

The European Union and the OSCE – Natural Partners in a Networked World

In a globalized world, with all the opportunities and risks that this brings, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the European Union are natural partners.

For more than three decades, the OSCE has been a cornerstone of the Euro-Atlantic institutional architecture. By uniting 56 countries between Vancouver and Vladivostok it has become a unique platform for enhancing and promoting comprehensive security. Since the Final Act of Helsinki was signed three decades ago, the OSCE has achieved a huge amount, and the Organization's activities have progressed from confidence-building measures and arms control to post-conflict institution building and the observation of democratic elections.

The EU has also changed a lot during this period. It has honed its foreign-policy instruments and become a major actor on the global stage. Through its worldwide presence, the EU is now increasingly able to contribute to tackling the root causes of insecurity: from using its role as the world's largest trading block and provider of development aid to contributing to the struggle against climate change and promoting respect for human rights, as well as carrying out peacemaking missions and crisis management activities.

Recent EU enlargement has helped towards sustaining regional security, and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) will also contribute to this further. The ENP has grown significantly in importance and is now a key foreign policy priority for the EU that will have its own dedicated instrument, the "European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument", from the beginning of 2007. The ENP is used to promote stability and reform in our neighbouring countries to the east and the south. ENP Action Plans – detailed agendas for reform that are produced with every partner country – invite our neighbours to move towards deeper economic, political, cultural, and security co-operation. The ENP is a win-win policy, allowing Europe and its partners to strengthen stability, security, and well-being for all concerned, and in implementing it we see further potential for synergies with the OSCE.

Despite admirable efforts on the part of the EU and the OSCE, 2005 was a challenging year. On the one hand, there was progress in consolidating democracy and the rule of law within the area covered by the OSCE. At the same time, we saw a rise in violations of fundamental OSCE values, while several "frozen conflicts" remained unresolved.

These ongoing challenges mean even more effort is required across all three OSCE dimensions: the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and, of course, the human. To this extent, there is no "imbalance" in

the OSCE, as some critics claim. The human dimension remains essential, as violations of fundamental freedoms and human security are increasingly at the root of broader security problems, the resolution of which is in all our interests.

Following the reform debate of 2005, it is now important that all OSCE participating States respect and implement the conclusions of the Panel of Eminent Persons. That means ensuring the OSCE, its specialized institutions, and its field missions become more effective, and granting them – and ODIHR in particular – the independence and political neutrality that they need to perform their tasks effectively. The OSCE must also be provided with the financial means it needs to fulfil its tasks. Comprehensive security can never be free of charge.

During 2005 in Ukraine, the OSCE and the EU succeeded in making a substantial contribution to strengthening the rule of law and democracy and towards ensuring sustainable economic reform. In Moldova, the European Union's Border Assistance Mission has been successfully operating since December 2005, not only to combat trafficking, but also to generate new momentum on the Transdnistria conflict.

We also saw positive developments in many key cross-cutting areas of the OSCE's work: for instance, in strengthening tolerance and non-discrimination, in the fight against terrorism, in activities related to environmental and transport security, and in initiatives for combating organized crime (particularly trafficking in drugs and human beings). This range of issues reflects the broad concept of security that the EU and the OSCE share.

The EU, and the European Commission in particular, played a constructive role within the OSCE during 2005 – both in the debate on internal reform and in concrete geographic and thematic areas. There was close co-operation between OSCE missions, European Commission delegations, and other EU representatives in the field (above all in South-eastern Europe), as well as between ODIHR and the Commission, particularly in election monitoring missions, and the EU continued to provide financial support for ODIHR activities. There was also enhanced co-operation on training for civilian crisis management. In order to further develop this close partnership, a declaration on EU-OSCE co-operation was adopted at the initiative of the Austrian EU Presidency.

However, despite this positive co-operation, we are aware that the European Union still needs to perform more effectively and coherently in the OSCE context. EU member states and the European Commission have to become better at speaking with a single voice in order to use their weight more constructively. There could also be further improvements in ensuring more effective inter-linkages between EU and OSCE activities.

The OSCE's activities have always been important to me in my political work. This was true when I was Austrian Foreign Minister and during my time as OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in 2000, and continues today in my ac-

tivities as EU Commissioner for External Relations and the European Neighbourhood Policy, which includes responsibility for relations with the OSCE. It is my view with regard to the OSCE's ongoing reform agenda that following the transitional period of 2005, the OSCE will experience a renaissance. In a complex world, we need effective multilateralism and an innovative security policy. Therefore, what is needed is not "less" OSCE, but a "better" OSCE. The challenges of the 21st century are too important for us to allow the legacy of Helsinki and the achievements made in all three dimensions of the OSCE to be forgotten.

In reforming the OSCE, I firmly believe we must not lose sight of its principles. On the contrary, the interconnectedness between security, democracy, and human rights is more relevant today than ever before. In the Euro-Atlantic region, managing change, building political confidence, and, above all, guaranteeing human security will continue to be the key tasks for the future.