

Opportunities for Regional Training and Information Exchange Reap Benefits for Central Asia

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Group photo after the Opening Ceremony of the EOD course, 2017, Dushanbe, Tajikistan.
Image courtesy of OSCE.

Regional cooperation and regional partnerships are an important aspect of creating strong and sustainable humanitarian mine action programs across the globe. Challenges and opportunities endemic to a particular region are best addressed by the experience and expertise of local organizations. Facilitating ways to foster information sharing is an imperative for the success of regional security goals.

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) seeks to support these goals by coordinating workshops and trainings in the Central Asian region in order to foster a cooperative mechanism among states that would address concerns and challenges stemming from the disposal of explosive hazards. The Center for International Stabilization and Recovery (CISR), through sponsorship from the United

States Department of State's Office of Weapons Removal and Abatement (PM/WRA) and in partnership with the Tajikistan National Mine Action Center (TNMAC), recently completed a Regional Senior Managers' Course (R-SMC) for the South and Central Asian region. As always, building and strengthening regional partnerships was a specific topic of discussion at the SMC as was the opportunity for participants to learn from one another in the classroom. The input from these international organizations expands the already significant steps that national programs are making in the region.

OSCE Regional Training and Workshops

Over the past decade the OSCE has undertaken "confidence-building" as part of its political-military pillar, a system that



Female participants during the practical part of the EOD course, Lahur Training Centre, Tajikistan.
Image courtesy of OSCE.

defines its operational scope as a part of an OSCE Confidence and Security Building Measure with the objective of developing and maintaining regular contacts among experts and practitioners and their respective institutions in the region. The OSCE has addressed mine action within this pillar at the strategy and policy level as well as at the technical level. At the strategic level, the OSCE organizes annual regional workshops for participating states in Central Asia. At the

technical level the OSCE, working with a wide range of donors and implementing partners, coordinated beginning-through-advanced level explosive ordnance disposal (EOD) trainings in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan, conducted in multiple languages to support participants from the entire region. The 2018 annual regional workshop focused on improvised explosive device (IED) threat awareness and included all Central Asian states, as well as Afghanistan and Ukraine,



leading to greater transparency among neighboring states and to increased confidence levels between partners.

OSCE Annual Regional Workshops

The OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe (OSCE POiD) is mandated to assist the Republic of Tajikistan in its efforts to ensure security and stability. In order to maintain the coherence of OSCE's regional approach, close cooperation between

OSCE POiD and other OSCE field operations in the Central Asian region has been ongoing over the past ten years. The OSCE facilitates the only initiative addressing explosive hazards issues on a regional level in Central Asia, which include topics on unexploded ordnance (UXO) and abandoned explosive ordnance (AXO), landmines, and IEDs, as well as other excess, unsecured, and unserviceable engineering munitions and ordnance. Fostering dialogue through technical



A session during the Regional Workshop 2016, Astana, Kazakhstan. Image courtesy of OSCE.

cooperation in Central Asia enables the OSCE to support Tajikistan and other OSCE Central Asian participating states to find innovative approaches and synergies to address concerns and challenges stemming from explosive hazards. In support of this goal, the OSCE POiD annually facilitates regional workshops and training activities that aim to raise awareness of and enhance common understanding of the concerns, challenges, and needs for proficient explosive hazards reduction and response capacities.

This annual workshop was most recently conducted in Astana but has also taken place in Almaty, Bishkek, and Dushanbe. The need for the exchange of experiences and best practices between relevant ministries and agencies involved in explosive hazard reduction is widely acknowledged. The focus of the workshop over these years was primarily topics like cross-border cooperation in mine action, quality and information management, challenges to explosive hazards reduction and response capacities development, and IED threat awareness. The workshop provides a platform for sharing best practices and lessons learned in the area of explosive hazard reduction, as well as international and global experiences. The OSCE POiD annually engages Afghanistan as its Asian Partner for Cooperation in the regional workshops. Experts from the Directorate of Mine Action Coordination, Afghanistan National Disaster Management Authority, as well as the United Nations Mine Action Service office in Afghanistan actively contribute to the OSCE POiD regional workshops and share their experience in addressing the challenges stemming from explosive hazards.

The presence of OSCE Field Offices in all five Central Asian participating states enables smooth coordination and implementation of the regional workshops and training initiatives. The OSCE closely cooperates with the Ministry of Defense of each participating state in planning and implementing the annual regional workshops. More recently, the OSCE began assisting the participating states to increase their technical capacity by coordinating EOD trainings for the region.

OSCE EOD Training

The OSCE regional Integrated Cooperation on Explosive Hazards (ICExH) program was developed at the request of the governmental authorities of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan, the Republic of Kazakhstan, the Kyrgyz Republic, and the Republic of Tajikistan. The program was initiated in August 2013 and, at that time, the role of Tajikistan in hosting regional trainings to address explosive hazards issues was established and recognized by its neighboring countries. The governments of Austria, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United States have funded the ICExH.

The overall goal of the ICExH program, more colloquially known as the EOD training course, is to reduce the threat of explosive hazards in interested OSCE participating states in Central Asia. This is done through training in EOD activities that includes demilitarization of explosive ordnance as well as IED disposal. As with the regional workshops, the EOD training is conducted through a regional approach with the underlying rationale that shared challenges and concerns



Swiss Foundation for Mine Action (FSD) team leader briefing the participants on battle area clearance procedures, Regional Workshop 2017, Chorcharogh, Gharm, Tajikistan. Image courtesy of OSCE.

regarding explosive hazards call for innovative approaches and synergies.

The EOD training courses through the ICEXH program began in May 2014. From May 2014 to May 2017, a total of 25 trainings took place. The trainings are offered in two languages, Russian and Tajik/Dari. Altogether, 180 trainees from Afghanistan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan attended one of the 25 implemented trainings.

It became evident by the end of 2014 that the training center infrastructure needed to be upgraded in order to enable a proper training environment. It also became obvious that continuing to build the national capacity and expertise of Tajikistan within the domain of explosive hazards demanded institutionalization of the EOD training course under the Ministry of Defense of the Republic of Tajikistan (MoD RT). The experience gained in the initial period of project implementation confirmed the MoD RT would be able to adequately support a training center and to one day integrate the

training center into the formalized education system of the MoD RT. The latter is especially important as it allows sustainability of training results and enables efficient transfer of training tasks from the OSCE project to the national authorities. Subsequently, the concept of the “Regional Explosive Hazards Training Centre of the MoD RT” was established with the signing of a memorandum of understanding between the OSCE POiD and the MoD RT in November 2017.

By the end of 2020, OSCE POiD’s ICEXH program aims to increase international and regional recognition, ensure the sustainability of results achieved so far, and enable long-term benefits for the host country, interested states in Central Asia, and other regional partners. The Regional Explosive Hazards Training Centre will provide an internationally recognized platform for training instructors and explosive hazard specializations in Central Asia. The training center also provides the key venue for a technical level dialogue through exchange of experiences and best practices, as well as military training and educational cooperation among Central Asian countries.



Visit to the TNMAC Offices: R-SMC participants share experiences and learn from the experiences of Tajikistan on a visit to the TNMAC offices.
Image courtesy of CISR.

The Regional Senior Managers' Course

Through the annual regional workshops and the EOD training course maintained through the ICExH program, the OSCE offers venues for the entire region to engage explosive hazards issues on both the strategic and technical levels. Through the Regional Senior Managers' Course, CISR combines the strategic and technical into a single integrated three-week regional training.

The Regional Senior Manager's Course is in its fourth iteration, building upon the Global Senior Managers' Courses held on the James Madison University campus since 2004. The first Regional SMC was held in 2014 in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, in partnership with TNMAC and working with a number of other organizations active in the country's mine action program. Since then, the regional course was held in Vietnam (2015) in partnership with the Vietnam Veterans of America Foundation and the Association for the Empowerment of Persons with Disabilities, and in Croatia (2017) with the Croatian Mine Action Centre.

In 2018, the R-SMC returned to Dushanbe, Tajikistan, updated and adapted with a name change to the Regional SMC in Conventional Weapons Destruction, in accordance with the variety of issues with which participants' programs are engaged in their countries. In planning and implementing the 2018 R-SMC for South and Central Asia, CISR once again

partnered with TNMAC, worked closely with the OSCE, and collaborated with a large number of nongovernmental organizations, international organizations, and Tajikistan governmental organizations contributing to the collective effort to make the country safe from explosive hazards.

For the first time, the course welcomed participants from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, in addition to participants from Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, and Tajikistan. To support the Central Asian participants, simultaneous translation into Russian was coordinated for classroom sessions and field visits, and all written material from the application process through the final stages of the course were translated into Russian. By taking the time to adequately plan months in advance, CISR was able to create an environment in which participants who shared no common language could learn from lecturers and each other on topics ranging from business management skills to technical CWD topics. Indeed, one of the most valuable parts of the course are the carefully constructed group activities that challenge participants to engage with scenarios and problems they or their programs are likely to face and to work with one another to solve these issues, thus creating the environment necessary to nurture cooperation and understanding.

A central theme of every SMC is an emphasis on partnerships and relationship building amongst participants, programs,



Visit to WAD site: On a field visit to a weapons and ammunition disposal site, technical experts from FSD demonstrate to R-SMC participants their method of small arms ammunition destruction through burning.
Image courtesy of CISR.

and regional offices with the objective of fostering cross-border information sharing, expanding technical support, and coordinating efforts efficiently across a region. The process of planning for an R-SMC requires partnership building in itself, and CISR is always grateful for the cooperation of partner organizations. In this course, Norwegian People's Aid, the Swiss Foundation for Mine Action, the OSCE, the Union of Sappers of Tajikistan, and the Tajikistan Ministry of Defense Humanitarian De-mining Group were integral to the course instruction, providing special guest technical speakers and offering field demonstrations. In addition, the OSCE assisted in coordinating communications with many of the Central Asian participants, assisting them with applications and playing an important role in strengthening the diversity of the course.

Beyond the survey, clearance, and ammunition disposal demonstrations at the TNMAC training center and at the weapons and ammunition disposal site at the MoD RT training facility at Lahur, the course participants also benefitted from visits to the State Enterprise Orthopedic Plant of Dushanbe City and the Research Institute for Expertise and Rehabilitation of Persons with Disabilities, organized by TNMAC and local United Nations Development

Programme staff working with TNMAC in support of survivor assistance programs.

Above all, the course could not have been completed nor even imagined without the assistance of the TNMAC staff members who provided on-the-ground support in planning and hosting the course. From organizing translation of the course materials to arranging group dinners and activities, TNMAC was the linchpin that kept the course running smoothly. TNMAC has grown as a national program and through the collaboration among regional partners, has strengthened its own capacity. Muhabbat Ibrohimzoda, Director of TNMAC states "As a result of on-going mine action operations and continuing capacity building efforts, Tajikistan has transformed its role from an importer to exporter of technical knowledge and skills in mine action in the region and beyond."¹

Within the scope of the R-SMC, TNMAC brought technical as well as policy knowledge to the course, teaching modules and arranging demonstrations. TNMAC's capacity to support technical aspects of the course were recently expounded through their cooperation with the OSCE in opening the Regional Explosive Hazards Training Centre with the MoD RT. TNMAC also handled all of the national government



Participants in the 2018 Regional SMC in Conventional Weapons Destruction.
Image courtesy of CISR.

coordination necessary to host a group of senior level managers from across the region, demonstrating the maturity of the program within the country.

Conclusion

Vital to the planning, coordination, and execution of CISR's R-SMC are the relationships it shares with skilled partners across the globe. In Central Asia, the OSCE and TNMAC work together to strengthen regional knowledge and technical skills, as well as transparency and trust. As TNMAC demonstrates, investment by international organizations in both strategic and technical capacity across a region leads not only to stronger cross-border relations and information exchange, but also to greater capacities within national programs.

As the OSCE and CISR continue their regional-level interventions, and as national programs mature, we can look forward to a more integrated approach to explosive hazards management across the Central Asian region with programs learning from one another and assisting each other as required. ©

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Paige Ober joined CISR staff in October 2016 after completing graduate degrees in international affairs from American University, and natural resources and sustainable development from the U.N.-mandated University for Peace. During her undergraduate years at James Madison University, she worked with CISR on publications and projects. She has also served in Gulu, Uganda, as a sustainable agriculture curriculum developer; and with the Netherlands Development Organization as a program management and learning associate.

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Suzanne Fiederlein, Ph.D., joined CISR in 1999 and served as senior research associate and victim-assistance team leader before becoming associate director in 2010. She has worked on projects related to victim assistance, International Mine Action Standards, mine-risk education (managing the ERW Awareness in Schools project in Jordan), mine-action in Latin America, mine-action database systems (specializing in casualty data) and program evaluation. As coordinator of management training for CISR, Dr. Fiederlein directs the ERW/Mine Action Senior Managers' Courses, both those conducted at JMU and those implemented on a regional basis. She holds graduate degrees in Latin American studies (M.A., Univ. of Texas) and political science (Ph.D., Univ. of Arizona), and has served on the faculty of James Madison University and Virginia Commonwealth University.