caspian, Black Sea and Mediterranean basins.

Along with the measures taken to expand economic cooperation between Turkmenistan and Afghanistan, our country also actively cooperates with our neighbour in the humanitarian field. Based on interstate agreements Afghan students are being trained at various educational institutions in Turkmenistan, where they are taught professional knowledge and skills in many specialist fields.

In order to provide systemic humanitarian aid to Afghanistan, Turkmenistan has prepared a program stipulating a set of measures including the construction of social infrastructure facilities, a trading center, regular supply of humanitarian cargo to the population and other measures. One of the most indicative steps in the implementation of this program was the opening of a birthing center in the Afghan village of Turgundi in the Herat province in 2017. In order to establish the operation of this medical institution, necessary medical and other supplies were allocated as well as a team of doctors and nurses, who will be training the local medical staff. In this way, Turkmenistan has not only built a birthing center in its neighboring state but is also exercising patronage over its subsequent operation. Apart from this, Herat province has also received a school, medical supplies, foodstuffs and other kinds of humanitarian aid. All of this creates favorable conditions for the proper development and education of Afghan children and all of Afghanistan's population. The construction of these social facilities has enabled the creation of additional jobs which also has a positive impact of the social status of Afghanistan's citizens.

The expansion and diversification of trade and economic cooperation is a significant contribution to Afghanistan's development. In terms of the route to the Afghan market, small and medium enterprises of the countries in the region and other countries should play an important role in the development of cross-border trade and establishing various forms of cooperation in the fields of manufacturing of industrial goods, agriculture, services and other spheres. Expending effort to help Afghan business to fully integrate into regional and international trade and economic relations on a mutually beneficial and long-term basis is of importance. Special attention should be paid to empowering women in economic cooperation and entrepreneurship, as well as incentivizing regional scientific cooperation. All of these and other measures will facilitate the solving of acute social issues and putting in place the necessary conditions to develop new projects, which would correlate with the goals of common well-being and progress.

Turkmenistan shall continue its strategy of comprehensively aiding Afghanistan's peaceful reconstruction and providing systemic support to the Afghan people in restoring the country's economy and social infrastructure and involving Afghanistan into productive cooperation and integration into the international system of economic relations. ■

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UZBEKISTAN'S APPROACHES TO RESOLVING THE SITUATION IN AFGHANISTAN

Dear participants of today's conference!

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation for this opportunity to speak at such an important event to and convey Uzbekistan's vision and approaches on resolving the situation in Afghanistan.

When we say that Central Asia is the main priority for Uzbekistan's foreign policy we also mean developing our relations with neighbouring Afghanistan.

In our opinion the perspective for stable and sustainable development in Central Asia is inseparably connected to achieving peace in neighbouring Afghanistan. Afghanistan has always been, and is to this day an unalienable part of Central Asia. The prosperity of the region without resolving the «Afghan problem» is impossible. The events in the Middle East and Africa have led to the Afghan situation temporarily staying off the radar of global politics. However this does not mean that the conflict has lost in intensity and acuteness. Nowadays no one can deny that the Afghan conflict is one of the most relevant issues of ensuring regional and international security.

As analysis shows, the military-political situation in Afghanistan remains ambiguous and complex, which is demonstrated by the strengthening of the military-political influence of the «Taliban» movement, the expanding influence of the so called «Islamic State», the worsening of the economic situation and the growth in drug production.

According to the data of the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR), as of January 2018 Kabul controlled 57% of the country's 407 towns and districts while 33% were disputed by the «Taliban» movement and 10% was fully out of the Afghan government's control. It is notable that the activity of the so called «Islamic State's» militant's activity is expanding. In 2014 the islamists were engaged in warfare only in two provinces: Farah and Nangarhar, however currently the ISIS is already active in 17 provinces.

The situation is further exacerbated by the deterioration of the social economic situation in the country. According to World Bank data the general poverty level in urban areas is 39% and in rural areas it is at 46%. Afghanistan's GDP per capita is only 590 USD making it the poorest country in the region.

Moreover, the scale of drug production is increasing. According the 2017 UN report, the area of opium poppy crops in Afghanistan has increased by 87% to a record yield level of 9000 tons compared to 2016.

According to Afghanistan's official data, 25% of the drug transit is conducted through the territory of Pakistan, 47% through Iran and the rest through Central Asian countries. As a result, as mentioned before, the drug aggression towards the CA countries is increasing.

Due to this, the current complex situation in Afghanistan requires a sober assessment of the situation and the consideration of the following factors in the process of its resolution:

firstly, the results of the global community's joint efforts over the last 40 years have clearly shown that there is no military solution to the Afghan problem. The only way to peace is direct dialogue between the central government and the main forces of the armed opposition, mainly the «Taliban» movement. At the same time an important factor to this is the ability for Afghanistan to be able to define the format, time and place of the future negotiations and for the negotiations to be conducted with no preliminary conditions. In case the opposition participates in peaceful negotiations, and a national reconciliation is achieved, all the conditions for the opposition's integration into the political life of Afghanistan should be created as well;

secondly, by now, the Afghan conflict has been internationalized and the structure and content of the conflict have significantly changed. In this regard, apart from Afghanistan's internal agreement, the accomplishment of a robust consensus on a regional level as well as

understanding and common approaches among the extra-regional players should also be reached. At the same time, the efforts of all the stakeholders of the Afghan process should complement each other and not be mutually exclusive. In our opinion, the main condition for advancement to peace to take place is the development and practical implementation of a unified and regionally and globally coordinated Comprehensive Program, which would include the basic principles and mechanisms of a peaceful settlement as well as concrete measures for the international community to facilitate the national reconciliation process in Afghanistan;

thirdly, an important condition for bringing stability to the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan alongside political reconciliation is Afghanistan's integration to the global economic cooperation, including that with Central Asian countries.

We should regard Afghanistan not as a problem, but rather as a strategic opportunity, as a new possibility of mutually beneficial regional cooperation. Joint efforts on engaging Afghanistan into the system of trade and economic, transport and communication, cultural and humanitarian relations with neighbouring countries shall significantly contribute to the process of normalizing the situation and getting this country back to peaceful life. At the end of the day, peace on Afghan soil will open new opportunities and bring real benefits to all the countries on the extensive Eurasian continent.

In this context, Uzbekistan regards the enhancement of political dialogue, trade and economic and cultural and humanitarian cooperation as the most effective tools in resolving the situation in Afghanistan and conducts concrete practical measures on invoking bilateral cooperation.

During meetings with country leaders, including the president of Afghanistan, as well as in many of his speeches, the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev has repeatedly stated that Uzbekistan remains steadily devoted to assuming a friendly and pragmatic policy in relation to Afghanistan.

By virtue of the parties' commitment to building up constructive and friendly relations, the cooperation between Uzbekistan and Afghanistan has gained new momentum over the past year (2017) which can be considered unprecedented. A fundamentally new dynamic of the bilateral relationship is clearly traceable in all fields of cooperation.

Interaction on a high level: meetings of heads of state, ministries and agencies are now conducted on a regular basis. Uzbekistan's president Shavkat Mirziyoyev and the president of Afghanistan Ashraf Ghani have conducted 5 meetings, namely at summits of the SCO, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the UN General Assembly in New York.

By the end of 2017 the trade volume has grown by 15% amounting to around 600 mln USD. Another important practical step taken to expand bilateral cooperation was the opening of Uzbekistan's trading house in Kabul and the «Uztrade» showroom where a broad range of Uzbek made products are displayed.

Currently «Uztrade» company has concluded contracts with Afghan partners for the total amount of over 29 mln USD

In order to create additional favorable conditions to invigorate relations between the two countries, an international logistics center with a customs terminal was created in Termez. This «cargo center» is meant to facilitate export and import transit freight traffic between the two countries with access to Asian and European markets.

In addition, agreements on annual supplies of mineral fertilizer of up to 300 000 tons, 2 000 units of agricultural machinery, up to 250 000 tons of food-grade wheat and other products in demand in Afghanistan were concluded. Along with this, the parties do not intend to settle on the current successes and are taking comprehensive measures on increasing the volume of mutual trade to 1,5 bln USD.

In terms of content and the agreements that were concluded, the Afghan president's visit to Uzbekistan which took place in December 2017 is worth a special mention. During the visit 20 documents and 40 export contracts were signed for the total amount of over 500 mln USD. Also during this meeting, in a display of sincere friendship, the president of Uzbekistan presented Afghanistan's president with a gift of 25 «Isuzu» brand buses and 3 modern «New Holland» tractors all made in Uzbekistan.

Other important agreements concluded during that visit include the construction of the Surhan-Puli-Khumri power transmission line and the Mazari-Sharif – Herat railroad.

In terms of cooperation in the field of energy it is also worth noting that compared to 2002 the total volume of electricity supply from Uzbekistan to Afghanistan has

increased 30 times. At the same time, starting January 2018, Uzbekistan has reduced the cost of electricity supplied to Afghanistan from 7 cents down to 5 cents. We are certain that the launch of the Surhan-Puli-Khumri power line will be of assistance in solving energy deficit issues and creating new enterprises and jobs.

In turn, the construction of the new «Mazari-Sharif – Herat» railroad will also significantly contribute to the economic reconstruction of Afghanistan. According to preliminary data, after the launch of the new railroad Afghanistan's foreign trade turnover will increase by 50 % and the forecast freight transit volume will amount to around 5 mln USD per annum.

Touching upon the topic of the education of Afghani citizens playing a key role in delivering security and stability in Afghanistan, in January of this year Uzbekistan has opened an education center in Termez where young Afghan students will be trained on 2- 4- and 6-year intramural education programs on 17 higher education and 16 secondary professional and vocational education courses.

During the opening of the education center 110 Afghan students were enrolled in the center in Uzbek language and literature studies. In the near future increasing the number of these students to 300 is planned.

Relations between law enforcement agencies of Uzbekistan and Afghanistan on discussing relevant topics of delivering regional security have gained new momentum. Namely, on February 10th of this year the first meeting of the Uzbek-Afghan joint security commission was held in Tashkent.

Dear conference participants,

Uzbekistan is also taking concrete political-diplomatic measures aimed at achieving a peaceful resolution of the Afghan crisis.

This is demonstrated by the high level international Conference on Afghanistan: «Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity», held in Tashkent on March 27, which was attended by representatives of the UN, NATO, the EU, SCO, Russia, USA, China, Pakistan, India, Iran, Turkey, UAE, Qatar, Germany, the UK, Italy, France, Norway, Sweden, Japan and Central Asian countries.

This event got the close attention of most policymakers in the rest of the world. In regards to this, it is worth noting that the proposal to hold the international conference in Uzbekistan and the need to unite efforts aimed at delivering peace and stability in Afghanistan are contingent upon the following factors:

- I**, the initiative to hold the above mentioned international conference is an integral part of Uzbekistan's general strategy on delivering regional security and stability;
- II**, throughout thousands of years, the Uzbek and Afghan peoples were developing in one cultural-civilization environment. Currently Uzbekistan and Afghanistan have close political, trade and economic and cultural relations;
- III**, Uzbekistan is devoted to the principle of indivisibility of security. From this viewpoint we contemplate Afghanistan's security as Uzbekistan's security and as the key to the stability and prosperity of the whole extensive region of Central Asia and South Asia;
- IV**, Uzbekistan has history of aiding the peace process in Afghanistan. In 1999, by Uzbekistan's initiative, the «6+2» group meeting on the level of foreign affairs agency heads of Afghanistan's neighbouring states, Russia and the USA was held in Tashkent. The meeting was also attended by NATO and «Taliban» representatives. Following the talks, the Tashkent Declaration, defining the fundamental principles for the peaceful settlement of the conflict in Afghanistan was adopted, which became the single official document to be agreed and adopted by all the internal political powers of this long-suffering country and by the UN.

Following the Tashkent international conference, its participants were able to agree on and adopt the final declaration which included the following fundamental aspects of the Afghan peace process:

1. respect for sovereignty, independence, territorial integrity and national unity of Afghanistan;
2. support of the Afghan government's proposals to begin direct negotiations with the «Taliban» with no preliminary conditions;
3. providing joint assistance on advancing the peace process and social and economic development in Afghanistan;
4. to acknowledge the importance of international and regional initiatives on delivering peace and stability in Afghanistan.

In this context, foreign experts stress Uzbekistan's special role in conducting peace negotiations of the conflicting parties in Afghanistan. This is based on Uz-

Uzbekistan's credibility with the «Taliban» movement, the Government and the opposition as well as Uzbekistan's equal relations with all the regional and external actors in the situation. Moreover, Uzbekistan has always maintained a neutral position without pursuing self-serving political interests and has always advocated Afghanistan's peaceful development as a precondition to the prosperity of the whole region. Over the recent period of time the Uzbek side has conducted a series of consultative meetings and negotiations with the Afghan government, with representatives of the USA, China and Russia, participating countries in the International Contact Group, countries in the Eurasian region, South Asia and the Near and Middle East.

In order to enable a consolidated position of the Tashkent conference participants, Uzbekistan has established contact and conducted work meetings with high level representatives of the «Taliban» movement. During these meetings, the possibilities of dialogue and cooperation with the aim of establishing long-term peace, stability and economic development in Afghanistan were discussed. In July, 2018 during the visit to Kabul of the government delegation headed by the minister of foreign affairs Abdulaziz Kamilov, meetings with officials and other reputable Afghan social and political activists were held.

August 7–10 of this year the delegation of the «Taliban's» political office headed by the «Taliban's» leader Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanikzai visited Uzbekistan. Prospects of the peace process were discussed. Experts believe that considering the complexity of the Afghan situation, Uzbek diplomacy was able to make considerable progress in facilitating dialogue to resolve this extremely complex conflict of the modern era.

To conclude my speech, I'd like to underscore once again that Uzbekistan shall continue rendering practical assistance to building infrastructure in Afghanistan, viewing this as a necessary condition to delivering peace and prosperity in this country. Considering that stabilizing the situation in Afghanistan is the key factor in assuring regional security, Uzbekistan is prepared to approve and support any political or economic effort aimed at maintaining peace and stability in Afghanistan. ■

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ROLE OF PARLIAMENTS IN ENGAGING

AFGHANISTAN IN CENTRAL ASIAN

COOPERATION FRAMEWORKS

Is Afghanistan a part of South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East or a part of all of them? The historical relationship between Herat, Balkh Samarkand, Bokhara and Merv (or Merw) and biographies of the figures like Amir Ali Sher-Nawaie, Nasir Khosrow, Avicenna can better illustrate the significance of what Afghanistan shares with Central Asia.

Indeed, Afghanistan and Central Asia have historically been closely tied to the Silk Route, but more recently, they are tied to common opportunities and threats in the region. If geopolitics separated the region in the 20th century, in the 21st century, it again brought them together. Consequently, the regional cooperation between all Central Asian countries and Afghanistan is getting promoted in a collaborative manner recently. Parliaments, as exclusive legislative bodies, play a significant role in institutional reforms in all states committed to the rule of law. Therefore, parliaments can have significant impacts on political stability, peace promotion, economic growth, and social inclusion, and even nation-building, especially in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

Parliaments are not only important for each country, but they can have a great impact on regional cooperation and integration as well. Parliaments and par-

liamentarians can be brought together to collaboratively address existing and emerging concerns, threats, opportunities and issues in the region.

There are critical challenges to peace, security, and development in the region which can bring parliaments together to find effective and long-lasting solutions not only for each country but also for the region.

Peace, security, and development are regional challenges and are in need of regional responses. Certainly, there are interdependencies between peace, security, and development in all countries of the region.

Parliamentary diplomacy is a new aspect of international relations which has been paid less attention, especially in central Asia. It is completely acceptable that the parliamentarians tend towards their national interests. However, there are lots of multilateral opportunities and threats to bring the parliaments and parliamentarians in the region together to act as a cohesive and integrated body. So, the question is how to foster common understandings of these common interest.

The main question is how parliamentarians can represent themselves on international and regional stages as they are loyal to their national interests and accountable to their people desires and expectations.

Parliamentary diplomacy is a process whereby national parliaments contribute to foreign affairs including regional cooperation and integration. Parliamentary diplomacy could be approached in two levels: The first level is the legislative nature of parliaments and the second one is the political nature of parliaments.

Some examples of multilateral opportunities and threats in the region which all may agree with them:

- First, security and peace: It is so clear that terrorist organizations like Daesh, drug trafficking, and radioactive wastes are serious threats for all in the region. While terrorist organizations like al-Qaeda moved to the countries of the North Africa and the Middle East in last couple of years, they will return to Pakistan and Afghanistan if they can, and their next target will be Central Asia. Drug traffickers are actively networking in the region. Obviously, having a secure region needs regional cooperation and integration.
- States can cooperate in implementing regional trade systems, regional defense systems, and try to make win-win situations. This is a unique oppor-

tunity for parliaments in the region to take an initiative in this regard: come together; talk together and work together.

- Second, development: There are also lots of regional opportunities for development. Most countries in Central Asia have lots of natural sources to generate electricity and transit to South Asia. For instance, the Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan have surplus electricity during summers, while Afghanistan and Pakistan suffer from electricity shortages especially during the hot summer months leading to frequent power cuts which have negative impacts on social welfare and economic growth. It has made a great opportunity for the Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to cooperate on cross-border power projects like CASA 1000 initiative. Others can be listed as TAPI pipeline and Lapis Lazuli transit road.

Parliaments' cooperation can catalyze the progress of the regional development projects and programs. Accordingly, they can ratify annual budgets of all development projects. The other area for regional development cooperation is dispute resolution in trans-boundary waters. The importance of water is increasing day by day because of the negative impacts of climate change like decreasing rainfall and precipitation, long-lasting droughts, and global warming. Rivers don't recognize the territorial boundaries and flow between countries naturally. But reversely, states are competing with each other on how to get more and more from trans-boundary waters instead of working on comprehensive and inclusive agendas to use waters in most effective and efficient ways.

All water-sharing agreements between countries need to be ratified by parliaments. Supposedly, if the governments of Central Asia and Afghanistan come to a water-sharing agreement after long and difficult negotiations at a regional conference, what happens if one of the parliaments refuses the agreement?

The following sets are necessary for regional parliamentary cooperation:

1. Knowledge Management between Parliaments:

Parliaments face similar challenges and issues in the region. Each parliament has got experiences in legislation, internal processes, procedures, and best practices. Sharing these tacit and explicit knowledge would be beneficial to all.

If parliaments could be linked by information and communication technologies (ICT) and if parliaments could share their lessons learned repositories with each other, they can be more transparent, more responsive and more efficient in the regional cooperation and integration.

2. Educational Programs:

Parliamentary cooperation could be strengthened by regional scholarships, internships and exchange programs for students, young professionals and graduates from Central Asia and Afghanistan.

3. Exchange of Parliamentary Administrative Staff:

Parliaments can exchange their administrative staff. These staff can learn about the processes and procedures of the other parliaments, and it may result in reforming and integrating administrative rules and principles of parliaments.

4. Research Center:

There is often limited time to have enough debates on complex issues in parliamentary chambers, while members of parliament (MPs) can appoint committees to research various aspects of parliamentary agendas in more detail.

Parliamentary committees could be significant part of works done in each parliament. Parliaments should investigate issues and proposed laws in detail to enable MPs to make decisions effectively. To do the work effectively, parliamentary committees need data and technical knowledge as well. If a research center is established, it will facilitate the decision making processes in parliaments. The research center may focus more on regional cooperation and provide comparative analyses and information for parliamentary committees.

5. Parliamentary Professional Development:

Parliamentary professional development programs initiative can enhance the capacity of MPs to effectively perform their functions of oversight, representation, and lawmaking leading to better contributions in national and regional contexts.

The complexity of works and high-qualifications required for legislation in parliaments may result in initiating some parliamentary capacity development programs in sophisticated technical issues like open budgeting, extractive industries, and climate change.

6. Regional Parliamentary Organizations and Mediators:

Regional parliamentary organizations can act as a bridge to facilitate cooperation between the parliaments same as the other successful examples around the world namely, Inter-parliamentary Union, Council of Europe and Parliamentary Assembly of NATO.

7. Regional Parliamentary Meetings:

Regular meetings could be arranged between parliamentary committees of the region focusing on security, peace, and development. It could lead to a better

regional understanding, cross-border solidarity and more effective parliamentary cooperation.

In conclusion, regional understanding and the cross-border solidarity are crucial for engagement, cooperation and integration of the region and parliaments can play active roles in promoting security, peace, and development in the region. Parliaments' cooperation can be catalyzed by knowledge management, educational and exchange programs, regional parliamentary organizations and mediators and meetings.

The article does not reflect the official opinion of the AISS. ■

FINAL REPORT

The purpose of the tenth UNRCCA Strategic Dialogue meeting was to explore the role of Parliaments in engaging Afghanistan into Central Asian cooperation frameworks through preventive diplomacy. The Strategic Dialogue series were launched in 2009, and since then UNRCCA has been gathering politicians, officials from state institutions, experts from the Institutes of Strategic Studies based in Central Asian capitals, and members of academia at the annual meetings to analyse and discuss security-related developments and to recommend preventive measures. The Strategic Dialogues are also aimed at boosting interaction among countries in order to address threats and challenges facing the region, as well as to identify a possible role of different actors.

General Introduction on UNRCCA and the concept of Preventive Diplomacy

Preventive diplomacy has been a long-time priority of the UN Secretariat and the UN Security Council. The importance of preventive diplomacy in Central Asia was reflected in the Final Document of the high-level thematic briefing to the Security Council on Central Asia and Afghanistan that took place on 18 January 2018 in New York, under the Kazakh chairmanship. In their opening remarks, the UNRCCA SRSG, the UN Resident Coordinator in Uzbekistan, and the Chairman of the Committee of International, Foreign Economy Relations, Investment and Tourism of the Parliament of Uzbekistan, spoke of renewed policy of regional integration. There have been significant political changes and rapprochements among the countries of the region in the last years. At the same time, the Central Asian countries have taken a new approach towards Afghanistan. There have been high level official visits and inaugurations of ambitious development projects. In her opening speech, the UNRCCA SRSG also referred to the Tashkent Conference on Afghanistan «Peace Process, Security Cooperation and Regional Connectivity,» that was held in March 2018. She noted that it had served as an inspiration for this seminar. The SRSG also stressed the increasingly active positions of the legislatures in all five Central Asian countries and the growth of inter-parliamentary relations with

Afghanistan. As the international community is consolidating its efforts to find a peaceful regulation for the conflict in Afghanistan, we are also witnessing the Central Asian countries actively engaging in the peace building process. Whereas this is a very positive development, the Chairman of the Committee of International, Foreign Economy Relations, Investment and Tourism of the Parliament of Uzbekistan noted that the potential of parliamentary diplomacy is not fully utilised. He also admitted that while Uzbekistan is intensifying its relations with other countries in the region, this is not yet the case with Afghanistan, because of domestic problems that Afghanistan is facing. Parliamentarians, however, can meet and discuss these issues. This would be a very useful contribution to the regional cooperation and building trust among the states. All speakers in the opening session noted the relevance and timeliness of the seminar.

The introductory session considered the general concept of preventive diplomacy as well as the ways the parliamentarians could contribute to these efforts. UNRCCA Political Affairs Officer gave a comprehensive overview of the UNRCCA mandate and activities and explained the definition of conflict prevention. In the United Nations context, preventive diplomacy is regarded as an integral part of broader conflict prevention efforts and refers particularly to early diplomatic actions aimed at preventing new disputes and the escalation of existing tensions into violence, as well as limiting the spread of ongoing conflicts.

For 2018–2020, UNRCCA focuses on five priority areas:

- Promoting prevention among the governments of Central Asia;
- Conflicts monitoring and early warning;
- Building partnerships with Central Asian states for conflict prevention;
- Strengthening the UN's preventive activities in the region;
- Encouraging cooperation and interaction between Central Asia and Afghanistan.

The Centre actively participates in various regional formats, such as the Istanbul Process, Heart of Asia, SPECA, Regional Economic Cooperation Conference on Afghanistan, aimed at stronger engagement of Afghanistan in regional, political and economic cooperation, including with Central Asian neighbours.

UNRCCA expert in her contribution focused on the role of parliaments in preventive diplomacy. Parliaments have a critical role to play in regional conflict prevention. There are different ways legislatures can engage, for example, fact-finding missions to conflict areas and parliamentary forums. UNRCCA expert underscored that parliaments should make more effort in involving female members in parliamentary diplomacy by increasing the percentage of women in delegations to regional and international meetings and conferences. Analysis of different peace processes suggests that women often take a collaborative approach to peace-making and organize across cultural and sectarian divides.

Bilateral parliamentary contacts are useful in situations where governmental initiatives have not succeeded. This is where the parliamentary friendship groups can play a role. UNRCCA expert drew attention to the fact that such groups are established in the parliaments of Central Asia and Afghanistan; however, their potential is largely unexploited. The friendship groups can organize meetings with government and civil-society representatives and seek to meet with politicians from their partner state to discuss topics and problems in which they share a common interest as well as sensitive issues, and address the root causes of the tension. Likewise, the friendship groups can act as a platform for the organization of seminars, hearings and other meetings on issues of mutual concern. The parliaments can also appoint individual members who have particular knowledge and capacity to undertake missions of inquiry on certain aspects of conflict. Around the world, parliamentary diplomacy is playing an increasingly important role in peace initiatives and conflict prevention efforts.

Historical practice of parliamentary engagement with Afghanistan

In this session, current and former parliamentarians from Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan, and representative from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan shared experiences of parliamentary engagement with Afghanistan thus far. Since all Central Asian states, with exception of Kyrgyzstan to some extent, have presidential system of government and historically have been dominated by strong executive, there is limited experience of cooperation with Afghanistan on parliamentary level. Nevertheless, there are some practices that can be a good starting point for further cooperation. Most notably, the parliamentary friendship groups with Afghanistan that have been established in practically all Central Asian parliaments. The level of activity of these groups, however, varies – in some parliaments they exist only on paper. The participants agreed that parliamentary friendship groups are a good practice and should be reinvigorated.

Because of the upcoming elections, the parliamentarians from Afghanistan could not join the seminar. The participants expressed hope that elections in Afghanistan would be peaceful and legitimate.

The other important form of engagement has been interaction during the regional and international parliamentary forums, like Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization of the Collective Security Treaty (PA OCST), where Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are member states and Afghanistan – observer. PA OCST has dealt with the fight against terrorism and, importantly, parliamentarians from Afghanistan had participated in this initiative. There was a general agreement among the seminar participants that any conference or meeting addressing the problems of Afghanistan must include representatives from Afghanistan. Similarly, Rose-Roth Program seminars, organised by the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, have been a good opportunity for bilateral meetings on the side-lines of the event. The 84th Rose-Roth seminar «Afghanistan and the future of the region: global cooperation» was organized by the Jogorku Kenesh of Kyrgyzstan. Both of these events have facilitated the meetings between the leaders of the Jogorku Kenesh of Kyrgyzstan and the Wolesi Jirga of the National Assembly of Afghanistan to discuss the development of stronger inter-parliamentary ties and cooperation in education and culture.

Almost all Central Asian states are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), while Afghanistan has observer status. Recently, SCO has been discussing the development of inter-parliamentary cooperation. The member of the Kyrgyzstan Parliament suggested that institutionalization of parliamentary cooperation among the member states and the SCO observers would definitely have a positive effect. So far, there have been forums of political parties, presenting an opportunity for interaction among parliamentarians.

There are also some good examples of bilateral parliamentary cooperation on concrete cross-border matters, like the joint work of the parliaments of Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan on the issue of ethnic Kyrgyz living in the Small and Large Pamirs. With the help of the parliamentary involvement from both sides regarding their protection, in 2016, a Kairylman (Returnee) program for 2017–2020 was adopted with an aim to create favourable conditions for the socio-economic integration of ethnic Kyrgyz who have resettled in Kyrgyzstan. A part of the ethnic Kyrgyz minority received Afghan passports.

Another positive example of proactive parliamentary engagement with Afghanistan is the recent meeting of the members of the Jogorku Kenesh with the Afghan Ambassador, demonstrating that Kyrgyz Parliament is ready to cooperate

with Afghanistan and expand trade and economic relations. There are a number of agreements between Kyrgyzstan and Afghanistan (trade, transportation, taxation, security, the fight against drug trafficking, etc.) that are currently being drafted and will require parliamentarians' attention and support.

Several speakers mentioned the exchange of visits by parliamentary delegations. For instance, the visit of parliamentary delegation of Kazakhstan to Afghanistan, meeting the leadership of the lower house and return visit by the delegation of Wolesi Jirga to Mazhilis. Similar exchanges have taken place between Turkmen and Afghan, as well as Uzbek and Afghan parliaments.

There was a general agreement among the participants that recent changes in Central Asian countries' foreign policies towards Afghanistan have strengthened the parliamentary cooperation in the region. At the same time, this change of policies has enabled the start of regional development projects with Afghanistan's full participation in the cooperation framework. All Central Asian states have carried out some kind of initiative to support the development of Afghanistan. It is a national security interest for Central Asian governments to help Afghanistan defeat the Taliban and other insurgent movements, and to promote the country's development and prosperity. A number of important governments' initiatives (mediation attempts; humanitarian assistance; nurturing investment and construction; and educating the Afghan youth) were mentioned by the speakers. The discussion reaffirmed the notion that Afghanistan is an integral part of Central Asia and regional parliamentary cooperation is needed to overcome the challenges that the region is facing.

The 17 sustainable development goals (SDGs) to transform our world: Role of inter-parliamentary cooperation in regional trends to direct Central Asia and Afghanistan towards prosperity.

This session explored the different ways how the parliaments and inter-parliamentary cooperation can support the implementation of sustainable development goals (SDGs), ultimately leading to greater prosperity of Central Asian countries and Afghanistan. In the beginning of the session, the UNDP Regional Governance Adviser from Bangkok Regional Hub briefly introduced the 2030 Agenda, paying a special attention to SDG 16, also known as the governance goal; and role of parliament in implementing SDGs. The UNDP Adviser suggested useful information resources, where legislators can find good practices and tools from around the world that can be adapted, as needed, depending on the national context. The introduction was followed by contributions from members of parliaments of Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, and discussion.

The main lesson from this session is that parliamentarians have an opportunity, and a constitutional responsibility, to play a significant role in supporting and monitoring SDG implementation. The Agenda 2030 Declaration acknowledges the «essential role of national parliaments through their enactment of legislation and adoption of budgets, and their role in ensuring accountability for the effective implementation of our commitments.» The SDGs are a robust framework around which parliaments can base their strategic plans and pursue their own oversight and accountability work. While parliamentarians have a responsibility to support and monitor implementation of all 17 SDGs and safeguard the integrity of Agenda 2030, Goal 16, known as the ‘Sustaining Peace and Good Governance Goal,’ has special significance for parliamentarians. SDG 16 aims to «promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels.» Based on their core functions – legislation & constitution, budget scrutiny, oversight, representation and leadership – parliamentarians have a leading role in advancing all facets of this Goal.

SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS



The UNDP Regional Governance Adviser noted some important tasks, where parliaments should have a role:

- Development of visions and strategic plans – mainstreaming Agenda’s principles and the SDGs;
- Priorities setting – preserving integrity, maximizing synergies, minimizing trade-offs;
- Establishing an enabling legislative environment for implementation;
- Ensuring vertical and horizontal policy coordination and coherence;
- Ensuring adequate financing for SDGs;
- Broad partnerships, consultations, contributions;
- Overseeing the implementation;
- Ensuring there is adequate monitoring, reporting.

The United National Development Programme (UNDP) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) have prepared a self-assessment toolkit

<https://www.ipu.org/resources/publications/handbooks/2017-01/parliaments-and-sustainable-development-goals-self-assessment-toolkit> to provide parliaments with the framework to evaluate their readiness to engage with SDGs. It further helps parliamentarians identify good practices, opportunities and lessons learned on how to effectively institutionalize the SDGs and mainstream them into the legislative processes. Another useful tool, recommended by the UNDP Regional Governance Adviser, is a Parliamentary Handbook on Parliament’s Role in Implementing the Sustainable Development Goals http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/librarypage/democratic-governance/parliamentary_development/parliament-s-role-in-implementing-the-sustainable-development-go.html, produced jointly by the UNDP, the Global Organization of Parliamentarians Against Corruption and the Islamic Development Bank. The handbook is designed to be an easy-to-use resource that can help parliamentarians and parliamentary staff members play an effective role in implementing the SDGs.

As it was noted in the opening session, the role of parliaments in Central Asian society is increasing, and legislatures have greater involvement in foreign affairs

and international relations. Inter-parliamentary cooperation and preventive diplomacy can help integrate Afghanistan into Central Asia's cooperation frameworks; and promote prosperity, peace and sustainable development – both in Afghanistan and in the whole Central Asian region. The UN Resident Coordinator in Uzbekistan noted that there is an intimate link between peace, sustainable development and security. Moreover, cooperation around sustainable development can generate jobs, growths and other positive spillover effects. Therefore, inter-parliamentary cooperation plays an important role also in SDG implementation.

The Head of the Commission on Family and Women of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis spoke about the experience of Uzbekistan's parliament in implementing SDG 5 (gender equality). The parliament has just prepared draft laws «On guarantees of equal rights and opportunities for women and men» and «On prevention of domestic violence», as stipulated in the «Action Strategy». The parliamentarian also referred to the recent Astana conference on empowerment of women in Afghanistan. The conference gathered prominent women politicians from all countries of the region.

In Kyrgyzstan, the Jogorku Kenesh has established a working group to monitor the enforcement of legislation on the implementation of SDGs. The working group is also actively cooperating with the respective UN agencies.

During the discussion, a question was raised about introduction of SDGs to the new convocation of Afghan parliament. The UNDP Regional Governance Advisor stated that the UNDP is prepared to have sessions on SDGs with Afghan parliamentarians. The participants also exchanged views on the government institutions responsible for SDG implementation in Central Asia. The conclusion was that principle is the same, although the institutions may vary. The UN representatives stressed the importance for each parliament to make a self-assessment on SDGs, using the above-mentioned toolkit and promised to distribute these materials to all participants.

The role of the current regional parliamentary cooperation in implementation of preventive diplomacy and the role of Afghanistan in the political development of CA.

This session considered the state of the current regional parliamentary cooperation in preventive diplomacy, and the role of Afghanistan in Central Asia. Participants agreed that the Central Asian region includes not only five former Soviet republics, now five independent Central Asian states, but also Afghanistan. Joint religion, common cultural features, to some extent shared history, and even some of the languages unite these countries. Likewise, many of the prob-

lems that the Central Asian states are facing are the same, some of them determined by geography, and cannot be solved without coordination and joint action. In their contributions, parliamentarians, experts and representatives from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan, spoke about the pressing need and importance of cooperation at parliamentary level. There are a lot of unresolved issues related to state borders, security, water and land that can have serious destabilizing effect in the region and become detonators of potential conflicts. The Vice President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly suggested that legislators have specific leverages, ways and means to address the conflict issues and build trust. They can open doors which only politicians can open and which professional diplomats or governmental representatives cannot. Parliamentarians also enjoy a greater degree of freedom to launch public debates or make public statements on sensitive topics, thus testing public opinion and leading the way, before governments are ready to take an official stance. Members of parliament can also pave the way for negotiations and they can promote political dialogue at the level of parliaments, political parties and civil society.

An independent expert argued that parliamentarism, just like statehood, is still in development in Central Asia, and the parliaments in the region are very different from each other in terms of maturity. There are relatively strong parliaments that are trying to influence the executive, but there are also parliaments that perform their functions as a parliament, and practically fulfil the will of the head of state – the president. In these circumstances, at present there is not much cooperation at parliamentary level on preventive diplomacy, however there is a trend towards the development of this cooperation and it should be supported. A parliamentarian from Turkmenistan, in his contribution, also noted that parliamentary diplomacy is a new practice in Central Asia. There was a consensus among participants that the regional parliamentary cooperation in preventive diplomacy has a huge potential. For example, in local border conflicts, legislators from both sides can help with reconciliation and issue could be resolved without bringing the matter to the use of force or the involvement of authorities.

A strong argument for closer cooperation on security matters and preventive diplomacy was presented by an independent expert: the so-called proxy war, led by major powers in Central Asia. This implies that countries of the region need to cooperate ever more closely, both among themselves and with Afghanistan, and start solving their own issues. As it was already mentioned in the previous sessions, at the moment there are favourable conditions in the region for taking the parliamentary cooperation to the next level.



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One of the important factors facilitating this is Uzbekistan's emergence from isolationism. The change in Uzbekistan's foreign policy was underscored by Uzbekistan's parliamentarians and experts, as well as other participants. It was also noted that success of parliamentary cooperation in preventive diplomacy requires mutual trust and one of the steps to create a climate of trust could be creating a regular exchange of information between the respective parliamentary committees dealing with these issues. Notwithstanding the undeniable need for closer cooperation with Afghanistan, some experts and parliamentarians cautioned that, until security issues are solved in Afghanistan, it will be very difficult to cooperate. Security situation in Afghanistan rises fear in Central Asian countries.

The Vice President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly gave a comprehensive overview about the work of this interparliamentary forum on preventive diplomacy. All five Central Asian countries are members of the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. Afghanistan has been an Asian Partner for Co-operation of the OSCE and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly since 2003. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is well positioned to exert preventive diplomacy as it is a flexible organization with a variety of instruments at its disposal to increase engagement with particular countries or regions and to promote parliamentarism. In 2007, the OSCE PA established a Special Representative for Central and Eastern Asia (formerly Special Representative for Central Asia).

The current mandate of the Special Representative includes encouraging active participation by parliamentarians from Central Asia in the work of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, as well as encouraging closer contacts between the parliaments in the region. The OSCE PA Ad Hoc Committees on Countering Terrorism and on Migration are another potential instrument for preventive diplomacy, as well as a forum for further engagement by legislators from Central Asia and for parliamentary exchange on issues of common concern. While there are currently no members from the region in the two Committees, field visits and membership are being considered.

The Deputy Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic speaking countries (TURKPA) briefed the participants about TURKPA activities and suggested that Afghanistan can participate as guests at the TURKPA sessions and workshops (application subject to approval by TURKPA General Assembly). Currently, one of the TURKPA four committees is working on harmonising the laws on combatting terrorism. He also underlined the importance of the Istanbul Process.

Experience from other regions shows that, most often, preventive diplomacy is a stepwise undertaking, in which one initial meeting leads to a series of fruitful

discussions. One should, thus, think in terms of cumulative steps to peace and reconciliation – initial steps may lack direct effects and only the last prevention tool may have a decisive effect.

Role of female MPs in inter-parliamentary engagement to mediate and negotiate peaceful settlement of local conflicts

This session dealt with the situation of women in Afghanistan and female representation in Central Asian parliaments. Since parliamentary diplomacy in local conflict settlement in Central Asia is not yet established practice; and given the low female representation in region's parliaments 21 % on average), one cannot yet speak about the involvement of female parliamentarians in conflict mediation. However, an expert from Uzbekistan drew attention to the initiative to establish inter-parliamentary cooperation between the women parliamentarians of Afghanistan and Uzbekistan on peaceful mediation and settlement of local conflicts. She also suggested that such cooperation should take place not only between the members of national parliaments, but also between the deputies of local governments in border areas.

An expert from Kazakhstan noted that the Committee on Foreign Relations, Defence and Security of the Senate of the Parliament of Kazakhstan is headed by a woman, implying that this could facilitate the cooperation of women parliamentarians on local conflict mediation in the region.

An expert from Azerbaijan shared experience from Nagorno Karabakh conflict, where women from both sides had issued a joint resolution and contributed to the solution.

In a recent meeting, organised by the International Peace Institute, the Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Affairs of Afghanistan said that her country had made progress in increasing the number of women negotiators but questioned how seriously they were being taken. «We realized that the commitment from leadership to bring them on board is just representation, but do they actually participate? We struggle with that second part, ensuring an actual space to speak and be part of the negotiation.» It should be noted that Norway, that is often invited to facilitate talks, agrees to do so only if the assembled team is composed with gender balance and female envoys. Research shows that when women substantively participate in peace processes as witnesses, signatories, mediators, and negotiators, the resulting agreement is more likely to last. The discussion highlighted that parliaments should make more consistent effort to include female members in preventive diplomacy activities, as well as in the re-

spective parliamentary committees dealing with foreign relations/ security; and delegations for cooperation with Afghanistan.

Perspectives for cooperation between Central Asian and Afghan Parliaments

Based on reflections from previous discussions, the last session considered the perspectives for future cooperation between the Central Asian and Afghan parliaments. A prevalent theme was the need to establish a regional parliamentary platform that would also include Afghanistan. Participants agreed that the potential of parliamentary diplomacy is not fully utilised. Several speakers, both experts and parliamentarians noted that, following the recent political developments, there is a positive dynamic in the region and all preconditions exist for closer cooperation. There were also concrete proposals for the shape of the parliamentary platform.

One expert suggested that it could be the «Dialogue Group of Parliamentarians of Central Asia and Afghanistan», while some others proposed the regional parliamentary assembly. The moderator of the session put forward a plan for the Parliamentary Assembly of Greater Central Asia (PACA), which, besides five Central Asian states, should include Afghanistan and also Mongolia. He suggested to design PACA after the model of Parliamentary Assembly of Mediterranean (PAM) <https://www.pam.int/> with a centralized managing office in one of the member states and allocated funds for cooperative efforts.

Participants agreed that the parliamentary friendship groups are a useful tool, where legislators can openly raise sensitive issues, and they need to be activated. It was agreed that parliamentarians will communicate the information about the seminar to the friendship groups in their respective parliaments and parliamentary leadership. In the course of discussion, some parliamentarians already came up with a plan how to do it according to the rules of procedure of the house. There was a general commitment from participating parliamentarians to take up this matter in their parliaments.

When it comes to the issues of cooperation, the following topics were suggested as priority:

- threats of religious extremism and terrorism;
- fight against drug trafficking;
- use of water resources.

There were calls for systematic exchange of information on issues of mutual interest and harmonization of legislation. Another proposal was to establish contacts among women parliamentarians.

Participants agreed that the seminar had been very useful and expressed a wish for more such meetings on regular basis. Several speakers suggested also more informal meetings. The representatives from Afghanistan acknowledged that this seminar had been very important for the country and thanked the UNRCCA and colleagues from the region.

In her closing remarks, the SRSB invited the parliamentarians to use the UN platform for further cooperation. The SRSB also noted the willingness for organised manner of parliamentary cooperation in the region and assured of UNRCCA support in these efforts.

Moving forward

The participants agreed that the potential of parliamentary diplomacy in Central Asia is largely unexploited and there is a need for a regional parliamentary platform. Below are some key recommendations that can serve as a blueprint to move this forward.

1. According to the rules of procedure of the house, inform the parliament about the seminar conclusions and idea of establishing the Central Asian parliamentary platform.
2. Activate the parliamentary friendship groups.
3. Take the necessary steps towards establishing the Central Asian parliamentary platform after the matter has been agreed upon in each parliament. It is recommended to form a small working group, consisting of one or two deputies from each parliament, and a senior civil servant from each parliament's administration to draft the rules of procedure. UNRCCA may need to support/ facilitate the initial meeting of the working group and provide expert.

*Drafted by Anitra Jancevica,
UNRCCA Leading Expert ■*

LETTER FROM THE MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF THE ISLAMIC REPUBLIC OF AFGHANISTAN

*Respectful Madam Natalia Gherman,
Special Representative of the Secretary-General
For Central Asia*

The detailed report of the delegation of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan on the current seminar titled, «Role of Parliaments in engaging Afghanistan in Central Asian cooperation frameworks through preventive diplomacy» which took place in Uzbekistan, was studied and assessed.

The Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan has looked into this innovative approach of the United Nations and sincerely thanks and supports this initiative.

We believe that solving common problems of the region needs cooperation of countries, in particular between the Parliaments. If all the parties sincerely and jointly don't counter terrorism and extremism and drugs, then these elements will result more than ever in victims on a daily basis and expand, and tomorrow would be too late for prevention.

We hope that the Parliaments of the Central Asian countries, with cooperation of the Parliament of Afghanistan, could be helpful in resolving the problem of four decades.

The Foreign Ministry of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan once again commends this good initiative of the United Nations and extends its gratitude and whole-hearted support of it.

*Respectfully,
Salahuddin Rabbani,
Foreign Minister of the Islamic
Republic of Afghanistan ■*

