

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe - Its Development and Prospects

The Current Position of the OSCE in the International Environment of Europe

During the quarter-century of its existence, the CSCE/OSCE has undergone a substantial evolution, both in terms of form and organizational structures and in the range and substance of its operations. At the opening stage, from the mid-seventies through the eighties, the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe was above all an instrument of what might be termed conference diplomacy, supplementing the two-way diplomatic channels linking the two rival politico-military blocs. It also served as a venue for dialogue and endeavours aimed at cushioning the impact of the division of Europe, especially by way of creating for the entire CSCE area common value systems and political "rules of the game".

The role and position of the CSCE changed dramatically in the late eighties and the early nineties when the bipolar alignment of international relations fell apart under the impact of stormy, historical democratization processes and political and socio-economic transformations sweeping through Central Europe, to be replaced by a multipolar set-up. The advent of this period of transition gave rise to many doubts and questions regarding the possibility of survival under the new geopolitical and geo-strategic conditions of a CSCE system created under the conditions of the Cold War and the division of the continent.

That was a daunting challenge, but the CSCE resolved to address it. In 1990, in Paris, a Charter for a New Europe was adopted, setting in train the process of adjustment of CSCE structures and mechanisms to the altered conditions of Europe's international environment, a process that was to unfold alongside the ongoing search for the Organization's proper place in the pan-European security system. This process has largely continued to this very day.

The Charter of Paris, subsequently supplemented by the decisions of the Helsinki, Budapest and Lisbon "Summits", re-directed the CSCE's endeavours towards conflict prevention, the promotion of democracy and broadly defined human rights, and the strengthening of the military order in Europe.

In December 1994 the CSCE was transformed into the OSCE to highlight its new functions, emphasizing the need for more actual operations on the ground, much needed under the new international conditions.

The present position of the OSCE in the international environment of Europe is best defined by a range of co-existing factors, both subjective (prompted by the Organization itself) and objective (existing outside the Organization). The factors in question include in particular: the area covered by actions and interests of the OSCE, the role of the OSCE as an institution of European security, and the impact of processes conducive to the opening up to the East of certain other organizations.

The Area

Today the OSCE is the only pan-European organization that has been extended to include very important trans-Atlantic and - to a certain extent - Euro-Asian dimensions. The geographic scope of OSCE interests now covers virtually the entire northern hemisphere. The sheer size of this operational area, perceived by some as the main source of the Organization's weakness, in fact forms the sound footing of its potential successes and effectiveness, thanks both to its pan-European nature and the genuine equality of its participating States. Moreover, this extended coverage may be helpful in assessing the nature of all kinds of possible threats to Europe's security from beyond the continent.

The enlargement of the operational area of the OSCE has also greatly influenced the prioritizing of the Organization's objectives. Although the basic goals of the OSCE have remained unchanged (despite the undeniable changes that have taken place in the political context of these goals) the new operational outreach has prompted the emergence of a catalogue of new challenges and problems for the Organization. Prominent among them are democratization processes in five countries of Central Asia that need to be helped and strengthened to achieve stability.

The OSCE: The Security-Promoting Institution

Security - the factor defining the Organization's position in the international environment of Europe - is intimately linked with the aforementioned area factor. The enhancement over the past several years of the OSCE as an organization working its way towards the maintenance and consolidation of European security anchored in common principles and values is the result of the vigorous growth of the Organization's circle of participants since the early nineties. In 1995 the OSCE became a forum for discussions on a new European security order.

We are all confident that the range and depth of the OSCE's expertise in preventive diplomacy makes it practically indispensable. However, the OSCE should see to it that European security systems are spared the pain of developing excessive rigidity. Being by nature a weaker party, the OSCE cannot take on the task of co-ordinating and overseeing those organizations that command both a military capacity and what is known as "hard guarantees" of security (NATO), wield political clout, are established on a proper financial footing (European Union) or, for that matter, have at their disposal legislative measures and occupy the moral high ground to boot (Council of Europe). The current position of the OSCE essentially stems from its active search for a model of co-operation between different organizations - incidentally, in areas other than security as well - that would keep partners out of one another's way while strengthening the complementary nature of their respective pursuits and endeavours. The OSCE can be particularly helpful in sounding early warnings and defusing conflicts, while pushing hard for democratization and respect for human rights.

One cannot overrate the importance of the OSCE in urging the need for and overseeing the observance of a whole range of disarmament agreements and arms control treaties in Europe, including the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) and the Treaty on Open Skies. Its importance also lies in serving as the venue for negotiations designed to hammer out new decisions in these fields. The OSCE's position is further bolstered by its splendid record in the realm of confidence- and security-building measures (CSBM).

The Enlargement of the European Union and NATO

It takes no great perspicacity to see that the enlargement of the European Union and NATO as well as the processes taking place within these (and other) organizations and institutions are influencing relations between these structures and the OSCE and, consequently, the performance of the Organization itself and its ability to discharge its obligations as well. The Organization continues also to be a hostage to all sorts of processes occurring inside other international organizations. As long as the countries of Central Eastern and Eastern Europe keep integrating with Western European and Euro-Atlantic organizations, and as long as organizations like the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, the NATO-Russia Permanent Joint Council or, for that matter, the NATO-Ukraine Commission go on refining their operations, the OSCE will not significantly reposition itself vis-à-vis these organizations and institutions. That may pose certain problems for the current work of the OSCE and also hamper the search for compromise in the work on a future

model of European security and in negotiations on the adaptation of the CFE Treaty or on a new generation of the Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures.

The OSCE in the Areas of Early Warning and of Conflict Prevention and Solution

Preventive diplomacy as well as conflict prevention and solution are today the key areas of the OSCE's operations, intimately linked with the protection of human rights.

Regional conflicts breaking out within the OSCE region, notably in the former USSR and Yugoslavia, constitute the paramount threat to the success of historical transformations, to common values and to stability in the entire European continent.

As long ago as the early nineties the CSCE began to specialize in broadly construed preventive diplomacy. However, the difficulties resulting from the pace of change in the international environment, a lack of political will on the part of national governments, and the absence of a coherent vision of the Conference's activities combined to undermine this aspect of its mission. The war in the former Yugoslavia is a case in point.

Today the OSCE has at its disposal a wide array of political and diplomatic instruments which enable it to embark upon and carry through effective actions to maintain or restore peace. These especially include all kinds of missions in conflict-prone or conflict-torn regions; Personal Representatives of the OSCE Chairman-in-Office, appointed to handle conflicts with a view to their solution; peacekeeping operations; and the like. The protracted presence of the Organization at a number of flashpoints has become proof of the OSCE's expertise in crisis-combating diplomacy. Through operations of its own missions on the ground, it can discover and define problems and possible areas of tension very early on, giving both the Organization itself and other relevant institutions enough time to take appropriate action. The missions are also very useful in helping with the building of democratic institutions.

The evolution of the OSCE has given rise to a whole host of institutions and organs responsible for regional stability, prevention and/or solving of conflicts and minimizing their consequences. The list of these institutions includes: the Office of the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, the Conflict Prevention Centre, the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights - the latter with only indirect links to preventive diplomacy - and the Representative on Freedom of the Media. The quiverful of measures available to the OSCE further includes the political and diplo-

matic commitment of the Organization's main bodies (Chairman-in-Office, Troika, Secretary General).

We do realize that the OSCE's current position and role in the early warning as well as in the conflict-prevention-and-solution systems leave a lot to be desired. However, there is ample evidence at hand to support the belief that the past several years have seen substantive progress in this field of endeavour. A fundamental problem awaiting solution, which might still turn out to be a blessing in disguise, is the record of possibly useful measures, developed by the OSCE, but so far never put to the test, that might prove their worth on the ground. Hence the need to generate the political will on the part of national governments to mount common actions aimed, ideally, at conflict resolution.

Another reason for the recurring signs of the OSCE's weakness is its traditional policy orientation towards preventing conflicts between states, which are international law-makers just as is the United Nations, while putting lower priority on, for example, civil wars in the traditional meaning of the term. However, it is not inter-state relations but mass violations of human rights and the democratic deficit that generate the kind of crises that send shock waves through entire regions.

In this context, the OSCE is confronted with the novel issue of solidarity. It is our desire that this word, which carries a wealth of meaning and in the eighties both underpinned and epitomized Poland's struggle for full sovereignty and democracy, should spread to the realm of European relations as well. For there is a powerful case to be made here for solidarity with weaker partners, whose independence, sovereignty and democracy - our common values - need assistance and protection, for endorsing the application of the universal norms of the United Nations and the OSCE, and, last but not least, for solidarity in the face of displays of hegemonic attitudes in international relations, coupled with contempt for common principles and values.

Throughout its chairmanship of the OSCE Poland has highlighted the role and significance of preventive diplomacy and its relevance for the early-warning system first and foremost. We are particularly keen on improving this system as much as possible, and it is with this in mind that we have been mobilizing the efforts of the Organization's institutions. Considerable attention should also be focused on the strengthening and expanding of all forms of the OSCE's complementary co-operation with international organizations responsible for European security.

The Human Dimension

The "human dimension" has for a long time been the mainstay of the concept of broad, co-operative security first advanced by the OSCE. For the maintenance of peace, conflict prevention and efforts to ensure stability are inseparably linked with respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, democracy and the rule of law. The experience of the past few years fully bears this out.

Crucial for the development of the OSCE's "human dimension" is the principle, first spelt out in 1991 in the Document of the Moscow Meeting of the Conference on the Human Dimension, that the observance or violation of human rights is a matter of direct concern to all OSCE participating States, and that individual states may not assert unlimited prerogatives in respect of these issues. This proposition forms both the basis and the rationale of the OSCE's involvement in all situations where human rights - whether individual or collective - are breached or violated. Poland, the current Chairman of the Organization, is of the opinion that this is an area where there is a need for further improvements and modifications if the requirements of the OSCE are to be fully met.

It is worth highlighting at this juncture the importance and role of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) active in the protection of human and civil rights. These organizations should become an integral part of the OSCE's efforts to further the observance of human rights. It must be stressed that even at this stage the OSCE can rely on these organizations' experience and dedication when it comes to alerting world public opinion to instances of human rights abuses or violations. NGOs also have a good record of coming to the aid of the victims of such outrages.

Ever since the peaceful transformations that began in our country in 1989 when Poland rejoined the family of democratic states in Europe, we have been taking advantage of each and every opportunity to demonstrate our country's attachment to and support for the "human dimension"-related activities of the OSCE. This found its expression in - among other things - the opening in Warsaw of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (also remembered under its earlier name of Office for Free Elections). Today also, when Poland holds the chairmanship of the Organization, the "human dimension" figures prominently on our list of priorities.

From our perspective, the protection of human rights needs an efficient system of mutually supportive institutions. It needs especially the Council of Europe, the European Union and a whole host of regional organizations. Good co-ordination of common endeavours aimed at strengthening the protection of human rights should be at the heart of the OSCE's work.

The same also applies to the need to impart specific meaning to the notion of "indivisibility of European security". A major political advantage of the OSCE is its informal character, which provides the flexibility much needed in all kinds of ventures related to human rights. It is also necessary to draw the attention of the OSCE participating States and institutions to the aforementioned interaction between conflict prevention and human rights-related issues.

The Polish Chairmanship has been making efforts to upgrade the role and maximize the significance of the "human dimension" of the OSCE as a factor cementing the entire area covered by the Organization's operations into a single value system and an instrument of conflict prevention. We shall also make every effort to consolidate the established principle, already noted, according to which the observance of human rights is the legitimate concern of the entire OSCE community and not merely an internal affair of a given country. This means that the "human dimension" - in other words, a combination of human rights and the rule of law - is part and parcel of the collective security issue.

The OSCE in the Face of Other European Problems

Military Aspects of Security

Military matters have figured conspicuously in the CSCE/OSCE process since its very inception. As is well known, the basic aim of the CSCE was to curb conventional armaments and military activities and to secure a greater openness and transparency in the military activities conducted by different countries. After the collapse of the two-bloc system, military issues did not fade from the scene; on the contrary, they gained in importance under the conditions of a rapidly changing politico-military situation, especially in the Central Eastern and Eastern part of Europe. Today these considerations constitute a very important element of the OSCE's efforts to maintain the peace and international order in its entire operational area.

One of the basic aims of the OSCE today is to strengthen co-operative security in the entire area covered by the Organization's operations. This is an extremely ambitious task requiring the participation of all OSCE States. The OSCE is the guarantor - indirectly and directly - and the "political guardian" of many far-reaching arms control and disarmament agreements that form the foundation of the new military order in Europe. The agreements in question include: the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), the Concluding Act of the Negotiations on Personnel Strength of Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE 1A), the Treaty on Open Skies, and the con-

secutive editions of the Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures.

At present, the main thrust of the OSCE's work in the military sphere is focused on the Forum for Security Co-operation (FSC). The Forum is primarily engaged in searching for ways of securing the observance of military arrangements; it also negotiates new arrangements and is involved in discussions on future arms control programmes, notably the adaptation of the CFE Treaty. At the moment, the Forum is the only disarmament negotiator on behalf of the OSCE and also the only agency of its kind in Europe with representatives of almost all European states taking part in it.

The military dimension of the OSCE undoubtedly serves as an example of an efficient instrument assisting in the reconstruction of political and military relations in the wake of the collapse of the communist system.

The Economic Dimension of the OSCE

The broadly defined economic and social issues that between them have formed the economic dimension of first the CSCE and later the OSCE and which are popularly known as the "second basket", have always formed an integral part of the OSCE concept of comprehensive European security.

The dimension in question consists in deepening co-operation in the areas of economies, science and technology as well as environmental protection and ecological security, and is based on the conviction of all the States participating in the Organization that full political and military security must rest on the firm foundation of a well-functioning economy, since any turbulence in the machinery of the economy must sooner or later rebound on the policies and security of states and their citizens.

The economic dimension and all it stands for took on particular importance after the collapse of the communist system in our part of Europe. The processes of socio-economic transformation in post-communist states opened the prospect of pan-European economic co-operation resting on the bedrock of generally accepted and tested principles of the market economy. This gave the OSCE a chance to move to the forefront of all those in the business of providing conceptual assistance to the post-communist states then in the process of reforming their economic systems.

Economic reform processes, as we are only too well aware in Poland, can be difficult and time-consuming. They may also give rise to new challenges and threats, and the OSCE has to deal with both. Prominent among these challenges are the destabilizing impact of economic transformations on some countries of Central Eastern and Eastern Europe, internal tensions whipped up by growing contrasts in the living standards of different social groups and conflicts caused by the high cost of social reform.

The decisions taken by a series of meetings held within the framework of the economic dimension in Bonn, Rome, Prague and Geneva, to mention only a few, have corroborated the growing role and importance of this sphere of the OSCE's work. The tightening bonds of co-operation between the OSCE participating States and component bodies and international economic and financial institutions (the relevant agencies of the UN, OECD, WTO, IMF and others) are important for the efficient functioning of the economic dimension. As Chairman of the OSCE, Poland is desirous of helping to intensify work within the framework of the economic dimension and also to fulfil the obligations assumed earlier.

The Future of the OSCE

Sometimes we ask ourselves whether the OSCE, in its present form and operating under its current mandate, has any future at all, and, if it has, what kind of a future is it going to be? Will the Organization keep developing or will it shrink and fade, withering away for lack of new ideas and creative stimuli?

The future of the OSCE depends on many different factors, such as:

- the development of the geo-strategic situation throughout the OSCE operational area (especially the continuation of European integration processes and the enlargement of NATO);
- the political will (or, for that matter, its absence) on the part of individual OSCE participating States, notably the big powers, to embrace the norms and comply with decisions of OSCE bodies and to keep the development of the Organization on track;
- the creation of a non-hierarchical system of co-operation between the European organizations and institutions responsible for security on our continent;
- the institutional and conceptual development of the Organization as the answer to the new challenges and changing realities of the international environment.

Certainly, the OSCE now has the capacity to be a useful player in carrying out many important European security-related tasks in which it could not be easily replaced by other institutions and organizations operating internationally. This is particularly true of such OSCE functions as the aforementioned political and institutional oversight of disarmament and arms control processes in Europe or of the OSCE's role and record of performance in the realm of preventive diplomacy and conflict prevention. These responsibilities

of the OSCE will in all likelihood move to the forefront of its activities in the near future. There is still much to be done in this field of endeavour, for example the possibility of extending the OSCE's sponsorship to regional arms-control and confidence-building initiatives. The OSCE is also likely to develop an interest in such disarmament- and arms-control-related matters as creating zones free of nuclear weapons or helping post-communist states implementing Western transparency and control standards in arms trading.

Yet another role for the OSCE - which might also help tap the Organization's full potential in the future - is the promotion of sub-regional co-operation in Europe. It is worth pointing out that quite a few existing regional organizations are even now playing a very useful role in making co-operation easier at the regional level, in effect creating "soft" security on the continent while helping to eliminate the security "grey zone" in Central Eastern and Eastern Europe. In the future, the OSCE may support such activities by helping to create the appropriate political climate at a high level and by legitimizing regional ventures.

All this makes the OSCE useful and much-needed. One can safely assume, therefore, that over the next decade the OSCE will carry on in its capacity as a regional European security structure, focused primarily on charting the principal directions of change, strengthening democratic tenets in public life and promoting respect for human rights, as well as preventing and solving conflicts (especially in the former USSR and Yugoslavia). The Organization will also continue to strengthen the military order, refine the norms and standards of behaviour of its participating States and popularize common values. However, of key importance to the OSCE's future is whether its participating States - primarily those enjoying big power status - will permit the Organization to develop while consolidating its position as an instrument of European security.