

The Future of the OSCE Presence in South-Eastern Europe¹

Introduction

The OSCE has a long and distinguished history of providing assistance to governments and societies in South-eastern Europe. This dates back to the early 1990s, when the OSCE deployed its first field operations in response to the armed conflicts that had engulfed the region. It is not surprising then that the OSCE's presence in South-eastern Europe has covered the entire range of OSCE activities, from early warning, conflict prevention, and crisis management, via post-conflict rehabilitation and the rebuilding of inter-community relations, to supporting democratic consolidation. Moreover, no other region where the OSCE has operational experience illustrates so well the depth of OSCE activities in the field and the scope of the Organization's multi-dimensional vision of security.

While the region's violent conflicts and their aftermath once provided the stimulus for the establishment of an extensive network of OSCE field presences in South-eastern Europe, such purpose has now given way to long-term engagement in transition processes and democratic consolidation of the states in this region. As of mid-2007, the OSCE had seven field operations altogether in the region, the Mission to Montenegro having been launched in the summer of 2006. Since the Organization's role in South-eastern Europe has been so wide-ranging, its field operations there have required the allocation of extensive resources and the deployment of large numbers of personnel. Sixty-nine per cent of the OSCE's total field operation budget is spent in the region. South-eastern Europe also hosts the largest concentration of international and national OSCE staff members – nearly 2,000 – and the Mission in Kosovo has the highest number of staff of all OSCE field operations. This strong operational presence has been the main vehicle for the OSCE's engagement in the region. Before turning to discuss its future, let us briefly review the OSCE's involvement in the region so far. By considering this long-term engagement, the OSCE and its participating States can assess what they have learned. This is particularly true with regard to a region that has seen major change over the last fifteen years: from violent conflict to democratic consolidation, with prospects of further integration into European institutions.

¹ The views expressed in this article are the personal opinions of the authors and not the official views of the OSCE and its participating States. The authors would like to thank their colleagues, Dov Lynch, Calin Stoica, Sophie Massal, and Marcin Czaplinski for their comments and contributions in preparing this article.

Across the region, OSCE missions share similar priorities: to strengthen states, to consolidate democratic institutions and values, and to foster regional co-operation.

The activities of the field operations in the region are multi-dimensional, covering the politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions, and vary according to the needs identified by host countries. The list of activities is long, ranging across legislative and electoral support; judicial reform; police development and education, particularly with regard to creating a multi-ethnic police force and implementing community policing standards; assisting governments in fighting organized crime and corruption; strengthening local government; supporting citizen participation and civil society development; and assisting with educational reform. All of these activities contribute to the comprehensive capacity- and institution-building endeavours in which the OSCE plays an active role, along with other actors from the international community.

The OSCE has also been successful in supporting and facilitating regional co-operation processes to deal with the long-term consequences of war: the return of refugees and the proceedings on war crimes. These issues are also critical for the re-establishment of constructive inter-community relations. With the assistance of the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre, four of the OSCE missions in the region – Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Montenegro, and Serbia – have established mechanisms to enhance cross-border co-operation in these areas. Such regional co-operative processes, the so-called “4x3 Initiative” on refugee return and the “Palić Process” on interstate co-operation in war crimes proceedings, are also excellent examples of the OSCE's close co-operation with other international organizations, in this case with the European Union and the United Nations.

The OSCE has also been at the forefront of efforts to improve inter-community relations in the region, a process that is still far from complete and will continue to require OSCE engagement, especially in Kosovo/Serbia. OSCE efforts in the area of inter-community relationship building have taken place at two levels: first, through the creation and institutionalization of effective confidence-building measures – for example, in police development and training, media training, the protection of minority rights, or education and tolerance building; and second, through long-term reform programmes designed to benefit communities. In particular, most OSCE field operations in South-eastern Europe have played a crucial role in the creation of a multi-ethnic police force and in training police officers in community-based policing. The efforts of OSCE field operations to promote tolerance and non-discrimination in the multi-ethnic societies of South-eastern Europe mirror the Organization's efforts to promote inter-cultural dialogue and inter-faith co-operation across the entire OSCE area. Given the region's importance as a

crossroads of cultures, religions, and national and ethnic groups, OSCE assistance to youth, education, and the media are in themselves crucial confidence-building and security-enhancing measures.

Intense and wide-ranging interaction with other regional and international organizations is also part of the OSCE's engagement in South-eastern Europe, and demonstrates the OSCE's complementary role in the region as well as the specific added-value it creates. The OSCE works in close co-operation not only with the EU and NATO, but also with the UN, the Council of Europe and other regional actors such as the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe, and the South East European Cooperation Process (SEECF). The most illustrative example of complementarity and added-value is provided by the OSCE's co-operation with the UN in Kosovo, where the OSCE mission will serve as a pillar of the UN interim administration (UNMIK) as long as UN Security Council Resolution 1244 remains in effect. This institutional arrangement is unprecedented in the history of the OSCE or that of the region, although OSCE field operations in South-eastern Europe have worked alongside other international actors, as in Bosnia and Herzegovina or in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The OSCE also works closely with the EU, NATO, and the UN in assuring a smooth transition following the settlement of Kosovo's status and the termination of Security Council Resolution 1244.

In addition, OSCE missions in the region are in many cases key partners for the implementation of joint projects. A series of such joint activities exist with the Europe Union, and especially with the European Commission. The "Ohrid Process on Border Management and Security in South-eastern Europe" is another excellent example of successful co-operation between the OSCE, the EU, NATO, and the Stability Pact for South-eastern Europe. The OSCE and NATO have in the past also worked closely on disarmament issues, such as the elimination of small arms, and on security sector reform. Moreover, governments in the region make full use of their co-operation with OSCE missions as a means of achieving their foreign policy objectives. These processes have also reinforced OSCE-EU interactions.

Thus, in many respects, the OSCE as we see it today was forged in South-eastern Europe, in response to the conflicts of the 1990s and the difficulties of complex transition processes. Over the past fifteen years, much has been achieved, and with some success, given the difficulties that come with shifting from a post-conflict environment to one dominated by democratic consolidation and extensive reforms.

The Prospects for Future OSCE Involvement

In April 2007, the OSCE's Presence in Albania celebrated its tenth anniversary, with a fifteenth anniversary to be celebrated by the OSCE Spillover

Monitor Mission to Skopje in September. While these events demonstrate the long-term nature of OSCE field operations and the Organization's commitment to South-eastern Europe, they also raise the question of the prospects of continued OSCE involvement in the region in the coming years. In particular, voices calling for a re-assessment of the OSCE's role in South-eastern Europe are beginning to be heard more loudly in the OSCE forum in the context of plans for the EU and NATO to enlarge to include these countries. Some participating States believe that the OSCE's increasingly limited resources must be redistributed from the field operations in South-eastern Europe to other OSCE regions, in particular Central Asia and the South Caucasus. While there is not yet a consensus on the future of the OSCE presence in South-eastern Europe, there are signs that in the next few years the Organization will witness some significant changes as far as its field operations are concerned. This is especially relevant as some of the host countries themselves are increasingly supportive of a scaled-down OSCE presence.

Before discussing some of the changes that we are likely to witness when it comes to the OSCE's field presence in the region, it is crucial to place these in the context of the challenges that lie ahead for both South-eastern Europe and for the OSCE. First, the basic challenge for the governments of the region is to continue on the path to successful transition and democratic consolidation, as this will be a prerequisite to their fulfilling their Euro-Atlantic aspirations. Concern has already been expressed by a number of international actors that in some countries of the region the pace of reform is slowing down or that not enough has been done to consolidate the progress made. Co-operation among local governments is also important, especially when it comes to border security and management, fighting organized crime, or combating trafficking in narcotics and human beings. All these are security challenges that will still require the continued assistance of international actors, including the OSCE.

It is also crucial for the region to come to terms with its past. For Serbia, for example, full co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) is essential as it affects the country's relationship with its neighbours as well as with the EU. Settling Kosovo's future is also a pressing challenge, as a delay in that process will have uncertain implications for the region and beyond. Already the OSCE and the EU, both of which will be the primary actors in a post-status Kosovo, are co-ordinating their future activities in the field.

For the OSCE and its participating States, continued engagement in South-eastern Europe also means carefully meting out its limited resources while maintaining a level of involvement in the region that allows for continued assistance to South-eastern European countries in tackling the political, socio-economic, and societal challenges that are likely to remain for the near future. These include complex reforms, which for the most part have already been underway for years, such as legislative and election reform, prop-

erty reform, the creation of a civil registry, the strengthening of rule of law and other broad-based judicial reform. Thus, seeing through the consolidation of good governance is one argument for a continued OSCE field presence in the region, even if on a smaller scale than at present.

Furthermore, the governments in South-eastern Europe continue to require assistance with socio-economic development. While the OSCE does not have the financial resources to fund large-scale infrastructure or economic development projects, it nevertheless has an impressive record of providing assistance on a small scale, such as with training to help with the setting up of small enterprises or helping small companies to develop sound business strategies. The high level of unemployment in the region, particularly among young people, remains a concern, as they can more easily be exploited for extreme nationalist purposes at times of economic insecurity.

There also continues to be a need for reconciliation in the region, as well as inter-community relationship building. Kosovo is a good case in point, as reconciliation between the Serbian and Albanian populations there will be a long-term process. The same is true of Bosnia and Herzegovina, where reconciliation is also slow to proceed for a number of political reasons. Here again the OSCE missions in South-eastern Europe remain important, as they have a wide-ranging repertoire and long-term experience in confidence-building measures and in facilitating constructive inter-communal relationship building.

As to the future of its engagement in South-eastern Europe, the OSCE currently faces a series of institutional developments, including the present trend toward downsizing and phasing out field operations. Croatia may be the first country in South-eastern Europe to experience mission closure as the mandate of the OSCE Mission to Croatia is nearing completion, most likely by 2008, if not sooner. This will be the first step in the "phase-out cycle" we are likely to witness in the next few years. Some of the OSCE's field operations in the region have already undertaken considerable downsizing, with more to come in the next two to three years. The exception of course will be Kosovo, where the Organization is likely to face the challenge of creating a mission structure independent of its present UNMIK pillar and with a new mandate, since the current mandate of the OSCE Mission in Kosovo will end with the adoption of a new UN Security Council Resolution.

A major challenge for the OSCE will be to continue to co-operate and co-ordinate its activities with other international organizations in the region. Again, Kosovo provides a good example of such co-operation and co-ordination. However, there are other areas for co-operation, many of which already exist and need to be expanded further. In particular, joint OSCE-EU activities will remain crucial, not only for South-eastern Europe but for the OSCE as an organization as well, as it allows the OSCE to draw on the EU's political and financial support. Almost half of the OSCE's participating States are EU members, and these provide more than 70 per cent of the

OSCE's core budget, while their extra-budgetary contributions are crucial for the implementation of many OSCE activities in the field, including in South-eastern Europe. Well-established and extensive mechanisms for co-operation already exist, both on the political level as well as on the levels of programmes and projects.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that even though the OSCE is likely to face a number of developments in the region – including the downsizing and potential closure of some of its field operations as well as a growing role in assisting other international actors in maintaining stability and security in the region – South-eastern Europe will always remain crucial for the OSCE when it comes to the Organization's capacity- and institution-building experience. It would also be right to emphasize here that OSCE missions are not intended to stay forever. When they were opened in the 1990s, they were only supposed to remain for two to five years. Nobody would have expected them to still be there a decade or more later. One of the crucial lessons learnt over the last fifteen years in South-eastern Europe is that the international community and governments and communities across the region must act together to embed peace and craft stronger institutions and societies. Another important lesson tells us that even the strongest endeavours to assist in building more democratic and just societies do not yield results if political will among those who are on the receiving side is lacking. Unfortunately, a shortage of political will continues to blight many states of South-eastern Europe.

It is important to note that the OSCE has not only stood by the governments and societies in South-eastern Europe in difficult times – past and present – but is firmly committed to seeing its engagement brought to conclusion when the time comes. This will, of course, entail the transfer of its institution- and capacity-building competencies to local ownership.