

“BRINGING THE YOUNG GENERATION TOGETHER IN CENTRAL ASIA”: THE OSCE ACADEMY IN BISHKEK

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Interview with Pal Dunay
Held by Irina Mironova



Abstract:

The OSCE Academy, established in 2002 in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan, stands as a unique regional initiative. It marked the first time the OSCE partnered with a participating state to create a training institution. As of 2024, the Academy boasts over 650 alumni working across various sectors both within Central Asia and beyond. In this interview with the Academy's Interim Director, Pal Dunay, we explore the origins of the OSCE Academy, the evolution of its curriculum, and the challenges it currently faces. We also reflect on the vital role of education in promoting regional development.

Keywords: conflict resolution, education, international relations

«Объединяя молодое поколение в Центральной Азии»: Академия ОБСЕ в Бишкеке

Аннотация: Академия ОБСЕ была основана в 2002 году в Бишкеке

(Кыргызстан) и стала уникальной региональной инициативой. ОБСЕ впервые создала учебное заведение в сотрудничестве с государством-участником. К 2024 году более 650 выпускников Академии работают в различных секторах как в Центральной Азии, так и за её пределами. Пал Дунай, временный директор Академии, рассказал в интервью об истории создания Академии ОБСЕ, развитии её учебных программ и текущих вызовах. Мы также обсудили важную роль образования в развитии региона.

Ключевые слова: международные отношения, образование, разрешение конфликтов

Irina Mironova: *Dear Pal, I would like to thank you for finding the time to do this interview. Can you tell me about the origins of the OSCE Academy?*

Pal Dunay: The OSCE Academy was established in 2002 upon the initiative of Kyrgyzstan. Although originally the initiative focused primarily upon Kyrgyzstan, following consultations with the OSCE it became a unique regional initiative. It was the first time the OSCE established a training institution in cooperation with a participating state. Its activities started with a so-called trial course. In 2004, the Academy received the building at Botanicheskiy Pereulok in Bishkek where it has worked since.

The first Politics and Security MA (Central Asia) class graduated in 2005. Since then, many of those in that class have

achieved a lot. One of them is a member of the government of Kyrgyzstan, another teaches at a reputable university in the Far East to mention but two.

Irina: *What are the Academy's main objectives, and why was Bishkek selected as its location?*

The Academy is an institution whose main aim is to provide the students with high quality professional training in certain critical areas. It is an institution that fosters the development of the region through post-graduate, and (since 2022 also undergraduate) education, bringing the young generation together in the region. This basic activity is complemented by executive education and some policy-oriented research published by the Academy on its website and elsewhere, including open access books. The Academy aims

to be one of the centres of international intellectual life in Bishkek and has achieved quite a lot in that area from time to time. It is essential to notice that there is one political consideration behind this. Namely, to bring the young intellectuals in the region together and contribute to region-building so that cooperation would prevail. Even though the favorable changes during the last decade were contributing to an improvement of cooperation in Central Asia, it will take further efforts to consolidate and contribute to maintaining its dynamism. The OSCE Academy makes its complementary contribution to this process by its own limited means.

Of course, the agenda broadened as time elapsed. The Academy moved from one MA programme to three, has a BA programme on economics, regular cooperation in executive training and an incredibly active Alumni programme for our more than 650 alumni.

The list of states that attend the courses broadened. First, Afghan students started to arrive in the second half of the first decade of the century, whereas following the accession of Mongolia to the OSCE in 2012, students have also arrived from that country. In addition to the seven countries, the citizens of other OSCE participating states are also welcome. The Academy was fortunate to have students from Russia, Belarus, Poland, Germany, the UK, Denmark, Canada and the U.S. to mention but a few.

Bishkek has been the host of the Academy for two main reasons: firstly, it was the initiative of Kyrgyzstan to establish the institution. Secondly, Kyrgyzstan was standing out in Central Asia with its established record of respecting the values that the OSCE expects from its participating states to share. Time proved the correctness of this choice even though historical developments, including the not particularly favorable position of some Central Asian states towards the OSCE until some turning points in their historical development, had a bearing upon the composition of the student body. The same applies to some historical changes in the region. It is understandable that the tragic collisions between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in the south of Kyrgyzstan in 2010 reduced the interest of Uzbek students to apply. The situation is different with Afghan students who have difficulties joining our courses since 2021. The Academy appreciates that the authorities of Kyrgyzstan try their best to support it also in this area.

Irina: *During my time as a visiting lecturer in 2014 and 2016, I recall the Academy offering two master's programs – one focused on economics and another on politics and security/conflict resolution. What were the reasons behind promoting these two particular fields?*

Pal: The Politics and Security (Central Asia) MA programme was the first, and for some time the only, long programme that the OSCE Academy offered. It was apparent that if states of the region after the dissolution of the Soviet Union were looking for their identity that meant both defining what a nation was and what it was not. The Academy could help with the intellectual foundations of understanding the political processes. The second MA, in Economic Governance and Development was also demand driven. It is clear that eco-

nomics interaction under conditions fully different from the Soviet planned economy is essential for regional development. Time proved that it was the correct decision more than 15 years ago to enrich the programme offer of the Academy.

Again, a phase of consolidation followed for approximately a decade. Under the leadership of Dr Alexander Walters, who was the director of the Academy between 2017 and 2022 and on the basis of earlier achievements partly, a vertical development began. The Academy launched the four year Economics BA programme in 2022. The first students will graduate from that programme in 2026.

A Ph.D. programme was also conceived. However, it had to be put on ice due to three major issues that the Academy had to consider:

1. The availability of financial resources.
2. The permanent faculty that can supervise and foster the realisation of the programme.
3. The physical capacity of the OSCE Academy: The building that is now used is beyond capacity.

Without a change in each of these three, now another consolidation phase has to follow. This is my task, and this will be the main task of the next director coming into office in early 2025. I find this an appropriate challenge.

To tell the truth, I never felt I was apt as a transformational leader for a variety of reasons. Maybe I am not brave enough, I am very careful and avoid radical decisions, including ones related to personnel. However, I find managing the Academy, hopefully guaranteeing its smooth functioning, will recreate collegial relations that were somewhat weakened due to four persons rotating in the leadership of the Academy during the last two years. Now, consolidation of the achievements will have to be the priority.

However, there are a few plans that may go beyond just consolidation. The Academy's plan to participate in a regional MA programme based on the cooperation of several universities is on its way and if all goes well, the Academy hopes to welcome the first students in Spring 2027. It will be the fourth, and last semester of the two year MA programme. We are beyond the first planning meetings with our partners and we are very much looking forward to the Academy's participation.

Irina: *The Academy recently introduced a new program incorporating human rights and sustainability. When was this program launched, and how does it align with the Academy's strategic vision?*

Pal: There is no need to argue in favor of human rights and sustainability that are essential in Central Asia. The region has limited democratic experience. In some cases, it extends to a few years, in others a few decades. The more the Central Asian former Soviet republics distance themselves from the Soviet legacy, the more they will be regarded as developing countries. In sum, both issues are highly relevant on the regional agenda. This MA programme, just as the two others, have been demand driven to address those matters, which

are the most relevant in the region (and due to the participation of students from Afghanistan and Mongolia) also in its neighborhood. Even though under the current conditions the knowledge acquired in this programme may not be put to use in Afghanistan under the current conditions, it must never be forgotten that such teaching programmes are investments in the future.

The Master of Arts Programme in Human Rights and Sustainability (MAHRS) is unique in the sense that it is part of the Global Campus of Human Rights, one of eight hubs, and the only one in Central Asia. This opens a window again to the world in an area that multiplies the opportunities for the students of the Academy to understand the value system and the aspirations of many states and societies to pursue, and the advantages of acting in support of human rights and sustainability. It goes without saying that such a programme also takes a critical look at the situation in these fields. It is not propagating an agenda, it is presenting and analysing. The programme started in September 2023 and the first students will graduate in February 2025. As I have seen the thesis outlines of the students, I was very impressed by the variety of approaches ranging from abduction of women to language rights, and to the relationship between national security and human rights. The Academy does not take a position on these matters, and we respect the views of students if they elaborate and argue their position on a high level. The quality of the forthcoming theses is very promising. We are all looking forward to the day when the theses will be submitted on 8 January 2025 to see the quality the students will demonstrate with their theses. We will be glad to see the first graduates of the MAHRS programme together with the two other MA courses on the 14th of February 2025 when the students receive their diplomas.

Irina: What key challenges does the Academy currently face?

Pal: The OSCE Academy has often been facing challenges during the last 22 years. Some old and new challenges co-exist on the agenda. As I mentioned above, the OSCE Academy went through rapid growth during the last five years and it is now the most important to provide for the conditions to consolidate the achievements. The BA and MA programmes stand, and in their cases, it is the most important to continue to attract excellent students from each of the seven states. It is just as important to guarantee that an excellent international body of professors would continue to find the OSCE Academy attractive to engage in teaching for a week (a module), a semester, or a year if not more. Still on the substance, it is important that the Academy would carry out high quality policy-oriented research and publish its results. Fortunately, and as a small step, the Policy Brief series¹ restarted after a year long interval, and five papers will get published before the end of 2024.

All this is related to resources that entail funding, the retention of the dedicated and motivated staff of the Academy, and finding a new venue that will be sufficiently large to host all

our classes. This could not be achieved for the 2023-4 academic year when we had to rent a classroom for the first time. If the Academy cannot move to a new, larger facility, we will need two external classrooms in the autumn of 2025. However, I am hopeful that the matter can be resolved earlier. As the building of the OSCE Academy is the contribution of Kyrgyzstan as host state I hope that we will be helped with our relocation plan. As of now, state institutions move to new locations in Bishkek. I hope once the ministries and other parts of the Kyrgyz administration find their new location, the Academy will also benefit from the unceasing attention and support of the state reflected on helping find the Academy's new location after 20 years in the same building.

The OSCE Programme Office and the Academy work together to gain the support of donors to continue to fund the now significantly enlarged Academy. There are highly promising signs, and I hope this is only the beginning.

In sum, my work is divided between the substance and the “technical conditions” among which the Academy works. I hope the new director of the Academy, who will arrive in the beginning of 2025, will have the chance to focus more on the former and somewhat less on the latter.

Irina: Could you highlight three notable achievements of your graduates that have had a significant impact?

Pal: The former students of the Academy have been quite successful in their careers in various areas. There are many international officials among them, including 44 in various OSCE missions and offices. There are ranking civil servants that help their states to develop, including a few ambassadors. There are some who had to leave their countries, and we see outstanding primarily former Afghan students who are trying to find their chance in the world at large. There are many Ph.D. holders who teach at various universities from Europe to the Middle East, Central Asia and the Far East. In sum, although of course there are some Academy graduates who did not excel in their professional life, a very large majority is doing extremely well.

Of course, we must not forget that the Minister of Digital Development of Kyrgyzstan is a graduate of the first cohort of Politics and Security MA students. Of course, it is the result of her own effort, perseverance, and her studies not only at the Academy but also abroad but we share the pride with others.

Irina: How are energy markets and economics integrated into the Academy's curriculum, and how do you see their impact on developments in Central Asia's energy markets?

Pal: There is a course in the Economic Governance and Development Programme named “Economics and Regulation of the Energy Sector”. This course aims to give students the fundamentals of energy economics and regulation. Students obtain a set of knowledge and tools to make judgments and talk about the economic part of the energy sector: the main “players” in the market, what affects prices and trends in energy, how certain markets are regulated, how the environment and climate are affected while we are producing and consuming energy, etc. Moreover, our students are trained to:

¹ “Academy Policy Briefs”, The OSCE Academy in Bishkek, <https://osce-academy.net/en/research/publication/policy-briefs/>.

1. Describe global energy trends (production and consumption, supply and demand of energy from different sources like coal, hydro, etc.).
2. Compare various energy types (what are the pros and cons, availability, feasibility, how they are regulated, etc.).
3. Describe policies to incentivise and promote renewable/clean energy (cases from different countries and their effects).
4. Social and environmental aspects of energy (health, environment and climate related issues).
5. Have an understanding on the future of energy (what are the future trends, what are the new energy technologies, how AI will affect energy consumption, etc.).

Furthermore, supply-side and demand-side management strategies are delivered with different examples from various countries for increasing energy efficiency. Constructing new energy facilities is extremely expensive, so students learn the strategies to keep the energy production at the highest possible levels with minimum loss. On the other hand, consumers should use electricity in an optimal way. Students are presented with the question why public awareness is important, why we should insulate our buildings, and why energy efficient technologies should be used. Last but not least, not to leave charging units of mobile phones plugged in while we are not charging the phone.

Irina: *We met with you for the first time in person about 10 years ago in Bishkek, at the Academy, and because of that I always associate your name with it. But you were not actually here all these years. How long have you served as the Academy's Director and how has your role evolved with time?*

Pal: My association with the Academy goes back to the beginning of the institution. I was working at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). As the Academy did not have permanent faculty, the GCSP signed a memorandum of understanding with it, and some faculty members from there as well as from some other similar institutions in Europe started to travel there and have courses and modules. As I have been interested in the so-called former Soviet space for a long time, I was very glad to come to the Academy. I was in Bishkek every year since 2003 except for 2020 when COVID prevented me from coming and I contributed online.

I may say the more I visited the Academy and Bishkek, the more I appreciated the colleagues who were working there, the student body consisting of excellent, ambitious, earnest, young people who wanted to achieve the best under not always the most favorable conditions. After several years of contribution to the teaching programme, supervising theses, and helping interns of the Academy who spent their internship at the GCSP, I found it logical to apply for the vacancy. Two former directors, Dr. Tim Epkenhans and Dr. Maxim Ryabkov did a great job during the nearly ten years they were leading the Academy and hence it was my main task to manage the Academy that was in excellent shape. I was selected and arrived on 1 May 2014. However, I had a difficulty: My family stayed in Budapest and while commuting from Geneva was easy, Bishkek was "a bridge too far". After 13 months I had to leave. I returned to Europe, more speci-

fically to Garmisch-Partenkirchen in the south of Germany that was only 720 kilometers from the family. However, I missed the Academy, and then returned for a further nine months in 2016. For the return, I asked for an unpaid leave from the Marshall Center that was kindly granted to me. However, and irrespective how much I loved the Academy and my job there, the prevailing reasons required my return to Garmisch in September 2016 again.

Still, I kept returning to have classes at the Academy. When I retired from the Marshall Center in Garmisch in May 2023, I informed the chairman of the board of trustees, Ambassador Alexey Rogov that I would be available to fill in the post temporarily if need be. (The post was vacant and the deputy director, Dr. Indira Satarkulova was working as acting director.) At that time, there was no need for such an interim solution. The Board of Trustees tried to fill in the vacancy on the basis of secondment. Finally, the new director, Dr. Kate Walker was not selected as a 'seconded'. She did a remarkable job as director. Unfortunately, she announced her resignation effective at the end of June 2024. However, my expression of interest to volunteer and contribute to the work of the Academy in 2023 was not forgotten. I was selected and started to work as interim director with a contract until the end of the year of 2024. Although the Academy has changed significantly, it became larger with a broad-ranging teaching, training and research agenda. I think my long term engagement with the Academy and experience as director was found useful. I enjoy the challenge of working at the Academy again. I am waiting for the selection of the new director and will then hand over the post at my best.

About Pal Dunay

Dr. Pal Dunay is Interim Director of the OSCE Academy since 1 July 2024. He was director of the OSCE Academy between 1 May 2014 and 30 June 2015 and again between January and September 2016. Over the past 40+ years, Dr. Dunay, a lawyer by training, has worked in various positions, predominantly in post-graduate education and training. He taught public international law at his alma mater, Loránd Eötvös University, Budapest between 1982 and 1996, was course director at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (1996–2004, 2007–2014), and was Professor of NATO and European Security Issues at the George C. Marshall European Center for Security Studies in Garmisch-Partenkirchen, Germany. He was a senior researcher at the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) between 2004–2007.

His practical and management experience includes the role of legal advisor of the Hungarian Delegation to the Conventional Forces in Europe (CFE) talks, and the negotiations of the Treaty on Open Skies (1989–1992), head of the Security Policy Department of the Hungarian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1991), Deputy Director of the Hungarian Institute of International Affairs (1994–1996), and Director of the same institution (2007).

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WHAT IS THE OSCE, AND WHY IS ITS WORK IMPORTANT FOR ENERGY POLICY IN EURASIA?

Background note by *Irina Mironova*

Source: *OSCE website*²

The **Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)** is an international organisation addressing security issues across a broad geographic region.

Discussions to establish a multilateral, supranational framework involving countries from both sides of the “Iron Curtain” began in the 1950s. These discussions led to the founding of the organisation in 1975 with the signing of the **Helsinki Final Act**³ under the original name *Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE)*. Key elements of the CSCE’s foundational documents include:

- **Principles of State Interaction:** Emphasising mutual respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, the inviolability of borders, non-interference in internal affairs, and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.
- **Confidence- and Security-Building Measures:** Evolving into a comprehensive mechanism for the exchange of information on armed forces, including their composition, deployment, armament, and defense planning and funding.

The CSCE’s institutional framework was solidified in 1992, and in 1994, it was renamed the OSCE, a change that took effect on January 1, 1995. Today, the OSCE includes **57 participating states** from Europe, Central Asia/Eurasia, and North America.

The OSCE operates under the concept of **comprehensive security**, encompassing three key dimensions outlined in the Helsinki document:

- **Military-Political Dimension:** Covers arms control, hazardous chemicals regulation, conflict resolution, border security and counterterrorism efforts.
- **Humanitarian Dimension:** Involves protection of rights and freedoms, advancing education, strengthening democratic institutions, combating discrimination, supporting national minorities, election monitoring and press freedom.
- **Economic and Environmental Dimension:** Focuses on promoting sustainable economic growth, combating corrup-

tion, enhancing government transparency, and protecting the environment.

This comprehensive approach underscores the OSCE’s belief that political and economic rights violations can create tensions potentially leading to armed conflicts.

The OSCE maintains a strong presence in Central Asia through:

- Three program offices (in Kazakhstan⁴, Kyrgyzstan⁵ and Tajikistan⁶);
- A program center (in Turkmenistan⁷);
- A project coordinator (in Uzbekistan⁸).

Since 2002, the OSCE Academy in Bishkek has provided education to students from Central Asia, Afghanistan and Mongolia, further fostering regional cooperation and development.

Relevance to Energy Politics and Policy

Energy security – understood as the stable, sustainable and affordable access to energy resources – is a cornerstone of international security. Reliable energy access is a critical enabler of economic growth, political stability and societal prosperity. As such, achieving energy security aligns closely with the OSCE’s comprehensive security framework, especially within its economic and environmental dimensions.

Within this context, several energy policy themes are particularly relevant to Central Asia:

- Growing energy demand;
- Regional interconnections and regional market integration;

⁴ OSCE Programme Office in Astana, <https://www.osce.org/programme-of-office-in-asta>.

⁵ OSCE Programme Office in Bishkek, <https://www.osce.org/programme-of-office-in-bishkek>.

⁶ OSCE Programme Office in Dushanbe, <https://www.osce.org/programme-office-in-dushanbe>.

⁷ OSCE Centre in Ashgabat, <https://www.osce.org/centre-in-ashgabat>.

⁸ OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Uzbekistan, <https://www.osce.org/project-coordinator-in-uzbekistan>.

² OSCE website, <https://www.osce.org/>.

³ Helsinki Final Act, <https://www.osce.org/helsinki-final-act>.

- Energy transition and sustainability;
- Changing geopolitics of energy resources.

List of selected publications by the OSCE relevant to the Central Asian energy sector:

- Advancing Energy Security in Central Asia (2022). <https://www.osce.org/ocea/513787>
- Protecting Electricity Networks from Natural Hazards (2016). <https://www.osce.org/secretariat/242651>
- Advancing a Just Energy Transition in Central Asia: Women's Key Role in the Energy Sector (2024). <https://www.osce.org/ocea/561811>
- The Effects of the Crisis in Afghanistan on Central Asia's Energy Sector: A Risk Assessment (2024). <https://www.osce.org/ocea/564931>