

CCDP Project Report

The Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding – January 2011

The Tajikistan Dialogue Project (TDP)

**Paper authored by
Moncef Kartas**

Disclaimer: The views and opinions expressed in this paper do not reflect the official position of the Swiss FDFA, the CCDP, or any partner institutions, but only those of the author who acknowledges sole responsibility for possible inaccuracies or omissions.

THE GRADUATE INSTITUTE | GENEVA
**CENTRE ON CONFLICT,
DEVELOPMENT AND PEACEBUILDING**

Religion & Politics
Initiatives and Applied Research



Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Federal Department of Foreign Affairs FDFA
Directorate of Political Affairs DP
Political Affairs Division IV – Human Security:
Peace, Human Rights, Humanitarian Policy, Migration

Table of contents

I. Religion and Politics: Tajikistan Dialogue Project	3
II. Tajikistan: Historical Background	4
III. Project Description: Background, Goals and Set-up	6
1. <i>CORE dialogue project (2001-2002)</i>	
2. <i>Phase I: 2002–2003</i>	
<i>From strategic retreat to the Confidence-Building Measures:</i>	
<i>CORE and PD-IV/PSIO cooperation</i>	
3. <i>Phase II: 2004 – 2006</i>	
<i>From words to deeds: PD-IV and PSIO</i>	
4. <i>Phase III: 2006–2008</i>	
<i>From project design to operations</i>	
5. <i>Phase IV: 2008 – 2009</i>	
<i>Towards self-dependent Tajik expertise</i>	
IV. Diverging Logics of Mediation and Project Management	15
V. The Way Forward	18

I. Religion and Politics: Tajikistan Dialogue Project

"Religion & Politics: Initiatives and Applied Research" is a joint programme of Political Affairs Division IV of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA – PD IV) and the Centre on Conflict, Development and Peacebuilding (CCDP) at the Graduate Institute of International and Development Studies, Geneva. The programme combines research on and facilitation of practice-oriented dialogue aimed at transforming conflicts with religious dimensions. The underlying assumptions guiding its work is that religion plays an important role in the social construction of experienced reality and shapes the social epistemologies of conflict parties and their interpretation of the conflict and of the notion of lasting peace. From such a perspective, religion is more than a means to mobilize, mark identities of communities, or divide societal forces for ultimate political ends. Although the politicization of religion is an undeniable fact, it seems too one-dimensional to reduce religion to such a simplistic function.

The "Religion and Politics" programme debuted in 2003 at the Programme for the Study of International Organizations (PSIO) of the Graduate Institute of International Studies, Geneva, before being incorporated into the CCDP in early 2009. The Tajikistan Dialogue Project (TDP) was the programme's first initiative, born out of the German-Swiss Project "Creating a Peace-building Dialogue with Moderate Islamists in Tajikistan and Central Asia." The project was originally developed by the Hamburg-based Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) in 2001, and sought to study, together with Tajik political officials, past experiences of interaction between secular and Islamist forces during the negotiations leading up to the 1997 Peace Agreement, as well as future possibilities of constructive participation of Islamic organizations in the Tajik secular national state and in Tajik politics. The TDP project was completed at the end of 2009, after eight years of dialogue and research as well as five years of practice-oriented work.

This project paper reviews this eight-year period, providing the reader with a concise overview of the TDP. The paper features three main sections, beginning with historical background information placing the dialogue in its context. The second main section delineates the evolution of the project and achievements. It is divided into five subsections reflecting the main stages of the project. In the first two stages the dialogue was set up and so-called confidence-building measures were developed. The following three stages used a "dialogue through practice" approach to implement the previously developed ideas. To avoid redundancies in each of the last subsections the efforts of each of the respective three working groups are presented in more detail. Finally, the paper addresses the strengths and weaknesses of the project and the implications of these insights for future or ongoing initiatives conducted as part of the "Religion and Politics" programme. The report emphasizes that the iterative transition from confidence-building to dialogue-as-action is one of the most delicate phases in the programme's approach to conflict transformation.

II. Tajikistan: Historical Background

In order to understand the approach and dynamics of the TDP and help the readers to acquaint themselves with Tajikistan's contemporary history, this section briefly introduces the historical background to the dialogue project.

Tajikistan gained independence in September 1991 as the Soviet Union (USSR) dissolved. As an artificial administrative unit, the Tajik Soviet Socialist Republic was created in 1929 as one of the 15 republics of the Soviet Union with no previous history as a common nation or unified state. The country's extremely mountainous topography further inhibited the outreach of the central government and administration, leaving plenty of space for local warlords and hideouts for militias. The political landscape remained extremely fragmented, featuring strongly localized politics often influenced by forces from neighboring countries, especially Afghanistan and Uzbekistan.

With the institutional structures of the Soviet administration retreating, the political struggle for state power culminated in the 1992 presidential elections. This first multi-party election brought to the fore nine presidential candidates and ended with the victory, by a small margin, of the former leader of the Communist Party. This first election, however, hardly produced the nation-building effect that the actors had hoped for, and political competition rapidly transformed into civil strife. A principal characteristic of the Tajik civil war was the interaction of macro-level regional conflict and meso-level national factions, with micro-level localized skirmishes adding to the complexity and fluidity of the armed violence.

Thus, by the end of 1992, only one year after independence, about 50,000 people had died in the civil war and around 600,000 were internally displaced or fled the country, mostly to Afghanistan. The UN-led efforts to negotiate a conflict settlement focused mainly on the national conflict between the government and the parties gathered under the United Tajik Opposition (UTO), with the Islamic Revival Party (IRP) as its main force. The UN multilateral diplomatic approach did, however, co-ordinate its efforts with neighboring countries (Russia, China, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan) and regional organizations (CIS and OSC).

Although most parties had strong regional and communal bases – IRP South-West Vakhsh valley, Democratic Party of Tajikistan (DPT) Dushanbe intellectual elites, La'li-Badakhshan Pamiri people from Badakhshan, and since 1994 Abdumalik Abdullajanov's National Revival Movement (NRM) from the Leninabadi province – the conflict was neither based on communal hatred nor on a secessionist agenda, but rather on the struggle for access to state power. It reflected the schism between political ideologies of liberal democracy vs. a strong presidential nationalistic system, and secularism vs. Islamism. The absence of fierce secessionist or autonomy movements was less the result of an existing Tajik national identity, but rather stemmed from the artificial nature of the division between the Uzbek and Tajik Soviet Republics in the 1920s, followed by many centrally-enforced resettlements. In fact, the traditional Tajik cultural and economic centers of Bukhara and Samarkand were assigned to the Uzbek Republic.

At the time of independence, Tajikistan was thus primarily marked by the numerous fiefdoms that had sprung up during the economic crises of the 1980s, as well as by the

emergence of localized criminal networks that were subsequently strengthened through the formation of militias headed by what might be described as warlords. This latter group hardly found its way into the diplomatic negotiations and remained a dimension excluded from the 1997 Peace Agreement, which focused on the struggle for political power between the government and the UTO. The Peace Agreement left out many core issues of the conflict, notably the role of Islam and scope of secularism in the political constitution of the post-violence state. Taking the form of a framework document, the General Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and National Accord in Tajikistan, 27 June 1997, endorsed the different protocols and declarations on refugee, military, and political matters. While the different protocols prescribed concrete measures on refugee and military issues, it relegated decisions on the political reforms to the Commission on National Reconciliation (CNR).

The CNR was primarily designed to serve as the central institution for the management of the end-of-combat activities and the transition towards a new elected government in 2000. Instead, this 'reconciliation' commission functioned as a verification body and a negotiation committee tasked, on the one hand, with monitoring the implementation of the agreement and, on the other, with the formulation of constitutional amendments geared towards political and institutional solutions to the problems at the heart of the Tajik civil war. The Tajik conflict parties, in cooperation with the international negotiators, thus decided to take a path that was in stark contrast to the one followed in other peace processes. In fact, in cases such as those of Namibia, El Salvador, Cambodia and Mozambique, the broad institutional and constitutional principles of reforms were at least negotiated beforehand and integrated into the peace agreements themselves. Surprisingly, the international community supported a path to peace that followed the same logic as in Angola and Rwanda, where the transition phase focused mainly on the distribution of state power, and thus relegated political reforms to a later stage.

The CNR monitored the demobilization and reintegration of the UTO's armed units. The UN retained the leadership over the peacekeeping mission, in cooperation with the military peacekeeping forces from the Community of Independent States (CIS). The power-sharing transitional government headed by Rakhmonov and the Parliament remained in office during the transition phase and still had to pass the constitutional and legal changes presented by the CNR. Interestingly, military issues focused mainly on the demobilization process, but totally neglected the reform of the military structures. The CNR – endowed with far-reaching powers from the agreement and protocols – was thus left to carry the important responsibility of shaping the structures of peace for the future of Tajikistan.

However, the CNR hardly seized the opportunity to introduce substantial reform of the Tajik state structures. Instead, it reproduced the same logic that had prevailed as the civil war unfolded; namely distributing state and governmental power among the main conflict parties (30% of ministerial posts and legislative seats to the UTO, and 70% to the president's party) and regional representatives. Despite the technical assistance of the OSCE in drafting the constitutional amendments, the results failed to address core grievances – such as, for example, regulating the role of religion in the state and strengthening human rights protection – or the high centralization of administrative and executive power inherited from the Soviet state model. Further, the electoral laws drafted with the support of the OSCE also failed to increase regional representation and the powers of the legislative. Finally, despite the fact that the IRP was the first and only party to be legalized and participate in government in the

former Soviet republics of Central Asia, the CNR could not realize its potential to facilitate a dialogue on the role of Islam in the Tajik political community and engage with the stern and conservative understanding of secularism upheld by the former communists.

With the electoral victory of Rakhmonov and his party in 2000, the IRP was left with little space to sustain a gradual opening of religious freedom. What is more, with the CNR's mandate coming to an end, the dialogue between religious and secular forces had not created the foundations for a renewed and common vision on the co-existence between the secular state and a polity inspired by Islamic references as well as on the place of religious organizations in a secular polity – a problem that would have to be addressed to bridge the political division between secular and Islamic forces after many years of armed violence.

III. Project Description: Background, Goals and Set-up

1. CORE dialogue project (2001-2002)

In 2001, CORE, under the direction of Dr. Arne Seifert, initiated the Tajikistan Project under the title of "Creating a Peace-building Dialogue to Promote Co-operation and Co-existence between Cultures and Civilizations in the OSCE Area." The process was designed to bring together Islamic and secular politicians and scholars – former members of the CNR or participants in the intra-Tajik dialogue of the Dartmouth Conference – to discuss their experiences and to transform their exchanges into an established, ongoing dialogue process. Taking into account the academic background of most Tajik participants, the approach offered a promising entry point to study Tajikistan's unique negotiation process in Central Asia, which had led to the legalization of the IRP and its participation in the transition government. It also offered the opportunity to explore possible political solutions among secular and Islamic forces for providing a space for a moderate Islam in Tajik politics.

With the financial support of the German Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the CORE Tajikistan project outlined three objectives:

- 1) Analyzing the intra-Tajik Islamic-secular process of negotiations and compromises and, through these academic insights, creating new impulses for an Islamic-secular dialogue;
- 2) Showing a genuine interest in an inner-Islamic reform process through dialogue with moderate Islamic scholars and politicians;
- 3) Allowing the broader OSCE area (Europe and Asia) to benefit from Tajikistan's experiences with Islamic-secular dialogue and compromises. (In other words, to promote the Tajik experience as both an important string in a dialogue between Islamic and Western civilizations, and a model for the region and neighboring countries where Islamic movements remain illegal and/or suppressed.

Strategically, the Tajikistan Project undertook three major steps to attain these objectives:

- The 13 participants were invited to write papers on their past experiences from their work within the CNR and the transition government. The German project coordinator drafted a summary of the contributions for the first assessment of the writings and experiences. These were discussed and all participants agreed to publish them;
- At a subsequent round-table, the second summary of the project coordinator was presented and the commonalities and divergences between both sides were discussed. The debate was then casted in the broader contest of Western anti-terrorist policies since 9/11 and the threat from Islamic extremism in the region;
- The dialogue project was also conducted in Germany during two separate workshops that brought together international experts to discuss political Islam and the OSCE, as well as representatives from West-European states and international organizations to reflect on ways to integrate political Islam in a peaceful political process in Central Asia.

2. Phase I: 2002–2003

From strategic retreat to the Confidence-Building Measures – CORE and PD-IV/PSIO cooperation

In October 2002, the FDFA-PDIV, along with its German partners and in collaboration with the PSIO, joined the project and presided over a new round of discussions throughout 2003, although not intervening at this point of the process and project design. This new phase of the dialogue worked according to the following objectives:

- Setting-up a forum where secular and Islamic representatives can discuss religious issues that need to be solved by the political centre. The project thus aimed at institutionalizing what had begun with CORE, namely an inner-Tajik secular-Islamic dialogue at the elite level guaranteeing direct access to governmental deliberation. The projected institutionalization was seen as the increase of the Tajik ownership and force of initiative;
- The German partners sought to broaden and deepen the work of the Tajik representatives by establishing five different Working Groups (WG). Concomitantly, the spectrum of participants was to be enlarged to guarantee a larger representation of Tajik interests and social forces.

The approach adopted by the project consisted in increasing the autonomy of the Tajik dialogue by dividing the process into three stages. The first one was conducted solely by the Tajik participants, who, together with Tajik experts, had to draft a series of propositions presenting the positions of the Islamic and secular representatives. The aim of the first stage was to create a first broad compromise paper laying the ground for the first round of discussions with the involvement of international experts. In the second stage, a formal plenary discussion led to the presentation of a

final paper entailing a list of "confidence-building measures" (CBMs) on each WG topic. The CBM paper established principles for co-existence and mechanisms for peaceful transformation of conflicts between Islamic and secular actors when dealing with religious, legal, and political issues. At a third stage, the document was signed by all dialogue participants in December 2003, and delivered to the Tajik President for consideration. The experience of this process, and the results achieved in this phase, resulted in a second book, published in 2005.

The topics of the five working groups were:

- **Confidence-building measures;**
- **The place and role of Islam in the national state;**
- **Reform of religious education;**
- **Further 'concretization' of the principles of separation between religion and the state;**
- **Approach to religious radicalization.**

The WGs released a landmark document in December 2003 – the Confidence Building Measures (CBMs) – which was not only presented to the President of Tajikistan, but also to a broader Tajik audience. In essence, the CBMs spelled out a common vision on the possible co-existence of Islam and a secular state, a vision that advocates the principle of secularism while recognizing the cultural importance of Islam and its positive force for the strengthening of national unity, and the need for a proper space for religious organizations. Further, the CBMs emphasized the exclusion of violence as a means to solve disputes, to consolidate the adherence to the constitution, and to renounce Islamic radicalism. Finally, the declaration made clear that defining a common ground did not exclude identifying contradictions, but necessitated the commitment to work together towards political solutions.

While the German partners had managed to assemble a platform of high-level Tajik representatives and made great advances in building up trust among the participants, Switzerland, as co-organizer of the new phase, contributed with two related dialogue projects that took place at the provincial and district levels:

- The continuation of the Inter-Tajik Dialogue, also referred to as the "Dartmouth Dialogue". This project carried out sustained dialogue sessions in seven regions of the country on the theme of "Islam, State and Society";
- The "Law and Religion" seminars, organized by the OSCE in Soghd Oblast, and later in the south of the country, at the local level.

The creation of these networks sought to facilitate a two-way exchange of information and dissemination of ideas between the national elites and the participants in the Inter-Tajik Dialogue and in the seminars at the regional and district levels. In other words, the interaction between the three projects was expected to allow them to proceed with the realization of the CBMs on various levels. The three processes were integrated into a multi-level and multi-track dialogue project, the implementation of which began in 2004 during the second Phase of the TDP.

3. Phase II: 2004 – 2006

From words to deeds: PD-IV and PSIO

In the second phase (November 2004 to September 2006), the dialogue focused on how the CBMs identified in the first phase could be put into practice by supporting an interactive network of Islamic-secular dialogues at the local (district), regional (province), and central levels. The second phase resulted in the drafting of several cooperation projects within the framework of three main WGs created during that phase:

WG 1: Reform of religious education;

WG 2: Law, religion and politics;

WG 3: Cooperation against radicalization.

In order to avoid redundancies, the work of WGs 2 and 3 is presented in the next subsection, while WG 1 is discussed in more details in the last subsection.

During phase II, the TDP endorsed four broad aims:

- 1) Transforming the conflict between secular and religious forces in Tajikistan;
- 2) Elaborating political solutions to the relationship of a conservative secular state administration and a largely religiously active population;
- 3) Translating the CBMs and concepts of the TDP into political change;
- 4) Generating new ideas and practices on the transformation of conflicts with religious dimensions.

These aims were to be reached by a number of specific operational measures: firstly, by increasing the level of ownership of the dialogue by the Tajik participants; secondly, by developing very concrete projects designed to remove obstacles to political solutions; thirdly, by encouraging a vivid interaction between the national dialogue and the regional dialogue processes; and finally, by widening the scope of the TDP through public information in Tajikistan and in Central Asia. Designing such specific projects, however, required the focus of specialized and thematic working groups.

The three WGs created addressed the following issues:

- WG 1 addressed the issue of religious education: how can the standards of education in Madrasas¹ be improved so as to prepare the way for a qualified and recognized diploma? Addressing this issue aimed at more political objectives, notably by invigorating a sense of possibility for the integration of religious and secular modes of life. What is more, a Tajik curriculum would provide the opportunity for Tajikistan to shape the form and content of religious education and shield it from foreign, perhaps more radical, influences.

¹ Throughout the text, the term Madrasas is used to refer to moderate religious schools in Tajikistan.

- WG 2 sought to clarify the legal framework in order to create a predictable environment for religious organizations in Tajikistan's secular system. However, in the meantime the Tajik government in June 2007 had adopted the law on religious customs and tradition, with the aim of restricting some religious traditions so as to diminish the costs of ceremonies like weddings and funerals, which had often been the source of serious financial trouble for Tajik citizens. Further, and more importantly, the government developed a draft bill on religion. This law on freedom of conscience, religious associations, and other organizations sought to reduce the numbers of mosques in the country, require certification for mullahs as to their 'qualifications' to practice, prohibit religious education for children under seven, and, finally, set such strict requirements on political parties that it would de facto weaken the IRP by banning mosque employees from party membership. WG 2 therefore turned its attention to the draft law on religion, since its proposition had deepened, once again, the antagonism between secular and religious forces.
- WG 3 addressed cooperation to prevent radicalization, which was probably the most ambitious endeavor. In fact, the topic may have been too complex to develop any project proposals rapidly. Nevertheless, WG 3 focused on 'top-down' sources of frustrations for religious forces and sought to improve the everyday relationship between public authorities and religious organizations. WG 3 came up with the idea of developing confidence-building training modules in cooperation with the Tajik Civil Servants Training Institute (CSTI) and to provide training and information to civil servants. WG 3 also contributed to the conceptual development of soap operas to be broadcasted on Tajik radio stations as part of UNSECO's Silk Roads Radio project.

4. Phase III: 2006–2008

From project design to operations

During phase III (October 2006 to June 2008), the three dialogue WGs monitored the implementation of three cooperation projects, while continuing with the overarching reflection on the experience of Islamic-secular reconciliation. The overall objective of Phase III was thus oriented towards the implementation of the projects designed in Phase II.

Politically, however, the situation in Tajikistan hardly improved. In November 2006, Emomali Rakhmonov was re-elected President of Tajikistan. According to the OSCE, the elections were characterized by an absence of real competition and did not fully comply with the requirements for a democratic process. The presidential elections were marked by splits in the opposition parties, boycotts, and withdrawals from the election process. The IRP, the only opposition party with good prospects for a high turnout, decided not to field a candidate.

After the elections, the Government proceeded with a newly-formed cabinet, and the Committee on Religious Affairs became a department within the Ministry of Culture. As a consequence, some of the project participants saw their posts removed, and the TDP thereby lost a number of important channels of influence on government policies.

The moderate religious forces were also losing ground, or at least feared increasing competition from other more radical Islamic movements. The death of the IRP president, Said Abdullo Nuri, on 9 August 2007, resulted in internal struggles, and ultimately also led to financial troubles. Muhiddin Kabiri, head of the IRP, who until then had been seen as the moderate wing of the party, also appeared to have lost substantial support among influential IRP members (which risked causing a radicalization of IRP), notably due to the lack of success of the party in the previous months. Yet when an IRP congress was held on 25 September 2007 and Muhiddin Kabiri re-elected as the leader of the party, the IRP experienced a resurgence in membership with the joining of many new young followers. Fearing its growing membership and influence, the Government put increasing pressure on the party, and some IRP members were prevented from participating in the parliamentary elections in March and April 2007. Despite a lack of financial means, the IRP gained substantial public support on account of its active engagement and defense of Muslim rights.

Despite new declarations from the Government about supporting cooperation between secular and religious spheres, more and more unregistered mosques were closed. Concomitantly, many signs pointed towards a radicalization of the population – the retreat to religion was further nurtured by the monopolization of political and economic power and the exclusion of large parts of the population from the economic progress. Nonetheless, the government increased restrictions on religious freedoms by mainly targeting Islamic organizations and groups. In the beginning of April 2007, universities were closing their doors to veiled women. Relative stability was further threatened by tensions emanating from the increasing potential for the polarization of the Islamic sphere and the state. The lack of freedom of religion in Tajikistan was showcased by the destruction of the only synagogue in Dushanbe (on account of new city planning), the closing down of mosques, and the prohibition on the activities of Jehovah's witnesses.

Religious extremism occurring in neighboring countries (Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan) also impacted the North and South of Tajikistan, with various arrests taking place. In Northern Tajikistan, a number of bunkers and arms caches were found in Isfara. Members of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) were caught in Dushanbe, as well as in other parts of the country, and they were sentenced to long periods of imprisonment. Other radical movements like Hizb-ut-Tahrir or Salafia stayed active, albeit clandestinely. The IRP became concerned about the growing influence of these groups, notably among the young generation in Dushanbe and the Khatlon Province.

Although the external conditions seemed less encouraging for the TDP, the dynamic of the dialogue remained excellent during Phase III, with the specific projects registering significant progress. Over a period of 18 months, the three WGs worked actively to shape and implement the subprojects that had been designed during the previous phase.

As a majority of local stakeholders had a poor sense about the relationship between state and religion and the specifics of the forthcoming mosque registration process, WG 2 participants decided to conduct several pilot training seminars in different regions of Tajikistan. The targeted groups were

representatives of government agencies, local hokumats, clergy, community leaders, and community representatives. Further, WG 2 leaders decided to develop a specialized module and a booklet outlining all the information needed for local stakeholders. The booklet was then used during the seminars and also served as a source of information about the registration process.

The TDP's recommendations on a law on religion did indeed influence the drafting of the new 2007 law. Most importantly, the new law recognized Islam as a specific aspect of Tajik culture (one of the IRP's main demands), clearly listed the documents needed to register a mosque, mentioned the right of citizens to go on Hajj, and made possible religious education in secondary schools. However, according to the narrative reports of the project, the main ideas on secularism did not find their way into the draft, which provided the state with many potential restrictions to the freedom of religions.

From an operational standpoint, WG 3 made some important progress. Through joint training for religious leaders and local authorities in Khatlon, regional tensions between the government and religious actors were reduced and cooperation on the legalization of religious entities and mosques became possible. WG 3 began to show the visible fruits of six years of dialogue efforts with the aim of building confidence between religious organizations and state institutions. The training modules developed and initiated in cooperation between the WG 3 and the Tajik Civil Servant Training Institute (CSTI) had reached several hundred civil servants, transforming their attitude towards religious institutions and actors. High-level officials had undergone the training and the spirit of cooperation increased in the ranks of civil servants representing the executive power at the local level. Most importantly, a unique expertise had been generated, and the modules developed for training at the CSTI were integrated into the regular teaching program for civil servants.

Phase III of the TDP managed to deliver concrete outcomes addressing both common interests and concerns among the secular and religious participants. Wider circles of society and the international community were showing greater interest in the activities of the dialogue. In January 2008, HE Micheline Calmy Rey, the Swiss Federal Minister of Foreign Affairs, mentioned the Tajikistan Dialogue Project in Madrid during the first Annual Forum of the Alliance of Civilizations. Television programs dedicated to the new curriculum process were broadcasted on Tajik national television and Mir Canal (aired throughout the former Soviet Union). Articles and interviews on the religious school curriculum project were also published in different online newspapers. Moreover, at the government level, a book was even published by the President in 2007 on the cooperation between the religious and secular sphere, and its introduction written by two participants in the TDP.

Although it is difficult to measure the success of the TDP, many of its effects may only come to fruition in the mid- and long-term. It should also be pointed out, however, that current political developments in Tajikistan do not bode well, with the regime leaving little space for pluralistic ideas. This underscores the fact that broader political issues and structures lying beyond the scope of the project limited its overall impact.

5. Phase IV: 2008 – 2009

Towards self-dependent Tajik expertise

Phase III was successful in getting the WG's projects underway and broadening the network and outreach of the TDP, for example through the interaction with the UN's Alliance of Civilization. Further, Phase III put in considerable effort in the review and recalibration of its strategy. These reflections led to an important conjuncture in the project, with the partners concluding that the dialogue would have to be carried out by the Tajik partners self-dependently from 2010 onwards. Hence, Phase IV was characterized by advancing the regular dialogue activities that had been started in Phase III, as well as building up capacities for management, funding, and coordination of the dialogue. Additionally, Phase IV foresaw the following:

- Test the dialogue experience within social projects carried out by international organizations (notably the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC));
- Review the composition of dialogue participants according to the latest socio-political trends, with the view of including young participants;
- Increase the dialogue's visibility within Tajik society, within Tajik political structures, and within the relevant international fora;
- Encourage the replication of dialogue-inspired cooperation projects within Tajikistan and abroad.

The project was divided into two frameworks: WG projects and secretariat management (development and outreach). On the latter issue, the TDP received institutional support during Phase II and III from the Scientific Secretariat. FDFA-PD IV and the PSIO ensured the strategic planning, the direction of the project, and the overall monitoring and fundraising, and the Scientific Secretariat based in Dushanbe was responsible for the monitoring of project activities. The Secretariat was composed of four persons. The Project Manager was in charge of the general coordination of project activities and the supervision of operations, including monitoring the dialogue and new project activities. The position also ensured effective communication with the dialogue participants. The Coordinator of the Scientific Secretariat was tasked with the administrative supervision of the Secretariat, along with external and internal reporting to donors as well as for communications – such as with civil society organizations, partners, and the international community. The position's terms of reference also consisted of supporting the Project Manager and supervising the publication process. The Coordinator also acted as the liaison for various PD IV activities in Tajikistan. Finally, an Administrative Assistant provided logistical support for the dialogue and its project activities.

For the project to continue without an explicit Swiss contribution, the local structures had to be adapted accordingly. The participants of the TDP thus founded the Academy of Dialogue as a local non-governmental organization (NGO) with the aim of securing the participants' own capacities to continue the dialogue project self-dependently. On 28 August 2009, the Academy of Dialogue was registered and successfully raised a small grant from UNIFEM. With the creation of this NGO, the project structures could be streamlined in view of improving the efficiency of an otherwise complicated construction between the Swiss co-direction of the TDP, the

CCDP's monitoring tasks, and the local implementation. This way, the project would have the possibility to run all aspects of the operations out of one single institution.

After having developed an innovative curriculum for religious schools by combining religious teaching with some qualifications required in secular schools, the WG 1 introduced it at the Abu Hanifa Private Educational Establishment. The project sought to close the rift between religious and secular education by providing a new model for religious schools that included civic education and non-religious courses such as English, information technology, and literature. This rift had prevented children from religious schools from proceeding with secondary school. During Phase IV of the TDP, a first full year of the curriculum was realized. Hence a new class of students was admitted, and the first group had the possibility of continuing into the second school year. This alone was seen as an important achievement. Not only would a broadening of religious teaching increase the educational perspectives of the pupils, but a uniformized curriculum also offered a progressive way to improve the quality of religious education and hence to curtail the diffusion of ideas coming from abroad and viewed as radical. Another important success of the curriculum project was the ongoing and productive cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MoE) in view of advocating for and demonstrating the possibility of cohabitation of secular and religious teachings.

The pilot school faced tremendous bureaucratic and security challenges at the beginning of the academic year. Nonetheless, it was the only Madrasa in Tajikistan that provided an official diploma (pre-university and college), along with the Islamic Institute in Dushanbe which provided college-level education. The drive developed by the project encouraged Swiss donors to continue financing the pilot and promote the revised curriculum.

Salafism, denounced by the government as a foreign interpretation of Islam conflicting with traditional Tajik religious values, was officially banned in January 2009 as a governmental aim to prevent its spread. As part of the same effort to contain the rise of radical Islamism in Tajikistan, a new law on freedom of conscience and religious associations was passed in March 2009. The new law created novel possibilities for the government to restrict and regulate religious activities throughout the country. In fact, the law followed the regional trend set in motion by new Russian regulations to seal off the region from radical forms of Islam, most importantly through important financial and ideological support from Arab religious organizations. While the concerns of the Tajik government to halt the spread of these new and less secular interpretations of religion were understandable, the law could have also been used to restrict benign religious cults. What is more, it added to the tensions in a society already excluded from broad participation in Tajik political life.

These trends in national politics have underlined the importance of the local interventions of the TDP, especially through WG 3 which played an important role in broadening the reach of the dialogue to the regional and local level. The tight cooperation between WG 3 and CSTI allowed the participants to take stock of the already quite impressive expertise developed in training civil servants and local Imams together. WG 3 profited from Phase IV of the TDP to review new training modules and submit them to the Scientific Board of the CSTI. Some of the modules developed over the past years by experts and the WG 3 are currently being fine-tuned for inclusion in standard textbooks for civil servants. Besides the expertise gained through the trainings, the Tajik participants informally profited from the experiences

and information on the local situation through the meetings and training sessions. This will have a long-term impact on the national and regional administrations' approach to religious organizations. Finally, the meetings often created an important space for exchange between civil servants and religious representatives as a real need for better information on the current legal situation became obvious to all participants. Removing obstacles to political solutions requires a mid- to long-term view, one that recognizes that facilitating the possibility of asking the pertinent questions is a necessary step before social change can materialize.

This last part of the report briefly highlights the weaknesses and strengths of the TDP. It is, however, not a formal evaluation, but rather an analysis based on a thorough reading of the project reports and the external evaluations as well as on interviews with key informants working for the Swiss partners. Since two independent external evaluations have been conducted and the "Religion and Politics" programme has ended its activities in Tajikistan, the priority is placed on strategic issues rather than on the management of the project. In order to have a focused analysis rather than a long and shallow list of 'lessons learnt', the emphasis will be on one of the major hazards for the Swiss dialogue approach, namely the divergence between the rationale of mediation and dialogue on the one hand, and of project work and management, on the other.

IV. Diverging logics of mediation and project management

The academic dialogue approach used by the German partners proved to have some strength in generating the dialogue as such. Participants might hold different worldviews on religion and politics, but, nevertheless, they may share the characteristic experiences of academic work (research, teaching, publishing, etc.) as well as its language. In fact, the shared and cherished status of being an academic, along with its common valuation of academic production and publications, and, more generally, the philosophical stance of critical reflection and debate, offered appropriate entry points to gather these diverse high-level Tajik personalities. Yet, while focusing on the Islamic-secular political compromise offered a tidy research field and question, it also shaped the whole mediation approach. Ultimately, its emphasis was entirely placed on religion and secularism as conflict 'driver', and thus strengthened the binary division between a secular and an Islamic side. Again, it may have been more efficient for the dialogue to exclude more radical views, but it nevertheless precluded the chance to offer such social forces a voice and integrate them into the mediation process. If we assume that exclusion is one of the issues of contestation, then the dialogue project reproduced that mechanism.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on research opened the way for more operational work by establishing more confident relationships between Tajik and European partners. With the shift of strategy towards "dialogue through practice", the TDP left the common ground of academia and engaged in a more tedious and gradual work than the process of publishing edited books. Thus, the action-based dialogue placed greater demands on the management of the TDP. What is more, it solicited more efforts and a deeper commitment from the participants. It increased the intensity of interaction

between the participants, but the investment required from them led to a greater Tajik ownership of the dialogue.

Yet the same effect propels a certain selection of participants. Actors at the leadership or top decision-making levels of government cannot invest themselves to such a degree into projects. Other less qualified actors and social forces that tend to be marginalized or stand in weaker societal positions cannot contribute to such concrete projects and therefore drop out or can hardly be integrated into the dialogue in the first place.

More importantly, perhaps, is the recognition that such projects also require a skill set different from the one required for implementing academic work. In fact, dialogue through practice entails a dual operational logic; mediation and conflict resolution on the one side, and project management and coordination on the other. The skills and capacities of a mediator or facilitator are quite different than those of an experienced project manager or coordinator. Concomitantly, the administrative requirements of the dialogue grow considerably. The challenge for the TDP has been to create the capacities and structures appropriate for project management without losing sight of the essential goals, namely the transformation of conflict through the removal of obstacles to political solutions. This transition has been very critical for the project. In the end, the dynamic of the working groups, the uniqueness of the serious debate between secular and religious forces in Central Asia, and the considerable expertise created by the TDP all suggest that the strategic shift has worked, but not without considerable tension between the Tajik participants and the Swiss partners.

The TDP took note that working on concrete projects to remove obstacles to political resolution goes far beyond a classic facilitation of dialogue and requires the kind of project management structures elaborated, for example, in development and technical cooperation projects. It became obvious that rational management also entails some Western cultural elements, which in turn might irritate local project partners. In fact, the position of the project coordinator monitoring the Scientific Secretariat and the WGs in Tajikistan might have been the source of such misperceptions. The Tajik participants were intrigued by the Swiss partners' need to have a 'control instrument', although the latter appointed the project coordinator as a means to ensure a constant and reliable communication between Dushanbe and Geneva/Berne. In conclusion, a substantial amount of energy and time was invested in sorting out this contentious issue.

The last phase of the TDP was aimed at implementing the confidence-building measures that were formulated in 2003 by the participants. A swift glance at the activities accomplished compared to those formulated in the original project proposals indicates the success achieved by the participants. In fact, the vast majority of the activities on the proposal's agenda were accomplished on time. Although there were numerous bureaucratic and administrative hurdles, the coordinators and participants in the TDP successfully carried out the main activities.

The introduction of the new curriculum at the Abu Hanifa Private Educational Establishment was aimed at providing a new model for religious schools that included civic education and non-religious courses, such as English, information technology, and literature. The main success of the school has been the ongoing and productive cooperation with the Ministry of Education (MoE). The participants were able to successfully carry out the first full year of the curriculum. A new class of

students was admitted, and the first group had the possibility of continuing into the second school year.

The pilot school faced bureaucratic and security challenges at the beginning of the academic year. However, its administration and the TDP's participants were able to overcome the difficulties in official procedures and receive the support of all the necessary ministries. The coordinators and the management of TDP were able to respond to the needs of the ministries and government apparatus without altering the fundamental concept behind the pilot school.

The impact of the pilot school curriculum mostly rested in how it was perceived by other Madrasas, institutions that work with religious education, as well as Tajik colleges and universities. For this reason, it was very important that WG 1 continued to improve the pilot curriculum on a regular basis. Over the course of the 18-month phase, the WG incorporated the thoughts of well-known experts and clerics on how to use the curriculum most effectively. The teachers also regularly provided their feedback to the project coordinator and the school principal. The WG successfully developed a method for both analyzing the teaching process and putting it into practice.

Overall, the school has already had a great impact by successfully introducing this innovative pilot curriculum and disseminating information about its benefits to the students. Although it is too early to say whether it has reached its final goal of easing secular and religious tensions, the students who are progressing through the pilot school portray tolerance and understanding.

One of the major successes of WG 2 has been its initiative to run a seminar without any compensation or payment from the Secretariat. The WG had received such excellent feedback and strong interest that its participants decided to hold an additional seminar in Rudaki district on December 23, 2008. This was the initiative of both the WG and the local administration.

Another major success was the ability of the seminars to open discussion and to end long-lasting disagreements in local communities. Thus, improved cooperation between local governments and religious leaders was one of the greatest results of the activities of WG 2. In fact, the seminars became a real forum for discussion allowing local community leaders to express their grievances and learn about the legal regulations. In this context, through awareness-building, long-standing disagreements were naturally resolved and mutual confidence greatly increased. One of the main working premises of the dialogue group was that people in local communities simply did not have enough information about the laws at their disposal. Often by simply providing basic legal information to the participants, the seminar leaders from the WG were able to overcome misunderstandings and conflicts in local communities.

For its part, WG 3 aimed to prevent future radicalism and extremism by enhancing the conflict management capacity of regional and local civil servants. Through holding seminars and roundtables on critical issues, and by training civil servants and clerics together, the WG was able to help promote cooperation between the secular and religious segments of society.

The main effort lay in teaching local government leaders how to cooperate with religious leaders on common problems, thereby decreasing tensions and the possibility that certain segments of the population become more radical in their viewpoints. The seminars were not only a way to educate civil servants but also to interactively engage local community leaders in the main political issues underlying the new law on religion and other topics of interest. The WG was able to have a significant impact on the attendees because the study modules were contemporary and scholarly. The participants spent significant time and energy ensuring that the modules reflected the current reality, particularly after the promulgation of the law on religion. The group leaders also ensured that the methodology was sufficiently interactive, participative, and inclusive. These seminars and roundtables became a useful source of information for TDP on the state of religion in local communities and the potential impact of government legislations – particularly the new law. It was also for this reason that the group promoted the publication of the two new modules and the textbook, which were welcomed by CSTI.

Another impact of the roundtables was outreach for TDP as a whole. Owing to the presence of representatives of the media, TDP participants were able to explain the main work of the dialogue and the role of such roundtables. This meant that the interesting debates were also an open forum and presented a means for people to publicly express their grievances towards new laws and regulations. At the same time, by having a more public viewing of civil servant education, TDP was also able to contribute to the overall modernization and improvement of training for government officials. TDP participants regularly monitored the quality of the trainings, and they expressed their viewpoints about the content of training for civil servants during roundtables. Therefore, it did not come as a surprise that, after the seminars, civil servants expressed that practical management had become easier for them, and that they were developing categorically useful skills. This was particularly true for the employees at the local level, whose work is closest to the local religious communities.

V. The Way Forward

The paper has shown how the TDP has evolved from an academically-oriented mediation project into a broader project-based dialogue. The historical context of the conflict made it clear that the negotiated end to armed confrontation had left many conflict issues unaddressed. In effect, the conflict-to-peace transition enacted with the CNR – which offered an opportunity to the secular and religious actors to define the space and role of religion in the Tajik polity for the first time since independence – was too narrowly focused on transitional power sharing rather than political reforms.

For the first time since the elections in 2000, the TDP created a platform for dialogue and deliberation at the national level among politically-responsible secular and religious actors. The confidence-building measures developed by all the participants in the dialogue set a unique signal in the region, showing that a path to peaceful and constructive co-habitation between religion and a modern secular political order was possible. In 2003, the Swiss partners seized the opportunity to facilitate the cooperation between the dialogue partners on concrete projects aimed at removing obstacles to political solutions. What is more, the cooperation was extended from the

central and national level to the regions. After a six-year effort and a set of successful projects, the three working groups have proven that the Tajik society can tremendously benefit from a creative interaction between religious organizations and the state administration, thus acting as a role model for the entire region.

Unfortunately, the TDP also bears witness to the fact that many political, social, and economic conflict issues remained or emerged anew, thus limiting the impact of the dialogue on the political situation in Tajikistan. Although religion offers crucial venues for the transformation of conflict, more material drivers of conflict can, however, still hamper the constructive effects of the dialogue process.

In conclusion, a number of guidance points for ongoing and future dialogue projects can be highlighted:

- The idea that religion has potential for conflict transformation is valid; the concept needs, however, a better integration into a broader understanding of conflict dynamics.
- The facilitator is never a neutral third-party simply mediating between dialogue participants. Dialogue as such should not be based on – and thus reproduce – simplified ideas and binary conflict divisions. Through the intervention itself, the facilitator becomes himself a part of the conflict and enters the dialogue with his or her own worldview.
- Dialogue through practice requires more sophisticated project management structures than mediation. The related strategic reflection must lend the same priority to management issues as to conflict resolution. However, in order to encourage ownership of the project and avoid intercultural misunderstandings, local partners should create their own, or use existing, organizational structures. Swiss partners should maintain their presence through regular missions, albeit not by sending foreign consultants. In the ideal case, a local partner should conduct project co-ordination without simultaneously participating in the dialogue.
- The interaction between the foreign facilitator and the local participants has proven to be a critical issue in conflict transformation. The "Religion and Politics" programme should put more emphasis on accompanying the dialogues with a research component that takes a sociological or anthropological perspective on the above-mentioned interaction.