



**EASTWEST INSTITUTE**

*Forging Collective Action for a Safer and Better World*

**United Nations Regional Centre for Preventive Diplomacy for  
Central Asia**

**Seminar on  
“Security and Stability in Central Asia – Interaction with  
International and Regional Organizations”**

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**CONTRIBUTION BY THE EASTWEST INSTITUTE**

**To be delivered by Mr. Benjamin Sturtewagen  
Project Coordinator Regional Security Program**

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Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure the EastWest Institute participates in this very topical seminar on “Security and Stability in Central Asia”. I would like to thank Ambassador Jenča and his team for providing us with such a timely opportunity to share views on the ways forward for improved security in this strategically so important region.

In my remarks today I would like to focus on the crucial role that international and regional organizations can and should play in contributing to sustainable security for Central Asia. I hope to raise a number of questions that we might keep in mind during the discussions of this meeting.

### **Becoming full members of the international community**

Nearly twenty years after achieving independence, it is worth asking to what extent the states of Central Asia have committed to cooperating with one another. On which issues has cooperation been built? Have regional organizations played a useful role? The large number of organizations of which Central Asian states are members seems to indicate they have. After all, historically, the peoples of Central Asia have always maintained close socio-economic relations, not least through the Silk Road system of connections.

The existence of the UNRCCA serves as only one of many examples of the presence of major international organizations in the region. The signing of last month’s Memorandum of Understanding between the United Nations and the Executive Committee of the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea yet again underscores the existing ambition to strengthen regional cooperation and develop mutually acceptable mechanisms to deal with issues of crucial importance to the region.

### **Opportunities for and challenges to regional cooperation**

Yet, successful regional cooperation presupposes a shared vision on the purpose and value of such cooperation. A joint identification of opportunities and challenges is crucial to the success of cooperation. Such opportunities and challenges are plenty in Central Asia.

Issues that seem to present good opportunities for increased regional cooperation include:

- Issues of border security and demarcation;
- Illegal narcotics and organized crime;
- Resource management issues, including transboundary water and energy
- Migration, including illegal migration and refugee issues;
- Health care issues, such as tuberculosis and AIDS;
- Other ecological issues, including the mining industry and radio-active waste contamination; and
- Interfaith relations.

Why is it then that in many of these issues the role of regional organizations appears to have remained limited and progress on the ground even more so?

It appears that regional organizations in Central Asia have suffered from many of the same challenges as they do in other regions of the world. There is a lack of shared vision on regional solutions to most of the aforementioned challenges. A lack of political will and inter-state trust continues to exist among the Central Asian states. This contributes to a lack of political, financial and personnel resources that are necessary for regional organizations to fully play the role they have been established for in the first place.

**One must ask why the political will of member states to fully embark on a more regional approach of their relationships has been limited.**

- Is it because the Central Asian states feel they are not strong enough yet individually to fully engage in frameworks of regional cooperation?
- Do the Central Asian states perceive regional organizations as a potential impediment to the full exercise of only recently gained independence?
- Are power discrepancies among Central Asian states a major hurdle to regional cooperation? Some may indeed fear the dominant position of another state in frameworks of regional cooperation.

**If political will would exist, what are the strategies to strengthen regional cooperation?** Would focusing on concrete issues of functional cooperation with the possibility of spill-over lead to stronger organizations or are holistic approaches more promising? Regional cooperation can have a higher value to member states where there is an increased understanding of how to mobilize them in the area of security and stability and how to drive forward the agenda to the benefit of states and regions.

- Having a clear agenda for how regional organizations can play a constructive role in security across the region is crucial. Such an agenda, in the Central Asia case, could possibly be developed initially bilaterally or among several states that are “like-minded” on certain issues and subsequently fed into the regional organization, where broader support can be built among all states. In other words: a bottom up approach from the bilateral to the regional level may be a way to gain “ownership” of member states in regional solutions.
- Taking into account the differing quality, focus and membership, are there currently too many or too few regional organizations? Which ones are to be considered the most successful from a regional cooperation point of view as opposed to from an individual state’s view? Are regional organizations, currently, really the best way to promote regional cooperation in Central Asia? It can indeed be asked whether some bi-lateral tensions do not jeopardize certain frameworks of regional cooperation at the outset. At the same time, even a struggling regional organization does provide a useful forum for dialogue – in that respect keeping the channels of communication open regarding certain shared challenges is important.

- To which extent do human resources, technical and budgetary capacity issues determine the political will to engage in regional organizations? Are Central Asian states reluctant to establish full-fledged cooperation because they lack those resources or have some chosen not to commit these resources because regional cooperation is not a priority?
- To which extent can the international community help in setting up frameworks of regional cooperation in Central Asia? Does the current involvement of major outside players like the United States, the Russian Federation, China, the European Union, Turkey and Iran threaten the opportunities for improved regional cooperation? Or are the possible investments of regional and other stakeholders enablers for growth, stability and inter-state security? The issue of insufficient coordination of activities and processes is a well-known challenge that is no less in Central Asia. Current bilateral relationships with international actors - both organizations and states - constitute another key challenge to improving security capacity. These relationships are often not coordinated, and based on policies that play to the main interests of the outside actor. But, committing to regional approaches will help increase the collective value of outside investment in security.

## **The EastWest Institute's Global Conference on Preventive Action**

The Central Asian states are certainly not alone in facing the need for and challenges of strengthening their frameworks for regional cooperation in ways that are commensurate with the challenges currently being faced.

As part of its preventive diplomacy work, the EastWest Institute, in cooperation with partners from across the globe, is working to convene a global conference that brings together the most relevant actors from states and regional organizations from the Americas, Europe, Africa and Asia. The conference will help share best practices and lessons learnt, collect and disseminate information that helps ideas generation and the development of practical actions towards improving the knowledge and understanding around regional organizations, the interplay with member states and their role in security and stability.

In preparation for the global conference, regional preparatory meetings have been held in Central America and Africa. From the Central American preparatory meeting in particular, valuable observations and suggestions should be borne in mind when focusing on Central Asia.

In spite of the numerous regional agreements and mechanisms, states in Central America have seemed to be unwilling to adopt a regional approach to security challenges. This has led to failure of states to ensure security of their citizens.

Further, regional organizations in Central America, similar to the Central Asian region, lack financial, technical and human resources and face a serious legitimacy deficit. In order to

address this deficit, regional organizations must deliver value to states and help them address their security challenges.

To this end, experts and policy makers have suggested during EastWest Institute seminars that regional organizations must:

- Collect and share lessons learned and best practices;
- Help states and civil society address security challenges by providing training, conflict analysis and legislative guidelines;
- Share information with other regional organizations and other actors involved in conflict prevention; and
- Strengthen the links between regional organizations and civil society actors.

It has been underscored during the EastWest Institute's preparatory meetings to the global conference that regional approaches to common security threats are not incompatible with state ownership of national security, understandably a major concern for most governments. A regional approach can, in fact, help strengthen key aspects necessary for national and regional security and, at the same time, help build trust between states. For example, information sharing between foreign and justice ministries, national military, and police can be done quite effectively through existing regional structures. Regional organizations are already mandated to support system-wide information-sharing efforts. This will help states strengthen their own information gathering processes in a manner commensurate with a region's security challenges.

As the EastWest Institute continues its outreach in preparing for the global conference on preventive action, we cordially invite the UNRCCA and all representatives here to become part of this process each in their own way and look forward to future collaboration.

To learn more about the global conference, please visit [www.ewi.info/globalconference](http://www.ewi.info/globalconference).

## **International Expert Meeting on Capacity Development for Transboundary Water Management of Afghanistan and Neighboring Countries**

In 2009, the EastWest Institute (EWI), in partnership with the Gerda Henkel Stiftung, launched the project "Alternative Futures for Afghanistan and the Stability of Southwest Asia: Improving Regional Cooperation on Water." Supported by EWI's Parliamentarians Network on Conflict Prevention and Human Security, this project has aimed to contribute to more effective international cooperation to help stabilize Afghanistan and neighboring countries with a view to a highly relevant issue indeed: cross-border cooperation on water. A parallel series of off-the-record and private consultations have complemented the process of generating new policy options towards this goal.

Improving the national and cross-border management of water resources of Afghanistan is a necessity to improve the lives of millions of people. Enhanced regional cooperation, including Central Asian states, to avoid tension over the use and management of shared

water resources will be crucial to the success of the Afghan government's and the international community's efforts to provide a secure and stable future for the country and its neighbors. Cross-border cooperation on water is not an option; it is a necessity.

EWI's ambition to help improve regional security in Afghanistan and its neighborhood, has led us to convene on 13-14 July 2010, in Bonn, Germany, an international Expert Meeting on "Capacity Development for Transboundary Water Management of Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries".

It is well known that there are currently few mechanisms for cooperation on water between Afghanistan and its neighbors, including the Central Asian states. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly independent Central Asian states established a number of institutions for regional cooperation. The 1997 integration of the Interstate Coordinating Water Commission (ICWC) and the Interstate Council on the Problems of the Aral Sea Basin (ICAS) into the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS) indicates that the Central Asian member states are fully aware of the gravity of the Aral Sea environmental crisis and the need to more effectively coordinate their response. And, through their regional water cooperation frameworks, Central Asian states have agreed to adhere to international water law. The inherent commitment to equitable, reasonable, and mutually advantageous water resource use would imply recognition of Afghanistan's interests in the Amu Darya basin in particular, but to date there have been no credible moves to integrate Afghanistan into IFAS structures.

A difficult political situation and lack of cooperation mechanisms have hampered the potential for forward-looking collaboration on part of all stakeholders. The expert meeting on "Capacity Development for Transboundary Water Management of Afghanistan and Neighbouring Countries" is to provide an opportunity for regional and international experts to explore new ways to build capacity on transboundary water cooperation.

The expert meeting will provide opportunity for experts and policy makers to:

- Assess the needs and potential for transboundary cooperation
- Assess legal aspects of regional cooperation on water
- Assess the role of the international donor community in promotion of cross-border cooperation on water
- Assess the deriving capacity building needs and agree on a draft strategy for capacity development both at institutional and individual levels, on water issues in Afghanistan and its neighborhood

## **About the EastWest Institute**

The EastWest Institute (EWI) is an international, non-partisan, not-for-profit policy organization focused solely on confronting critical challenges that endanger peace. EWI was established in 1980 as a catalyst to build trust, develop leadership, and promote collaboration for positive change.

For nearly 30 years EWI has operated long-term projects that aim to reduce tensions and promote dialogue and mutual understanding in critical locations around the world. Since its founding, EWI has committed itself to strengthening global security and to building a culture of conflict prevention by entrenching cooperation among and between states and non-state actors, including the private sector and civil society. EWI is a recognized global leader in its promotion of international cooperation between representatives from governments, business, military, media and other sectors of society in confidential and public dialogue to tackle intractable problems, build trust, reconcile disparate views and reframe issues.

The institute has offices in New York, Brussels, and Moscow.

To learn more about EWI, please visit [www.ewi.info](http://www.ewi.info).