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Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan

Opening Speech at the Regional Seminar on Machine Readable Travel Documents (MRTDs) and Traveller Identification Management

Ambassador Gyorgy SZABO,
OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan

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International Business Center,
Tashkent, Uzbekistan
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(Total expected duration: 9 minutes, including demonstration of a short video "Security Begins")

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His Excellency Mr. Najmitdin TURAKHODJAEV, (Director, State Personalization Centre, Uzbekistan)

His Excellency Mr. Luis Fonseca de Almeida (ICAO Regional Director, European and North Atlantic (EUR/NAT) Office in Paris)

His Excellency Mr. Thomas WUCHTE (Head ATU/TNT, OSCE)

Distinguished Delegates,
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Morning,
Assalomu alaikum!

It is an honor and privilege for me to address such a distinguished audience for the opening ceremony of the Regional Seminar on Machine Readable Travel Documents (MRTDs) and Traveller Identification Management, which is being held for the first time in Central Asia.

First of all, I would like to thank the Government of Uzbekistan for accepting to host this important Regional seminar and also thank you, Mr. TURAKHODJAEV, Director of the State Personalization Center, for all the efforts in making this seminar possible. Your presence is a testimony to your commitment and the commitment of the Government of Uzbekistan to promote travel document security as important practical measure in preventing and countering terrorism, and the urgency of this issue for the host Government in fulfilling its international commitments, to ensure citizens' security and curb transnational organized crime.

I would also thank both Mr. Luis Fonseca de ALMEIDA and Mr. Thomas WUCHTE for having taken time off from your busy schedule to be present with us today.

I wish to thank you participants, presenters and the organizations you represent, for being here.

Before I proceed further with my speech, for you to have better understanding of the role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe - spanning 57 participating countries from Vancouver to Vladivostok - and the reasons of our involvement in this particular event, I would like to demonstrate a short animated film entitled "Security begins...", which is exploring what 'security' can mean from the perspective of the OSCE (can be accessed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=m6JGT6bcfs0 – duration 1 min 43 sec)

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Beginning in 2003, the OSCE, through the field office in Tashkent together with the Action Against Terrorism Unit (ATU), has been actively engaged in extensive co-operation with the Government of Uzbekistan on Travel Document Security. This has encompassed Uzbekistan participation in hosting of a number of essential capacity building activities. These events have delivered vital standards and expertise and contributed to shaping a more advanced and harmonized travel document, border control and identity management environment in Uzbekistan.

In 2009 Uzbekistan government approached the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan with the request to assist in practical implementation of this program.

As an immediate response to the Uzbek side's request, the PCUz in cooperation with the ATU organized a workshop on identity Document (ID) Management for local specialists, who would potentially be responsible to handle the process of new biometric passports introduction in Uzbekistan. The workshop addressed all key aspects and helped the local experts to increase their knowledge in the field of professional identity management from a strategic and tactical perspective.

Starting from 2010 the PCUz started implementation of the project to support full-scale introduction of a local system of machine readable travel documents with biometric identifiers by means of extra budgetary contribution of the USA. The project is focused on raising awareness of the key government officials involved on electronically enabled machine-readable identity and travel documents with biometric identifiers and development technical capacity for introducing biometric passports in accordance with the interoperable standards and specifications developed by ICAO.

One of the first activities of the project was facilitation of the OSCE and International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) visit to Uzbekistan to make an initial assessment of and provide consultations on the national passport system and introduction of identity and travel document with biometric identifiers.

To accomplish such a challenging wide-scale objective and recognizing that even the most expert advice cannot rival the enrichment of observing best practices first-hand, study visits to Great Britain, Canada and USA for the specialists from Uzbekistan including technical specialists as well as senior officers and officials of related agencies at decision making levels.

The delegations had the opportunity to exchange experiences with their foreign counterparts about large scale policy of the visited countries in the area of passport issuance, ensuring security, combating fake passports. The delegation members also familiarized themselves with best international practices of production of biometric passport templates and booklets, as well as the whole process starting from procedure of accepting applications and collection of biometric data, till passport personalization and it being issued to specific applicant. A visit of Uzbekistan delegation to Head Quarters of International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in Montreal to learn main objectives of implementation of Machine Readable Traveling Documents Program, and the issues related to operation and maintenance of ICAO Public Key Directory (PKD) and Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) was organized in 2011.

The outcomes of the visits contributed to the plans of Uzbek authorities in proceeding with full-scale introduction of the biometric passports in the country by the end of 2015.

Our joint project was also focused on providing assistance to Uzbekistan colleagues in lifting their understanding on the Public Key Directory (PKD) infrastructure and to build a confidence on their way to ICAO PKD participation. To facilitate this, a visit of Uzbekistan experts to Netrust office, Singaporean company which is contracted by ICAO to setup and operate the ICAO PKD,

was organized. During the visit, which took place in August 2012, the experts from Uzbekistan were able to grasp the benefits of the ICAO PKD participation which enables national system to automatically upload certificates to a single and secure multilateral technical platform, and received detailed answers to the range of technical questions with regard to the operation and maintenance of Public Key Infrastructure (PKI) certification service. I am also glad to underline that this aim was also successfully achieved: on 21 March 2014 Uzbekistan officially became a 43rd member of the ICAO PKD.

We may also consider holding this important event in Tashkent as one of the successful outcomes of the joint cooperation between the OSCE and the Government of Uzbekistan.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in closing I wish you all a very engaging and successful Regional Seminar and pleasant stay in Tashkent.

Thank you for your attention.

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