

Book Review

Christian Nünlist and David Svarin
(eds.), *Overcoming the East-West Divide:
Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in
the Ukraine Crisis*, Zurich, 2014. Retrieved
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Crisis.pdf](http://www.css.ethz.ch/Crisis.pdf).

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In 2014 Europe's security configuration had to deal with a severe crisis. Events in Ukraine led to a situation of civil war in Ukraine and a further development of the East-West Divide between (Western) Europe and Russia. During 2014 most attention was given to international actors like the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the European Union (EU), the United Nations (un) and state actors like the United States (us) and the Russian Federation, whose actions were either ineffective in resolving the conflict or further antagonised the situation. The Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), however, fulfilled an important role in the background and tried, with some success, to offer a forum for mediation and impartial fact gathering.

The active role which the OSCE took upon itself in 2014 comes at an interesting point in the organisation's history: the organisation's relevance was doubted by some and it was struggling to find new common ground between its member states in the run-up to its 40th anniversary in 2015 (Helsinki+40, after the original Helsinki process). The OSCE's relevance had declined due to the expansion of NATO and the EU (both in terms of their membership and their role within the European security system), but also because a number of post-Soviet states, Russia first and foremost, valued their sovereignty above the other pillar of the Helsinki process, human rights. Those human rights were more valued by Western participants in the OSCE, leading to growing scepticism in post-Soviet states about the OSCE. Moreover, there are a number of unresolved conflicts among OSCE member states.

The fact that precisely the OSCE acted as the main moderator during the Ukrainian crisis thus provokes some questions about the conditions leading to this development, as well as questions pertaining to the role of the Swiss chairmanship of the OSCE in 2014. These questions are brought forward and analysed in the report *Overcoming the East-West Divide: Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis* published by the Centre for Security Studies at the eth Zurich and foraus – Swiss Forum on Foreign Policy. Not counting the preface by the OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier, three contributions to the report try to further analyse the role of the OSCE in the Ukrainian crisis, while the editors Christian Nünlist and Pál Dunay provide the reader with a to the point introduction and a summary of the conclusions drawn in the contributions.


The first contribution by Thomas Greminger, the permanent representative of Switzerland at the OSCE, the un and international organisations in Vienna, argues that the Ukraine crisis was both a curse and an opportunity for the OSCE. The crisis might be considered a curse because during the conflict the principles of the Helsinki Final Act have been broken by Russia, but also because of the growing distrust between East and West and because the crisis diverted attention from other important issues concerning the OSCE. It was however also an opportunity because it allowed the Swiss chairman to revive the OSCE as an important actor within the European security constellation, by using the OSCE as both a platform for political dialogue and operational crisis management. This was made possible by the fact that the crisis reactivated the OSCE's ability to take decisions by consensus. While the reasons for the revival of the OSCE are clearly put forward by the author, he however fails to explain how the ability to make consensus decisions returned; also the precise role of the Swiss chairmanship could be further expounded.

The second contribution by Christian Nünlist addresses the problem of the growing East-West divide between Russia and the West and its interactions with the Helsinki process and the OSCE and places it within a historical context. Having provided the reader with a historical overview Nünlist continues to analyse the positions of several participants in the OSCE, whose reactions to the crisis have been very different. He concludes that the crisis has brought the threat perceptions of Western countries closer together and that

Russia's attempts to divide the West have not succeeded, and that therefore the West's main challenge is to keep together. He also concludes that the OSCE has been put back into the spotlight, offering many useful services to the international political processes. For the OSCE, however, this renewed attention only holds true for the short term; Nünlist argues that in the long run it will have to decide what its *raison d'être* is: is this to promote security through Western values like democracy, the rule of law and human rights or through an inclusive concept of security, like the one used by the OSCE during the Cold War. If the OSCE opts for the former, it will most likely lead to Russia blocking the OSCE, while the latter might be more productive. In effect Nünlist argues that the OSCE's past may contain the key for the future.

The last contribution by Pál Dunay is much like the second one in the sense that it starts with sketching the historical context of the East-West divide within the OSCE, analysing the reasons for the currently perceived divide in some more detail than Nünlist, and one could say in a complementary manner. He next shows how the OSCE's activities in Ukraine (i.e. facilitating exchanges between Kyiv, Moscow and the self-declared entities of the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics, the monitoring of elections in Ukraine and the OSCE field operation, the Special Monitoring Mission) have been important during the crisis. While the results have been positive, Dunay argues that the role that the OSCE took in this crisis is not to be taken for granted due to the East-West divide within the constellation of European security. Moreover, the whole structure of the European Security constellation is currently changing, which leaves many open questions for the future of the OSCE. Furthermore, the current crisis has stretched the OSCE to the limits of its operational capabilities.

The report gives many important insights into the functioning of the OSCE during the Ukrainian crisis and provides general directions for the future of the OSCE. The title of the report is however slightly misleading. Instead of delving into the role of the OSCE in the Ukrainian crisis, as the title suggests, the authors rather delve into the general discourse surrounding the future of the OSCE using the current crisis as a pretext. This is of course not disastrous, but it leaves one important question unanswered: the report consistently talks about the different perceptions about the OSCE in Western countries and Russia, yet in this crisis there is at least also a third actor of importance: the country of Ukraine itself. What the OSCE should offer to Ukraine in order to be successful in mediating in the current crisis remains unclear and is still a question which is open for further investigation.



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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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