

## FINAL

Mister Chairman, Mister Secretary General,

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour to address this Permanent Council as the Director of the OSCE Academy in Bishkek. (I had the same honour in 2016 for the last time when I was director of the OSCE Academy between 2014 and 2016.) Those who are familiar with Central Asia know, once you get there, you want to be back. I am very grateful for the opportunity that after serving as Interim Director of the OSCE Academy, I was selected for the post of Director. I try my best to live up to the trust of the Board of Trustees, and the OSCE as an organization.

Let me summarize three key messages I wish to emphasize today.

**First – Impact.** The OSCE Academy is the longest-standing OSCE implementation partner, with 23 years of continuous work. To date, we have 708 alumni — including ranking diplomats, OSCE staff members (39 of them, 27 serving in Central Asia missions), researchers at Harvard and LSE, Gronenburg and at Ruhr Universität. We have alumna who served as a former cabinet minister, and now leads AI policy in Kyrgyzstan. These graduates are making real contributions to the stability and development of the region.

**Second – Relevance.** The Academy's work is becoming more relevant than ever, as Central Asia experiences growing momentum for regional cooperation and dialogue. Our three MA programmes and the BA in Economics attract an international student body taught by international faculty and visiting lecturers from the US to Russia, alongside Central Asian experts. We have started curriculum adjustments to prepare graduates to contribute directly to this new regional dynamic – focusing on security, good governance, and economic integration - in line with OSCE priorities.

**Third – Efficiency.** The Academy operates with a small, focused team and a lean budget, ensuring that every euro contributed directly supports high-quality education, training, dialogue, and research. We have faced challenging times in the recent past, but with the guidance of the Board of Trustees and the donors, we are consolidating finances and strengthening management to turn the Academy to a more than ever resilient institution. Our goal is clear: to deliver more impact and remain a sustainable, trusted partner of the OSCE for years to come.

The OSCE Academy has been through some difficult times and even though there may be some difficulties ahead of us as well, I am glad to report that many problems are firmly behind us. This is partly due to the dedication and hard work of the previous director, Dr. Kate Walker who during her five months short stay in the position did everything she could to revitalize the OSCE Academy and address some delicate administrative matters. I am immensely grateful to her and try my best

to continue on the pathway she started. In continuation of her great legacy, the OSCE Academy now plans to be more visible in front of the participating States so that the good news could also spread and the delegations could learn about the work we are carrying out in some cases under not fully favourable conditions.

Those delegates who have been at the Permanent Council during the last four years, may remember that every year a different person came here to report. This was partly due to understandable change of guard at the Academy. However, it may not have helped provide the stability necessary for an institution to focus on its basic function – contributing to region-building through providing high level, first and foremost, post-graduate education to bright young people from five Central Asian OSCE participating States, Mongolia, and Afghanistan.

In 2026, the Academy, in addition to the next cohort of graduate students, will graduate undergraduate students of its Economics BA programme for the first time. It is another milestone in the history of our institution.

It is reassuring that our admission statistics shows high demand for our courses. In 2025 we had 1,163 applications to the three MA programmes. This means that we had 22 applicants per place in the programmes overall. We must not deny that the high number is partly due to a very high number of applications from Afghanistan. This, in turn, is partly due to that the Academy had less opportunity to reach out to universities, BA students graduating there through education fairs, open days at universities, and be visible. Still, some of our students when asked from where they learned about the Academy say, from social media, former graduates, friends, or family. This will change, and some of my colleagues will combine their visits e.g. for entrance examination tests to the Central Asian states where such events take place whenever possible.

We need more Central Asian ownership, more attention in regional states. We are in Central Asia in order to contribute to regional development, to serve the region by contributing to the further development of the intellectual strength of countries by our limited means. That's why we do our best to improve our intellectual base, including our course offer. We have adjusted the curriculum of the Politics and Security programme to be followed by the two other MA programmes. However, we should be aware that larger scale revisions are only possible when the respective programmes go through reaccreditation.

The Academy remains strongly committed to advancing gender equality and supporting the next generation of women leaders in the region. As of today, women make up over half of our 708 members strong alumni community (375 of 333) and represent a clear majority in the current cohort — 33 of 52 students.

The OSCE Academy is there to contribute to social mobility in a region where incomes tend to diverge and where talented young people shall benefit from the opportunity to complete competitive higher education and be helped in breaking the "glass-ceiling".

The OSCE Academy continues to offer tuition-free teaching complemented by modest stipends to the students with the support of UB and ExB funds, and the support of two further major donors, the Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (NUPI) and the Global Campus of Human Rights (GC). As the Global Campus is funded by the EU, this brings significant EU funds to the OSCE Academy. Among the ExB funders, a few participating States stand out with their long-term sustained commitment, and often also with the volume of their contributions. Among them, Finland, Germany, Norway, Switzerland, and the U.S. have been standing out, followed by Austria, France, Italy, and Poland. The Academy is immensely grateful for the support it receives. The OSCE Academy is grateful to the host state, Kyrgyzstan that is also supportive. We appreciate the support of the Kyrgyz authorities in making efforts and helping resolve the pending matters as they emerge.

Funding is essential for the continuation of the Academy's mission and work. Let me mention some funding challenges that the OSCE Academy has been facing lately. Understandably, with one major donor reconsidering its priorities, there is more fierce competition for resources. The OSCE Academy has started to reach out beyond its traditional donors, including the private sector, and international financial institutions. The results are more promising in the areas of research, publications, and short executive training courses than in the area of our basic function: post-graduate teaching. The Academy is planning to proactively reach out to those participating States that align their political priorities with achieving more regional cooperation and integration in Central Asia. As you entered the room, you may have seen some of our recent publications, Policy Briefs and Research Papers. Please take a look, and you will see that we are complementing the Academy's teaching activities with research focussed on Central Asia.

Support to the OSCE Academy is money well spent. The OSCE Academy has consolidated its financial structure, and it spends its entire budget on its essential activities. It has modestly reduced the size of its staff and will consider further ways to continue spend the dedicated resources in a thoughtful manner and responsibly. Although the director of the OSCE Academy may not be the right person to contemplate this objectively and with adequate distance from the object of analysis, the Academy seems to have regained the support of many of our main partners. While internal consolidation has been largely successful, now the OSCE Academy turns its attention to the intensification of cooperation with the Programme Office in Bishkek and its new head, Ambassador Dr. Volker Frobarth. The Academy hopes to receive unceasing support and operational guidance from the Board of Trustees and work with it beyond the regular (and in the recent past several extraordinary) meetings.

I would like to thank the Academy's staff, including our dedicated visiting lecturers, our donors and partners, our Board of Trustees, and its chairmen, and the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe for their tireless support to our institution.

I thank you most sincerely for your attention.