

Insecurity and Common Interests in Security in the OSCE Area

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Abstract

How can we improve security in the immense area of the fifty-seven participating states of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)? The author addresses this question by appealing to the Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project. This Report is full of insights, and much of it is seen by the author as an honest account of the events and policies that divide OSCE countries. On the basis of the final report, the author offers twelve concrete recommendations that may promote trust in the OSCE area.

Keywords

OSCE – self-defence – security building – conflicts

Introduction¹

It is very regrettable that the basic agreements on which the OSCE rests have been violated. Since the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris, tens of millions of people have suffered from war, civil war, hybrid war and the threat of violence—particularly in eastern and south-eastern Europe. This has seriously undermined prospects for the realization of the idealistic vision, harboured in the early 1990s, that the OSCE might grow into a viable, regional, collective-security organization for maintaining peace all over Europe, and that it indeed might become better at this task than the United Nations can be given the vetoes in the Security Council. Still, thanks to the experience and devotion of the OSCE's leaders, High Representatives and Commissioners, and many professional staff members in Vienna and in the field missions, the OSCE has been able to perform many essential tasks in various countries toward promoting European security and co-operation in a variety of fields.

Much of what is wrong in our world has a common cause: the abuse of political, economic, military and media power. Full rule of law curbs the perennial inclination of the powerful to abuse the powers entrusted to them. Are governments seeking to serve the well-being of their citizens, or are government leaders seeking less-elevated personal goals? Do they restrict or eliminate their critics, upset the international status quo, change borders, or create confrontation, thereby encouraging nationalism to solidify popular support in the short run? The latter approach fuels military expenditure and conflict and harms the long-term interests of countless people.

Many conflicts raise the underlying question of how to serve the true interests of all citizens and avoid abusing the manifest and implicit powers of office. The answer to this question also determines the possibilities for fruitful co-operation in international organizations such as the OSCE.

One of the questions that divide the OSCE involves a sad and deep misunderstanding of the end of the Cold War. It is a serious mistake to view this as having been a victory for NATO, which in fact did not win any victory over the Soviet Union or Russia. The winners of the Cold War are not the old NATO members but the peoples who secured self-government and freedom after democratic struggles and reform opportunities in the late 1980s and 1990s.

Some of those groups joined Western organizations several years after the Cold War was over. Their choices were completely voluntary; nobody forced them.

¹ This article is based on a presentation delivered at the joint meeting of the Forum for Security Co-operation and the Permanent Council of the OSCE in Vienna on 9 March, 2016.

I note that very recently, when the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly met in Vienna for its Winter Meeting, the Chairman of the State of Duma of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation emphasized how important it is to increase trust. I agree with the Chairman and quote:

Trust, the very same trust that was painstakingly pieced together within the OSCE, put an end to the Cold War. Without this trust, the OSCE would not have been created; there would have been no German reunification or many other successes of European and Eurasian integration.

This is very true. Quoting from this speech does not mean that I subscribe to other remarks in it; but I do find this to be a very important point.

Several factors undermine trust. Violent behaviour dominates the news. Some stories of violence have lost their daily news value, but the number of victims continues to increase. Also, the annexation of Crimea by another country was a fundamental violation of international law. Stirring up separatism, arming separatists and intervening with armed “volunteers” in eastern Ukraine are also violations of international law. Such violations fly in the face of the basic rules of international law and the principles of building trust. The dismemberment of Georgia falls into the same category. Threatening the use of nuclear arms when there is no need to counter in self-defence is unacceptable, as is any theoretical threat of attack. Such behaviour leads to a renewed arms race.

Violence also continues near the OSCE area in the Middle East and northern Africa. Terrorism, violent religious radicalism and regional rivalries have caused immense suffering, particularly in Syria. The horrible results are being felt all over the region. About a quarter of a million people have been killed and eleven million are refugees. It is uncivilized to bomb civilian targets on purpose.

Increased armed action by several OSCE participating states carries a serious risk of military incidents and escalation among OSCE countries. More confidence- and security-building measures are urgently needed. The Ukraine conflict shows that the Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (CSBMS) needs to be improved. This is necessary for crisis prevention and risk reduction.

I cannot consider all serious questions in this short contribution, but I must mention the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, which continues to claim victims. It requires a negotiated settlement. I also hope that the “5+2” negotiations on the conflict over Transnistria will be revived. The challenges faced by all OSCE states require a restoration of trust and co-operation. Climate change is expected to cause great disruptions to the lives of hundreds of millions of people in the future. There is also the vast population growth in the poorest and most brittle states south of Europe to consider. The rapid growth of cross-border crime must be tackled. Given the need to feed a world population of over nine billion people in thirty-five years’ time, action must be taken to solve the problem of the serious lack of fresh water. There is also the urgent task of containing the rapid spread of old and new pandemics.

Military adventures, aggression, hybrid warfare and the destabilization of other countries do not help us to face these common challenges to state and human security. Sabre-rattling and clandestine activities diminish the means available to address these urgent problem. Solutions are vital to the peoples of all the participating states of the OSCE and beyond.

As often happens in history, states that are satisfied with the status quo are challenged by those that would change it by military means. Some governments think that expansion of their control over territories and people living in other states will increase their power and prestige. To think in terms of coercive influence is, in my view, to indulge an outdated and dysfunctional approach to national security. Hybrid warfare seems new, but it fits into the old patterns of power politics that dominated history long before Machiavelli. Many countries in Europe and their electorates have assumed for a long time that the fruits of international co-operation will far outweigh those of confrontation. They have accordingly turned to one of the most important innovations in international politics that has ever been: voluntary, peaceful integration, with supranational aspects in some spheres, in which sovereignty is pooled to facilitate better common policies for the well-being of citizens. While this functionalist approach to foreign affairs works very well, it needs a cooperative attitude to be successful. This requires trust, at least to the extent of all partners seeking their enlightened self-interest in a rational and transparent way. It is based on reason, persuasion and peaceful conflict settlement for mutual benefit. But co-operation falters when openly or covertly coercive policies enter.

States can seek confrontation and exploit weaknesses and lack of alertness in other states, but such a negative-sum game does not fix basic problems, and it harms long-term development. In the last sixteen years, some states in the OSCE area have engaged in a vast increase in military build-up despite not being under any military threat while at the same time facing serious deficits in their rule of law, democracy and economy. This raises the question why so much is being spent on coercive power. It undermines trust and is leading to a new arms race in Europe.

The security interests held in common by states in the OSCE area are best served by peaceful conflict settlement in accordance with the UN Charter, the Helsinki Final Act and the Paris Charter. As long as a number of states do not act in accordance with these basic laws and rules, other states will feel threatened and will have to protect themselves through individual or collective self-defence.

The best means of self-defence is to make it clear in peacetime that aggression will not pay. This principle should be applied to all possible spheres of potential conflict, not only in the conventional context but also in the cyber sphere and in space. Furthermore, it should be used to prevent weapons of mass destruction from ever being used. The crux of the principle is psychological: to persuade potential aggressors beforehand. Prevention of violence requires that boundaries, rules and consequences should be well-defined before confrontation.

I would like to draw attention to the wise recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons and then add twelve brief remarks of my own.

- The reactivation of the NATO-Russia Council in April of 2016 would be helpful, as would meetings between military leaders to build understanding and to enhance operational safety and emergency communications.
- The Panel has suggested a treaty on European security. This could be useful after full trust has been restored to ensure that the existing rules of international law are followed in good faith.
- The Vienna Document on CSBMS needs to be adapted to current challenges and military realities. The obligation to exchange information, the announcement of manoeuvres in advance, and the allowance of mutual observation will enhance the security of all participating states. Dangerous misperceptions,

surprises and escalation must be prevented. Demilitarization of potential conflict zones should be taken into consideration.

- As the German Foreign Minister and current OSCE Chairperson-in-Office, Frank-Walter Steinmeier, has emphasized we urgently need to revitalize confidence- and security-building and arms control. These measures reduce military risks for the benefit of all. The OSCE needs to strengthen conventional arms control. Conventional arms kill more people every year than weapons of mass destruction. Conventional arms are weapons of mass destruction in slow but constant motion that kill about half a million people every year. Nor are conventional arms curbed by the UN Arms Trade Treaty, which is rather weak and does not cover ammunition even though it is the bullets that kill and not usually the weapons themselves. One might consider drawing up a better, pan-European arms-trade treaty as an example to the rest of the world, limiting sales of arms and ammunition to legitimate parties and reporting with precision on the activities of individual countries.
- The provisions of the Open Skies Treaty must be better implemented.
- Trade and human exchange should be encouraged. The Panel recommends several trade and investment steps that are in everybody's interest.
- The recent OSCE Security-Days event in Rome, entitled "Focusing on Migration and Security", concluded correctly that migration needs more attention. As President Ivanov of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia stated, an all-European solution is needed: "The migrant and refugee crisis is a stress test for all the values, principles, institutions, policies and procedures of the European Union and European countries".² To refuse assistance to victims of war is a violation of international law and human values. The OSCE urgently needs to make a success of the special meeting of the Permanent Council devoted to migration that is to be held before the summer. The recent report of the Parliamentary Commission on the migration crisis contains very useful recommendations.³
- Security requires free and honest reporting by media. The OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media was right to warn repeatedly about serious violations of freedom of expression and media freedom. All OSCE states need to comply fully with freedom commitments.
- One powerful way to increase trust among states that participate in the OSCE would be the correct and prolonged implementation of a ceasefire in Syria, faithful negotiations for a political settlement, and a Security Council mandate to prevent further bloodshed.
- Another question concerns the enlargement of NATO. I think NATO members should refrain from making ambiguous promises to non-member countries about joining the alliance. Vague promises can be self-destructive. In my view, some non-aligned countries would be better advised to promote their own safety

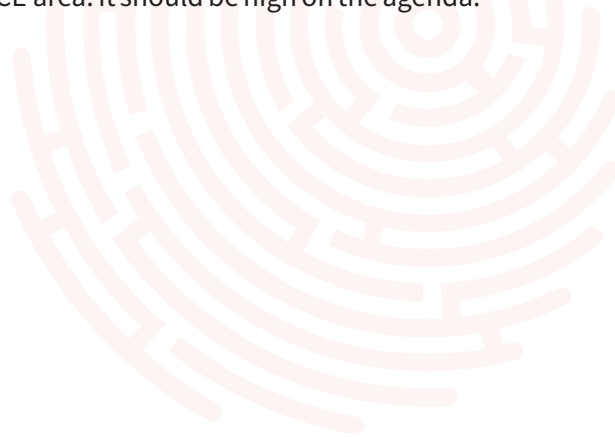
2 Speech at the High Level Panels on Migrants and Refugees, Rome, March of 2016.


3 By the way, I serve on an advisory commission of my government concerning international affairs. It recently determined its advice to parliament about the Schengen system: not to limit Schengen, but to properly implement all agreements on migration and refugees. This requires rapid expansion of the personnel for border control all over Europe, more assistance to countries that cannot handle the large number of migrants, and equitable sharing of the burden of migration among all European states. I admire particularly the excellent example Germany and Sweden set last year in dealing with the refugee crisis, and I welcome Canada's commitment to accept more than 30,000 refugees.

by strengthening their domestic order and reducing their vulnerability to external pressure. Strong unified governance, rule of law, and economic strength will help much more than sitting in a waiting room for an unclear and uncertain period. Remember the wise policies of Finland, which has emerged from nonalignment as a very strong, advanced and co-operative democracy. This is not to deny the sovereign right of states to choose their own security arrangements; it is instead to plead for a prudent choice of means of self-protection against the kind of destabilization and dismemberment that has already affected some OSCE countries. Many other forms of intensive co-operation are better suited than membership in an alliance to the strengthening of non-aligned countries.

- Nor should the EU's European Neighbourhood Policy be mistakenly depicted as a certain precursor to EU membership. Association is not membership; it is rather a framework for peaceful co-operation without any threat to the interests of third parties.

I would like to conclude by asking the reader to pay attention to peace education. The Panel stated that a recommendation should be made about how to deal with propaganda, demonization and misinformation. I would like to elaborate on this important point. Many states imbue their population from primary school onwards with rather distorted views of history and negative views of other cultures. School books and opinion leaders can foster dangerous nationalism and sow the seeds of confrontation. Improved education at all levels is of great importance to peace in the OSCE area. It should be high on the agenda.





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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.

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