

Security Matters

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Issue

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Starlink Goes to Kazakhstan

In the second half of 2007 we decided to take the Starlink programme further east and got in touch with the Netherlands Embassy in Astana to investigate possibilities in Kazakhstan. During a fact-finding mission in November 2007 we found that there was a clear need to develop capacity for democratic governance in the security sector of Kazakhstan. The country is engaged in a process of reform that, if successful, will improve oversight of the security agencies, enable the country to fulfil the commitments it undertook in its NATO Individual Partnership Action Plan of 2006, and enhance Kazakhstan's standing at the OSCE. Kazakhstan will hold the presidency of the OSCE in 2010. It is obvious that Kazakhstan has put in place several of the laws and institutions required for democratic oversight of the security sector, and others are likely to follow. However, Kazakhstan still has some way to go to foster a culture of accountability. Here Starlink training courses will be helpful. The Starlink programme has been included in Kazakhstan's Individual Partnership Action Plan.

A high-level meeting, held on 24 June in Astana, introduced the Starlink programme to Kazakhstan and discussed Kazakhstan's domestic security dynamics. It also provided ample opportunity for the Kazakh security community in the broadest sense (that is to say, including government officials, members of parliament, NGO representatives, journalists, etc.) and international security experts to engage in discussions. A try-out Defence training course directly followed the high-level meeting. It was organised in Almaty by CESS in cooperation with Al-Farabi Kazakh National University and the Kazakhstan International Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law. Both are based in Almaty.



Students of the al-Farabi University participating in the Starlink try-out course



Mountainous Almaty

After these two very successful events, the first real Starlink Defence Course commenced on 8 September in the Radisson SAS Hotel in Astana. On Monday morning we welcomed a total of 25 participants, including officials from the Senate as well as the Ministries of Defence, Interior, and Emergency Situations. Representatives of our partner NGO from Astana, the Civil Alliance, travelled all across the huge country to participate in the course. Opening words were provided by Maurits ter Kuile, Deputy Head of Mission at the Netherlands Embassy in Astana, Aigul Solovyeva, the President of the Civil Alliance and a member of parliament, and Sami Faltas. The first day was rather quiet. The unfamiliar Starlink material, the large group and the enormous conference room in the Radisson Hotel seemed to overwhelm the participants. But in the course of the next day, this feeling was replaced by engagement and excitement. This was the day of the simulation exercise on a parliamentary inquiry into the irregular purchase of army uniforms in a fictitious post-Soviet republic.

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Merijn Hartog, Pollien van Keulen, Kees Homan and Bauke Snoep in front of the al-Farabi University

"I know I should have informed parliament about the purchase of the uniforms, but there was no time! We had to send our troops to Georgia and Ossetia, so we needed the uniforms immediately!" With this clever opening, the Minister of Defence removed much of the sting from the game. After a day of serious discussions by the participants, the concluding remark of the MP who was leading the committee of inquiry in the game was a good indicator of the way the participants approached the political problems in the fictitious post-Soviet republic of Croania: "We don't want to politicize the problem, but we want to solve it at a business level."

An NGO representative captured the essence of one of the Starlink objectives: "This approach puts an end to stereotyping. We are able to look at each other and at ourselves in a new way. Government officials from the security sector were not really familiar with us, the NGO representatives. They work with orders and do not always have the time to think these orders over. And we, the NGO representatives, learned that the civil servants working in the security area are also just people like us. We can sit down and have dinner with them!"

The laughter that followed this last remark was an indication of the very good atmosphere throughout the entire course. Netherlands Ambassador Klaas van der Tempel concluded the course with the following words: "Kazakhstan is a very peace-loving country. Violence often starts when you don't know each other. So this course represents at a micro level what we need to do internationally."

Politics as Management

With these last words of the Ambassador in our minds, we embarked on the second leg of our journey. On Thursday morning, we launched the second defence course at the Department of International Relations of al-Farabi University in Almaty. Words of welcome were provided by Geoffrey van Leeuwen, head of the Netherlands Embassy Office in Almaty, and Yevgeny Zhovtis, representing our partner the Kazakhstan Bureau of Human Rights and the Rule of Law. Mr Zhovtis made an important remark about the link between democratic governance and effectiveness, which was taken up by Sami Faltas (CESS), who said: "We believe democratic governance actually works better than undemocratic governance, because it is more effective."

Considering that the venue was a university, it was fitting that students formed a large part of the group. This led to a different dynamic, compared with the group in Astana. Whereas the Astana participants were quite reserved on the first day of the course, the Almaty group plunged head first into the discussions. Together with the more interactive approach adopted by our trainers, this made for an interesting and lively first day.

The simulation exercise on the second day took a surprising turn with the sudden departure before the lunch break of the person playing the Minister of Defence. After some quick improvisation, game controller Bauke Snoep announced that the minister had fled the country and taken a job in Italy. Consequently, the Prime Minister now became the main target of the inquiry. After a short period of adjustment, the game continued.



Sami Faltas and the Netherlands Ambassador to Kazakhstan, HE Klaas van der Tempel, congratulating a course participant



Acting as journalists in Starlink's simulation game

Perhaps the opposition was a bit lame. Hardly an eyebrow was raised when in the game the Head of Procurement at the Ministry of Defence stated: "Of course we did not break the law, we simply by-passed one article." Nevertheless, the overall outcome of the game was satisfactory. The most interesting thing was that even though the composition of the group was completely different from the group in Astana, the story developed differently, and the outcome was different, the game was played in a similar fashion. Both exercises were characterised by a business-like approach to political problems. Party political struggles were left aside, and problems were tackled and solved in boardroom style. This gave us the impression that parliamentary politics is management in Kazakhstan. Effective, yes, but as Bauke Snoep said, too smooth and civilised for a democracy. In a mature democracy, politics is usually a messy and sometimes a dirty business. That is why democracies need strict rules on parliamentary procedure, transparency, accountability and the rule of law.

After this successful start in Kazakhstan, we look forward to continuing the programme in November with the law enforcement course and a new course on disaster relief and management in the first quarter of 2009.

Academics Ponder Turkey's Accession Problems

On June 26 and 27, Turkish, Dutch and other academics met in Oegstgeest, the Netherlands, for a Round Table Conference on Turkey and the European Union. They were joined by distinguished representatives of the Dutch and Turkish governments, the European Commission and Turkish NGOs. The meeting, organised by CESS and the Turkey Institute, studied perceptions and misperceptions in Western Europe and Turkey about each other and identified stumbling blocks on Turkey's road to EU accession.

Over the last four years, support for accession has been dwindling, both in Turkey and in Western Europe. So no one expects easy progress toward accession. But today the political obstacles blocking its path are proving formidable, enthusiasm on both sides of the Bosphorus is evaporating, and the outcome of the whole endeavour is uncertain. What makes things even worse is that much of the debate on these problems is shallow and self-serving. More than ever, we need knowledgeable people to take a careful and dispassionate look at the political obstacles that stand in the way of Turkey's accession to the EU and suggest ways of overcoming them.



Participants at rountable Oegstgeest



After watching the football thriller Turkey-Germany on tv in Oegstgeest...

Turkey and the European Union agreed on an association treaty in 1963. In 1987, Turkey formally applied for EU membership. Its candidacy was recognized at the EU summit in Helsinki in 1999, and negotiation talks began in October 2005. Since then, however, relations have deteriorated, and accession seems increasingly distant and uncertain.

The recently established Turkey Institute in The Hague and CESS jointly organised this conference to address the problems in Turkish-European relations. Instead of addressing detailed and specific problems at the micro level, the organisers aimed to address underlying and deeper problems in the relations. As this was an expert meeting, the number of round-table participants and speakers was limited.

The basic idea of the roundtable was to tackle some fundamental issues that will sooner or later appear on the EU-Turkey agenda. These are not problems that a round table meeting can thrash out. Instead, the meeting looked at cases in which similar problems have occurred elsewhere and tried to discover the underlying concerns. The participants especially dwelled on unspoken fear and distrust underlying disagreements. They also paid special attention to Western European and Turkish perceptions of one another. Whether these perceptions are a true reflection of reality or not, they have a powerful impact on the relationship between Turkey and the EU.

The conference's first session dealt with the waning enthusiasm for accession in Turkey and the member states of the European Union. During the second session the diverging strategic and political cultures of Turkey and Western Europe were discussed. Session III was about the socio-economic differences in and between Turkey and the EU. Session IV studied the exploitation of fear and distrust by populist politicians. On the second day the focus of the conference was on future directions of Turkey and the EU and suggesting ways to overcome the formidable obstacles that stand in the way of Turkey's accession.

One of the main conclusions of the conference is that public opinion in Western Europe seems to have a skewed view of who stands to gain from Turkish accession. There is a widespread, but questionable, feeling that in economic terms Turkey will benefit a great deal, and the EU will benefit little.

There is also a populist challenge. Advocates of accession are portrayed as elitist and out of touch with popular sentiment. This populism, the participants felt, is not so much a consequence of Turkey's candidacy, but a result of globalisation.

Finally, the conference found that the process of negotiation itself has had traumatising effects. Cynicism and fatigue continue to grow. The culture of negotiation is very different in Turkey and the EU. This leads to misunderstanding. There is a serious lack of momentum and true commitment.

Leaving the conference, our Turkish friends concluded it was a great success not only because of the openness demonstrated by all participants of the round table, but also because of the very valuable discussions held. They asked for a follow-up event to further advise the relevant authorities in Ankara, Brussels and elsewhere. The proceedings of the conference will be published before the end of 2008.



...Roundtable proceedings started on the second day



The Moldovan delegation in front of the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Moldovan Delegation in Sunny Scheveningen

A sunny day at the Scheveningen beach was the perfect setting for the reception of 10 Moldovan parliamentarians and staff members for a three-day visit to The Hague. As we like to point out, the Netherlands government is based here, but it is not the national capital. During the official opening reception at the famous Kurhaus, against the background of a beautiful sunset, the relationship between CESS, Moldova and the Moldovan parliament was praised.

Indeed, we highly value the good relationships we have developed with the Moldovan Parliament since the Moldova Parliamentary Programme was launched last year. After a difficult start, in which both parties waited to see which way the wind would blow, the programme has evolved into an initiative that the parliament has accepted with open arms. This has led to highly productive seminars in Chisinau. The first seminar outside Moldova measured up to that high standard. In the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs the Moldovan delegation frankly discussed the first draft of the Expert Report, written by Moldovan experts, on security sector reform and parliamentary oversight. The problems, needs and options for parliamentary oversight of the security sector in Moldova put forward in the report were critically assessed and discussed.

The next day the delegation visited the Netherlands Court of Audit, where they discussed the role of the Court of Audit in the Dutch system of democratic oversight. Afterwards, the group visited the adjacent offices of the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS). HCSS is a think-tank that provides policy advice to government and parliament. At this visit the discussions were mostly focused on the relationship between government and parliament on the one hand and civil society on the other.

On Wednesday the Moldovan parliamentarians met with their counterparts from the Netherlands Defence committee. Although it was so-called 'accounting day' for the government at the parliament and a session of the defence committee combined with the foreign affairs committee was taking place concurrently, the chairman of the defence committee, Hans van Baalen, took the time to receive his Moldovan colleagues. He discussed the functioning of the Netherlands parliament and the defence committee in particular, and answered the delegates' questions. A tour through the Netherlands parliament concluded this day and the working visit of the delegation. At the farewell lunch,



Moldovan visitors enjoy view of Scheveningen beach



Moldovan parliamentarians in the Dutch parliament

the head of the Moldovan delegation, Mr. Iurie Rosca, deputy speaker of the parliament of the republic of Moldova, stressed the strong cohesion of the group. Although the members of the delegation are political opponents in their daily work, they got along very well during the days they spent in the Netherlands. Indeed, new Moldovan friendships were made across party lines.

This autumn the second phase of the Moldova Parliamentary Programme will begin. In the last week of October, CESS and its partner institute in Moldova, the Institute for European Institute for Political Studies, will organise the first of four training courses on democratic governance, with an emphasis on parliamentary oversight. These courses are based on the successful Starlink formula and are designed for young practitioners from the parliamentary staff, the relevant Ministries and civil society. They will take three days. The second course will follow in December.

Before the end of the year, the Expert Report will be published. At the moment we are editing and finalising it. This will be a very unusual product, because there are few studies on the Moldovan security sector, and those that exist are not written by Moldovans. We hope that the recommendations made in the report will be of use to practitioners and will contribute to the further development of parliamentary oversight of the security sector in Moldova.

SSR Workshop for Burundi

Bert Koenders, the Netherlands Minister for Development Co-operation, has made support for fragile states one of the key elements of his policy. Countries like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Burundi and Kosovo can only achieve sustainable development when their states are functioning properly. Even in poor and conflict-torn countries, the state must provide essential things like education, health care and

of course security and justice services. But to ensure human security, government agencies like the police and the military must not only be professional and well-equipped. They must also protect the rights and liberties of the population, abide by the law, and account for everything they do. So the Netherlands and other donors want to help fragile states to build capacity and improve integrity in their security sector. These are the twin pillars of Security Sector Reform (SSR). The donor governments insist that they go together.



SSR Workshop for Burundian delegation



Burundian participant displays certificate

Mr Koenders was the keynote speaker at a workshop on SSR organised by CESS on 10-13 June for high military and civilian officials from Burundi. The venue was the Netherlands Defence College in The Hague, and the assignment came from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs. This event, conducted entirely in French, helped to familiarise senior government decision-makers from Burundi with the OECD DAC approach to SSR that the donor countries share. But the chief purpose of the exercise was to develop a common approach to SSR between Burundi as a host country and the Netherlands as one of its main donors.

The subject matter was not a problem. We had the OECD DAC workbook on SSR compiled by CESS and others precisely for this kind of workshop, and luckily, we received the French edition just in time for the Burundi event. The big challenge was to find experts on SSR who were good trainers, spoke French, and knew Africa. With the help of various government agencies and thinktanks in Belgium, Switzerland, the UK and the Netherlands we managed to attract an excellent team of speakers.

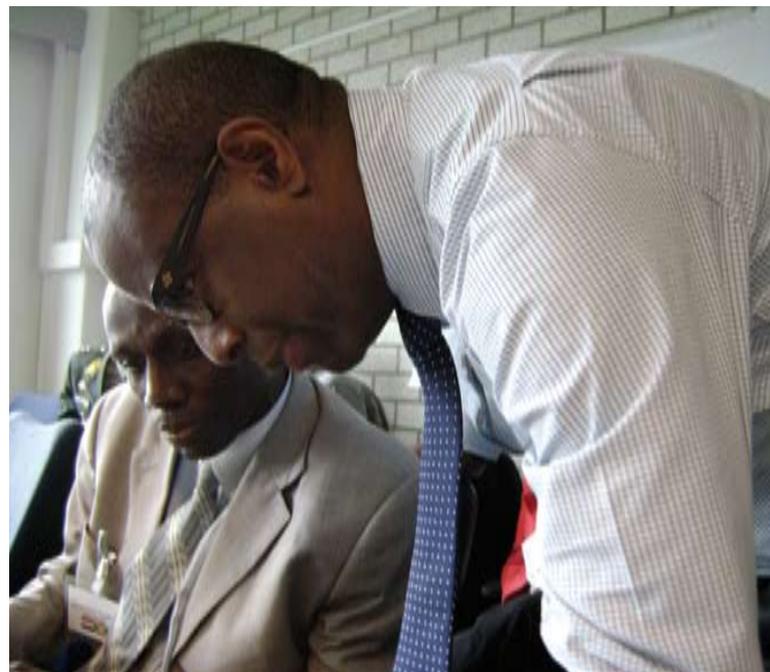
The final day of the meeting was reserved for a symposium for policy-makers from Burundi and the Netherlands on the way forward for SSR in Burundi. It was facilitated by Sami Faltas and Jan Heukelom of the European Centre for Development Policy Management in Maastricht. After some difficult discussions on the way forward for SSR in Burundi, the leaders of the delegations met in private and achieved the necessary breakthrough.

Training of SSR Trainers

The common approach to SSR developed by the donor countries united in OECD DAC is described in their Handbook on SSR published in 2007. On this basis, training material and training courses were developed and tried out last year by CESS in cooperation with German partners, for OECD DAC.

Now the donor countries and the organisations working on SSR have begun training people who will be working on SSR. On a small scale, we have also begun training SSR trainers, who will of course go on to train practitioners.

The first of these Training of SSR Trainers courses was held on 24-26 November 2007 at the training centre of InWEnt in Bad Honnef, Germany. Mike Ashkenazi (Bonn International Center for Conversion) and Sami Faltas were the instructors, and the participants came from a wide range of European countries, as well as Canada, representing various government organisations and NGOs. The second and last in this series was held on 7-9 July, again in Bad Honnef, with Mike Ashkenazi and Sami Faltas in charge. In both events, participants did most of the teaching, and the course was felt to be very effective and stimulating.



Dutch and Burundian delegates during SSR workshop

Now that CESS was moving more and more into the field of SSR training, we felt a need to build and enhance our own capacities in this field. So we staged our own Training of SSR Trainers in Groningen, on 25-27 August. This was a co-operative venture with BICC, and two SSR experts from the Geneva Centre for Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF) joined us as participants. Again, Mike and Sami were the instructors. From the CESS staff, Merijn Hartog, Erik Sportel, Ritske Bloemendaal and Pollien van Keulen participated. Using her experience as an amateur actress, Pollien showed us how to

move around and ‘throw’ our voices. From the CESS network, Margriet Drent, Sascha le Large, Cees Homan and Bauke Snoep were among the trainees. The result is that we now have a team of SSR trainers that we can field.

SSR Training for ESDP and the European Commission

Minister of Defence Eimert van Middelkoop promised his EU colleagues that the Netherlands would develop and provide a training module on SSR and European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP), to be used in the framework of the European Security and Defence College (ESDC). France agreed to co-sponsor the effort. The two main organisations responsible are the Netherlands Defence College in The Hague and the Institut nationale des hautes études de défense nationale (IDEDN) in Paris.

The assignment to develop the module and do most of the teaching was given to CESS.

The course is to be held at the Netherlands Defence College on the former naval airbase Ypenburg in The Hague. Participants will come from most EU member states. The Dutch Minister of Defence is expected to open the course, and there will be presentations on various ESDP and European Commission missions engaged in SSR. From CESS, Sami Faltas, Merijn Hartog, Erik Sportel, Ritske Bloemendaal, Bauke Snoep and Cees Homan will be involved in the teaching.

For its part, the European Commission has asked CESS to organise an SSR training course for its staff in the Charlemagne building in Brussels, on 27-28 November. The instructors will be Sami Faltas and Erik Sportel.

Publications

Centre for European Security Studies, *Peace Support Operations: The Past and the Future. Papers of the Ankara seminar*, Harmonie Paper 22 July 2008.

Sami Faltas, *Bulgaria and Romania: Quick Start, Ambiguous Progress*, Contemporary Security Policy, Volume 29, no. 1, April 2008: 78-102.

OECD, *Training Module on Security System Reform and Governance, Workbook for Trainees*. Contributions by Sami Faltas, et al.

Merijn Hartog and Sami Faltas, *The Starlink Program: Training for Security Sector Reform in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine*, Connections Quarterly Journal, Volume VII, Number 2, Summer 2008, ISSN: 1812-1098, 81-92 pp.

People

Pollien van Keulen came to us in April 2008 for an internship as part of her MA programme in Contemporary History. Her internship ended in July. However, she says: “Now it is September and I am writing a piece for ‘Security Matters’ to introduce myself as the assistant programme manager for the Turkey project. Obviously I fast-tracked my career over the past months!

From the moment I started working as an intern at CESS, the organization, its staff, their philosophy and the cute little office on Lutkenieuwstraat grew on me.”



As Pollien’s internship was drawing to a close, we were recruiting someone to take over a lot of the work in the Turkey programme from Ritske Bloemendaal and also help out with other programmes, like Starlink Kazakhstan. Pollien applied, and we were happy to give her the position. She has already participated in our training of SSR trainers and managed the first two defence courses in Kazakhstan, an experience she enjoyed. “I greatly appreciate the opportunity to see through the Starlink Kazakhstan programme, which I helped start up during my internship, and the new adventure I can embark upon in Turkey. A Dutch saying comes to mind: ‘Things turn out best for you if you make the best of the way things turn out.’” We are happy to have Pollien on board.

Artyom Korotkov was our English-Russian interpreter during our preparatory trips to Kazakhstan. We were impressed by his work and delighted by his unfailing cheerfulness and can-do attitude. So we invited him to be our first Kazakhstani intern. His first impression of the Netherlands is that it’s green. Then he was amazed to find all shops closed on Sunday. The huge mass of bicycles outside Euroborgstadion, home of FC Groningen, astonished him. But that was nothing compared with the experience of mounting a bike himself.



“Man, if you haven’t ridden a bike for 12 years, Groningen is the wrong place to be! I’ve never done the Tour de France, but now I know what it’s like. At first the cycling was hard. Then it got worse and worse, because a small street leading to my student hostel got narrower and narrower. That was no good! So many cyclists, and they all seemed to be going in the same direction as I. The flood of bikes became heavier and heavier. If I had stretched my hands out, I could have hugged the bikers riding next to me. It took a great deal of concentration, self-control, and faith to get back home in one piece.”

Welcome to Groningen, Artyom. We are famous for our parking problems for bikes, and traffic jams involving only bicycles.

A Monnet Plan for Central Asia?

When the French politician Jean Monnet contemplated a peaceful Europe, he believed that this required European integration. During the Second World War, he said: "There will be no peace in Europe if the states are reconstituted on the basis of national sovereignty. (...) The countries of Europe are too small to guarantee their peoples the necessary prosperity and social development."

Monnet was convinced that Europe's safety, stability and prosperity required a common free trade area. In his view the way to realise this bold initiative was to convince interested countries to slowly merge parts of their national sovereignty into that of a European community. Monnet realised that this process would be long and that countries in post-war Europe, largely devastated, would never give up their sovereignty for the benefit of a leap in the dark. So he defined narrow areas of common interest (namely coal and steel) in which participating states would, perhaps, be prepared to give up some sovereignty. On this narrow basis the ECSC (European Coal and Steel Community) was established in 1951. The direct result was that it became undesirable for participating countries to wage war among each other, because they knew it would vitally harm their industries and trade. Moreover, countries that are dependent on each other for their trade and are in constant talks with each other have a shared interest in peace, prosperity and stability. And as the countries of Western Europe became more and more interdependent, war between them became not only unattractive, but also very difficult.

As a historian by education, I do realise that analogies can be misleading. History does not repeat itself, and success stories from the past cannot be used as blueprints for the resolution of today's problems. Conditions and contexts change from one period to the next and from one place to another. However, history does suggest potential solutions to current problems.

Using the Monnet Plan and the early stages of European integration as my point of departure and source of inspiration, I will suggest three lessons that can be learned from them, and I will argue in favour of a similar, but of course not identical, process in Central Asia. First of all, as long as states are only chasing their own interests, peace, prosperity and stability will most likely not take root. Second, countries that are willing to yield only a part of their sovereignty to a supranational authority are bound by trade and dialogue and thus, have a shared interest in peace and stability. And third, visionary leaders like Jean Monnet are needed to initiate a process of integration and cooperation.

With regard to the first lesson learned, the recent history of Central Asia shows that several attempts have been made to strengthen regional ties. However, these attempts have not been very successful. The various Central Asian leaders have different reasons for seeking greater regional cooperation and are pursuing diverging national interests. Until recently, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan were competing for regional supremacy. Moreover, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have had

a touchy relationship for years. Finally, Turkmenistan voluntarily isolated itself from the region and showed no interest in cooperation. Fortunately there have been some changes for the better. Turkmenistan is opening up since the death of President Niyazov in December 2006 and relations between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have improved in the last two years.

When considering the second lesson learned—the need to formulate narrowly-defined common interests to establish trade and dialogue—it is not too difficult to identify common ground in Central Asia. An important regional issue seems to be the urgent need to utilise hydro-power. However, regional integration in the area of water management is beset by several difficulties. As I said earlier, national interests dominate negotiations and smother dialogue. Since the beginning of the 1990s Central Asian states have been debating a solution to the water distribution problem but consensus was never reached. When it comes to the availability of water in this region, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan provide the overwhelming share of it, while Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are the major consumers. But, to give an example of the smothered dialogue, Uzbekistan takes a suspicious view of Tajikistan's ambitions to develop its hydro-power sector, which could be applied to the entire region. Uzbekistan's leadership fears the new self-assurance that Tajikistan will display when it starts making serious money on hydro-power. As long as there is fundamental mistrust between the potential partners, regional co-operation on hydro-power issues will not mature.

By the same token, unless visionary leaders for reform stand up and start initiating dialogue and cooperation, nothing will change. That was the third lesson learned in early European integration. In this regard promising developments took place in Central Asia in 2008 which point to a possible change. Tajikistan's leadership used a conference on water management to build consensus for a stronger regional approach. Another positive development is that the economic powerhouse of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, has become convinced that a solution for water-related issues in the Central Asian region is essential and realises that it has to cooperate with the water-rich countries Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.

In my opinion, the real window of opportunity lies in a combination of factors. Kazakhstan sees a need for regional cooperation on water management. Unlike Tajikistan, Kazakhstan has real leverage in Central Asia. Finally, in recent years Kazakhstan has developed increasingly friendly relations with the other powerhouse in Central Asia, Uzbekistan. If the five Central Asian republics eventually decide to give up part of their national sovereignty and decide to form a supranational water management community that will, in my opinion, benefit them all. To realise this goal the Kazakhstani government needs to play a pro-active role in establishing a platform for cooperation on water-related issues.

Serbia: On the Right Track at Last?

By Jovan Teokarević, Director of the Belgrade Centre for European Integration (BeCEI)

In 2008 Serbia went through a number of difficult challenges that, contrary to most predictions, only made pro-European political forces stronger. At the beginning of the year, not many people had expected Serbia to move closer to the EU so soon. They would have been surprised to find its powerful anti-European opposition crippled and in disarray. Nor would they have thought that the overall situation in the country would rapidly improve, making Serbia a better place to live in. Of course Serbia still has plenty of problems to deal with. But at the moment, optimism is prevailing.

Two things happened in September, contributing to this positive mood. First, in an unusually supportive and bold statement, European Commission President Barroso said that Serbia, if it meets all necessary conditions, might become a candidate for EU membership already in 2009, after so many years of lagging behind others in the region. Second, the Italian Fiat group decided to invest a billion euros in Serbia's once strong car industry. As a result of this, the biggest individual foreign investment ever, Serbia should soon be exporting cars worth a billion euros a year. The investment is equally important as a symbol of trust abroad in Serbia's economy and its European future.

Everything seemed different at the beginning of the year, when it became obvious that the independence of the province Kosovo was inevitable, despite strong opposition from Serbia. In addition to the deep political crisis and the expected rise of frustration, confusion and nationalism, many predicted that Serbia was facing another war with the Kosovar Albanians over the province. That didn't happen, and luck had nothing to do with it. Despite many angry words, Serbian political leadership basically acted in a responsible way and didn't encourage a spread of the Kosovo crisis to other parts of the region.

Serbian President Boris Tadić helped to establish a realistic and constructive public mood. In a tight competition with the nationalist leader of the Serbian Radical Party Tomislav Nikolić Mr Tadić was re-elected for a second five-year term in late January. This happened in a very unfavourable context and only a month before Kosovo became independent. Furthermore, the triumph of the pro-European leader of the Democratic Party was confirmed in mid-May, during early parliamentary elections, when his coalition 'For European Serbia' beat the nationalists that marched in two columns. In addition to the Radicals, there was also the party of former Prime Minister Vojislav Koštunica.

True victory came only two months later, when Mr Tadić was finally able to form a coalition government dominated by his party, but including representatives of the Socialist Party of Serbia, once led by Slobodan Milošević.

Their tiny majority in the Parliament (127 versus 123 seats) rests also upon the support of several smaller parties, including the ones of the Hungarian and the Bosniac national minorities. Another 13 votes of the Liberal Democratic Party will also be at Tadić's disposal when the key decisions that will take Serbia closer to the EU are at stake. Serbia's new ruling coalition did even better at other levels of power. It won an absolute majority in the province of Vojvodina and retains power at the local level in most important cities across the country, including Belgrade. This in turn has made Tadić 'the strongman of Serbia', as the Economist put it recently, or the 'Serbian Putin', as many people are saying in Serbia.

This has resulted in a concentration of power in the hands of the president, in the way that is unprecedented since the times of Milošević. But it was not achieved only through victories at the polls. It was also made possible by a deep crisis and internal divisions within the once dangerous nationalist opposition. Two crucial electoral defeats in four months crushed its self-confidence. In addition, the long-awaited internal transformation of the Serbian Radical Party led to its split in two factions a few weeks ago.

Nationalists were particularly hurt by the biggest political sensation of the year: the unexpected discovery and arrest, after years of hiding, of the former Bosnian Serb leader and indicted war criminal Radovan Karadžić in Belgrade, in late July. Weak protests by Radicals and the firm position adopted by the newly established government, which subsequently transferred Karadžić to the tribunal in The Hague, were clear indications that the political landscape had changed in Serbia.

With two remaining indicted persons, Ratko Mladić and Goran Hadžić still at large and possibly hiding in Serbia, the capture of Karadžić was, alas, not enough to convince the Netherlands Foreign Minister Maxime Verhagen that Serbia is finally fully cooperating with the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia. Although his colleagues from the 26 other EU member states were ready to reward Serbia in mid-September by 'unfreezing' the interim trade agreement, the Dutch 'no' prevailed in the end.

That's why question marks continue to hover above Serbia's ambitious plan of becoming an EU candidate in 2009. President Tadić took a risk in late April when he signed the Stabilisation and Association Agreement with the EU. The opposition accused him and his party of treason at that time, because in their mind this was too high a price for allowing Kosovo to declare independence. The new government keeps insisting that, despite its wish to join the EU, it will never give up Serbia's legitimate demand for new negotiations on the status of Kosovo. In order to strengthen its case, Serbia is trying to bring it to the International Court of Justice, which doesn't resonate well among many of the EU and NATO members that have already recognised Kosovo's independence. The government is counting on its peaceful behaviour, a sign of which was the return of its ambassadors to the EU countries. These were called home in February in protest against the recognition of Kosovo's independence.

This 'both EU and Kosovo' policy ultimately depends on the Russian veto in the UN Security Council. It made Serbia very dependent on Russia's support. In exchange for it, two additional concessions have been made towards the newly-found ally. An unfavourable energy agreement with Moscow was ratified in September. Serbia had officially turned neutral in its foreign and security policy in December 2007. The latter move was made under the previous government, which included the Democratic Party, and can be read as a present to Russia in stopping further NATO enlargement in the Balkans. Although Croatia and Albania will join NATO next Spring, NATO membership ceased to be mentioned in the case of Serbia, even under descriptive terms like 'integration into Euro-Atlantic structures'. The new government promised instead to make the most of its membership in the Partnership for Peace programme. Its role has been marginalized ever since Serbia became a member at the end of 2006.

Burdened with so many extraordinary problems, and faced with specific challenges other EU and NATO aspirants have not faced, Serbia seems to have returned to the right track with unexpected speed. But it keeps walking a thin line between key alternatives and allegiances. Results are still few and far between, but the trend of change is clear and bound to become stronger in the following months.

"Why Don't They Just Say They're Sorry?"

A defence scandal in the Netherlands

By Sami Faltas

On 14 September 1984, Rob Ovaa, a technician working for the Netherlands Ministry of Defence, was told to test a type AP-23 landmine. When it failed to detonate, he waited for the prescribed five minutes, then came closer in order to safe it. As he bent over it, it exploded and killed him. He was 27 years old. A social worker called Fred Spijkers was told to cover up the real cause of Rob Ovaa, refused to do co-operate, started his own investigation, was harassed by the government and eventually fired.

"Just imagine it happening to you. A man comes to your door and tells you that your husband, the father of your children, has been killed in an accident, an accident he caused himself." Frans Timmermans, now the Dutch Minister for European Affairs, commented on the Spijkers scandal when he was a Member of Parliament. "At that moment, a process is set in motion that even Kafka could not have imagined. Years and years of deception—there is no other word for it. This is a process that all representatives of the state should feel deeply concerned about. And all of us, inside and outside the Ministry of Defence, should feel deeply ashamed."

I often teach in countries with high levels of corruption, and I tell my students there is no such thing as an honest

government. All over the world, state officials lie and abuse their powers if they think they can get away with it. The only way to keep them honest is to watch them day and night and hold them accountable for their actions. In the Netherlands, transparency, accountability, the separation of powers and the rule of law are well established. But even with these controls in place, things can go seriously wrong, as they did in the Spijkers scandal.



The AP-23 landmine that killed Rob Ovaa had a faulty fuse. The Ministry of Defence had been aware of this for several years, and had banned the use of this weapon back in 1970. However, it had not removed the landmine from its stockpile. On 18 July 1983, several soldiers had died and others had been seriously injured when a landmine of this type exploded in a military classroom.

The AP-23 is an antipersonnel weapon similar to a Claymore mine. It was manufactured by Eurometaal, formerly a state ordnance factory called Artillerie-Inrichtingen. In 1997, the Ottawa Convention banned all anti-personnel mines. The Netherlands supported the adoption of this treaty and has ratified it.

There was a secret file on the 1983 accident, and social worker Fred Spijkers had seen it. He had joined the Ministry of Defence in the spring of 1984. On the day Rob Ovaa was killed, Spijkers was instructed to inform Marjolein Ovaa, a police officer and a mother of two children, that her husband had died as a result of his own mistakes. Spijkers drove to Zandvoort and carried out this order, but revealed to the widow that he did not believe the official story. He began to investigate the real cause of Ovaa's death and attempts by the defence authorities to cover up the facts. It would take about 13 years before the story hit the mainstream media. In 1985, a secret investigation by the military police concluded that Ovaa had died because he had not been careful enough. His widow was denied compensation.

Fred Spijkers' role in this scandal was complicated by the fact that besides working for the Ministry of Defence, he was working for the Netherlands internal intelligence service (BVD) and passing sensitive information to the BVD. In 1986, the Ministry of Defence suspended him from service, and

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the Military Intelligence Service labelled him 'politically criminal'. Another year on, he was fired. He successfully contested his dismissal in court, but was not allowed to return to his job. Doctors of the Ministry of Defence declared him psychologically unstable.

On 18 June 1989, unknown persons shot at Spijkers in the car park of a McDonald's restaurant in Huis ter Heide, but he survived. Spijkers claimed that one of the assailants was working for one of the security agencies. He reported this incident to the police, but it was not investigated.

In 1992, the human rights organisation Global Initiative on Psychiatry criticised the treatment of Spijkers as 'political abuse of psychiatry'.

Spijkers won another court case in 1993 but lost his unemployment benefit because he refused to sign a declaration that he was unfit to work. In the 15 years that have since passed, Fred Spijkers has not had an income.

In the mid-1990s, the leadership of the Ministry of Defence began negotiating the payment of compensation to their former employee. Since then, as a result of hostile publicity, critical questions in parliament, condemnations by experts and court rulings, the Dutch government has been on the defensive in this scandal.

By the turn of the century, it was clear to all concerned that the government had frequently lied, tried to intimidate Fred Spijkers and violated his rights. Now, 24 years after his ordeal began, it seems likely he will soon receive complete rehabilitation and proper compensation. However, Spijkers also expects an apology. He wonders: "Why don't they just say they're sorry?" This the government seems to find particularly difficult.

We can learn several things from this story.

Power tends to corrupt. In the Netherlands, as everywhere, politicians and government officials sometimes think they can cover up their incompetence, their wrongdoing and their lies. They may try to bully their subordinates into compliance. Often, these attempts are successful.

It is difficult and dangerous for government officials to attempt to expose such abuse of power. Most 'whistle blowers' fail, and their careers are destroyed. This discourages others from following their example.

Transparency helps to prevent the abuse of state power. But the media are not always vigilant and thorough. It took about ten years before the Spijkers affair developed into a full-blown scandal. Now that it has, leading politicians and officials have egg all over their face. Some are still in office.

The Dutch government has not done itself any favours in this scandal. If at an early stage it had carried out a full and honest investigation, acknowledged its mistakes and misdeeds, taken action against the people responsible, apologised to the victims, repaired the damage, and acted to prevent any such scandal from recurring, it would have done the right thing. It would also have spared the victims further pain and damage. Finally, the government would have saved itself a lot of money and embarrassment.

Transparency and accountability are essential for good governance. Without them, we would never be able to keep our governments honest. But they are also useful to the people in power. When things go wrong, they can cut their losses. By coming clean quickly, they can limit the painful consequences of their lies, their wrongdoing and their bungling.

Colophon

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