

Book Review

OSCE Yearbook 2011 – Yearbook on the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), by the Institute of Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg/ IFSH, Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, Baden-Baden, 2012, pp. 513, ISBN 978-3-8329-7311-7.

Harm J. Hazewinkel
Editor of Security and Human Rights and, retired diplomat of the Netherlands
Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Each year the OSCE Yearbook is greeted by many scholars and others interested in (aspects of) the OSCE as a welcome addition to their, probably already large, library. Of course, as all will have a different field of interest, he or she will make his or her own choice among the 28 articles contained in the 2012 edition. The following is therefore no more than an impression, as a thorough review of all contributions would easily surpass the space available in this issue of 'Security and Human Rights'. If some articles therefore receive only a brief mention, this certainly does not imply that they are less valuable or less interesting.

The introduction to the 2012 edition of the Yearbook this time includes not only a foreword by the Chairperson-in-Office, the Lithuanian Minister of Foreign Affairs Audronius Ažubalis and a preface by the Editor-in-Chief Ursel Schlichting but also an obituary for Max van der Stoep by Wolfgang Zellner. The remaining part is divided into three main sections and six sub-sections, of which the lion's share goes to the ODIHR with almost 230 pages. But the ODIHR celebrated its twentieth anniversary, and in any case it encompasses a large number of different issues.

The first part, however, is devoted to "The OSCE and European Security" and starts with a retrospective by the former Secretary General Marc Perrin de Brichambaut. In a highly readable way (were all articles such a pleasure to read!) he looks back not only on his six years in office but provides many personal views which make this article of great interest to all who are interested in the OSCE, its past, present and future. This sub-section further consists of an overview of Kazakhstan's OSCE Chairmanship by Pál Dunay, which is both informative and analytical, and a contribution by Ian Cliff on the Corfu Process. "What Was It All About?" is its subtitle and indeed for many, perhaps the majority of the readers, who will not have followed this subject closely, this article will be useful. It will certainly be even more so for future readers, to whom the Corfu Process will no longer be a household word.

In the next sub-section ("The OSCE Participating States and Multilateral Commitments") such incongruous issues as "The Abiding US Regional Engagement through the OSCE" by Ian Kelly, "The Presidential Election in Belarus in 2010" by Elena Kropatcheva and "Politics and Human Rights in Tajikistan" by Payam Foroughi are grouped together. As the titles more or less speak for themselves, we restrict ourselves here to just mentioning them if only for the sake of space, which does not in the least imply that they will not find many an interested reader. The same might be said of the articles in the next sub-section "Conflict Prevention and Dispute Settlement" which deal with respectively Kosovo (Claudio Formisano and Georgia Tasiopoulou), Moldova (Claus Neukirch), Armenia (Carel Hofstra), Nagorno-Karabakh (Hans-Joachim Schmidt) and Central Asia (Arne C. Seifert). The issues and areas will be familiar to all those who have followed the OSCE and its missions over the past years and they will probably stay on the agenda for many years to come – but of course in a Yearbook they deserve their place.

The sub-section "Comprehensive Security" consists of only one contribution, "Recent Developments in the Field of Arms Control and Confidence and Security Building Measures" and discusses not only what happened up to the 2010 OSCE Summit, but also the hardening impasse around the conventional armed forces in Europe.

Proceeding to the central part of the Yearbook – under the title "Focus on ODIHR: 20 Years of Democracy and Human Rights Support" – we find no less than 14 contributions, on a wide range of subjects. But of course that is exactly how ODIHR has grown in these twenty years.

The first deal with the ODIHR as a whole. The present First Deputy Director of ODIHR, Douglas Wake, provides a picture of the work ODIHR has done and is doing up to the present day, in a continuously changing situation, and considers some of the expected developments. Former ODIHR Director Christian Strohal looks more towards the future under the title “More Must Be Done” and after giving his views on the various activities and inter-action with other institutions, he describes the existing challenges and concludes that the Chairperson-in-Office has a special and important role to play in this respect. It is difficult not to agree with him, although it will be less easy to implement his valuable ideas. The third contribution, by Jens-Hagen Eschenbächer and Bernhard Knoll, describes the Human Dimension aspects of the Astana Summit, and in doing so provides a useful insight into the current situation.

Various aspects of the Human Dimension of the OSCE now follow this more general first part. Despite its hardly inviting title “Democracy as a System of Institutions and Practices: The Dynamic Legacies and Living Commitments of Key OSCE Documents”, the contribution by Grigorii V. Golosov proves to be highly interesting. The importance and impact of the Copenhagen and Moscow Documents for our understanding of democratic theory and practice are the main subject of this contribution. On reading it, one realizes that the importance and impact of what was formulated at the time regarding democratic principles like free and fair elections and political pluralism, probably has surpassed what those who drafted and adopted them could then foresee. This significance of the Copenhagen and Moscow Documents returns in the contribution by Jos Boonstra, Natalia Shapovalova and Richard Youngs, though its title “Reviving OSCE Democracy Support” already indicates that the implementation of the principles enshrined deserve revitalization. Here they come forward with some interesting suggestions. The Copenhagen and Moscow Documents figure also in the contribution by Nadezda Shvedova, “A Short Commentary on the OSCE’s Contributions to Gender Equality in Political and Public Life”, but this is mainly an analysis of the texts of these documents, which somewhat ignores the context in which they were adopted (and the Canadian delegate who so vigorously and successfully promoted their adoption in Moscow). The practical application of these ideas however receives a well-documented and forward-looking treatment by Andreea Vesa and Kristin van der Leest, “Towards a Strategic Approach in Applying Gender-Sensitive Indicators: Guidance for OSCE Programming”. The contribution by Andrzej Mirga, “Roma and Sinti: Status and Outlook”, also deserves special mention. Having been active in the promotion of Roma and Sinti rights from the very beginning and now a Senior Adviser in the field at ODIHR, from his own experience he is able to describe how this issue, starting in a very minor position in Copenhagen, ultimately became one of the important achievements of the OSCE.


The other contributions in this section are generally speaking of an informative kind. Often useful and interesting, they can hardly be called surprising, so we again limit ourselves to mentioning the titles, which largely speak for themselves: “Election Observation and its Parliamentary Dimension” (Geert-Hinrich Ahrens), “Rule of Law and Judicial Independence in Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia” (Adam Bodnar and Eva Katinka Schmidt), “ODIHR’s Contribution to Human Rights Education” (Pavel Chacuk), “ODIHR and Civil Society” (Snježana Bokulić and Assia Ivantcheva), “National Human Rights Institutions in the OSCE Area” (Liane Adler) and “Parliaments in the Principles and Practice of the OSCE” (Karin Esposito and Ruben-Erik Diaz-Plaja). And who explains the proliferation of capital letters in the captions of so many documents of the OSCE and in this Handbook?

The Yearbook concludes with a section called “External Relations and Influence”. Here we find a very topical article by Rita Marascalchi and Oleksandr Pavlyuk on “The OSCE and Change in the South Mediterranean: A New Opportunity for the OSCE Mediterranean Partnership?” Of course, developments in that area of the world

are taking place much more rapidly than could be foreseen when this article was written – but that is often the fate of topical articles. Still, it gives both an insight into the revived interest in the Mediterranean dimension – so often a stepchild of the OSCE and the possible way ahead. The last but certainly not the least contribution is “The Evolution of Japanese Diplomacy towards Central Asia since the Collapse of the Soviet Union” by Timur Dadabaev. It offers an interesting insight into the policies of this OSCE Partner for Co-operation towards a part of the OSCE area.

This has obviously been insufficient to do justice to all the contributions. But hopefully it has served to arouse the interest of readers to take the Yearbook off the shelf. They are certain to find much that deserves their attention.





This article was first published with Brill | Nijhoff publishers, and was featured on the Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) website.

Security and Human Rights (formerly Helsinki Monitor) is a journal devoted to issues inspired by the work and principles of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). It looks at the challenge of building security through cooperation across the northern hemisphere, from Vancouver to Vladivostok, as well as how this experience can be applied to other parts of the world. It aims to stimulate thinking on the question of protecting and promoting human rights in a world faced with serious threats to security.

Netherlands Helsinki Committee
Het Nutshuis
Riviermarkt 4
2513 AM The Hague
The Netherlands

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