

Bulgaria and the OSCE

Bulgaria is one of the countries that signed the Final Act of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe in Helsinki in 1975; thus it is a founding member of the CSCE. Until the changes of 1989, Bulgaria followed without reservation the guidelines of Soviet foreign policy. Thus it hardly makes sense to talk about an independent Bulgarian position towards the CSCE during that time. The country sent the requisite high-level delegations to all CSCE follow-up meetings, i.e. to Belgrade and Madrid, where full agreement with big brother's position, expected and desired by Moscow, was invariably forthcoming. Big brother repaid this debt by ensuring that Bulgaria was not too sharply attacked for its human rights offences against ethnic Turks in violation of the Helsinki Final Act. Ironically, it was a CSCE forum on environmental policy which gave the final shove when the hated Bulgarian dictator Todor Zhivkov fell from power. The excessive behaviour of the police towards dissidents and environmentalists during a meeting of the CSCE forum in October 1989 and the huge demonstration of dissidents and environmentalists which followed showed the world that the days of the totalitarian regime, in Bulgaria as elsewhere, were numbered.

The change which began with Zhivkov's fall on 10 November 1989 represented a new beginning for Bulgarian foreign and security policy and, hence, for the Bulgarian position with respect to the CSCE. For a country like Bulgaria, whose post-war development was characterized by the division of Europe, the Cold War, membership in the Warsaw Pact and COMECON as well as by mute observance of Soviet instructions, this new beginning represented the first opportunity after the Second World War to pursue an independent foreign policy oriented solely towards national interests.

After the Changeover - between Hope and Disappointment

The redefinition of Bulgaria's national interests began immediately after the changeover and aimed, as its ultimate goal, at full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic political, economic and security structures. Transitional difficulties, the sharp polarization of Bulgarian society and especially the conflict-laden surrounding region, which includes the Balkans with their enormous crisis potential, pushed this objective into an indefinite future.

Great hopes were still attached to the CSCE's 1990 Summit in Paris at which the Bulgarian delegation was led by Dr Zhelev, the country's first democratically

elected President. The CFE Treaty, which was signed there, and the later dissolution of the Warsaw Pact and COMECON were the most important developments in European security policy during the first years after the fall of the Berlin Wall. But they were unable to defuse the already threatening crisis in the Balkans. Although Bulgaria was finally free of the economic and military alliances that had been forced upon it, it searched in vain for new and dependable partners. The region in which the Yugoslavia war had begun in 1991 was incapable of attracting investors or potential allies. The EU, which was distancing itself, along with the powerlessness of the CSCE, demonstrated to the neighbouring countries of the Balkans how premature it was to hope for a collective security system in which the CSCE might play a key role. The early years of the war in former Yugoslavia were years of disappointment and of a sense of isolation and neglect, for Bulgaria as for others.

From CSCE to OSCE

The value attached to the CSCE by politicians and experts had reached its low point. At the CSCE's 1994 Summit in Budapest Bulgaria was again represented at the highest level. It welcomed the CSCE's transformation into the OSCE but, impelled by a sense of reality, began to move towards more efficient organizations such as NATO. In Bulgaria, as elsewhere, a conviction gradually came to the fore that an effective security system for all of Europe would only make sense if the cornerstones of the system were - in addition to the OSCE - the WEU and above all NATO. This was confirmed by the Bulgarian Parliament when in December 1993 it passed an almost unanimous declaration favouring Bulgaria's future membership in the WEU and NATO.

By the mid-nineties Bulgaria was already present in many European and Euro-Atlantic structures. It was admitted to the Council of Europe in 1992 and from 1994 on worked actively in the "Partnership for Peace" initiative; in addition, it became a member of the North Atlantic Cooperation Council and an Associate Partner of the WEU. When the Europe Agreement entered into force on 1 February 1995 Bulgaria also became an associate member of the EU. Thus the time when it had relied solely on its OSCE membership was finally past. This trend underlined Bulgaria's European and Euro-Atlantic orientation while the OSCE continued to play a perceptible but in reality somewhat subordinate role. In 1995 and 1996, at the time of the socialist government in Bulgaria, there was a brief revival of interest in the OSCE and in the extension of its responsibilities as an alternative to the eastward enlargement of NATO; it was noteworthy but had little influence on the overall trend. The internal debate over a new OSCE or a new NATO for Bulgaria really represented an attempt to make domestic political use of the problem rather than the expression of a serious intention to

look at the security prospects of the country in a different way. The result, however, was that there was no clear position on the security priorities of the country - a lack which damaged Bulgaria's image and its reputation as a dependable future strategic partner of the West in the Balkans.

With regard to Bulgaria's OSCE activities during this period, the OSCE seminar on "The Role of Trans-European Infrastructure for the Stability and Co-operation in the Black Sea Region", held in Sofia in November 1995, deserves mention. Bulgaria also took an active part in the discussions on working out the Comprehensive Security Model for the 21st Century. The results of the OSCE Summit in Lisbon in December 1996, which the Bulgarian delegation attended for the third time under President Zhelev, were very positively received in Sofia. Bulgaria attaches particular importance to the OSCE's future activities in the Balkans for the stabilization of the post-Dayton peace regime.

Bulgaria in the OSCE - New Tasks Ahead

The solution of the political crisis in February 1997 and the results of the early parliamentary elections in April 1997 have clarified Bulgaria's orientation with regard to security policy. On 17 February the Bulgarian government had already decided to apply for membership in NATO. Thus the cornerstones of Bulgarian foreign and security policy were laid once and for all. Even though the country was not one of the invited candidates for membership at the NATO Summit in Madrid in July 1997 it entertains high hopes for a possible second wave of enlargement in 1999. Sofia is convinced that eliminating the enormous crisis potential in the region will require stable and dependable security partners. The best partners, however, are alliance partners. Hence Bulgaria's strong desire to make its contribution as a NATO member to the transformation of the region into a peaceful and economically prosperous integral part of Europe.

This goal also opens up new possibilities for more active Bulgarian co-operation with the OSCE, particularly in connection with the OSCE's Balkan initiatives. The OSCE, as an instrument of preventive diplomacy and of regional stabilization and co-operation, is ideal as a supplement to the activities of IFOR and SFOR and for carrying out the civilian portions of the Dayton Agreements. The close co-operation between NATO and the OSCE in the Balkans can serve as a model for the future approach to conflicts anywhere in the OSCE area which put security at risk.

Bulgaria can play a part in this co-operation and wishes to do so. All existing and possible sources of conflict in the Balkans should be included in this co-operation, not just Bosnia and Herzegovina. Along with the successful mission to help prepare and carry out parliamentary elections in Albania there are similar ones, such as monitoring the elections in Serbia, and more important (and,

hence, more difficult) tasks such as the long-term Mission to Kosovo, Sandjak and Vojvodina. In a region with as many minority problems as the Balkans have, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities also has his hands full. And, finally, the problem of OSCE participation for the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia has to be solved. Bulgaria can help with all of these tasks - with advice and action, with experts who know the region and its languages extremely well and also with certain mediation services. The success of the Security Model for the next century will depend, among other things, on developments in the Balkans. As a Balkan country, a candidate for NATO membership and a founding member of the CSCE, Bulgaria is ready to do everything in its power to contribute substantially to this success.