

Annual Security Conference 2026

Central Asia in a Fractured Eurasia: Intra- and Extra-regional Cooperation

25–26 June 2026, Bishkek

Conference Rapporteur: Dr. Shairbek Dzhuraev

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Introduction

The OSCE Academy held its Annual Security Conference in Bishkek on 25 and 26 June 2026 under the title “Central Asia in a Fractured Eurasia: Intra- and Extra-regional Cooperation.” The conference occurred at a time when its central questions were becoming harder to ignore. The post-Cold War order under which Central Asian states built their foreign policies is under sustained pressure. Shifts in the United States’ global governance engagement, Russia’s war against Ukraine and its consequences for regional economic and security calculations, the intensifying competition among major powers for influence in Eurasia: each of these developments bears directly on how Central Asia positions itself and how external partners understand the region’s strategic significance.



The participants of the conference after the opening session

The conference brought together scholars, policy analysts, and diplomatic practitioners over two days to examine these pressures and the responses they are generating. Sessions covered Central Asian regionalism and its conceptual foundations, the water-energy nexus as both a governance challenge and a source of potential cooperation, the proliferation of C5+1 frameworks and what they reveal about Central Asia’s collective foreign policy posture, and the perspectives of external partners on the region’s changing role. The second day concluded with a diplomatic panel convened under the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship at the National Historical Museum of Kyrgyzstan.

The conference’s organizing question was how regional states are constructing their responses to a world that offers more external attention than stable frameworks for managing it. Three

tensions structured much of the debate: cooperation versus integration as a conceptual and political choice with real institutional stakes; strategic autonomy as both aspiration and constraint; and the relationship between intra-regional solidarity and the individual foreign policy interests of five states whose circumstances differ considerably.

This report synthesizes the main arguments and exchanges across all four sessions of the conference. It aims to capture the analytical content of the presentations and discussions rather than produce a chronological account, and to reflect the points of genuine disagreement alongside the areas of broader convergence. The full conference programme is available in Annex I.

Opening Remarks

The conference opened with remarks that together set the political and institutional tone for the two days ahead.

Dr. Pal Dunay, Director of the OSCE Academy, welcomed participants on behalf of the co-organizers: the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship, and the Swiss Embassy in Kyrgyzstan. He outlined the conference's thematic progression, spanning intraregional cooperation across its economic, energy, and political dimensions for the morning of Day 1; water governance in the afternoon; and the proliferating C5+1 frameworks on Day 2; concluding with a high-level diplomatic exchange at the National Historical Museum on the afternoon of the second day. He observed that external actors are increasingly drawing the Central Asian states toward greater cohesion at a moment when intraregional conditions are more favourable than at any point in the past decade.



Opening remarks by the Director of the OSCE Academy, Pal Dunay



Ambassador Melis Mamadaliev, Director of the Department of International Organizations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic welcomes the participants

Melis Mamadaliev, Director of the Department of International Organizations at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic, offered a substantive reading of the geopolitical context. In a world marked by armed conflict, declining interstate trust, and intensifying great-power competition, multilateralism is not an abstraction for small states but a practical necessity: the framework within which their voices carry weight and rules, rather than power, govern. He presented Kyrgyzstan's election to the UN Security Council for 2027–2028 as an achievement reflecting Central Asia's broader standing, secured as the region's consensus candidate. The Helsinki principles, he concluded, remain operative for Kyrgyzstan's foreign policy, and the OSCE retains its value precisely as other formal channels of communication narrow.

Switzerland's Ambassador to Kyrgyzstan, Siroco Messerli, speaking on behalf of the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship, argued that fragmentation is not an abstraction: it shapes economies, constrains access to resources, generates environmental risks, and limits opportunities for people. Sustainable solutions in governance and natural resource management require collaboration, patience, and trust. Fragmentation, he proposed, is not a conclusion but an invitation to think beyond established boundaries.



Opening remarks by the Ambassador of Switzerland in the Kyrgyz Republic, Siroco Messerli

Keynote Speech: The Role of the OSCE in a Fractured Eurasia

Dr. Pal Dunay delivered the keynote in his personal academic capacity, a distinction he marked deliberately. Drawing on nearly four decades of direct engagement with the OSCE and its predecessor, the CSCE, he offered a frank, structured assessment of where the organization stands and what it can realistically be expected to achieve.



Keynote speech by the Director of the OSCE Academy, Pal Dunay

*“Socialization proved more effective than conditionality would have.”
“The Central Asian states no longer focus on who they are not –
they focus on what connects them.”*

Dr. Pal Dunay

His central premise was methodological: the OSCE's record should always be assessed against calibrated expectations. An organization spanning 57 participating states with volatile cohesion and deliberately constrained institutions will disappoint any observer expecting a unified regional security architecture. Three more precise questions, he argued, lead to a more honest verdict: whether the OSCE lives up to its foundational documents; whether it addresses the most pertinent security issues of the day; and whether it meets the genuine expectations of its participating states.

On the first count, Dunay described the OSCE as a historically “declaratory value community” whose commitments have been genuinely honoured only during two narrow periods: the years immediately following the Helsinki Final Act, and the late 1980s through the mid-1990s. He identified the Soviet Union's/Russia's persistent violations of the Helsinki Decalogue, from Afghanistan to Ukraine, as a source of tension but was equally pointed about a Western tendency toward selective interpretation. For decades, Western states prioritised self-determination and human rights while treating sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the prohibition of the use of force as secondary concerns. The consequences of that imbalance are now visible: principles deprioritised during Europe's post-Cold War period of relative optimism have returned, under the worst possible circumstances, to the centre of international debate.

On whether the OSCE addresses the most pertinent security issues, Dunay acknowledged the breadth of its agenda as a genuine strength but identified a recurring vulnerability. The organization has repeatedly been captured by single dominant crises, most notably Yugoslavia in the 1990s and the Russia-Ukraine conflict since 2014, at substantial cost to its broader functioning. This is compounded by an institutional design problem: built without a strong bureaucratic structure, the OSCE is more exposed to political volatility than organizations with more durable institutional architecture. The difficulty of agreeing even on a chairpersonship, the annual rotation of that role, and the disproportionate energy absorbed by internal organizational maintenance at the expense of substantive output are, in his assessment, signs of institutional decay rather than growing pains.

His reading of the Central Asian dimension was more constructive. The decision in the early 1990s to admit the new Central Asian republics without prior conditionality was, he argued, correct: socialization proved more effective than conditionality would have. A generational shift is now underway in the region, with the first phase of nation and state-building largely complete. States are increasingly able to focus on what connects them rather than on constructing exclusionary national identities, which creates meaningful space for the OSCE to deepen its engagement in governance capacity-building, law-making, and human dimension priorities, particularly the rights of women and children.

Dunay pointed out that Central Asian security has historically received less OSCE attention than conflicts in Moldova, the South Caucasus, or Ukraine, a pattern he attributed partly to geographical distance and partly to Russia's absence as a direct party to Central Asian disputes. The organization has nonetheless survived successive crises with its institutional credit intact, a resilience that, he suggested, should not be mistaken for complacency about

the work that remains.

Session I: Key Aspects of Cooperation Across Policy Fields

Session I, moderated by Dr. Emilbek Dzhuraev, brought together four scholars examining the political economy and energy dimensions of Central Asian cooperation.

Prof. Ikboljon Qoraboyev (Maqsut Narikbayev University, Kazakhstan) opened with a conceptual argument that reframed the session's core premise. The standard verdict on Central Asia's failed regionalism, he argued, resulted from a mistake of categorization: three decades of cooperation were graded against the standards of integration, with the EU as the unspoken benchmark. He distinguished cooperation and integration as categorically different modes rather than points on a single scale. Integration requires pooled sovereignty and supranational legal authority; cooperation leaves sovereignty intact and is governed by classical international law. The institutional bodies Central Asian states built were, by design and finality, cooperation organizations and should be assessed as such. A related confusion equated cooperation with harmony. Keohane's theory treats cooperation not as the absence of conflict but as its management: discord is the condition that makes cooperation necessary, not evidence that it has failed. The corrective task, Qoraboyev concluded, is to build cooperation that is "strong, effective, and a habit." Integration remains a question for a later generation to address deliberately, not a template to borrow and then fault for its inadequacy.



Professor Ikboljon Qoraboyev (r) speaker, and Dr. Emilbek Dzhuraev (l), moderator of Session I

"We have been grading the region on the wrong exam, testing a project of cooperation against the standards of integration, and recording the predictable gap as defeat."

Prof. Ikboljon Qoraboyev

Dr. Filippo Costa Buranelli (University of St Andrews, UK) examined intraregional trade with a mixture of measured optimism and structural caution. Trade has doubled over five years to US\$12.3 billion, representing 8 to 15 percent of the region's total trade, a figure broadly comparable to Mercosur and the Gulf Cooperation Council. The headline, however, conceals sharp imbalances: Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan together account for roughly 80 percent of intraregional flows, while Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan remain marginal. Research suggests the benefits are unevenly distributed, with some evidence of negative GDP effects in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Buranelli proposed “systemic reasoning” as an alternative frame: rather than pursuing intraregional market-building as the primary goal, Central Asia should function as a macro-system in which national interests are not entirely detached from those of neighbours, with trans-regionalism connecting to the Caucasus, South Asia, and the Gulf as the more productive long-term horizon.

Dr. Farkhod Aminjonov (National Defence College, UAE) offered a structural reality check on energy. Transitioning to resilient energy systems will require an estimated US\$1.4 trillion by 2050, over ten percent of the region's combined annual GDP, while electricity demand is projected to rise 40 percent before 2030. Seventy percent of existing power infrastructure has already exceeded its operational lifespan. Intraregional energy solidarity faces a structural ceiling: when harsh winters strike, all five states experience simultaneous shortfalls and cannot compensate for each other. Diverging national tariff reforms are further eroding the basis for electricity trade. Meanwhile, geopolitical exposure is intensifying: 80 percent of Kazakhstan's oil transits through Russia, 90 percent of Turkmenistan's gas exports go to China, and southern routes toward South Asia remain obstructed by regional conflicts. Maintaining a diversified portfolio of external partnerships, Aminjonov concluded, remains the most defensible position.

Dr. Nargis Kassenova (Harvard University, USA) introduced strategic autonomy as a conceptual anchor for the region's cooperative trajectory. The concept, drawn from the EU policy discourse, is not the one Central Asian states currently use but one, she argued, they should adopt. The water-energy nexus offers the most credible nucleus for deeper institutionalized cooperation, analogous in function to the European Coal and Steel Community. She proposed two institutional bodies, a Council of Ministers as a political umbrella and a Technical Commission with an explicitly regional mandate, stressing that any such project must be driven by regional governments rather than external donors.



Participants of Session I

The Q&A surfaced productive challenges. A participant questioned whether Professor Qoraboyev's framework overstretched cooperation as a concept, noting the near-vacuum of meaningful engagement between roughly 2005 and 2017, and the Eurasian Economic Union as the actual integration structure operating in the region. Discussion of Turkmenistan prompted Dr. Buranelli to note that Ashgabat in fact originated the consultative meetings format, and that Turkmenistan is considerably more active in non-sensitive domains than its outlier reputation implies. Dr. Kassenova added that consultative meetings predate the Soviet collapse, pointing to cooperative roots deeper than the post-independence record suggests.

Session II: Water and Energy Security in Central Asia

Session II, moderated by Ambassador Dr. Volker Frobarth, Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Kyrgyzstan, addressed water governance, energy cooperation, and the institutional architecture needed to sustain resource sharing in a region under intensifying demographic and climatic pressure. The session's framing was stark: a population that has grown from 25 million to 75 million since Soviet times and will reach 100 million within roughly twelve years, almost entirely dependent on irrigated agriculture and a shared water infrastructure that predates current borders.



Ambassador Volker Frobarth (l) moderator, Ms. Dinara Kemelova (m), and Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev (r), speakers of Session II

Dinara Kemelova, Special Representative of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic on Mountain Regions Development, positioned the water challenge upstream. With 93.4 percent of Kyrgyz

territory classified as mountainous, the country's glaciers and snowpack are the primary freshwater source for the Aral Sea basin. Glacier area has declined by 16 to 22 percent over the past fifty to seventy years. Flood-related emergencies have occurred 33 times more frequently over the past 24 years than in earlier periods. Kemelova outlined Kyrgyzstan's international diplomacy around these realities, including the UN General Assembly's 2022 endorsement of a Five-Year Plan of Action for Mountain Regions Development.

Mr. Thierry Umbehr (Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation, Switzerland) offered a practitioner's account spanning two decades. When Switzerland intensified its regional engagement in the early 2000s, Central Asia had inherited a highly interconnected water-energy system but had lost the institutions and incentives that had previously made it function. The main deficit was not the absence of agreements but the erosion of conditions for cooperation: trust, transparency, and shared information. Switzerland's central lesson was that water disputes are "rarely about water alone." Its engagement accordingly shifted from infrastructure assistance toward water diplomacy, joint fact-finding, and data-sharing capacity. Umbehr identified 2017 as the regional turning point, when water re-emerged as a shared challenge rather than as a purely national security concern. He pointed to Kambarata-1 as a practical template for joint upstream-downstream investment, and to the regional electricity market interconnectivity programme, co-funded with the World Bank, as a milestone in moving from good intentions to cross-border energy infrastructure.



"The same water system can unite people or divide them and bring conflict, depending entirely on how it is governed."

"Central Asia has one hydrological system with many sovereign priorities."

Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev

Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev (International Water Management Institute, Uzbekistan) organized his contribution around four propositions. Water is power: control over storage, release, and data on water confers strategic advantage across borders. Security starts locally, not between states: stress in irrigation canals escalates into regional instability, rarely the other way around. Diplomacy is wider than treaties and must encompass energy swaps, trade, finance, and research, all of which reduce the zero-sum dynamic that water exchange alone tends to produce. Most emphatically: governance decides the outcome. “The same water system can unite people or divide them and bring conflict” depending entirely on how it is governed. The structural diagnosis he offered was precise: Central Asia has one hydrological system with many sovereign priorities. He welcomed bilateral working groups as an underappreciated vehicle for progress, citing Kazakhstan-Uzbekistan water channels as a case in point, and identified Afghanistan’s Qosh Tepa canal development as a diplomatic opportunity requiring early engagement rather than deferred response.

Dr. Tobias Siegfried (Hydrosolutions Ltd., Switzerland) provided the climate science underpinning these governance discussions. A critical corrective: 80 percent of Central Asia’s water resources come from snowmelt, not glaciers, making snow dynamics the more consequential variable for near-term planning. Climate modelling across 300 basins produced a differentiated picture. The Amu Darya basin is projected to see increased mean water availability through much of the 21st century as accelerating glacier melt releases stored water; the Syr Darya faces decline. Both basins, however, share the same seasonal problem: peak discharge is migrating earlier in the year, leaving the hottest summer months, when irrigation and cooling demands peak, increasingly deprived of reserves. He noted that last year’s snowpack in the Amu Darya catchment fell into the lowest five percentiles of the observational record, with this year’s recovery equally sluggish, suggesting that conditions previously projected as future scenarios may already be present.

Mr. Sven Ernedal (GIZ, Germany) contributed a focused observation: the Soviet-era regional power grid, disconnected progressively and most definitively during Uzbekistan’s Karimov presidency, is now being rebuilt with World Bank support. He added that demand-side management deserves greater attention than it typically receives: the cheapest electricity is that not consumed, and the renewable potential of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan via solar and wind could be realized through transmission infrastructure rather than large generation projects.

“The appropriate evaluative question is not whether an institutional response is formal or regional, but whether it is effective in managing rapid physical and political change.”

Dr. Jenniver Sehring

Dr. Jenniver Sehring (IHE Delft, Netherlands) offered a conceptual reframing that directly extended the cooperation-versus-integration argument from Session I into the water sector. The bilateral-regional distinction, she argued, is not a binary between failure and success but a complementary toolkit. IFAS head-of-state summits resumed in 2018; bilateral agreements on the Syr Darya and specific canals resolved issues that multilateral formats could not easily accommodate. The consultative meetings since 2017 have established a normative language

of solidarity and mutual obligation that legitimizes sub-regional action within a broader common framework. The appropriate evaluation question, she concluded, is not whether an institutional response is formal or regional, but whether it is effective in managing rapid physical and political change.



Participants of Session II

The Q&A turned on a pointed question from Ambassador Frobarth: as renewables increasingly cover the region's electricity needs, is water too scarce a resource to dedicate primarily to power generation? Could downstream states eventually pay upstream countries for stored water rather than hydropower output? Abdullaev suggested this could work as a joint decision, with payment for environmental services entering the region's policy vocabulary. Ms. Kemelova pointed to Kyrgyzstan's continuing energy deficit as evidence that the current arrangement reflects genuine need. The Kambarata model, the moderator suggested, may yet offer a blueprint for the benefit-sharing architecture the nexus approach requires.

Session III: C5+1 Frameworks and Regional Multivectorism

The morning session of the second day, chaired by Dr. Pal Dunay, turned to inter- and extra-regional cooperation frameworks, with three presentations examining Central Asia's engagement with external partners from different analytical angles.



Dr. Pal Dunay (l) moderator, Dr. Nargiza Muratalieva (m), Mr. Eldaniz Gusseinov (m), and Dr. Emilbek Dzhuraev (r), speakers of Session III

Mr. Eldaniz Gusseinov (Heydar Aliyev Centre for Eurasian Studies, Ibn Khaldun University, Türkiye) opened with an analysis of Central Asia's engagement with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which he described as the first fully-fledged inter-regional cooperation framework involving Central Asia. Unlike EU engagement, the GCC-Central Asia summits bring together all five Central Asian presidents with high-level Gulf representation. Gusseinov was pointed in his scepticism about the format's material foundations. Infrastructure and distance remain the central obstacle: routes through Afghanistan and Iran are underutilized, closed, or unreliable, and the Pakistan-Afghanistan border closure since late 2024 has constrained options further. He also questioned announced investment figures, noting that the Kazakhstan-Qatar framework agreement's twenty-year suspension of transfer pricing rules raises the possibility of capital round-tripping rather than genuine inward investment. Trade remains concentrated, with Kazakhstan and the UAE accounting for roughly ninety percent of the total volume. What drives the format, he argued, is a coordination logic: it gives smaller states access to partners they would otherwise rarely engage with, while GCC states use the platform to raise their profile amid competition between Russia, China, India, and the United States.

Dr. Nargiza Muratalieva (American University of Central Asia, Kyrgyzstan) situated the C5 platform within a broader argument about "soft regionalism" in Central Asia: flexible and without a central bureaucracy, yet increasingly institutionalized through national coordinators,

roadmaps, and joint declarations. The seventh consultative meeting in Tashkent produced security-oriented conceptual documents and raised the question of Azerbaijan's accession as a potential sixth member. Dr. Muratalieva argued that a C6 configuration would likely produce a differentiated hierarchy, with Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan forming an economic and logistics core. On external C5+1 formats, she noted that partner countries have grown from three or four to ten since 2019, with the China-Central Asia platform advancing furthest through a permanent secretariat and expanding working groups. These formats also give visibility to smaller states: Italy's engagement with Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan deepened once a C5+1 channel created regular contact. Dr. Muratalieva argued that institutionalization should follow functional cooperation rather than precede it and noted that a shared regional identity remains underdeveloped.

Dr. Emilbek Dzhuraev (OSCE Academy, Kyrgyzstan) offered a conceptually ambitious contribution, introducing the notion of "regional multivectorism" (RMV) as an analytically distinct concept for understanding Central Asia's collective foreign policy posture. Building on Amitav Acharya's multiplex world order framework, Dr. Dzhuraev argued that Central Asian states are converging on a shared regional practice of simultaneously courting and balancing multiple external powers. This differs from individual multivector foreign policies: RMV is a collective and region-wide posture that C5+1 engagements both express and reinforce. One of its less obvious functions, he suggested, is that C5+1 formats generate internal C5 coordination: states that would not otherwise coordinate are developing shared narratives through the accumulated practice of appearing together before external partners, and presenting a regional face to the world. The benefits for smaller states are real: Kyrgyzstan engaging Russia or China within a C5 framework carries weight it cannot generate alone. The risks are equally real, however, as RMV has no formal grounding, is vulnerable to fracture under major external pressure, and may deepen internal rivalries if individual states perceive asymmetric gains from any given external engagement.

The discussion was pointed. David Lewis questioned the actual routes sustaining Central Asia-GCC trade and highlighted Gulf private capital, through firms like ACWA Power and Masdar, as a more substantive driver of investment than government frameworks. Shairbek Juraev offered a provocation: at the intra-regional level, can the consultative meetings point to tangible outcomes beyond the meetings themselves, and on C5+ platforms, has Central Asia ever genuinely been in the driving seat, or has it always been the invited party? Dr. Muratalieva pointed to incremental but real changes: more open border crossings, growing joint ventures and intraregional tourism, and cross-border travel on national identity documents. Dr. Dzhuraev acknowledged the gap between possibility and achievement but argued that the status-visibility dimension of these engagements carries sovereignty-enhancing value for states otherwise at the margins of great-power attention.

Dunay's closing remarks offered a direct synthetic assessment. Multivectorism, in his reading, is primarily a reaction to great-power rivalry and growing global unpredictability, and since February 2022 it has undergone a qualitative shift: Russia has lost its formerly privileged vector status, as evidenced by visible tension in encounters between Russian officials and Central Asian counterparts, particularly in Astana. Competition among Central Asian states has not disappeared, but the decade since 2016 has nonetheless produced genuine change, with the region no longer defined primarily by contestation among its

members. On Turkmenistan, Dunay was blunt: its near-total economic dependence on China and selective engagement with regional frameworks make it more realistic, for now, to speak of four Central Asian states than five. Structurally, he identified the over-empowerment of the public sector as a persistent drag on economic dynamism across the region, and governance capacity as the most acute shortfall, particularly in the smaller capitals. Whether bottom-up pressures, including in favour of growing intra-regional trade, easier cross-border mobility, and generational change, eventually shift the domestic political calculus remains, in his view, an open question.

Session IV: External Perspectives on Central Asia – A Diplomatic Panel



Mr. Meder Abakirov (l), Ambassador Monika Lenhard (l), Ambassador Mekin Mustafa Kemal Ökem (m), Ambassador Rémi Duflot (r), and Ambassador Dr. Serge Rumin (r), speakers of Session IV

The conference concluded with a panel held at the National Historical Museum of Kyrgyzstan, bringing together diplomatic representatives of the European Union, Germany, Türkiye,

and the OSCE, alongside Kyrgyzstan's Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, moderated by Ambassador Siroco Messerli of Switzerland. The setting signalled the intent: to move from academic analysis to the policy register, probing how external partners understand Central Asia's changing strategic weight and where their engagement falls short.

The opening question, on how the region's strategic significance has shifted over the past decade, drew a consistent answer with distinct emphases. Ambassador Rémi Duflot (EU) offered a structured account, identifying five drivers: geography, with the Trans-Caspian corridor now understood to be a resilience asset rather than a mere trade route; security, encompassing Afghanistan spillover risks, trafficking, and disinformation; economic diversification, which the EU frames as bringing more options and reducing dependence on single routes or powers; climate and water, where Central Asia's vulnerability has moved from an environmental concern to a national development priority; and human capital, where the region's youth and connectivity create long-term strategic value. He suggested that Central Asia's importance was not newly created by recent events but is instead newly recognized: the first EU-Central Asia Summit in Samarkand in April 2025 marked a formal acknowledgment of what had been true for some time. Germany's Ambassador Monika Lenhard identified Russia's war against Ukraine as the inflection point, bringing economic diversification and sanctions circumvention onto a priority agenda previously organized around development cooperation. Ambassador Ökem of Türkiye drew on a longer timeline, noting that Türkiye was the first country to recognize Central Asian independence in 1991, and framed its engagement from the outset around sovereignty consolidation and connectivity, contributing over US\$1 billion in technical assistance and US\$1.5 billion annually in FDI.



Ambassador Siroco Messerli moderating the diplomatic panel on external perspectives on Central Asia

Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs Meder Abakirov offered a corrective to the external framing. Central Asia, he argued, should be understood as a subject with its own agency and agenda, not as an object of great-power interest. The Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan border settlement, concluded through sustained diplomatic negotiation, was cited as evidence that the region has its own conflict-resolution capacity to offer. He was explicit that Central Asian states do not want to become an arena for geopolitical competition, and that the region's self-definition as a space of stability and opportunity should shape how partners engage with it. Afghanistan was a recurring concern: Mr. Abakirov framed Kyrgyzstan's forthcoming UN Security Council non-permanent membership as an opportunity to redirect international attention to the humanitarian situation there, arguing that Afghanistan's Central Asian neighbours are better positioned than distant partners to maintain engagement and serve as transit channels for assistance.



“Central Asia should be understood as a subject with its own agency and agenda, not an object of great-power interest.”

Mr. Meder Abakirov

On the question of multilateral institutions under pressure, Ambassador Duflot argued that such institutions must defend their principles more concretely; remain places of dialogue without conceding moral equivalence; implement those principles practically in areas like border management, water governance and cyber-resilience; and reform themselves to become faster and more results-oriented. The OSCE's particular value, several panellists noted, lies precisely in its breadth: it is the only platform that brings together all 57

participating states within a single security framework. OSCE Special Representative for the Promotion of Dialogue and Confidence-Building, Ambassador Serge Rumin, described his mandate as reinvigorating the organization's confidence-building function, pointing to the Kyrgyzstan-Tajikistan process and the emerging Fergana Forum as illustrations of how sustained dialogue work creates conditions for cooperation that declarations alone cannot produce.

The floor discussion covered several threads. The Azerbaijani ambassador argued that external engagement framed around sanctions or conditionality risks pushing Central Asian states away from cooperative frameworks, and called for approaches that respect the region's specific conditions rather than impose external benchmarks. An Afghan participant pressed Deputy Minister Abakirov on what practical form international attention to Afghanistan should take, drawing a response focused on food security, medical assistance, and Kyrgyzstan's readiness as a transit channel for partners unable to engage Kabul directly. Dr. Emilbek Dzhuraev asked whether the confidence-building mandate would outlast the Swiss chairpersonship, prompting a description of efforts to institutionalize dialogue capacity across field missions. A final question raised the human dimension, noting significant recent aid reductions for gender and health programs and the broader question of whether external engagement can outlast shifts in political cycles and donor priorities.

Synthesis and Conclusions

The two days of discussion produced no single conclusion on Central Asia's trajectory, but they gave sharper definition to the questions in play. Across four sessions, a shared analytical vocabulary emerged even where participants' judgments differed. The region's cooperative architecture, its relationship with external powers, its water and energy systems, and its place within multilateral institutions all generated debate in which positions were clearly articulated and genuinely contested.

Several threads ran across all four sessions. The first concerns the distinction between cooperation and integration, which the conference treated as a political question as much as an analytical one. Professor Qoraboyev identified the conflation of the two as a structural problem in how Central Asian regionalism is understood and practiced. The distinction returned in Dr. Dzhuraev's argument that regional multivectorism depends precisely on coordination remaining short of integration, since integration forecloses the sovereign flexibility that makes a collective foreign policy posture possible. Kassenova's water-energy community proposal sits in productive tension with both, suggesting that in specific functional domains binding institutions may be strategically necessary regardless of the broader question. Different actors within and outside the region have strong and divergent interests in which path prevails.

The second thread concerns agency. Dr. Dzhuraev's regional multivectorism reframes C5+1 engagement as something Central Asian states do collectively and with purpose. Deputy Minister Abakirov made the same argument in the diplomatic register: the region's record on

border settlement and intra-regional dialogue gives it something to offer on a global scale. Yet the sharpest question of the conference, whether Central Asian states are ever genuinely in the driving seat or are structurally the invited party, remained without a satisfying answer.

The third thread considered water governance as a political question, not a resource management problem. Dr. Abdullaev's formulation serves as a summary principle: the same water system can unite or divide, depending entirely on how it is governed. Siegfried's data added an important complication: Amu Darya water availability is currently increasing due to accelerated glacial melt even as long-term trajectories point toward scarcity, meaning the governance challenge is already present even where the hydrological signal appears benign.

Finally, for the fourth thread, the conference placed the OSCE's institutional condition in productive, if unresolved, focus. Dr. Dunay's keynote offered a frank assessment of the organization's structural challenges: the distance between declared commitments and operational capacity, and the growing normative divergence among participating states. The closing diplomatic panel offered a different register, with Ambassador Duflot arguing that multilateral institutions must defend their first principles concretely, remain genuine places of dialogue, and reform to demonstrate practical results. Neither position resolved the other, and that tension is itself informative about where the organization stands in 2026.

Dunay's closing remarks pointed toward what may ultimately matter most: whether the bottom-up pressures accumulating in Central Asian societies, generational change, growing intra-regional mobility, deepening cross-border ties, will eventually shift the political calculus in ways that elite-level reform has not. That question is not answerable at a two-day conference, but it is the right one to leave open.

Annex I: Conference Programme

Annual Security Conference 2026 <i>Central Asia in a Fractured Eurasia: Intra- and Extra-regional Cooperation</i> 25–26 June 2026, Bishkek	
DAY 1 — 25 June 2026	
Venue: OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Botanicheskiy pereulok 1A	
09:00 – 09:30	Registration and Arrival
09:30 – 10:00	Opening Remarks Dr. Pal Dunay — Director, OSCE Academy in Bishkek H.E. Ambassador Melis Mamadaliev — Director, Department of International Organizations, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kyrgyz Republic H.E. Ambassador Siroco Messerli — Ambassador of Switzerland to the Kyrgyz Republic, Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship
10:00 – 10:30	Keynote Speech Dr. Pal Dunay — “The Role of the OSCE in a Fractured Eurasia”
10:40 – 10:50	Group Photo
10:50 – 11:10	Coffee Break
11:10 – 13:00	Session I: Key Aspects of Cooperation Across Policy Fields Moderator — Dr. Emilbek Dzhuraev, OSCE Academy in Bishkek Prof. Ikboljon Qoraboyev — Maqsut Narikbayev University, Astana Dr. Filippo Costa Buranelli — Senior Lecturer, University of St Andrews (online) Dr. Farkhod Aminjonov — Associate Professor, National Defence College, UAE (online) Dr. Nargis Kassenova — Senior Fellow and Director, Program on Central Asia, Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University (online)
13:00 – 14:00	Lunch
14:00 – 16:30	Session II: Water and Energy Security in Central Asia Moderator — H.E. Ambassador Dr. Volker Frobarth, Head of the OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek Ms. Dinara Kemelova — Special Representative of the President of the Kyrgyz Republic on Mountain Regions Development Mr. Thierry Umbehr — Head of Section, Caucasus, Central and East Asia, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (online) Dr. Iskandar Abdullaev — Senior Researcher, International Water Management Institute (IWMI) Dr. Tobias Siegfried — Hydrosolutions Ltd. (online) Mr. Sven Ernedal — Programme Manager, Renewable Energy in Central Asia (EURECA), GIZ (online) Dr. Jenniver Sehring — Associate Professor of Water Governance and Diplomacy, IHE Delft (online)
16:30 – 17:00	Coffee Break

DAY 2 — 26 June 2026 (Morning)	
Venue: OSCE Academy in Bishkek, Botanicheskiy pereulok 1A	
09:00 – 09:30	Registration
09:30 – 11:30	Session III: C5+1 Frameworks and Regional Multivectorism Moderator — Dr. Pal Dunay, OSCE Academy in Bishkek Dr. Emilbek Dzhuraev — Senior Lecturer, OSCE Academy in Bishkek Dr. Nargiza Muratalieva — Associate Professor, American University of Central Asia, Bishkek Mr. Eldaniz Gusseinov — Non-Resident Research Fellow, Heydar Aliyev Centre for Eurasian Studies, Ibn Khaldun University, Istanbul
11:30 – 11:45	Closing Remarks — Dr. Pal Dunay
11:45 – 12:00	Group Photo
12:00 – 13:00	Lunch
DAY 2 — 26 June 2026 (Afternoon)	
Venue: National Historical Museum of Kyrgyzstan, Ala-Too Square	
15:00 – 15:15	Official Welcome H.E. Ambassador Pietro Lazzeri — Delegate of the Swiss Government for Trade Agreements, State Secretariat for Economic Affairs (SECO)
15:15 – 17:00	Session IV: External Perspectives on Central Asia — A Diplomatic Panel Moderator — H.E. Ambassador Siroco Messerli, Ambassador of Switzerland to the Kyrgyz Republic H.E. Mr. Meder Abakirov — Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs, Kyrgyz Republic H.E. Ambassador Mekin Mustafa Kemal Ökem — Ambassador of Türkiye to the Kyrgyz Republic H.E. Ambassador Monika Lenhard — Ambassador of Germany to the Kyrgyz Republic H.E. Ambassador Rémi Duflot — Head of the EU Delegation to the Kyrgyz Republic H.E. Ambassador Dr. Serge Rumin — Special Representative of the Swiss OSCE Chairpersonship for the Promotion of Dialogue and Confidence-Building
17:00 – 17:10	Group Photo
17:10 – 18:30	Opening of the Swiss Water Exhibition
18:30	Official Reception

