



Border Management & Governance Standards
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Chair, Your Excellencies, colleagues, friends,

I have started to work again on Central Asia, after something of an absence. It is refreshing to see the situation in a fresh light, and to note the changes since I started to work here on border management some 10 years ago. First, I would like to congratulate Central Asian Governments on the marked improvements made, and acknowledge also the generous contributions made by the donor community, not least the EU and Japan.

In general, however, international perceptions of border management in Central Asia remain poor, characterized by impressions of byzantine regulations, corrupt practice and the lack of a culture of public service. I looked up the usual international indices of country rankings for corruption and transparency in preparing this speech, and felt a sense of pain as a development professional.

It doesn't matter how accurate are the rankings. Perceptions may not conform fully to reality, but they do matter. They affect international relations and collaboration on security; the decisions of potential cross-border traders, foreign investors and future tourists; attitudes of

the general public, and especially of border communities, to a key element of the State security apparatus.

Across the CIS, infrastructure has been built or modernised, new equipment has been provided, and operational capacities have been developed. But there has been little institutional or legislative change, and – perhaps more importantly from the point of view of perceptions – few serious and targeted attempts to increase public confidence in the integrity, transparency and accountability of Border Agencies.

My sense is that CIS Governments themselves now view such initiatives as necessary. Any level of corruption in Border Agencies is understood as a *direct* threat to citizen security, national security, and international security. Poor governance standards are now a major impediment to trade and increased levels of foreign direct investment, a human rights problem for labour migrants, and a significant factor in the alienation of border communities.

Of course these are sensitive issues, and they must be addressed with tact and a collaborative approach – Central Asian Governments neither want, nor deserve, to be lectured on these matters. So how can we best support Governments to overcome these negative perceptions? I see two prerequisites for action.

First, the desire for change must come from the very highest Offices of State, in order that the domestic and international audience has confidence that any vested interests – public or private – can be overcome. Although national anti-corruption strategies can provide an overarching framework for intervention where they exist, what is needed is more precise and practical national action plans for reform of the Border Agencies, with costed interventions and timelines.

Second, let us take a strategic approach commensurate with the political will to be invested. The strategic objectives are to improve human security, national and international security, and to contribute to increased levels of cross-border trade and foreign direct investment. Whatever arrangements are in place at the border, fostering domestic and international confidence is about re-presenting the Border Agencies as public services, which collectively ensure a certain benign predictability at the borders for those that need to cross them. For potential foreign direct investors, border crossings are windows on a country, as well as the doors.

It is this conception of border management as a public service – ensuring citizen security against organised crime and terrorists, protecting the public from sub-standard goods, falsified medicines, plant and animal diseases, facilitating trade and human mobility, offering asylum and disaster preparedness – that needs to be better communicated to the general population, and that requires high-profile efforts to improve the transparency, integrity and accountability of the Border Agencies.

A general impression of poor governance standards of border management in Central Asia is not very helpful as a basis for action. Every country has different problems, capacities and needs in this regard, and each country will wish to define its own trajectory of development on this issue. At the technical level, however, there is general consensus as to the sort of interventions required. I tend to think in terms of measures to enhance transparency, integrity and accountability, but these cover all of the measures defined by the World Bank, OECD and others in regard to trade facilitation indicators, for example.

In terms of transparency, measures are usually required to enhance levels of consultations with border users, to publish and disseminate trade information, to reinforce public enquiry points and complaints hotlines, to improve systems of advance rulings for traders. And these measures should be accompanied by a public awareness campaign in regard to the reform

process – it is the message, just as much as substance, which will begin to alter domestic and international perceptions.

The current introduction of Single Window schemes in Central Asia will be a great step forward in all respects, and should help establish a real enabling environment for increased trade and foreign direct investment. They can help address the corruption issue also, especially if they can move over time to online payment systems that ensure electronic audit trails, and which reduce the need for cash at borders.

The first thing I want to say about corruption at the borders is that in my view, it is not just about salaries. Yes, remuneration is important, but some Border Agencies in the neighbourhood have moved to almost European salary levels, whilst maintaining their reputation for corruption.

For me, a broader conception of enhancing professional integrity standards is required, and this means supporting Border Agencies to take an holistic Human Resources Management approach. Support needs to be given to Agencies to undertake risks/gap analysis in regard to integrity frameworks and standards, and to give them appropriate options for change, including procedures for appointment, promotion, attestation, performance appraisal, rotation, conflict of interest and disciplinary processes. This may require existing Codes of Conduct to be reviewed. Monitoring systems for income/asset declarations and conflict of interest detection need to be in place, as well as CCTV surveillance of staff interaction with the public at border crossing points.

It is important that Agency training institutions are able to customize and introduce international-standard training modules on professional ethics, performance standards and corruption awareness for existing staff and new recruits. Support should be provided to prepare training curricula, manuals and Standard Operating Procedures down to BCP level.

Once these elements are in place, it may then be appropriate to offer international experience of schemes designed to incentivize or reward selected Border Agency personnel through supplemental salary awards.

Improving accountability of Border Agencies usually involves engaging the chain of command, ombudspersons, judiciary, media, Parliament, civil society, audit authorities and the community. Working with some of these actors is more or less possible in different Central Asian countries. I find it more useful to define who should be accountable to whom, regardless of country. Front-line service providers must be accountable to their Senior Management; Agency Senior Management must be accountable to the Government; and the Government is accountable to the people, via non-state actors and the electoral process.

In the sense that global trade and security threats are by nature cross-border issues, I am tempted to add that in regard to border management, States are increasingly accountable to each other. Certainly they are through the many international standards and conventions that govern it, and which often require the rigorous implementation of all parties if they are to fulfill their objectives. I believe this issue of inter-dependence and mutual accountability is particularly pertinent in relation to Central Asia today, and the security and regional integration challenges that Central Asia faces now and in the near future.

I would like to make a special mention of border communities here, as a subset of the general population to whom Border Agencies are ultimately accountable. Borderlands in Central Asia often include significant populations from ethnic minorities, disadvantaged and often disaffected, with poor access to Government services and restricted in their cross-border interaction with family and friends. At the local level, cross-border trade and transit is often constrained by bureaucratic procedures, harassment and demands for illegal payments. Many local communities view borders, and the restrictions they imply, with hostility.

From the EU external border to the Ferghana Valley and the Tajik-Afghan border, vulnerable border communities have become fertile recruiting ground for militants and networks of organized crime – whether they are focused on trafficking in drugs, weapons or human beings. The instability and corruption that these networks spread in their wake can quickly become systemic, threatening security, undermining legitimate trade and transit, and potentially compromising the development agenda as a whole. It is vital to better articulate border communities to the border management regime and to the legitimate law and order efforts of the State.

Doing so requires only a change of mindset, and a certain willingness of the Border Agencies to engage in a range of confidence-building measures with local communities, tried and tested in any number of situations around the world over the years. UNDP is a repository of experience in this area, and could usefully offer more support if requested to do so.

Since 2002, UNDP has delivered approximately 300m USD of border management and related assistance to countries of the former Soviet Union, on behalf of the European Union and its institutions. UNDP is open to continue working on border management in Central Asia and elsewhere, wherever there is interest from Governments and donors, and wherever there a convincing development rationale to the proposed intervention.

UNDP believes a multilateral umbrella remains an attractive option for building border management capacities in Central Asia at the present time, and that such an option should institutionalise a demand-led approach. Central Asian Governments should be encouraged to propose their own plans and projects, and should be given the technical assistance to prepare these for consideration by prospective donors. In regard to the provision of expertise for implementation, UNDP recognises the capacity that exists within the CIS itself, and is interested to see CIS expertise deployed to compliment that available under EU and US-funded programmes, in line with UNDP's policies in regard to South-South cooperation.

There is other non-CIS expertise that might be interesting also. Georgia has largely succeeded in overcoming the perceptions issue, following a major reform programme, although Georgian colleagues will readily admit that all is a work in progress and that constant vigilance must be maintained. The Baltic States also have significant experience to offer in regard to their own transition process after they joined the European Union. UNDP is working closely with Latvia on the issue, following an exchange of Letters of Cooperation between Ms Cihan Sultanoglu, Director of UNDP's Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, and General Garbars, Head of the Latvian Border Guard Service.

UNDP is well known for its work on governance, anti-corruption programming, and capacity development in general. Through its Bratislava-based Regional Centre, UNDP's Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS is able to offer strategic level advice to Government in regard to development of sectoral anti-corruption strategies for border management; advisory services in regard to adoption and implementation of relevant international Conventions and Standards; technical assessment, project formulation; identification of donor funding; project implementation support and monitoring & evaluation services.

I believe UNDP's mandate and legitimacy as an independent global organization allow it to address sensitive issues that characterize the "security-development nexus". UNDP has a long-term presence on the ground, is trusted by Governments, and is aware of local realities.

Good governance is both an objective of improved border management, and a means to achieve it. UNDP is already working with several CIS Governments on these issues, and stands ready to serve all Governments of Central Asia, including Afghanistan, upon request.

Thank you for your attention.