

The Future Impact of the OSCE: Business as Usual or Revitalization?

Of all of the regional international institutions in the northern hemisphere, none can equal the breadth of mandate or the number of participating States of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). Furthermore, no institution made a smoother transition from the Cold War into the post-Cold War era. Unlike NATO, the EU, or the Council of Europe, the OSCE accepted universal participation by all states located within its geographic region, and its enlargement did not require any encroachment into contested regions, as is the case with both NATO and the EU. This universality of participation contributes to its significance in contemporary global politics, but it also constitutes a weakness, as smaller, more homogeneous institutions often take priority in the minds of policymakers, especially where consensus is required to take action. Finally, the OSCE is unique in its comprehensive definition of security, which includes politico-military, economic and environmental, and human security.

In spite of its potential to be a major force in European security after the Cold War and its strong start in the 1990s, over the first decade of the 21st century, the OSCE has gradually been losing its prominence as a major actor within the overall “architecture” of European security. As of 2008, this constitutes a crisis for the institution as the OSCE faces a critical juncture: Over the next few years, it will likely either recede further to become an institution that focuses solely on “business as usual” in several “niches” for which it has already established a comparative advantage, or in the face of current challenges, especially in the security and human dimensions of its activities, it will revitalize its role as a central actor in European security. The next few years are likely to be critical for determining the direction in which the OSCE will turn.

The Challenges

There are many indicators of the declining role of the OSCE over the past decade. The last OSCE Summit attended by the heads of state or government from all participating States was held in Istanbul in 1999; throughout the previous decade, summits were usually held on a biennial basis, and virtually every summit produced important documents adding to the OSCE’s *acquis*. The OSCE budget has decreased from 212 million euros in 2000 to 164 million euros in 2008, a reduction of 23 per cent in nominal terms and an even greater decline in real terms. The last of the annual Ministerial Council Meet-

ings to adopt a consensus declaration was held in Portugal in 2002; beginning with the Netherlands Ministerial in 2003, these have been replaced by the Chairperson's statement of his or her "perception" of the results of the meeting rather than the usual consensus document reflecting the collective views of all participating States. Although the number of field missions has decreased only slightly since 2001 (due in part to the opening of a number of small missions in the Caucasus and Central Asia), the budgets and international staff for these activities have been cut roughly in half over seven years. Several states where missions are currently stationed have either asked to have them downgraded or closed altogether, as their presence is increasingly perceived within their own countries as a stigma. In short, political visibility, resources, consensus, and on-the-ground activities have declined or disappeared altogether during the first decade of the 21st century.

These facts lead to the question of why an organization that seemed to offer so much promise in the first decade after the Cold War has apparently lost so much steam since the turn of the century. Perhaps most importantly, the normative foundations upon which the CSCE was constructed at Helsinki in 1975 and reinforced and expanded at Paris and Copenhagen in 1990 and in Moscow in 1991, seem to have lost their force. As Gareth Evans, head of the International Crisis Group and former Australian foreign minister, observed at the 2008 Fall Meetings of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly in Toronto, the OSCE currently seems to be "punching below its weight".

Prior to the summer of 2008, there was a widespread perception that the greatest threats to security within the region, emanating primarily from inter-ethnic violence, were largely behind us. The conflicts that broke out in the Caucasus, Central Asia, and especially South-eastern Europe were generally shocking and threatening to peace and security. The wars in Bosnia, Croatia, and Kosovo, in particular, presented a fundamental threat to regional security, and these threats are now largely viewed as history. The OSCE's contribution to calming tensions and promoting post-conflict peacebuilding in these regions is broadly recognized, even if often undervalued by political elites. Newer challenges of terrorism and transborder trafficking that have taken centre stage since 9/11 are often perceived as better managed by other institutions. And the confidence-building measures at the core of Helsinki Basket I and the subsequent Vienna Documents were viewed by many as largely outdated in a world of enhanced transparency, with few overt signs of preparations for military aggression by one state against another anywhere in the region.

In the Caucasus and Central Asia, there was also a fairly widespread, if reluctant acceptance of the role of Russia as a stabilizing force throughout the former Soviet space, leading to the perception that Western Europe and the US no longer needed to be preoccupied with these regions, especially at a time when other global regions, most notably south-western Asia and the Middle East, were begging for attention. For better or worse, by early 2008,

the direct violence had largely ended in Chechnya, and the conflicts on the Russian periphery in Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova, and Georgia remained frozen, neither capable of resolution in spite of extensive OSCE efforts nor believed likely to break out again into large-scale, open violence. The declaration of independence by Kosovo in early 2008, feared by many as a possible spark for renewed violence in the Balkans, created diplomatic controversy but no overt fighting. In many quarters, this contributed to the illusion that the OSCE's success in conflict prevention might, indeed, make its role as a promoter of security largely obsolete in the near-term future. While some work in post conflict reconstruction still seemed desirable, many political elites believed that other institutions, especially the EU, could assume these functions more effectively than the OSCE. The OSCE therefore appeared to be losing its core operational mandate in the conflict prevention, management, and resolution field.

This complacency was dramatically shaken with the war in Georgia that broke out in August 2008, demonstrating persuasively that "frozen" conflicts may become "unfrozen", not only by their resolution, which has so far remained illusive, but also by becoming once again "hot", leading to substantial loss of life among innocent civilians as well as combatants. After growing weary of seemingly fruitless negotiations, the government of Georgian President Mikheil Saakashvili moved to assert its control over the region of South Ossetia, recognized at that time by all states as sovereign Georgian territory, though autonomous *de facto* since 1992. Georgian military action plunged the region into escalating violence for the second time since the break-up of the Soviet Union. It also proved to be a major challenge to the OSCE's normative *acquis*, not least to two core provisions of the "Decalogue" that served as the foundation for the 1975 Helsinki Final Act – namely "refraining from the threat or use of force" and the commitment to the "peaceful settlement of disputes." Furthermore, it occurred in spite of the presence of an OSCE mission in Georgia that had been mediating the dispute over the status of South Ossetia since its arrival in 1992, in the aftermath of fighting that had led to the *de facto* autonomy of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. Georgia chose not to take its concerns about sporadic outbreaks of violence and the possible infiltration of Russian military units into South Ossetia through the Raki Tunnel from Russia (North Ossetia) to the OSCE's Conflict Prevention Centre or Permanent Council, or to the UN Security Council as called for by the UN Charter; instead, the government of Georgia resorted to military force within the separatist region in apparent disregard for its commitments to the OSCE and to the UN.

Although the OSCE Mission to Georgia, ably headed by Ambassador Terhi Hakala of Finland, played a valuable role in post-conflict efforts to reduce tensions and restore order, in the run-up to the fighting, it was largely bypassed by the parties to the conflict. The OSCE role therefore changed quickly from its emphasis on proactive conflict prevention to reactive crisis

management. Staffed by only 36 international personnel, the OSCE Mission was incapable of doing anything meaningful to stop the escalation of violence once it was underway. Overlooking Georgia's failure to fulfil its commitments under OSCE norms and principles, many OSCE participating States, including many NATO states, not only failed to condemn these violations but in fact actively rewarded the Republic of Georgia with pledges of military and economic aid in response to the violence.

The Russian response also disregarded that country's commitment to the principles of the 1975 CSCE Helsinki Final Act, the 1990 Charter of Paris, and the Code of Conduct on Politico-Military Aspects of Security, adopted in Budapest in 1994. The movement of Russian armed forces, not only into South Ossetia, but into the other breakaway region of Abkhazia, as well as the decision to send Russian troops into previously uncontested regions of Georgia, clearly violated Russia's most fundamental commitments to OSCE principles. Principle 2 of the Helsinki Final Act calls on all participating States to "refrain from any manifestation of force for the purpose of inducing another participating State to renounce the full exercise of its sovereign rights. Likewise they will also refrain in their mutual relations from any act of reprisal by force." Therefore, even in response to provocations initiated on the Georgian side, the much wider set of reprisals undertaken by Russia disregarded these fundamental norms of peaceful conflict management. The subsequent unilateral recognition by the Russian Federation of the regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia as sovereign states also flies in the face of the third Helsinki principle, which states that participating States "will also refrain from any demand for, or act of, seizure and usurpation of part or all of the territory of any participating State".

In the immediate aftermath of violence, the role of the OSCE was minimized once again. Acting on behalf of the EU, President Nicolas Sarkozy of France took the lead in mediating a ceasefire, albeit an agreement filled with numerous ambiguities that led to considerable differences of interpretation afterwards. After the ceasefire was put into effect, the OSCE contributed 100 unarmed monitors to work alongside another 200 monitors supplied by the EU. However, again showing a disregard for its OSCE commitments, the Russian Federation prohibited those monitors from entering and undertaking observations on the territories of either South Ossetia or Abkhazia, even though this was necessary in order to clear up ambiguities about the events that sparked the violence, allegations by both sides of deliberate attacks upon civilians, as well as concerns about the treatment of ethnic minorities that remained in these two enclaves.

In addition to this decline in respect for OSCE norms in the security field, the normative consensus that developed within the OSCE in 1990-91 in the human dimension has also eroded since 2000. First, the emphasis on democratization that was universally embraced as communism collapsed throughout Eastern Europe has been widely questioned, and authoritarian

tendencies have remained or reappeared in many participating States. In Russia, early attempts at democratization became equated in the popular mind with anarchy – poverty, inequality, insecurity, and instability; and the trend towards decentralization within the Russian Federation seemed to pose new challenges to the Russian state's capacity to govern effectively. These developments led to a retrenchment of democratic institutions, often welcomed by popular majorities, and movement towards greater political centralization. In other post-Soviet states where democratization and liberalization had not advanced as far as in Russia, the retreat to greater centralization and authoritarianism has been less dramatic, but no less evident.

The great normative consensus that inspired the Copenhagen and Moscow documents of 1990-91 on the human dimension has thus largely evaporated, and, along with that consensus, support has also dwindled for the OSCE institutional structures that were created to implement those norms. Most clearly, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) has been the subject of controversy in recent years, especially concerning election monitoring. Instead of viewing ODIHR as helpful in establishing their democratic credentials, an increasing number of countries have come to view ODIHR observation of their elections as an unwarranted interference in their internal affairs. This was most pronounced in the failure of ODIHR and the Russian Federation to agree upon a formula for OSCE monitoring of the March 2008 presidential elections in Russia. Therefore, while some countries – most notably the United States – view ODIHR as the most important and successful of OSCE institutions, others – most notably Russia – would like to see its mandate substantially curtailed. Indeed, they would like to revert to the 1975 principle of non-intervention in the internal affairs of states, rejecting the updated principles of the 1991 Moscow Declaration regarding the right of OSCE States to monitor and facilitate compliance with human-dimension commitments by all participating States.

Similarly, though less dramatically, the prominent role of the High Commission on National Minorities has also been reduced. This is partly due to an issue of personality, as neither of the successors to the initial HCNM, Ambassador Max van der Stoep of the Netherlands, has exercised the same kind of prominent role that the original incumbent brought to this position with his active engagement throughout the region. Instead of focusing primarily on issues such as the rights of national minorities in newly emerging states, an issue that has receded though it has not disappeared, much of the focus has shifted to issues reflecting the historic legacy of ethnic discrimination in Europe, such as the rights of Roma and Sinti peoples.

In short, since 2000 the OSCE has been forced to retreat from its enthusiastic endorsement of liberal democracy, individual human rights, and the rights of persons belonging to minorities. The normative position that these were universal principles associated with good governance everywhere has been replaced in some quarters by a reversion to the principle of absolute

state sovereignty and the right of each state to manage its own internal affairs free of any external oversight. This collides with the normative commitment of those who believe that the human-rights principles constitute the distinctive normative cornerstone of the OSCE's concept of comprehensive security. The result has been a move away from the unquestioning embrace of liberal democracy and human rights. The OSCE has not reverted completely to the debate that was the focus of divisions during the last decade of the Cold War, especially during the CSCE Madrid Review Conference of 1980-83, when a disagreement about the relative emphasis on security versus human rights between East and West largely stalemated progress within the CSCE. There has, however, been a significant erosion of the post-Cold War consensus that has made agreement about basic principles and some concrete activities all but impossible to achieve. Without greater commitment to the OSCE's fundamental norms, the Organization may find itself facing great difficulties in assuming its proper role as a major actor in European security in the years ahead.

Explanations for the Current Crisis

The interest and commitment of the major parties that sustained the OSCE throughout its history have declined significantly during the first decade of the new century. This is due to a combination of factors. One is the pronounced tendency towards unilateralism in the foreign policies of both of the former superpowers. In the United States, the administration of President George W. Bush has consistently been critical of multilateral organizations, less of the OSCE than of the UN, but it has nonetheless been unwilling to devote budgetary resources or political attention to any multilateral organization that it cannot dominate. Furthermore, since 9/11, US attention has focused almost exclusively on the "war on terror" and its proclaimed battle grounds in Afghanistan and Iraq. Similarly, since taking power in Russia in 2000, President Vladimir Putin has also pursued a largely unilateralist policy, while taking umbrage at the fact that OSCE missions and ODIHR election monitoring have focused more extensively on regions "East of Vienna", which he believes fall in Russia's traditional "sphere of influence", rather than on the West. This has led the Russian government to favour substantial downsizing of OSCE field activities, reductions of their budgets, and a major revision of ODIHR's overall mandate to curtail what Putin perceives as its intrusive intervention in the internal affairs of Russia and other states in its "near abroad", most notably Ukraine, Georgia, and Kyrgyzstan. Russia also resisted attempts by the OSCE to insist upon its compliance with commitments to withdraw its troops from bases in the Moldovan region of Transdnistria and the Georgian region of Abkhazia. In short, the OSCE has largely ceased to serve any immediate, concrete Russian interests, and it has thus ceased to

be a centre of attention for Russian political elites. On matters where the security interests of the US and Russia intersect, such as on terrorist activities near Russia's borders, both have preferred to manage these issues bilaterally and in relative privacy, largely compartmentalizing them from the broader issues of regional security.

Finally, the European Union has become increasingly assertive on issues of European security, especially in response to the declining commitment by the two former superpowers in European security affairs. The effort to establish the credibility of its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) has often led it to take up activities previously undertaken, or that might better be performed, by the OSCE. For many years, EU and OSCE missions have operated side-by-side in countries such as the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Georgia, as well as in Kosovo, where both operate under UN authority. As the EU increased its institutional capacity in conflict prevention, post-conflict reconstruction, and election monitoring, it has begun to assume functions that have so far been at the core of OSCE activities. Often EU aid missions are able to offer more lucrative assistance to countries such as those in Central Asia and the Balkans than the OSCE is. Some EU officials therefore seem to believe that Brussels could readily supplant most of the central activities of the OSCE with greater political coherence and budgetary resources, and concern at this tendency has been noted by the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna. In spite of difficulties that the EU confronts in achieving consensus around important issues of foreign and security policy, the relative homogeneity of its membership in comparison with the OSCE seems to many Europeans to make it a satisfactory alternative to the latter, especially at a time when American and Russian unilateralism have made consensus within the larger transatlantic body even more difficult to realize.

In addition to the changing commitment of key participating States and regional institutions, the international context within which the OSCE operates has become increasingly difficult, due to several factors. First, the major post-Cold War European arms-control agreements have been severely weakened. Although their formal connection to the OSCE is only indirect, there remains a close relationship in both substance and operational aspects. Of particular significance is the fate of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE Treaty), signed by 30 of the 56 OSCE participating States at the Paris CSCE Summit in November 1990; this treaty equalized levels of heavy combat equipment between NATO and the Warsaw Treaty Organization (WTO). However, with the collapse of the WTO within a year of its signature, the CFE Treaty needed to adjust to the new military realities in the region. An Adapted CFE Treaty was therefore signed at the OSCE's Istanbul Summit in November 1999, which most importantly redefined the basis of force limitations in terms of national rather than alliance-wide ceilings. Only Russia and a few other countries have ratified this treaty, however,

as Western states have made ratification contingent on the removal of Russian military forces from Moldova (Transdnistria) and Georgia (Abkhazia). In response, the Russian Federation suspended its participation in the original CFE Treaty in December 2007, in effect undermining the conventional forces regime altogether.

This decision is likely to have few immediate consequences, as all parties are so strapped for resources or have so many other high priority concerns that they are unlikely to expand their conventional forces in Europe significantly beyond treaty limits in the near future, even in the absence of formal constraints. Over the longer term, however, this failure to reaffirm constraints on armaments now, at a time when few states perceive an immediate need to increase, could lead to far more difficult negotiations in the future when and if one or more signatory states have greater resources to spend on military hardware and perceive the need to build up their conventional forces further. While this is unlikely to lead to a resumption of the Cold War in the foreseeable future, a conventional arms race could make the present peace within Europe far more unstable than it has been since the mid-1980s. The collapse of conventional arms control also impacts the OSCE's Forum for Security Co-operation, where efforts to strengthen and expand existing confidence- and security-building measures have largely come to a halt and the existing regime under the Vienna Document 1999 might also lose its import. In short, the future of the OSCE cannot be separated from the future of continent-wide arms control, and the collapse of the latter is a poor omen for the future of the former.

Other conflicts in the sphere of military security have spilled over to affect the OSCE. These include Russian objections to the eastward enlargement of NATO, especially its incorporation of former Soviet republics – such as the Baltic states, which have already joined NATO – and, even more significantly, the prospect of entry by Ukraine and Georgia, which many Russian officials perceive as creating a potential security threat in Russia's "near abroad". Similarly, the US decision to establish bases in new NATO member states Bulgaria and Romania has created security concerns in Russia, as NATO "encirclement" moves closer and closer to the Russian heartland and well into former Soviet satellite states. Finally, the US plan to build radar stations in Poland and the Czech Republic has created tensions with Russia. Although these bases are ostensibly intended to track long-range Iranian missiles fired towards Western Europe or North America, Russian leaders tend to perceive these new installations as the first step towards an eventual deployment of a "thick" ballistic missile defence shield directed against Russian ICBMs. Although there was some likelihood that a new US president might scale back those activities perceived to be most provocative by Russia after taking office in January 2009, it is likely that the Russian actions in Georgia in August 2008 will make that politically very difficult. While none of these issues directly affects the OSCE mandate, they provide an overall political

climate that creates tensions among OSCE participating States, undermines the existing Basket I commitments in the field of politico-military security, and makes consensus on new measures that might strengthen and close the existing gaps in the European conventional arms-control and confidence-building regime virtually impossible to achieve.

The Current OSCE Agenda: "Business as Usual"

Given these obstacles to consensus and co-operation, the OSCE has proceeded by engaging in "business as usual", pursuing an agenda of important, but generally low profile activities that create minimal controversy, while holding the institution together until a new consensus can be found. Most of these take place within the various units of the Vienna-based Secretariat and in the field missions, below the political "radar screen" of high-level policy makers in the participating States. A review of these activities indicates engagement by the OSCE in a number of significant but largely unknown tasks in spite of its inability to come to grips with many of the fundamental issues of regional security that provided its *raison d'être* during its first 25 years.

One recent effort to bring more attention to the OSCE has been advocated by the United States, which has proposed making use of the Organization's functional expertise to enhance border controls on the northern frontier of Afghanistan. Since Afghanistan is a high priority issue for the US, the US Mission to the OSCE believes that getting the OSCE involved in an important activity there will raise its profile, especially in the US Congress and the White House. This in turn might spill over into greater attention to the OSCE's contributions in other areas. One aspect of this proposal is largely uncontroversial and consistent with past OSCE practice, namely to assist the three Central Asian states (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) with borders on Afghanistan to enhance controls on their own side of the border. This would make good use of past OSCE experience in training border guards to reduce illegal transit across these long and rugged borders by teaching them skills such as identifying forged documents, discriminating between legitimate travel versus trafficking, and denying known terrorists entry to the region.

The more controversial aspect of the US proposal, however, involves training Afghan border guards within Afghanistan, preferred by authorities in Kabul. This would set a precedent by involving the OSCE directly in an activity "out of area", on the territory of a non-participating state. Moreover, concern has been expressed by some delegations that this could further drag the OSCE into the Afghan morass, possibly tarnishing rather than refurbishing its image if it becomes identified with another project in the increasingly chaotic conditions in Afghanistan, and also conceivably involving high risks for OSCE personnel. Finally, with so many actors involved in Afghanistan, it

is not clear that this relatively minor role for the OSCE in the overall complex of operations on the ground would receive sufficient attention to generate enhanced political support for the Organization in Washington or other capitals. Furthermore, many states and OSCE officials complain that the US is pushing the OSCE into this new task while simultaneously cutting its financial support, making demands on the Organization without providing the resources necessary to carry them out. Overall, this effort constitutes a potential diversion of the OSCE's energy from meeting the needs within the region it has traditionally served, thereby further diluting the Organization's efforts.

At the same time, the OSCE continues to perform several primary responsibilities that it undertook in the Balkans in the previous decade. Foremost among these is the OSCE Mission in Kosovo. Despite Kosovo's recent declaration of statehood, it is still not recognized by the vast majority of the world's states, including many OSCE participating States. As Kosovo's international status remains precarious, so does the situation for many enclaves within the region inhabited predominantly by members of the Serbian minority, who fear for their security as the international presence in Kosovo recedes. This is one location where the OSCE's extensive experience in conflict prevention is desperately needed, and no other institution is likely to be able to step in to replace it. Particularly as the role of the UN declines, the OSCE's presence and expertise is likely to be more needed than ever. The same largely holds true for Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although substantial progress has been made in many areas, this country remains fragile and still depends heavily on an international presence. As the function of the High Representative is in the process of being revised and downgraded, so the role of the large OSCE Mission on the ground becomes more central to Bosnia's continued stability. Although Republika Srpska did not try to secede from Bosnia and Herzegovina following Kosovo's declaration of independence, as many feared it might, it remains a largely Bosnian Serb-dominated region that is not fully integrated with the Bosniak-Croat Federation.

Furthermore, the outbreak of violence in Georgia should serve as a reminder that other conflicts within the region could flair up as well. There is a possibility of violence arising anew in Crimea, the source of a movement on the part of ethnic Russians to secede from Ukraine in the early 1990s. This conflict was settled in the mid-1990s in large part thanks to the good offices of the then OSCE Mission to Ukraine and the HCNM, supported by Russian President Boris Yeltsin's efforts to overrule supporters of Crimean secessionism in the Russian State Duma. Presently, however, as Ukraine moves closer to entry into NATO, there is no guarantee that the current Russian government will act with such caution. Crimea is just one of several regions within the OSCE domain where conflict prevention remains an important objective, especially since conflict between the two largest post-Soviet states, Russia and Ukraine, could have even greater global consequences than the

other conflicts that sprang up on post-Soviet space in the early 1990s or than the Russian-Georgian conflict of 2008.

Finally, the so-called “frozen conflicts” remain far from settled, though unlike the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, the unsatisfactory status quo appears to have become more or less routinized in Transdnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh. These conflicts have frustrated the OSCE for more than 15 years as all efforts to find mediated solutions have failed. However, there is little doubt that a success by even one of the OSCE missions in brokering a solution to one of these conflicts would considerably reduce tensions in the region and would go a long way towards re-establishing the reputation of the OSCE as a valuable instrument of conflict management. The resolution of these conflicts requires considerable patience, but in all cases the underlying issues are resolvable with sufficient political will by the parties to the conflict and their external supporters, especially with the aid of OSCE mediation.

The OSCE is particularly well suited to play this role of mediator for several reasons. First, it is not an “outsider” intervening in the affairs of states, but it represents an institution in which all of the participating States involved in these conflicts are represented. Second, these are not conflicts that can readily be settled by other institutions such as the EU. The central involvement of both Russia and the United States in these conflicts means that any resolution requires their participation, and the OSCE provides an institutional context in which they could, if they so agreed, work together quietly to find workable solutions.

In addition to its important responsibilities in the field of regional conflict resolution, the OSCE continues to play a role on a number of important, if less glamorous “niche” issues. These include:

- The Action against Terrorism Unit within the OSCE Secretariat has attempted to raise awareness of terrorist threats within the region, to build the capacity of participating States to respond to terrorism, to identify and fill gaps in both the legal and operational efforts to reduce terrorist threats, to enhance cross-border co-operation (e.g. by restricting terrorist movements across international borders and strengthening the capacity of national police forces to identify and combat terrorist threats), and, crucially, to assist states in assuring that human rights do not become unduly trampled as a consequence of anti-terrorist activities.
- The Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings has engaged in extensive efforts to enhance capacity and create greater co-ordination across international borders to reduce trafficking of human beings, especially women and children, to serve as “sex slaves”, in forced labour, and other servile roles.
- The Forum for Security Co-operation has taken the lead in the development of tools for enhancing transparency and assisting in the limitation

of small arms and light weapons (SALW) within the OSCE region. While most global attention has been focused on weapons of mass destruction (WMD) and heavy conventional armaments, in today's world, most violent deaths occur as a consequence of the use of small arms and light weapons. Here the OSCE has produced a "best practices" guide, as well as concrete training and assistance on the ground, to strengthen national controls for the manufacture and distribution of SALW, to enhance transparency concerning the export and import of SALW, to manage and safeguard stockpiles of these weapons to prevent them from falling into the wrong hands, to identify and safely dispose of surplus or deteriorating SALW and components that may provide environmental as well as security hazards to the public.

These examples illustrate several valuable OSCE initiatives in recent years in response to increased threats to security from non-traditional sources. Although these "niche" activities seldom achieve the publicity or political salience of activities such as conflict management in the Balkans, they do illustrate a range of security issues where the OSCE continues to make a unique contribution. It would be significantly detrimental to European regional security if these functions were no longer provided by an institution with such a broad geographic scope. Therefore, even if it is constrained to conducting "business as usual" in these "niche" areas, the OSCE should continue to have a valuable role to play in the near-term future.

Challenges for the Future: Can the OSCE be Revitalized?

Given the changes in the international security environment, domestic politics in several major OSCE participating States (especially Russia and the US) and institutions (i.e. the EU), and given the growing ability of other institutions to assume some of these tasks, some commentators have suggested that the OSCE has outlived its usefulness and should be cut back to focus just on these "niche" issues; a few have even suggested that it should perhaps be disbanded altogether. Thus, perhaps the most difficult challenge that the OSCE faces involves a diminishing sense of its relevance at the political level. The major contribution of the OSCE to regional security has been its role in conflict prevention and management through its comprehensive definition of security, involving security for states, groups, and individuals. Furthermore, security for the OSCE includes good governance, economic well-being, the avoidance of environmental degradation, and respect for human rights, as well as traditional security against armed violence.

Even when it contributes towards these goals, however, it is difficult for the OSCE to claim credit and to receive the recognition that it rightly deserves. These goals are so broad and so many actors are involved, that it is

impossible to separate out the contribution of any one institution, even one as large as the OSCE. In addition, when conflict prevention and management institutions are successful, “nothing happens”. And “nothing” goes unreported in the media, unnoticed in national capitals and among the general public, and even in academic research. By its very definition, therefore, the more successful the OSCE is, the less attention it draws. And when it fails to attract the attention of key policy-makers, it loses the political and material support so necessary for its continued success. In spite of extensive and well-intended efforts to change this reality, the OSCE has so far been unable to escape from this central dilemma. No matter what it does, it is not likely to achieve visibility comparable to that of the UN, NATO, or the EU. This is not always harmful, however, as it allows the OSCE to go about its work quietly and therefore often more flexibly and effectively than other institutions, whose work is often debated in the media and in policy circles. At the same time, it complicates its ability to achieve the political salience and level of material support that it requires to be revitalized as a major actor in European security.

It does not follow, however, that the OSCE has therefore lost its entire *raison d'être*, even though its normative and political consensus has certainly eroded. There are several key factors that should be kept in mind when considering the potential role of the OSCE in the near-term future:

Many of the regions of conflict with which the OSCE has worked since the early 1990s have not been fully stabilized, and there is still extensive work to do on the ground to try to promote stable peace, rather than just maintaining an unstable peace, with an absence of overt violence, as prevails today. This includes the “frozen conflicts” in Nagorno-Karabakh and Moldova; resolving the issues that produced the recent outbreak of violent conflict in Georgia; managing conflicts that appear to have been resolved but could reappear, including Chechnya and Crimea; preventing renewed outbreaks of violence in regions that have experienced the legacy of war but have subsequently returned to relative peace, including Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Croatia, and Tajikistan; building stable peace in regions where conflict prevention has thus far been relatively successful but where continued attention is necessary to prevent existing tensions from exploding into violence, including the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan. No other institution has the same level of on-the-ground experience in all of these regions as the OSCE, whose missions and other field activities provide a continuous international presence, and no other institution has the same legitimacy to become involved in conflicts within these countries, since all are OSCE participating States. None of these states presently belongs to NATO or the EU, though several are candidates for membership, and any involvement by either of these institutions is likely to be viewed by local political elites and publics as “outside” intervention in their internal affairs. Therefore, even though the period of seemingly conta-

gious violence that characterized the 1990s appears to have receded, it is still too early to assume that the entire OSCE region has become a zone of “democratic peace”, and it is clear that further efforts by an institution such as the OSCE dedicated to supporting the growth of a regional zone of peace are still very much needed.

In addition to these past conflicts that continue to require attention, the OSCE has identified some of the new security issues that plague the region and has begun to play a key role in responding to them. Examples of these issues were identified in the fourth section of this contribution. They include tracking terrorist activity transnationally and strengthening border security against movement throughout the region of terrorists, traffickers, and other criminals; enhancing the ethnic, national, and gender diversity of police and border guards and improving their capacity to pursue their tasks more effectively while also respecting human rights and the rights of persons belonging to minorities; expanding arms control by enhancing transparency and confidence-building, including small arms and light weapons; combating trafficking in human beings, especially of women and children for prostitution or forced labour; combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, anti-Muslim attitudes and behaviours and other forms of religious discrimination. These and many similar “soft” security issues remain as threats to peace and security throughout the region, and a multilateral effort to deal with these problems is essential if they are to be managed effectively.

The OSCE is uniquely qualified to respond to many of these issues in part because of its diverse participation across so many states and such a large portion of the northern hemisphere. The fact that the United States, the Russian Federation, and the European Union all participate within the OSCE gives it a framework in which issues affecting or affected by all three major actors may be discussed, debated, and even at times reconciled, without all of the complexities of achieving consensus in a global organization like the UN. Russia will be excluded for the foreseeable future from the other European regional institutions, and the US has no interest in or prospect of joining the EU. Yet almost all of the issues noted above involve one or both of these major powers; both are affected by virtually everything that occurs in the region, and both share responsibility for at least some of the problems it faces. In short, because they are part of the problem, they need to be part of the solution. With all of its limitations, the OSCE provides a unique forum for these major regional and global powers to deliberate, negotiate, and resolve their differences within a multilateral context, in an environment that is sufficiently removed from the limelight of public attention that issues can readily be dealt with before parties dig in their heels, causing the issues to become politically charged and thus far more difficult to resolve in mutually beneficial ways.

The OSCE can and should be more than a “talking shop”, but even that function should not be underrated when it comes to evaluating its utility as a

forum for dialogue among the United States, Russia, and Europe. This role can only be revitalized by determined leadership from the EU, Russia, and especially the United States. When Barack Obama is inaugurated as US President in January 2009, he should make it a priority to meet with Russian and EU leaders to revitalize the OSCE at the highest political level, including a commitment to holding an OSCE Summit in Athens in 2009, ten years after the last summit meeting. Structural reform of the OSCE is far less important at this point in time than a renewed commitment by the major participating States to reaffirm and enlarge the Organization's normative foundations and to enhance broad compliance with the existing, extensive normative *acquis*.

The OSCE needs to enhance its arms-control agenda. Russia and many other participating States have criticized the Organization for its focus almost exclusively on the human dimension, while neglecting the security dimension, and indeed they are correct to the extent that human rights has been virtually the sole focus of the United States within the OSCE for many years, especially since 2001. Conversely, Russia under Putin has tried to subordinate the human dimension of the OSCE and to narrow the institution's focus primarily to politico-military rather than comprehensive security. The strength of the OSCE's normative foundation, however, is its explicit linkage of human rights and other human-dimension activities with concrete measures to enhance security at all levels. This linkage has been broken largely by recent disputes between the US and Russia, each of which has emphasized its preferred "basket" at the expense of all the other dimensions of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security. The centrepiece of this arms-control regime is the CFE Treaty. It is essential that the parties move rapidly towards either the ratification of the already-signed Adapted CFE Treaty or, alternatively, open negotiations to produce an updated treaty that responds more effectively to the present situation rather than the conditions of 1999, when the Adapted CFE Treaty was signed in Istanbul. It is, of course, important that Russia live up to its Istanbul commitments to remove its troops from all participating States that request their departure, but this cannot be the sole issue of concern. It is essential to stabilize not only region-wide conventional armaments, but also local rivalries that could lead to violence, and thus to extend the area of application beyond the present 30 signatories to include as many of the 56 participating OSCE states as possible. Revising and ratifying the Adapted CFE Treaty should thus be a major priority to be completed at an OSCE Summit in December 2009.

Conclusion

In summary, while continuing to pursue "business as usual" on "niche" issues around which a substantial consensus exists, if the OSCE is to fulfil its mandate provided by the 1990 Charter of Paris to promote "a new era of democ-

racy, peace and unity in Europe”, it must reaffirm and revitalize its normative core and its unique set of activities that link security, good governance, and human rights within a single comprehensive framework. Unless it can reaffirm its commitment to that vision, the OSCE may continue with “business as usual”, but that business is likely to decline in importance, and the highest priority issues are likely to be taken over by other institutions. However, the OSCE vision – its normative core – is deeper and more far-reaching than that of any other comparable institution, and only by rediscovering that vision and revitalizing the functions of the OSCE can it take its appropriate place as a major actor capable of making a unique and significant contribution to peace and security in the broad region from “Vancouver to Vladivostok”.