

The Future of the OSCE

At the beginning of the Dutch Chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the relevance of the Organization was seriously challenged by several pundits in the security field. The enlargement of both NATO and the European Union entailed a double encroachment upon the traditional preserve of the OSCE. Had the old girl outlived her usefulness, or was there life in her yet? A number of seminars and articles were dedicated to analysing and debating this issue. One quarter of the way through the Dutch Chairmanship, the critical voices went quiet. The war in Iraq was occupying everyone's attention. And there is no *Schadenfreude* in saying that neither the European Union nor NATO can provide the comprehensive security umbrella the OSCE region desperately requires. More than at any time during the last half-century, ordinary citizens – individuals as well as communities – feel threatened as they go about their daily lives. Terrorism – or the fear of terrorism – is a new threat in the region, one that is directly affecting the lives of millions of people within the area. Military solutions alone cannot address these fears. A broad-based agreement is emerging that real, long-term security involves looking into root causes as well, irrespective of whether these are economic, humanitarian, political or of any other nature. For those familiar with OSCE matters, my intention should be clear: to highlight once again the good old OSCE concept of comprehensive security.

Freud in Vienna: The OSCE on the Couch?

In the recent past, the OSCE has often been described as at a turning point – midway between a very successful past and an uncertain future. This has generated a certain amount of self-reflection within the OSCE, if not self-doubt. Some have even referred to an identity crisis. But while this may be fitting, given the Organization's seat in the birthplace of psychology, I have always considered such talk to be overdoing things. Nevertheless, as the Dutch took over the presidency on 1 January 2003, it was certainly high time to face this matter head on and to help determine where the OSCE as an organization was standing and where it was heading. One could say that the OSCE, having brought about near-miracles, is the victim of its own success. To put it bluntly, and with only slight exaggeration, I would dare to say that the Berlin Wall would not have fallen without the OSCE, certainly not as early as 1989. And without the networks of Helsinki Committees, the various people-to-people links, and the OSCE's advocacy work on human-rights is-

sues, the political landslide that took place overnight in 1989 would have certainly been more violent and bloody than it turned out to be.

The big question staring the OSCE straight in the face is this: After the successes of the past, is there any role it can play in the future? The environment has changed drastically. Half of the OSCE participating States will soon be members of the EU, while many of them and some others will shortly join the growing ranks of NATO members. Even those who remain outside will be brought into the orbit of the EU and NATO to some extent through Stabilization and Association Agreements, Partnership for Peace arrangements and other forms of co-operation. It is clear that the area is shrinking in which the OSCE is the only player in the game. But are there any problems that still require an organization like OSCE? This only begs the next set of questions, namely, what is the OSCE for? What is so special about it? Why is it better equipped to tackle some problems than other existing international organizations? Or can the non-governmental structures created through the OSCE, the famous Helsinki networks, keep the flame burning?

Back to Basics: The Determining Features of the OSCE

Before answering these questions, I would like to return to fundamentals. What really is the core of the OSCE? What makes it different and distinctive? Four unique features spring to mind:

Breadth of Participation

The *first* factor is of course the Organization's broad circle of participants. From Vancouver to Vladivostok, fifty-five states in all participate in the OSCE. There is no other forum in the region with that kind of inclusivity. There is also no other international security organization that so clearly defines security as a co-operative responsibility. Security, as defined by the OSCE, is interdependent and indivisible. All OSCE participating States are stakeholders in each other's security and in the security of Europe. Only by co-operating can crises be prevented. The underlying assumption is that co-operation brings benefits to all, while the insecurity of one state can affect the well being of the rest: The Three Musketeers translated into the field of international security.

The Peer Review

The *second* feature – not often mentioned, yet distinctive to the OSCE – is that it is a platform for what I would call “peer review”. By this I mean that states engage in mutual “self-examination”. It is the only forum that I know where a domestic issue, problem or question concerning the state of democ-

racy or human rights in a country is a matter for all members to review, examine and act on. Such a situation is unthinkable for those who have been raised with the traditional diplomatic concept of non-interference – something that has often been used to hide the effects of bad governance. It is maybe fair to say that this peer review is the most fascinating aspect of the OSCE: an organization that allows domestic developments to be scrutinized or at least reviewed by other members or – as they are officially known – participating States.

The Moscow mechanism is a good example of such a peer-review process. During the Dutch Chairmanship, this mechanism was set in motion for only the second time (the first time was in 1992 over Croatia). Ten participating States expressed their concern over the response by the Turkmen authorities to an attempt to kill President Niyazov. The number of arrests and the treatment of those arrested, as well as the response of the Turkmen government to a request for information, which was perceived as inadequate, led to the invoking of the Moscow mechanism. Without going into details, and making no pretence that all problems have been ironed out since then, it is fair to say that the mechanism has brought the issue into the open, giving a fair chance to both parties to raise their concerns and to engage in critical dialogue that can be continued both within the OSCE and in other international forums.

Comprehensive Security

A *third* distinguishing feature of OSCE is its “comprehensive concept of security”, as mentioned in the introduction to this contribution. Security is more than arms control, conflict prevention, crisis management and the settling of political differences. Without due regard for human rights and economic and ecological development, no sustainable security, no lasting peace can be reached. In OSCE terms, we talk about three dimensions, all of which are directly related to the security situation. They are the politico-military dimension, the economic-environmental dimension and the human dimension. The interdependence among these three dimensions has since been widely recognized by other international agencies, such as NGOs. The derogatory distinction between “hard” and “soft” security topics has not been heard for some time. September 11 and other terrorist strikes, as well as resource-related conflicts such as that over water in the Ferghana Valley have brought the message home: Seemingly “soft” subjects can have violent consequences when not dealt with properly.

Field Presence

The *fourth* distinctive feature of OSCE is its operational presence in the field. The Organization’s missions in almost 20 countries are its eyes and ears and

one of its best-known assets, offering hands-on expertise and assistance where they are most needed. The OSCE field missions are often described as the Organization's front line. They give it an active presence in countries that require assistance, and are the vehicle through which political decisions are translated into action. Their work addresses all phases of the conflict cycle: early warning, preventive diplomacy, conflict management and post-conflict rehabilitation. In each and every phase, human rights form an integral part of their work. Every field mission has its own specific mandate, but no field mission's mandate can ignore human rights advocacy.

Challenges Ahead: Old ...

Having looked at the OSCE's history and its defining features, I now want to consider if there are any challenges in 2003 that require the special attention of this unique organization. This question forces us to consider the present and future security landscape, including possible security threats and challenges.

For starters, I think it is only fair to acknowledge that, despite the successful past of the OSCE and its predecessor, the CSCE, not all the problems of the past can be consigned to the history books. Some old problems are still awaiting a solution. These include conflicts resulting from the break-up of the former Soviet Union that, despite being frozen for a while, still pose a serious threat to overall security. An example is provided by the ongoing negotiations on the settlement of the political status of Transnistria within Moldova. There also continue to be legitimate concerns with regard to democratic developments and human rights in various parts of the OSCE world. The increasing concentration of media ownership in established democracies such as Italy, or the recent regression of human rights and democracy in Central Asia following the promising start that had been made in the nineties, are just two areas where the OSCE needs to continue its work. Comprehensive security is a work in progress. It is never finished.

... and New

Alongside established threats to security, there are a number of new threats and challenges that would seem to justify a continued role for the OSCE. Some of these are completely new, while others have re-emerged like a political "Revenge of the Mummy". These new threats can be grouped in four clusters:

Terrorism

The *first* new threat that has to be mentioned is of course terrorism (and extremism in general). Not only September 11, but also the attack on the Moscow theatre and the Bali bombing have brought the message home loud and clear: Terrorist acts carried out by non-state actors and directly affecting ordinary citizens lives represent one of the most serious new threats to stability and security throughout the OSCE region. In December 2002, towards the end of the Portuguese OSCE Chairmanship, two crucial decisions were taken in Porto in this regard. The adoption of the OSCE Charter on Preventing and Combating Terrorism and the document on the “Development of an OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-first Century”¹ have prepared the ground for the OSCE to play a role in the fight against terrorism. It would be absurd to imagine that the OSCE should or could be the only international organization to play a major role in this fight. The Organization should define the added value it can bring in terms of its specific experience and expertise. The niche the OSCE seems best suited to fill seems to be in the areas of policing, border security, anti-trafficking and the suppression of terrorist financing. True to the OSCE’s spirit of equality and solidarity, the Organization should be ready to assist all participating States in preventing and fighting terrorism. The OSCE’s traditional concept of common and comprehensive security provides an excellent point of departure. Only a strategy that combines the three dimensions and makes use of all the OSCE’s bodies and institutions will produce the desired results. Given the complex and global nature of terrorism, one-dimensional approaches will not be sufficient. In all its efforts, the OSCE will need to work closely together with other international organizations in accordance with the Platform for Co-operative Security as adopted at the Istanbul Summit in 1999.

Strict adherence to the principles of good governance and democracy will help to protect our societies from the threat of terrorism. The rule of law and the full participation of all citizens in political life are essential in the fight against terror. The only societies that have the strength to challenge the extremists in their midst are those where the right to question is beyond dispute. The fight against terrorism should never infringe the fundamental human rights of our citizens. This would not only be contrary to the basic and timeless principles of the OSCE, it would also make our citizens vulnerable to extremist manipulation of any kind.

Trafficking in Human Beings, Arms and Drugs

The *second* threat that should be mentioned is trafficking. It poses a clear threat to stability and security, both inside and outside the OSCE region.

1 The Documents and Decisions of the Tenth OSCE Ministerial Council are reprinted in this volume, pp. 421-455, here: pp. 425-428 and pp. 443-445.

Trafficking has a wide geographical distribution and is a central element of international crime. Under trafficking we understand the trade in human beings and the illicit trade in drugs and small arms and light weapons. Trafficking in human beings is a particularly repulsive crime and is rapidly becoming a major scourge. Estimates of the total number of victims of this new slave trade in recent years range from 700,000 to four million. Drugs trafficking is a multi-billion dollar business that directly affects the economies of all our countries. It also has a seriously destabilizing impact on our civil fabric. Finally, trafficking in small arms and light weapons also represents a clear and present threat to security. Trafficking does not just cross borders, it also crosses dimensions. It not only causes human misery but devastates national economies and puts undue pressure on political systems. The impact of trafficking across the whole OSCE region is negative and destabilizing. These are, briefly put, the reasons why the Netherlands has proposed that “trafficking” be made a major theme for this year’s OSCE Economic Forum in Prague.

New Minorities

A *third* cluster of new threats and challenges is associated with the emergence of new minorities in several societies, particularly in Western Europe. The social exclusion of minorities may lead to social disruption and instability. Growing tensions and feelings of unease have had their impact on recent elections in the region, including those held in the Netherlands. If national governments do not tackle these issues properly – and, I may add humanely – they may sow the seeds of future crises. This is an area where matters could escalate rapidly. It is a matter of relations between civilizations, cultures and religions. The logical consequence could be the involvement – in an advisory capacity – of the OSCE, specifically through the person of the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM). This could take the form of, for instance, general and specific recommendations on social policies made to national governments. In this way, social disruption and emerging crises could be nipped in the bud. The decision of the OSCE Rome Ministerial Council of 1993, which already invites the HCNM to get involved in combating xenophobia, points in this direction. The mandate of the HCNM has in fact been extended to general matters of non-discrimination.

Rich and Poor in the OSCE

The *fourth* cluster of new threats is associated with the growing discrepancy between the two parts of the OSCE world. I am referring to the economic imbalance between those countries that are already part of or are about to join the EU and those that remain outside. Stark differences in economic performance are already evident, and these may be exacerbated over time if we do

not address this imbalance. The risk exists of a dangerous “great divide” developing between those OSCE countries (maybe the bulk of them) that participate in mainstream economic development and those that are left behind. A new – and widening – divide between a massive, powerful EU bloc and the rest, between the “haves” and the “have-nots” will pose real problems, encouraging antagonism, tension and disintegration throughout the OSCE region.

In Short: There Are enough Challenges to Justify the Continued Existence of the OSCE

The conclusion we have to draw is clear: As well as a number of outstanding unresolved challenges from the past, some major new challenges are emerging that require the attentions of an organization structured like the OSCE – and require them in all three dimensions: the politico-military, the economic-environmental and the human. The OSCE’s all-inclusiveness – in terms of geographical coverage, breadth of coverage (the three dimensions), and its focus on both soft and hard security – place it squarely in the centre of any discussions of regional security. This is by no means to suggest that the OSCE is the only player in the game. Far from it: Other international and regional organizations (as already mentioned), national governments and NGOs play an important role, too. Examples of successful intervention, whether in terms of conflict prevention or crisis management, are often those where all actors played their part and were prepared to give way to better-suited players at certain times.

The OSCE can indeed look back on a successful past. But it would be wrong to pretend that no adjustments are needed to procedures or to the way the Organization co-operates with other players in the field of security. Organizations need to develop – to learn from their experience. There is always room for improvement. The OSCE is no different from any other institution in that regard.

The history of the region also shows the need for proper planning and co-ordination among the different agencies on the ground. It is absolutely vital for international actors to work together at the structural level and to make transparent arrangements as to the division of tasks. In comparison with Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina saw far less properly structured co-operation between the main international actors. As a result, there was more parallel activity, duplication and sometimes even rivalry, with consequent time, energy and resource wastages. In Kosovo, the plan from the start was to have one structure, UN-led, in which EU, OSCE and UNHCR (because of the refugee problem in this specific case) would work together. The result was a single structure with an overarching organization and very clearly defined

areas of competence. This made for greater efficiency in post-conflict and rehabilitation work.

The regional imbalance of the OSCE has come in for criticism in the past owing to the fact that the Organization has mainly addressed issues “east of Vienna”: in former Yugoslavia, the Caucasus and now also Central Asia. Issues “west of Vienna” were left largely untouched. Paying more attention to the new challenges I have detailed here would make it possible to redress the geographical balance of the Organization’s work. After all, issues like trafficking, “new minorities” and terrorism affect the whole region. Nevertheless, it has to be said that there can never be an excuse for the OSCE not to act merely out of geopolitical considerations. At the end of the day, the OSCE has to act where the problems are – whether they are in the East or the West.

The same can be said for the other perceived imbalance in OSCE’s work: the imbalance among the dimensions. In the past, the focus was very much on the human dimension, on human-rights issues. As important as this is – and it is certainly not to be belittled – the fact that it received virtually all the OSCE’s attention was often criticized by certain countries in the East as unfair and one-sided. In their opinion, some of their other needs – in the economic and environmental sphere, for instance – were neglected. Having heard these views and acknowledging that some grounds for criticism exist, I would like to be unequivocally clear in this regard. The Netherlands, and therefore the Dutch Chairman-in-Office, remain in the vanguard of countries working for the improvement of the human rights situation world-wide. This means that in no way will any efforts be supported that would undermine the current human-rights focus of the OSCE. In 2003, human rights remain, as far as the incumbent Chairman-in-Office is concerned, firmly on the Organization’s agenda. In other words, worries among the human-rights fraternity that the OSCE may be weakening the intensity of its focus are unfounded. The simple and tragic fact of life is that human rights abuses “west of Vienna” are not of the same order as those to the east of the city where the OSCE has its headquarters. The impact of the latter on security and human dignity is clear and the OSCE has to act true to its mandate. Anything less would be “an insult to ordinary citizens in the OSCE region”.