



BRILL  
NIJHOFF

SECURITY AND HUMAN RIGHTS 26 (2015) 3-10

**SECURITY AND  
HUMAN RIGHTS**  
brill.com/shrs

# Key Issues of the German OSCE Chairmanship 2016

*Gernot Erler*

Member of the German Bundestag, Special Representative of the Federal  
Government for the OSCE Chairmanship 2016  
*osze-b@zentrale.auswaertiges-amt.de*

## Abstract

Under the motto “Renewing Dialogue, Rebuilding Trust, Restoring Security”, the German OSCE Chairmanship 2016 will emphasize five priority areas. The primary focus will continue to be crisis and conflict management in and around Ukraine and in the other so-called protracted conflicts. Second, to this end it is necessary to strengthen the OSCE’s crisis reaction capacities. Third, the OSCE must be used as a forum for dialogue on a broad range of issues from arms control, via common transnational threats and other questions of European security, to shared understandings of principles and commitments. Fourth, the economic and environmental dimension should be used more effectively, and business should be given a stronger voice in OSCE forums. Finally, in the human dimension, Germany will pay special attention to issues closely related to current crises and security developments, such as tolerance and non-discrimination, freedom of expression, freedom of the media, and minority rights.

## Keywords

OSCE – German OSCE Chairmanship 2016 – Helsinki Final Act – Charter of Paris – Astana Declaration – European security order – dialogue – confidence building – crisis management – connectivity – human dimension

## I Introduction

Assuming the OSCE Chairmanship in such stormy times is a sign of Germany’s strong commitment to making an active contribution to peace and security in Europe. More than 40 years after the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act, fundamental pillars of international order in Europe have been shaken by the force

of arms, mutual distrust and competing narratives. Long-standing principles of the European security order have been broken and challenged; borders and the territorial integrity of states have been violated. Events in and around Ukraine have provoked a deep rift within the OSCE family: confidence between participating States has been sapped, while trust in our security architecture has been shattered. The crisis in Ukraine has demonstrated that peace and security in Europe are not at all self-evident.

Under these circumstances, “business as usual” is not an option. The German Chairmanship will start in difficult times. At the same time, we should not allow ourselves to become discouraged or abstain from attempting to shape and advance security cooperation actively in Europe. The challenge that has been levelled against its values and fundamental principles has also revitalised the OSCE as a forum for dialogue and as an actor in crisis prevention and conflict management. The history of the CSCE process and the OSCE shows that the willingness of the participating States to assume responsibility for the vision of Helsinki and the Charter of Paris, a vision of trust and cooperation throughout the continent, is vital for our common security.

It therefore seems logical to me that we should strive to make every effort to foster the political will of all participating States to cooperate, especially in these times of crisis. Cooperation, however, will only be achieved through meaningful dialogue among participating States. Of course, this dialogue will be critical and sometimes confrontational. It will have to encompass all three dimensions of the OSCE – the politico-military, the economic and environmental, and the human dimension – as the basis of and the key to our common security.

## **II Germany’s Chairmanship: Renewing Dialogue, Rebuilding Trust, Restoring Security**

If we want to translate the vision of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Charter of Paris of 1990 and the Astana Final Document of 2010 into the realities of our times, all participating States will have to assume their share of responsibility. Germany is determined to bear its share. Switzerland and Serbia – who had to deal with an unexpected and unprecedented crisis situation during their respective Chairmanships in 2014 and 2015 – have shown how crucial active and constructive engagement by participating States is for the future of our continent.

The German Chairmanship will strive to continue the successful work of its predecessors, both in terms of crisis management and of providing opportunities for dialogue on essential security issues for the OSCE area as a whole.

The OSCE acquis, as enshrined *inter alia* in the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, and to which all OSCE participating States recommitted at the Astana Summit in 2010 lies at the heart of European security.

We must work to ensure that the acquis is preserved, implemented comprehensively and strengthened if possible. The German Chairmanship will put its weight behind this goal.

In the current situation, it is my firm belief that we should view the OSCE as an indispensable forum for dialogue and make the best use of its instruments, including its comprehensive tool box in the fields of confidence building and conflict prevention, management and resolution. Developments of the recent past have shown the need to review and possibly update some of the OSCE's capacities in order to make it fit for future challenges. At the same time, we will strive for complementarity and aim to enhance coherent cooperation between the OSCE and other relevant international forums and actors.

### **1      *Enhancing Crisis Management***

Crisis and conflict management in and around Ukraine are likely to remain a major focus of our efforts throughout 2016. The Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in Ukraine representing the OSCE in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) and the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) remain essential tools in this respect. Reporting by the SMM has proven invaluable in evaluating the day-to-day implementation of the Minsk agreements. SMM management and mission staff do outstanding work. As the country holding the Chairmanship, Germany will offer all possible support to enable the SMM to meet the high expectations placed on it and will call on all participating States to continue to contribute.

We will continue to work within the framework of the Normandy format and in other forums towards a political solution to the conflict. The OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Ukraine and the three institutions (Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, High Commissioner on National Minorities and Representative on Freedom of the Media) also play important roles, and we will work closely with them to support the conflict resolution process.

At the same time, our efforts will not be limited to the conflict in and around Ukraine. We will pay close attention to the so-called protracted conflicts in the OSCE area and will therefore cooperate closely with the existing OSCE negotiation formats and mechanisms on Nagorno-Karabakh (Minsk Process), the Geneva Internal Discussions and the Transdniestrian Settlement (5+2). We will aim to underpin these efforts through tailor-made confidence building measures that are accepted by the conflict parties. The various Special

Representatives of the Chairperson-in-Office for Regional Issues will play a key role in this.

## 2 *Strengthening the OSCE's Capacities*

Ukraine has shown that the OSCE can provide us with essential instruments for de-escalation in times of crisis. The rapid establishment of the SMM in March 2014 proved that swift and effective cooperation among OSCE participating States is possible, even in times of crisis and confrontation. We should therefore continue to regard it as our common responsibility to ensure that the OSCE is ready to perform and accomplish its operational tasks. If we want it to fulfil its mandate effectively and remain an important actor in European security, it will need to have the necessary means at its disposal.

The experience of establishing and operating the SMM as a mission with entirely new requirements and operational capacities (e.g. drones and satellite imagery) compared to previous OSCE field missions has demonstrated the need to review some of the OSCE structures and processes. Areas such as conflict analysis, early warning and mediation also need close attention and should be strengthened.

In this context, we will aim to initiate a discussion process on OSCE capabilities in crisis response and management throughout all stages of the conflict cycle. During the course of this process, we hope to integrate the OSCE's own experience, as well as external expertise, in order to prepare the organisation better for various crisis response or conflict management scenarios. Of course, the OSCE needs adequate resources in order to function properly and be effective, particularly with regard to structures directly involved in crisis management. We should be aware that the lack of resources curtails the OSCE's efficiency in the field.

We do not need to start from scratch. Our reflections can build upon thorough work that has been conducted so far by the OSCE and make use of valuable input such as the findings of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project.

## 3 *Using the OSCE as a Platform for Dialogue*

In the light of the current crisis, one might question whether basic consensus on matters of European security still exists. Opposing narratives of developments in the OSCE area since the 1990s are put forward by Russia and NATO and EU members respectively. Positions have hardened to a degree where there is now no apparent easy way to return to a common understanding of how security can be safeguarded in Europe and all of the OSCE area.

However, one thing seems certain. In the long run, there will be no alternative to cooperation if we want to safeguard our common security – cooperation that is impossible without serious and persistent efforts to maintain dialogue both on issues that divide us and issues that may be of mutual interest. The diverging narratives themselves underline the need to put more effort into dialogue and communication.

The German Chairmanship will continue to strongly condemn violations of OSCE commitments. Nevertheless, the OSCE also remains an essential forum for maintaining dialogue, especially in times of crisis. And while it may take considerable time to overcome the lack of trust and confidence, we should aim to continue discussions on issues that are of particular relevance when times are difficult – confidence and security building measures (CSBMs), arms control and common transnational threats such as terrorism and human trafficking, but also a shared understanding of principles, commitments and key questions of European security.

CSBMs and conventional arms control were key issues in the CSCE process from the start and remain essential fields for the OSCE today. To my mind, they are essential in helping to bring about de-escalation in the present situation. Of course, a successful cooperative approach to security and the effectiveness of CSBMs depend on the political will and readiness of all participating States. And while prospects for progress are not encouraging, I believe it is our common responsibility to ensure the continued relevance of CSBMs in a changed politico-military and security environment.

In this regard, we want to make a sincere effort to overhaul and upgrade our instruments, in particular the Vienna Document and the risk reduction mechanisms it contains, that is, increased transparency on military forces, equipment and activities, strengthening of verification measures and an overall increased contribution to conflict prevention. To that end, we will work closely with the Netherlands, Poland and Portugal as respective Chairmanship countries of the OSCE Forum for Security Co-operation in 2016.

In February 2016, a high-level seminar on military doctrines will provide military decision-makers from the OSCE area with the opportunity to exchange views on the current security situation and emerging challenges in the OSCE area and to discuss current and recently updated national military doctrines. The year 2016 will show whether other opportunities for discussing the wider issues of European security will materialise, and this may be able to have positive effects on the cooperative implementation of the Vienna Document, the Treaty on Open Skies and the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe.

Our societies also face a number of transnational threats to which no country can hope to find a solution on its own. Working together on the response to

common threats, such as international terrorism, radicalisation, drug trafficking, risks in the field of cyber security, and human trafficking, continues to be essential for all countries in the OSCE area. The decisions on kidnapping for ransom and foreign terrorist fighters adopted under the Swiss Chairmanship in December 2014 are good examples as regards reaching a consensus and working towards addressing collective threats.

Germany will put special efforts into facilitating further cooperation and exchange of best practice in these fields through a series of events, both at the political and expert level.

Close cooperation with our partners in the Mediterranean region, who are also severely affected by the threats mentioned above, will also play an important role. The conference with Mediterranean partners in Jordan in October 2015 provided a good starting point for engaging in deeper cross-regional dialogue and coordinating our efforts vis-à-vis the growing challenges.

#### 4 *Connecting Economies in the OSCE area*

Sound and sustainable economic development is a decisive factor for human security and thus for the stability and well-being of societies and nations. The opportunities for modern economies and information and communications technology to foster economic development, scientific exchange, democracy and good governance will be used most effectively if we are able to enhance cooperation between our economies and to interact more deeply. We should therefore make the best use of the OSCE's economic and environmental dimension, focusing specifically on improving connectivity in the OSCE area. In 2016, we aim to give business a stronger voice in OSCE forums in order to enrich the discussion and gain a better understanding of impediments to connectivity and economic development. Practical improvements in areas such as traffic and transport infrastructure, digital lines of communication, conditions for investment, regulation and technical standards can all lay the foundations for stronger cooperation between participating States in the OSCE area. In my view, good governance needs particular attention, as it plays a key role in fields such as anti-corruption and investment climate, as well as in confronting environmental challenges and improving migration management as a prerequisite for enhanced connectivity.

#### 5 *Focusing on the Human Dimension*

We should not try to dodge reality – there is a lack of implementation of commitments in the human dimension in many OSCE participating States. Values and commitments that all participating States signed up to in areas such as human rights, fundamental freedoms and democratic government are

not being observed – areas that we once confirmed as central to security and stability and as cornerstones of the OSCE acquis. At the Astana Summit in 2010, we also all agreed and reconfirmed that these commitments are of “direct and legitimate concern to all participating States and do not belong exclusively to the internal affairs of the State concerned”. Hence, we should not tolerate any attempt to undermine these commitments and should all work to ensure better implementation of these obligations in all OSCE participating States.

The security crisis in Europe and other developments, such as the flow of refugees and the ensuing consequences, put pressure on our common commitments in the human dimension. In 2016, we will therefore pay special attention to issues closely related to current crises and security developments, focusing in particular on tolerance, non-discrimination, freedom of expression, freedom of the media and minority rights.

The need to stress the importance of tolerance and non-discrimination in and between our societies may yet grow as we tackle the long-term challenges of integrating large numbers of refugees into many societies in the OSCE area. Fighting anti-Semitism and intolerance and discrimination against Muslims and Christians alike will be the cornerstones in addressing all forms of intolerance and discrimination that we see developing.

In the current crisis, we have witnessed that freedom of expression and media and freedom of information have come under intense pressure. During our Chairmanship, we will stress the importance of pluralistic media landscapes and advocate for the upholding of these freedoms, as they make a crucial contribution to our common security.

National minorities and their transnational and cross-regional ties can form bridges in the cultural diversity of our family of nations and help to overcome dividing lines in and between societies. We will therefore make it a special point to emphasise concrete examples of the positive role minorities can play.

We will also make it a priority to work closely with the OSCE institutions, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFOM) in order to support their work and mandate.

### III Conclusion

Steering the OSCE as Chairmanship country for a year entails many uncertainties that we may not foresee at the beginning of the year. At the same time, success depends not only on the commitment of the Chairmanship, but also

on the cooperation of all participating States. In addition, success may be viewed from different angles.

As 2016 starts, I am certain, however, of Germany's unfaltering commitment to contributing to peace, security and stability in the OSCE area and of making the best possible use of its Chairmanship role and the OSCE itself to this end. We may not know where we will stand a year from now, but I am convinced that the broad agenda of topics and events we have prepared for 2016 makes for a comprehensive picture and offers every opportunity to put into practice what all participating States committed to from Helsinki to 2016, that is, to working collectively and cooperatively on our common comprehensive security.