

Report: Colloquium on “The Future of the OSCE”*

A Joint Project of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly and the Swiss Institute for World Affairs

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Executive Summary

The OSCE is facing serious difficulties as well as challenges to its purpose and political relevancy. Participants and contributors to the Colloquium unanimously agreed that the OSCE is still a valuable and relevant international organization that should continue to play a critical role in promoting stability and security in Europe. The political commitments made in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris as well as in other CSCE/OSCE documents are of great value. They should be preserved and upheld by the participating States.

It was also agreed that the crisis of the OSCE is first and foremost political. The structural reform in and by itself will not solve the political problems that only participating States can address. The governments of the 55 OSCE states should reconfirm their commitment to a useful, credible and professional OSCE that serves the interest of all. They should also commit themselves, at the highest political levels, to the full implementation of all of their OSCE commitments and to future improvements in the structures and procedures of the Organization.

It was also agreed that:

1. The strengthening of OSCE activities in the field of security, economy and environment should not be done at the expense of the human dimension or to the detriment of basic OSCE values and principles. The security dimension should be expanded by further elaborating the Code of Conduct on politico-military aspects of security and increasing the role of the Forum for Security Co-operation.
2. Election observation is one of the most politically relevant and visible aspects of the Organization. The independence of these missions must

* This report has been agreed by President of the OSCE PA, Congressman Alcee L. Hastings, and the Swiss Foundation Chairman, Ambassador Edouard Brunner. It has been drafted by Ambassador Gérard Stoudmann, Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy, and Spencer Oliver, Secretary General of the OSCE PA who served as co-Rapporteurs during the Colloquium. They were assisted by Nicolas Kaczorowski, Deputy to Ambassador Stoudmann and Tina Schön from the International Secretariat of the OSCE PA. The Report is a synopsis of views expressed at the Colloquium as seen by the Rapporteurs, and it also takes into consideration opinions expressed in the written contributions which were submitted to the project. The Report has been reviewed by the participants at the Colloquium who agree with the content [...].

be protected and efforts should focus on expanding electoral standards without weakening existing commitments. It is recommended that ODIHR and the OSCE PA increase their co-operation in order to maintain and ensure the independence of the OSCE election observation that has been recently eroded. Finally, election assessments could be expanded further in Western democracies. Double standards in electoral observations should be avoided.

3. The role of the OSCE Secretary General should be strengthened in the political, budgetary and administrative spheres. The Secretary General, as well as and in consultation with the Chairman-in-Office, should be able to speak for the Organization and to make policy pronouncements as well as appropriate criticisms when OSCE commitments are not observed.
4. The OSCE should improve its ability to make timely decisions through adjusting its decision-making procedure. The consensus rules could be modified for decisions related to personnel, budget and administration.
5. Transparency and accountability can be improved by requiring that a country which blocks or holds up consensus must do so openly and be prepared to defend such position publicly.
6. The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly could approve the budget and confirm the Secretary General once nominated, by an absolute or weighted majority vote and after appropriate consultations.
7. The budget must be adopted in a timely fashion and be commensurate to OSCE political objectives. A multi-year financial plan should be established in order to pursue longer term strategies.
8. Structural reform is needed to improve the functioning of the Organization: 1) Enhancing the analytical capabilities of the Secretariat by the creation of an Analysis and Prospective Unit; 2) Building permanent lessons learned capabilities by setting up a best Practices Unit; and 3) developing a truly operational civilian rapid reaction capability to intervene at time of crisis.
9. Professional standards should be raised in all OSCE structures. In order to attract and retain performing staff, fixed term limits on duration of service should be eliminated. At the same time, reliance on seconded personnel should be reduced. However, when seconded personnel are assigned, Governments should ensure that such assignment is for a substantial period of time – at least one or two years.
10. The OSCE needs to increase its network capabilities and reinforce its strategic co-operation with the EU, NATO, and the UN by opening liaison offices in Brussels and New York City.
11. The OSCE could export its comprehensive security concept, expertise such as election observation and assistance and share its values and experience beyond the OSCE area.

Addressing the Political Challenges First

At a time when the OSCE's purposefulness and political relevance are challenged and put into question, the participants in the colloquium unanimously agreed that with its unique composition and comprehensive security concept as well as its crisis prevention and management capacities, the OSCE still has the potential and has a relevant role to play in a Europe facing new security challenges. In recent years, the OSCE has encountered serious problems and has entered into a critical situation that requires high-level attention by the participating States.

The problems are first and foremost of a political nature and should find political responses at the outset. *Structural reforms are certainly needed, but the essential problem lies elsewhere. Putting the emphasis on these can only blur the issue and confuse the priorities. Only then does it make sense to proceed with structural reforms. If participating States decide to support the OSCE in its objectives, they need to commit resilience, will and resources in politically revitalizing the Organization before they undertake the structural reform.* The OSCE's ability to reform will ultimately depend on how much participating States are committed to and interested in the Organization's potential.

The OSCE today is in a complex situation. With successive EU and NATO enlargements, there is a tendency at the political level to devote less attention to the OSCE which has increasingly disappeared from public view. In many countries, the OSCE is rarely placed high on political agendas in Capitals. The fact that the OSCE Ministerial Council Meetings are attended at an increasingly lower political level is a sign of this diminishing political interest. These elements all point to the reduced political relevance of the OSCE. Political issues relevant to its mandate and geographical areas are barely addressed seriously any more at the Permanent Council.

The culture of informal discussions and consultations, which once was necessary to build up consensus and formal decisions has been eroded. Broad consultations should be carried out on current political issues. The EU countries in the OSCE arduously negotiate issues among themselves before they disclose their common position to non-EU countries. Once a compromise in the EU has been found, there is very little scope for negotiations, which contributes to the shrinking importance of the OSCE as a political platform. Therefore, rebalancing the decision-making process and making it more transparent and inclusive is a necessity.

Rebalance the OSCE Multidimensional Approach

The three dimensions of the OSCE have constituted the early and innovative recognition of the inseparable link between security, development and democracy that ensures stability. The OSCE comprehensive security concept is

still current and very relevant for addressing the challenges of the XXI century. *The expansion of security related activities should not be done to the detriment of the importance of the human dimension. Within the security dimension, actions should be taken to increase the role of the Forum for Security Co-operation, to involve the OSCE in security sector governance, by inter alia elaborating the Code of Conduct on politico-military aspects of security.*

Maintain the OSCE Lead on Electoral Activities

Election observation is recognized as the remaining most politically relevant and visible activity of the OSCE. This must remain so and the OSCE should not relinquish its leading comparative advantage in this field. The involvement of the Parliamentary Assembly is critical to maintain the visibility and independence of OSCE election observation. *Agreement was found on the need to complement the existing election standards and to continue to improve election observation, which should in no way result in a watered-down version of existing standards. As previously indicated, it is recommended that ODIHR and the OSCE PA increase their co-operation in order to maintain and ensure the independence of the OSCE election observation that has been recently eroded. Finally, election assessments could be expanded further in Western democracies. Double standards in electoral observations should be avoided.*

Democratization of the OSCE

Strengthening the Role of the OSCE Secretary General

It has been agreed that the present status quo is not sustainable and it would be in the interest of the Organization and the Chairman-in-Office itself to benefit from a strengthened role of the Secretary General. There is no contradiction or conflict of interest between a reinforced role for the Secretary General and the overall responsibilities of the Chairmanship. A Chairman-in-Office rotating annually means ever changing directions, lack of political continuity and difficulty to define long-term, coherent and sustainable priorities. The aims and role of the OSCE Secretary General should:

1. Ensure better political continuity from one Chairmanship to another;
2. Define long-term priorities, thus improving the OSCE credibility;
3. Serve as the focal point for the Organization;
4. Increasing his/her decision making power in personnel and administrative issues;
5. Speak for the Organization and making political pronouncements;
6. Take political initiatives;

7. Propose priorities for resource allocation (financial, human and administrative) and other activities in particular present a multi-year financial plan; and
8. Ensure that budget is adopted in a timely fashion and human and financial means be commensurate to the political objectives of the Organization. A slight increase in the OSCE budget will greatly boost its effectiveness.

Permanent Council Procedures: Transparency and Accountability in the Decision-making

Achieving consensus within the OSCE has become increasingly difficult. Protracted negotiations on relatively minor issues have hampered the effectiveness of the Organization and have, at times, led to paralysis. *It is recognized that the consensus rule for decisions related to budget, personnel appointments and general administrative issues should be modified.*

Furthermore, the decision-making process has to become more transparent. *A country should only be able to block the consensus openly and publicly. Debates should be more open and transparent and not limited to issues where a consensus exists but should extend to contentious matters where consensus is lacking. Informal consultations and generally better information sharing are critical to improve accountability, transparency and visibility of the Organization.*

Strengthened Role of the OSCE PA

The OSCE Parliamentary Assembly remains an essential player because it is by essence more independent and can take political initiative. The PA should be more closely associated to the OSCE decision shaping and making processes as is the case for the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The OSCE PA should approve the budget of the OSCE and confirm the OSCE Secretary General after the nomination. This would ensure the independence and legitimacy of the OSCE Secretary General, and reinforce his/her position.

Furthermore, in the field of conflict prevention and crisis management, the OSCE PA should take more political initiative such as organizing "fact finding missions", facilitating negotiations. These initiatives could be public or confidential assimilated to silent diplomacy and carried out alone or in co-operation with other parliamentary actors (European Parliament, Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe). Such initiatives would substantially increase the political credibility and visibility of the Organization.

Institutional Reform

Structural Adjustments

To regain political credibility, the OSCE has to act as an effective crisis management and conflict prevention/resolution body. The OSCE needs effective early warning and an ability to carry out swift follow-up action.

To this end, three concrete measures are recommended:

1. *Enhancing the analytical capabilities in the Secretariat by the creation of an Analysis and Prospective Unit.* It will process and analyze the wealth of information that the OSCE collects in the field and through its network of institutions and missions. This instrument would be essential to set up credible early warning and conflict prevention mechanisms.
2. *Establishing a Best Practices Unit in the Secretariat will provide the OSCE with a permanent lessons learned capability.* This unit will *inter alia* formulate recommendations aiming at improving the functioning, effectiveness and work of field missions. It will also analyse working methods of other organizations and will seek to adapt and apply them to the OSCE, when and where appropriate. And,
3. *Developing a civilian rapid reaction capability that could be deployed in time of crisis to supplement the work of field missions.* These teams would provide the OSCE with the opportunity to react swiftly to an unfolding crisis, assess the situation and the needs, and make policy recommendations to the OSCE executive bodies for future actions. These civilian experts could be recruited on an ad hoc basis.

Increased Co-operation with other International Organizations

The OSCE should further develop its network capabilities which are currently too dependent on personal individual contacts. *Permanent channels of communications must be opened and strategic co-operation with the EU, NATO and the UN must be established through the creation of liaison offices in Brussels and New York City.* Carefully selected liaison personnel would have a multiplier effect on networking, working contacts, and on guaranteeing prime access to strategic thinking and planned operations from other organizations. This would improve the OSCE's ability to respond adequately and swiftly.

OSCE Field Presences

The OSCE field presences offer significant comparative advantages. However, current weaknesses and grievances from the field, institutions and participating States indicate:

1. deficient recruitment procedures;
2. in some cases, insufficient professionalism;
3. a lack of adequate human and financial resources; and
4. a too often lack of clear political guidance and of coherent priorities.

Consequently, it is recommended that:

- i) clear political guidance be regularly updated and reviewed;
- ii) interaction and support from the Chairmanship, the Secretariat and field missions be revisited with the aim of improving the political and administrative functioning of missions;
- iii) micromanagement from Vienna be avoided; and
- iv) geographic and substantive priorities established for field missions be periodically reviewed.

Professionalism

The OSCE counts good professionals. The problem is that the Organization is not able to retain them or attract experienced senior staff due to restrictive staff rules that limit the maximum duration of employment to seven years. These rules have become counterproductive. The OSCE loses not only experience and know-how, but it also lacks the continuity needed for the successful implementation of programs on the ground. The OSCE competes directly with other career-based international organizations e.g. the European Commission, the UN, NATO and Council of Europe, for experienced trained staff. Addressing this problem is essential to improve the quality and credibility of the work of OSCE. The OSCE needs to keep efficient employees for as long as desirable in order not to lose experience, institutional memory and valuable networks. *To that effect, the OSCE employment rules should be revised. This can be done by eliminating maximum time limits while maintaining fixed term contracts subject to periodical, in-depth review of performance. Such system would allow full flexibility as well as preserve the best OSCE professional staff.*

Despite its financial advantages, the secondment system has shown its inherent weaknesses, such as the uneven quality of the recruited staff and the lack of transparency in the recruitment process. The Organization has little control over who is recruited through this system, and the quality control is less effective than for contracted personnel. Secondment is a factor that contributes to diminished effectiveness and credibility of the Organization. However, secondment in its current form and under specific circumstances is still useful since it confers flexibility to quickly deploy large scale and temporary missions such as military observers, but it should not be used to fill the Organization's core positions that require continuity. It is *recommended to re-*

view the OSCE secondment system, using for instance the UN system, whereby employees have a contractual relationship with the Organization.

Additional recommendations include: 1) *reducing reliance on seconded personnel in core positions in the field;* 2) *requesting participating States to second personnel for no less than one year at a time;* 3) *empowering regional experts, and 4) pursuing efforts on training.* There is an urgent need to reform the OSCE recruitment policy in order to enhance the level of continuity among the staff in the field and within institutions, and to guarantee highest possible professional standards.

Expanding Out-of-Area Activities

On the one hand, the OSCE specific expertise such as election observation and assistance could be used out-of-area directly or indirectly where it can contribute positively to the stabilization of an area. On the other hand, the OSCE should consider exporting its model of comprehensive and cooperative security to partner countries and beyond (Middle East, Africa, etc). There is a growing interest in the Organization from areas outside the OSCE. This opportunity should be seized to share OSCE values and experience. The OSCE should stand ready to provide assistance with regard to crisis in other areas. *This "out-of-area" policy could be endorsed at the next Ministerial Council. If approved, appropriate resources should be allocated to credibly implement this policy.*

Increased Visibility

The OSCE is not attractive for the media and will never be, unless it regains political credibility and is perceived as a relevant security actor. Therefore the issue of visibility is very much limited to the further political role of the Organization and cannot be fixed technically.

It is recommended to improve co-ordination and cross fertilization between the various media units in the Organization, in particular between the Chairmanship and the Secretariat.