

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly - Growth in Recent Years

The chequered story of the origins of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly¹ meant that from the outset it had a rather vague and ill-defined position in the CSCE/OSCE system. It was not given any say in the decision-making processes and it was only in a restrictive sense that it received a consultative role. The OSCE decision-making bodies have no duty to seek the advice of the Assembly. Admittedly, the Parliamentarians are free to make suggestions on all aspects of OSCE activities. Nowadays - after the 1999 Istanbul OSCE Summit - they are even encouraged to do so. However, the other OSCE structures and institutions are under no obligation to act upon the recommendations of the Parliamentary Assembly.

Against that background, it was perhaps only natural that in its early years the then CSCE Parliamentary Assembly led a life rather on the margins of the Organization. In those days, one of the main activities of the Assembly consisted in criticizing the work of other branches of the CSCE.

However, quite soon the Parliamentary Assembly started involving itself in the operational work of the OSCE by sending missions to areas of actual or potential conflict. It was also noticeable from early on that the ability of the Assembly to make decisions by majority vote has provided it with certain advantages, notably the possibility of addressing issues which, due to the consensus rule, are largely taboo on the governmental side of the Organization.

Guiding Principles

As the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly from 1998 through 2000 it was my constant endeavour to build upon and consolidate the results of the efforts of my immediate predecessor, Spanish Parliamentarian Javier Rupérez, that is to enhance the role of the Parliamentary Assembly by strengthening the influence and standing of the OSCE as a whole. As I stated when I took over as President in July 1998, it was my aim to make the Assembly a reliable partner for the other OSCE institutions. In keeping with this aim and with the strong and unequivocal support which I received throughout my term from the members of the Assembly as well as the dedicated assistance from the Secretariat of the Assembly, my own national Parliament and

¹ An account of the establishment and the first years of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly is to be found in: Michael Fuchs/Angelika Pendzich-von Winter, *The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly*, in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/IFSH (Ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 1995/1996, Baden-Baden 1997*, pp. 355-364.

the Presidential Adviser made available to me by the Danish Minister for Foreign Affairs, I did my very best to enhance the strength, visibility and resonance of the OSCE as a whole. It was my assumption that by following a co-operative policy along these lines it would be possible to enhance the strength and political relevance of the Assembly. The course of my term of office was to show that this was indeed the right method.

On the practical level I sought to promote my policies by thoroughly familiarizing myself with the activities of the OSCE on the ground, including the work of the other OSCE structures and institutions. In the course of my term of office I called upon the three Chairpersons-in-Office (the Foreign Ministers of Poland, Norway and Austria), whose terms of office overlapped with mine. I visited the offices of the other OSCE institutions and established close and confident co-operation with their leaders. Perhaps even more importantly I visited almost all OSCE field missions. In the process I used these visits to bring the support of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to these missions and to call attention to the importance of their activities, which in fact today constitute the backbone of the work of the entire Organization. In the activities of the field missions it becomes clear that deeds count more than words, and that words are not enough.

In my efforts to strengthen the importance of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, I was able to build on the fact that during the term of my predecessor it had been definitively recognized that the Assembly had a role to play in two quite different, but important fields of OSCE activities: the Ministerial Troika and election monitoring.

Co-operation with the Other OSCE Bodies

Thanks to co-operation between then Danish Foreign Minister and Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE in 1997, Mr. Helveg Petersen, and my predecessor it was formally recognized that the President of the Parliamentary Assembly attends meetings of the OSCE Ministerial Troika.

I found the Troika meetings a very useful tool for contributing directly to the solution of many major issues which were on the agenda of the Organization in the course of my term of office, among other things, by ensuring that the parliamentary angle of such issues were given due consideration.

In recognition of the pivotal role that the Permanent Council plays in the day-to-day work of the OSCE, I addressed the Council on several occasions and conducted a dialogue with its members, the Permanent Representatives of the participating States. In my contacts with these senior diplomats, I underlined the important role that the Parliamentary Assembly can play in the overall work of the Organization by making national Parliaments responsive to the need for promoting the implementation both of the commitments of their countries under OSCE norms and of the decisions of OSCE bodies, as well as

by generating the support of their publics for this objective. In this context I also addressed the issue of the democratic deficit of the OSCE. Given the important political and financial responsibilities of the Organization it is a source of serious concern that the exercise of these responsibilities is not subject to democratic scrutiny and control. The absence of elementary democratic safeguards also makes for a strange contrast with the fact that one of the main tasks of today's OSCE is precisely to promote democracy within its participating States.

Let me add that in the course of my term of office I not only strove to increase close and confident co-operation with the other OSCE structures and institutions. In keeping with the spirit of the Platform for Co-operative Security adopted at the Istanbul Summit, I also succeeded in strengthening contacts and co-operation between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and other inter-parliamentary bodies, in particular the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Election Monitoring

Given the special background of Parliamentarians as popularly elected politicians it was only natural that from the very beginning the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly felt it had an important vocation to contribute to OSCE election monitoring. However, even before the establishment of the Parliamentary Assembly another OSCE institution had been set-up, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR, then: Office for Free Elections), which had been tasked with the monitoring of elections within the OSCE area. As it might be expected in that situation, the first efforts of the Assembly to monitor elections gave rise to various disputes with the ODIHR. Again thanks to the joint efforts of my predecessor and the Danish Chairmanship it proved possible to settle these disputes by the conclusion of a co-operation agreement in 1997.

The co-operation agreement meant that henceforth the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the ODIHR would share, in close collaboration, the tasks inherent in election monitoring. In this context, each of these bodies would contribute in particular to those aspects of election monitoring in which they possess special qualifications. This concept implied that the ODIHR would focus on long-term election observation, often starting months ahead of the actual election, while the Parliamentary Assembly would concentrate on short-term efforts involving missions of members of the Assembly around the election day. The co-operation agreement also laid down that the short-term observer mission would usually be headed by the President or another senior representative of the Assembly as a special co-ordinator representing the OSCE Chairman-in-Office.

On this basis I headed several observer missions to elections that exerted a profound influence on the political life of the countries in question, such as the parliamentary elections in Slovakia and Croatia in the autumn of 1998 and the first days of 2000, as well as the parliamentary and presidential elections in Russia in December 1999 and March 2000.

Moreover, acting in close co-operation with the ODIHR, I took the initiative to add a new future-oriented dimension to election monitoring. Based upon this initiative, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the ODIHR no longer content themselves with issuing a report containing detailed recommendations after a given election, but they also initiate a dialogue with the electoral authorities of the country in question on the follow-up to these recommendations. The aim of this dialogue is to improve the conditions under which future elections take place.

Democracy Teams

During the course of my term of office, an important new tool was created which considerably increased the capability of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly to strengthen the hand of the Chairmanship and other OSCE structures and institutions in dealing with conflict situations. At the same time it enables the Assembly to bring a direct contribution to the day-to-day efforts of the OSCE in this regard. I am referring to the Democracy Teams.

These teams consist of small groups of experienced Parliamentarians who, on the strength of their background, are able to work closely with local Parliamentarians and other politicians and NGOs as well as the OSCE Chairmanship and the local OSCE missions. An additional advantage of the Democracy Team concept is that it improves possibilities for contacts and co-operation among members of the Parliamentary Assembly outside the Annual Session of the Assembly in July.

The first Democracy Team was set up in the autumn of 1998 to assist the efforts of the OSCE to bring democracy to Belarus. The Team was chaired by former Romanian Foreign Minister Adrian Severin, who was later, from July 2000, to be my successor as the President of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. The Belarus Team served as a pilot project for the Democracy Team concept. In fact it quickly turned out that this Democracy Team was able to make an important contribution from a new angle to the work of the OSCE and it became a major component of the efforts of the Organization in relation to Belarus. Against this background, the Democracy Team concept was warmly welcomed by the Chairmanship and other OSCE structures and institutions as an important new contribution to the array of instruments at the disposal of the OSCE in its work for conflict prevention.

Based upon the experiences gained in the course of the work of the Belarus Team and at the request of the Parliamentarians of the countries most directly

involved a second Democracy Team was established in early 2000 to help the OSCE solve the conflict as to the status of the Trans-Dniestria region of Moldova.

Following the Kosovo crisis and the establishment of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo in 1999 a third Democracy Team was set up also in 2000 to assist the OSCE in its effort to bring democracy to that area.

At the same time, in an interesting new departure, it was decided that a fourth Democracy Team would be established, which was not linked to a concrete conflict, but was intended to assist the OSCE in its relationship with an entire subject area, its work with the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

The Democracy Team concept has opened up significant new perspectives for direct involvement of Parliamentarians in the operational work of the OSCE. It must, however, be kept in mind that this concept suffers one significant drawback. Under the institutional arrangements of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, contained in its rules of procedure, Democracy Teams are appointed by the Standing Committee of the Assembly, which only meets twice a year. This fact is aptly illustrated by the time lag between the Kosovo crisis in 1999 and the establishment of the Kosovo Democracy Team in 2000. In other words, this constraint means that the Parliamentary Assembly is in general unable to respond quickly to emerging crisis situations by sending a Democracy Team at an early stage of the conflict. This lack of flexibility contrasts with the capabilities for early action on the governmental side of the Organization. The Chairman-in-Office is empowered to dispatch at short notice a Personal Representative who performs somewhat similar functions as the Democracy Teams. Moreover, the Permanent Council has the capacity to decide within a short time frame that it will set up an OSCE mission.

Gender Issues

In my work guiding the activities of the Parliamentary Assembly as well as in my collaboration with the other OSCE structures and institutions, for obvious reasons, I paid special attention to the gender aspect of the work of the Organization.

In substance, I stressed the need to involve the female part of the population in a conflict area if the efforts of the OSCE for conflict resolution in that area were to be successful. I also used the political weight of the Parliamentary Assembly to promote the adoption in June 2000 of the OSCE Action Plan for Gender Issues.

At the same time I had to criticize the fact that in the course of the execution of their tasks, the OSCE institutions and the missions themselves too often have problems living up to the OSCE commitments to promote gender equality. Notably, women are under-represented on the executive levels of all OSCE institutions and missions. In this context, on several occasions, I called

attention to the fact that the top administrative level of each and every OSCE institution still remains totally male dominated, a very unsatisfactory situation.

I was honoured when in recognition of my efforts to promote gender equality I was appointed to serve as the representative of the OSCE as a whole at the United Nations Special General Assembly on gender issues ("Beijing +5") in New York in June 2000.

The Istanbul Summit and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly

The high point of my term of office was undoubtedly the OSCE Summit in Istanbul in November 1999. I view it as recognition of efforts undertaken by my predecessor and myself to enhance the status of the Parliamentary Assembly within the context of the Organization as a whole that the Heads of State or Government of the OSCE States in a key provision of the Charter for European Security recognized the Assembly as one of the most important OSCE institutions and called upon it to develop its activities further as a key component of their efforts to promote democracy, prosperity and increased confidence.

This provision brought to an end years of uncertainty as to the nature of the relationship between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the other OSCE institutions. It also meant that the leadership of the Organization accepted the Assembly as their partner in meeting the challenges which the OSCE is facing. However, as I reminded the Heads of State or Government in my statement at the Summit, the Istanbul Charter does not address the issue of the democratic deficit of the OSCE, which includes the fact that the Assembly is not involved in the decision-making process of the Organization.

Obviously, the words of the relevant provision in the Istanbul Charter also imply new and broader challenges in future for the Parliamentary Assembly.

It was against this background and the general need for increased day-to-day contacts and co-operation between the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the OSCE structures and institutions in Vienna, that towards the end of my term of office I made an agreement in principle with the Austrian Chairmanship to the effect that the Assembly would be able to establish a liaison office in the Hofburg in Vienna. It will, however, be up to my successor and the Secretariat of the Assembly to flesh out the exact terms of this arrangement, which will become all the more necessary following the decision made at the beginning of 2001 to hold annual winter sessions of the Assembly in Vienna.

Challenges Ahead

Both individually and through their cumulative effect such developments as the enhanced working relationships with the other OSCE structures and institutions, the increased involvement in election monitoring, the establishment of the Democracy Team concept and the recognition of the Assembly as one of the most important OSCE institutions have a beneficial influence on the whole of the OSCE. They do not only strengthen the influence of the Parliamentarians in general and in particular that of my successors as the Presidents of the Assembly, but they also improve the standing and capabilities for action of the entire Organization.

However my successors in the leadership of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly still face two important challenges of an institutional nature.

One is the democratic deficit of the OSCE. It is obviously unsatisfactory that, in contrast to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly continues to lack a formal status in the decision-making process of the Organization, which includes such key issues as the approval of the budget and the appointment of senior officials. If this issue is not addressed, I fear that over time it may both harm relations between the Assembly and the governmental side of the OSCE and impair the capabilities for action of the OSCE as a whole.

The other institutional challenge facing the Parliamentary Assembly is a weakness in its working methods, which is, however, of its own making. I am referring to its time-consuming internal decision-making procedures which mean that usually the Assembly is not in a position to react with the same speed and flexibility as other OSCE bodies. This is a challenge which will have to be addressed if the Assembly is to maintain the momentum created by the growth of its role over the last few years.

I trust that also in future the OSCE will be able to play an important role in the security policy context of our part of the world. This presupposes, however, that the participating States - and not least their Parliaments - have the political will to invest the necessary resources in the Organization, notably by providing it with sufficient rapid reaction capabilities. It is also essential that the participating States have the will to ensure that the OSCE remains dedicated to being a transatlantic and pan-European organization with commitments reaching far into Central Asia. In other words, the OSCE must remain a central forum for close partnership and confident co-operation between Europe, the United States and Russia. It must also find adequate means of co-operation with the European Union as well as organizing the division of labour between the two institutions after the EU has expanded to include the Central and East European candidate countries.

In meeting the future challenges facing the OSCE, the Organization will need the support and active assistance of its Parliamentary Assembly. It is there-

fore essential that the relationship between the Assembly and the other OSCE structures and institutions continues to be developed and strengthened.