



Organization for Security and
Co-operation in Europe

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Travel Document Security (TDS) as a Priority Focus Area for OSCE Counter-Terrorism Efforts

Remarks: Thomas Wuchte, Head on Anti-terrorism Issues

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear colleagues

It is indeed a pleasure to be here in Tashkent today and I thank our hosts for providing us with this stunning venue and for all the preparations that went into bringing this Seminar to life.

Before I start talking about why Travel Document Security is a priority focus for OSCE counter terrorism efforts, allow me to also stress that the OSCE deeply appreciates its strong and fruitful co-operation with the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO).

You have contributed so much of your time and effort to improving document security throughout the OSCE area and beyond. You should know how much the OSCE appreciates your dedication.

We look forward to continue co-ordinating our efforts with you. After all, the effective co-ordination of regional capacity-building assistance is just one of the many reasons why the OSCE is supporting this seminar.

Allow me to also thank the OSCE Project Co-ordinator here in Uzbekistan. Without the sheer dedication of your staff, and in particular Otabek, I doubt we would be sitting here today.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

As an implementer of UN instruments including ICAO standards, this Seminar represents a continuation of OSCE efforts to prevent the cross-border movement of terrorists including the use of forged or fraudulent travel documents.

Having noted that the link between travel document security and tackling terrorist threats is not always obvious, allow me to elaborate on this a bit more...

Link between countering terrorism and detecting forged travel documents

Terrorism is a transnational and multi-dimensional threat, which poses challenges for the entire OSCE community. Terrorist groups depend on the ability to cross borders undetected in order to raise funds, recruit operatives, train operatives and send them out to plan and conduct terrorist attacks.

Key to their international mobility is being able to circumvent immigration laws and “watch lists” of national authorities as well as international organizations. And this is where a forged or fraudulent travel document can come into play.

In fact, a key finding in the 9/11 Commission Report was that “for terrorists, travel documents are as important as weapons.”

How do they do it?

- Some reports suggest that there are specialized terrorist cells or terrorist splinter groups whose only job is to supply passports and other documents that can be used by operatives. Other reports suggest that some terrorist groups even specialised in forging identity documents as a way to fund activities.

- Other evidence suggests that terrorists use or rely on criminal networks to procure false identity documents. This theory lends further credibility to a nexus between organized crime and terrorism.
- Other experts point out that terrorists falsify documents, such as birth certificates, which are needed to acquire a passport. This practice allows terrorists to get legitimate passports, using an alias.
- Yet other evidence suggests that in some countries violent extremists bribe corrupted officials to obtain official travel documents.

It is not that surprising then that the issuance and integrity of travel documents is an integral part of global counter-terrorism capacity-building efforts and anchored in documents such as UN Security Council Resolution 1373 (2001) as well as the Global Counter Terrorism Strategy.

For the last decade many nations have invested time, money and great expectations in enhanced travel document programmes, especially in machine readable e-Passports employing biometrics.

By all accounts, the current generation of ICAO-compliant chip based travel documents are the best and most secure the world has ever known.

They are a powerful tool to enable border control authorities to make more informed, safer and even faster decisions at passport control checkpoints; and to counter in one envelope concerns of terrorism, trafficking and organized crime.

However, our work must not stop here. It is not good enough to issue electronic passports if issuance processes can be abused by fraudsters using a fake birth certificate to apply for a passport under a fake identity. Likewise, there is no point investing in modern and securer travel documents if they can't or won't be read and checked at the border.

It is the lack of integrating identity and identification management processes that represent opportunities for terrorists and unearthed a major weakness in global efforts to ensure security, stability, good governance and the rule of law, including with respect to countering terrorism.

Today travel document security needs to be understood holistically - from secure and reliable civil registry systems to integrated border security solutions. Most importantly these components must not be viewed in isolation but as an upward and downward chain of events taking into account all those potential weaknesses we know terrorists have sought to exploit in the past.

And I believe this is the beauty of the new ICAO Traveller Identification Programme (TRIP) strategy. States decided to move on from looking at travel document security in a compartmentalized and document centric way.

Instead the focus is on strengthening the security of not only travel documents but also related issuance processes and their inter-linkages to modernized civil registries as well as the use of travel documents as part of comprehensive and integrated border solutions to facilitate fast and secure trans-border movement.

This comprehensive approach is vital to combat the asymmetric and transnational terrorist threat.

Travel Document Security: An OSCE CT priority area

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Having made the link between travel document security and counter terrorism efforts, allow me to talk a bit more about the OSCE work related to enhancing travel document security and related processes.

The recently adopted OSCE Consolidated Framework for the Fight against Terrorism¹ confirms that “Strengthening travel document security” remains among the strategic focus areas for OSCE counter terrorism activities.

OSCE participating States have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to prevent the movement of terrorists through effective border control and controls on the issuing of identity papers and travel documents as well as preventing their counterfeiting, forgery and fraudulent use. A primary objective is to facilitate the free and secure movement of persons.

The OSCE Travel Document Security programme started in 2003 and has grown into the largest OSCE anti-terrorism capacity-building programme.

¹ PC.DEC.1063, 7 December.

The programme rests on four pillars which are mutually reinforcing. Projects focus on upgrading technological security features of passports and making sure that the processes used to vouch for the identity of an applicant during the application phase are secure.

The OSCE also promotes effective solutions at borders to cut waiting times for travellers whilst giving greater assurances to border control officers that travel documents are genuine.

Let me elaborate a bit more:

To combat the threat of terrorists and criminals using fake identities to obtain a genuine travel document, the OSCE offers assistance to states in the area of Handling and Issuance of Travel Documents.

Activities in this area increasingly focus on national identity management by strengthening evidence of identity - so called breeder documents, civil registry systems and other media used to verify and/or validate a travel document applicant's identity. We will hear a bit more about this later on.

Moreover, the OSCE offers assistance with upgrading technological security features of travel documents to prevent them from being forged or counterfeited. In this context, it is vital to ascertain that the person holding a passport is indeed the authorized bearer.

Since the majority of OSCE participating States are issuing ePassports with biographic and biometric data contained on a chip, the OSCE is placing a particular emphasis on participation in the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) Public Key Directory (PKD).

The OSCE also promotes real-time access to INTERPOL databases, including for Stolen/Lost Travel Documents (SLTD). A key objective related to our work on document checks at the border is the promotion of integrated border management solutions to better capture, verify, share and analyse information on cross-border movements.

These assistance efforts are rounded off by trainings for border police and customs officials to strengthen their operational and analytical capacities to detect forged travel documents.

This holistic approach to Travel Document Security capacity building reflects the very spirit of the TRIP Strategy.

Central Asia as a priority focus area

In terms of geographic focus, OSCE activities focus in particular on Central Asia taking into account the evolving security priorities and needs in Afghanistan and the wider region.

Specifically, in recent years various studies pointed to an increase of trans-border organized crime related to illicit cross-border movements in drugs, arms and human beings. Worryingly many of these activities also seem to be connected to international terrorist networks.

For instance, U.S. Congressional hearings revealed the relationship between terrorists and organized criminal syndicates who smuggle humans across borders.

These human traffickers rely on huge numbers of forged or fraudulent passports, routing people through as many as two other countries to hide the country of origin. The bad news is that terrorists appear to tap into this resource.

It is therefore only logical to focus on these enablers of such illegal cross border activities - forged or fraudulent travel document.

Enhancing travel document security and developing border control capacities for the efficient detection of forged documents are significant tools to counter in one envelope concerns of terrorism, trafficking and organized crime and the links between them.

The task is huge and apart from the OSCE there are a number of organizations involved in this work. The key for efficiency of this work is co-ordination. This is one of the principal reasons why we supported this initiative in Central Asia since it gives us an opportunity to identify and co-ordinate pertinent capacity building needs with our constituents and partners.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me stop here. If you have any question related to our work please do not hesitate to approach me or my colleagues from the OSCE in Vienna or the various Field offices.