

# **Successful Small States in the OSCE and the German Chairmanship of 2016**

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## Abstract

The German chairmanship in 2016 will be an interesting diplomatic experiment for the OSCE. Germany is the most powerful OSCE participating state ever at the helm of the organization in its 20-year history. Previously, small states have predominantly held the voluntary OSCE presidency. This article reviews the performance of OSCE small states in chairing the organization since 1995. Both the motives for campaigning for the job as well as the factors that have determined whether the 12-month presidency job was done successfully or not, are analysed. The article concludes with a warning against setting the expectations too high for the 2016 German chairmanship.

## Keywords

OSCE Chairmanship – small states – Helsinki process (1972–1994) – neutral and non-aligned states (NNA) – Germany – East-West relations – Russia and the OSCE

## Introduction

In 2016, Germany will be the first ‘political heavyweight’ to take over the chairmanship of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). According to an informal gentlemen’s agreement, the United States and Russia abstain from this post as a matter of principle. So far, neither of the other two European permanent members of the UN Security Council, France and the United Kingdom, have ever held the chairmanship of the OSCE. Thus, Germany, the leading power within the EU, will be by far the most powerful OSCE participating state that has ever held the presidency of the organisation.<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, the German chairmanship will be an interesting diplomatic experiment for the OSCE, as the responsibility of balancing the interests of the three influential blocs around the US, the EU, and Russia has to date mainly been in the hands of small states. The 57 OSCE participating states may be roughly subdivided into three groups: micro-states (up to 1 million inhabitants), small states (1 to 15 million), and large states (more than 15 million). Out of the group of large states, only Poland, Romania, the Netherlands, Spain, and Ukraine have held the OSCE chairmanship so far. Others, including Turkey, Italy, and Canada, have not yet borne this responsibility.<sup>2</sup>

The nine micro-states – Montenegro, Iceland, Andorra, the Holy See, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, San Marino, and Liechtenstein – have never voiced ambitions to head the OSCE. And yet, the duties that come with the OSCE chairmanship would not necessarily overstretch the administration of these micro-states. For example, Luxembourg, San Marino, and Andorra have previously headed the Council of Europe, suggesting that they would also be capable of leading other comparable international organisations. Yet, chairing the OSCE with its small secretariat is much more ambitious than chairing the Council of Europe with its huge bureaucracy in Strasbourg.<sup>3</sup>

The 36 small states within the OSCE have thus been responsible for 16 of the 21 OSCE chairmanships between 1995 and 2015, which accounts for a remarkable ratio of 75 percent. Additionally, the OSCE presidency has

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1 Previously, Spain (46m), Ukraine (43m) and Poland (39m) were the biggest OSCE chairmanship countries. Germany has a population of 81m.

2 Italy, however, led the CSCE in 1994, before it was transformed into the OSCE. Other CSCE chairs were Germany, Czechoslovakia, Sweden, and Italy from 1991 to 1994. Hungary was the first official OSCE chairman-in-office in 1995.

3 C. Vandewoude, ‘The OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office’s election procedure: is there a need for formalized procedure?’, in *Security and Human Rights* 22, no. 1 (2011), pp. 49–62, p. 60.

been dominated by Western states (EU and/or NATO members), as they have headed the OSCE for a total of 17 years or 81 percent of the time. Since 2010, there has been a new tendency towards ‘unaligned’ countries taking over the OSCE chairmanship: Kazakhstan (2010), Ireland (2012), Ukraine (2013), Switzerland (2014), and Serbia (2015).

In the following, the reasons for the strikingly prominent representation of small states at the top of the OSCE are analysed in four steps. First, the analysis looks at the history of the OSCE and the Helsinki process since 1972 to illustrate the argument of on-going dominance of small states in the OSCE chairmanship. The second part presents the informal election process, which has been in place since 1995, and the central role the chairperson-in-office (CiO) plays within the OSCE. The CiO, not the secretary general, is the most important political force within the OSCE. Therefore, the selection of a suitable state for the chairmanship is highly important for the organisation as a whole. Thirdly, we will analyse the motives of countries that have previously chaired the OSCE. The fourth part discusses factors that have in retrospect determined whether a chairmanship has been successful or not. The analysis concludes with a warning against setting the expectations too high for the 2016 German chairmanship and presents a list of desirable future OSCE chairs. Whereas Austria, which has already been chosen to succeed Germany in 2017, seems like the perfect candidate for the chairmanship as host of the OSCE headquarters and with its dynamic and ambitious foreign minister, it is hard to think of suitable countries for the time after 2018.

## 1 From Helsinki to Vienna: Small States in the OSCE Process, 1972–1989

The OSCE is known as an organisation where small states can play a role that far exceeds the political influence such states usually enjoy in international relations.<sup>4</sup> This is due to the key decision-making principles of equal participation of all participating states and consensus, which are rooted in the early history of the OSCE: When the multilateral negotiations on European security started in November 1972 in Helsinki, international politics was dominated by the two blocs US/NATO and Soviet Union/Warsaw Pact. Western and Eastern European states played a secondary role in the Cold War despite a certain degree of tension within the two blocs.<sup>5</sup>

Nine European small states tried to soften the separation into two blocs. The so-called ‘Group of Nine’, namely Belgium, Denmark, Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Austria, Finland, Sweden, and Yugoslavia, met from 1965 to 1968 to work towards that goal. In 1965, the group launched UN Resolution 2129, which called for improvement of neighbourly relations among European states despite differing social and political systems and for more mutual trust. In 1967, the Netherlands joined the group, which thus became a ‘Group of Ten’ that was equally balanced between East and West. The group tried to establish a ‘third view’ on East-West relations outside of the two dominating blocs. However, it broke apart after the Soviet suppression of the Prague Spring in August 1968.<sup>6</sup>

The Group of Nine can be seen as a predecessor of the neutral and non-aligned states (NNA) in the Helsinki process. Especially for the neutral countries Austria, Finland, Sweden, Switzerland (which as a non-UN member had not been allowed to take part in the Group of Nine), and Yugoslavia, the Finnish invitation to a

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4 O. Höll, ‘Kleinststaaten im Entspannungsprozess: am Beispiel der neutralen und nichtpaktgebundenen Staaten in der KSZE’, in *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Politikwissenschaft* 15, no. 3 (1986), pp. 293–310; M.W. Mosser, ‘Engineering Influence: The Subtle Power of Small States in the CSCE/OSCE’, in E. Reiter / H. Gärtner (eds.), *Small States and Alliances*, Heidelberg, 2001, pp. 63–84.

5 See M.A. Heiss and S.V. Papacosma (eds.), *NATO and the Warsaw Pact: Intrabloc Conflicts*, Kent, 2008.

6 J.K. Laux, ‘Small States and Inter-European Relations: An Analysis of the Group of Nine’, in *Journal of Peace Research* 9, no. 2 (1972), pp. 147–160.

pan-European security conference in 1969 was an opportunity to position themselves as a 'third force'. The CSCE process from 1972 onwards offered small states a lot of room for manoeuvre. Free from the mandatory time-consuming consultations within alliances that determined decision-making within the European Community, NATO, or the Warsaw Pact at the time, these states were able to react more quickly to unforeseen circumstances during the multi-annual multilateral negotiations.<sup>7</sup>

The especially central role of the two small states Switzerland and Austria in the highly politicised CSCE context can be explained by three factors. First, some outstanding personalities, such as the Swiss diplomat Edouard Brunner or his Austrian colleagues Franz Ceska and Helmut Liedermann were members of the inner circle of lead negotiators in the negotiations on human rights ('Basket iii'). Secondly, the special format of the negotiations with 35 equal participants making consensus-based decisions was beneficial for small states. Thirdly, the cooperation within the NNA group combined individual positions of different small states into group proposals. In addition, the neutrals also provided good offices as honest brokers between East and West.<sup>8</sup>

During the Cold War, only NNA states acted as hosts of CSCE conferences.

The first negotiations were held in Helsinki and Geneva (1972–75). Follow-up conferences took part in Belgrade (1977–79), Madrid (1980–83), Stockholm (1984–86) and Vienna (1986–89). However, the Helsinki process also offered opportunities for small states either belonging to NATO or the Warsaw Pact. Belgium, the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, and Italy on the one hand and Poland, Hungary, and Romania on the other shaped the CSCE in equal parts. These junior partners on both sides of the Iron Curtain welcomed the chance to voice their views on European security and deepen their relations with all other European states. Between 1972 and 1974, the nine members of the EC clearly took the lead in the negotiations in Helsinki and Geneva and shaped the early CSCE process much more decisively than the reluctant US.<sup>9</sup>

Based on this historical background, it is not surprising that Switzerland, the Netherlands, Denmark, and Norway, all of whom were very active in the CSCE process, are keeping alive the memory of '1975' until today through the only still existing 'Helsinki Committees' in Europe. In Finland, Austria, and Switzerland, there has been a lasting 'CSCE nostalgia' regarding the active neutrality policy during the Cold War, which keeps motivating the disproportionately high commitment of these small states to the OSCE. Consequently, Switzerland and Austria are the first countries that have already been candidates for the OSCE chairmanship a second time.

## 2 From Berlin to Belgrade: OSCE Chairmanships 1991–2015

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7 H.J. Renk, *Der Weg der Schweiz nach Helsinki* (Bern: Haupt, 1996). For recent literature, see P. Rosin, *Die Schweiz im KSZE-Prozess 1972–1983: Einfluss durch Neutralität*, München, 2014; B. Gilde, *Österreich im KSZE-Prozess 1969–1983*, München, 2013; A. Makko, *Advocates of Realpolitik: Sweden, Europe and the Helsinki Final Act*, PhD thesis, Stockholm University, 2012; M. Reimaa, *Helsinki Catch: European Security Accords 1975*, Helsinki, 2008.

8 C. Nünlist, 'Expanding the East-West Dialog beyond the Bloc Division: The Neutrals as Negotiators and Mediators, 1969–75', in A. Wenger et al. (eds.), *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965–75*, London, 2008, pp. 201–221, pp. 216f. See also T. Fischer, *Neutral Power in the CSCE: The N+N States and the Making of the Helsinki Accords 1975*, Baden-Baden, 2009.

9 See A. Wenger and V. Mastny, 'New Perspectives on the Origins of the OSCE Process', in

A. Wenger et al. (eds.), *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965–75*, London, 2008, pp. 3–22, pp. 11f.

The current model of a yearly rotating presidency was introduced in 1990 with the Charter of Paris.<sup>10</sup> In 1992, chairmanship responsibilities were extended to include ‘coordination and consultation on current CSCE issues’. At the end of 1994, the chairmanship was granted ‘overall responsibility for operative actions of the CSCE’, which provided the role with its present-day authority and shaping power. The duties and responsibilities of the CiO, which had grown dynamically in the first years after the introduction of the chairmanship, were formally codified in 2002. Since then, the foreign minister of the chairing state acts as CiO of the OSCE for one calendar year. Usually, the OSCE Ministerial Council decides on future chairmanships two years before the start of a presidency.<sup>11</sup>

The secretary general of the OSCE has less authority than similarly named roles within the UN or NATO – he or she is more of a secretary than a general. The secretary general is mainly responsible for administrative functions. Compared to that, the CiO holds the highest degree of overall responsibility and shaping power within the organisation. The CiO acts as mediator in urgent crises, coordinates all activities of the OSCE and represents the organisation externally.<sup>12</sup> Since the Swiss chairmanship in 1996, the role of the CiO is known as a full-time job.

Candidacies for OSCE chairmanship are based on voluntary participation. Unlike in the EU, there is no rotation principle for political leadership of the organisation. However, candidacies need to be formally signed off by a consensus decision of an OSCE Summit or Ministerial Council. As talks and negotiations on upcoming chairmanships are conducted informally and are confidential, little information is available about this process.<sup>13</sup>

Until the heated debate over Kazakhstan’s suitability for the OSCE chairmanship in 2006/07, there been no codified criteria for a candidacy. When announcing in late 2006 that they would postpone their decision on Kazakhstan’s candidacy by one year, OSCE ministers made clear that a CiO has to act as a positive example regarding the implementation of the duties, norms, and values of the OSCE.<sup>14</sup> With this controversial move, the West made potential approval of an OSCE presidency conditional on previous implementation of democratic reforms and respect for human rights. In the short term, this experiment appeared to have the desired effect, as Kazakhstan indeed enacted several liberal reforms while awaiting final approval of its candidacy. However, this effect was not sustainable. Already in 2008, after having been confirmed as OSCE Chairman for 2010, Kazakhstan’s regime switched back to a more authoritarian style. The human rights situation in the country worsened and the presidential elections in 2011 were neither fair nor free.<sup>15</sup>

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10 CSCE, Supplementary Document to Charter of Paris for a New Europe, December 1990; CSCE, Helsinki Document 1992, The Challenges of Change, 10 July 1992, paragraphs 12–22. Both documents can be found at [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org).

11 OSCE, Decision No. 8: Role of the OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office, 6 December 2002, <http://www.osce.org/mc/40521>.

12 W. Kemp, ‘The OSCE Chairmanship: Captain or Figurehead?’, in *Security and Human Rights* 20, no. 1 (2009), pp. 9–12; A. Bloed, ‘The OSCE Main Political Bodies and Their Role in Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management’, in M. Bothe et al. (eds.), *The OSCE in the Maintenance of Peace and Security*, The Hague, 1997, pp. 35–52, pp. 46ff.

13 Vandewoude, OSCE Chairmanship-in-Office’s election procedure, p. 54.

14 OSCE, Ministerial Council Decision no. 20, Future OSCE Chairmanship, 5 December 2006, [www.osce.org](http://www.osce.org). OSCE ministers stressed that eligible candidates had to demonstrate the ‘willingness and capacity to exercise leadership to reach full implementation of OSCE commitments, norms and values through co-operation between participating States’.

15 V.D. Shkolnikov, ‘The 2010 OSCE Kazakhstan Chairmanship: Carrot Devoured, Results Missing’, in EUCAM Policy Brief no. 15 (April 2011), <http://www.eucentralasia.eu/>; M. Hellwig-Bötte, ‘Kazakhstan’s OSCE Chairmanship: The Road to Europe?’, in *OSCE Yearbook* (2008), pp. 175–186; M. Laumulin, ‘Kazakhstan’s OSCE Chairmanship: History and Challenges’, in *OSCE Yearbook* (2010), pp. 317–326.

Ukraine's candidacy for the 2013 chairmanship similarly attracted Western criticism. Here, the manipulated Ukrainian presidential elections of 2010 were of special concern, as the OSCE believed that the victory of pro-Russian candidate Viktor Yanukovich had been secured by undemocratic means. After the Ukrainian candidacy had been approved, the politically motivated imprisonment of former prime minister Yulia Tymoshenko led to harsh Western criticism.<sup>16</sup>

When in 2011 Serbia applied for the OSCE chairmanship of 2014, it did so with reference to the significance of the 100th anniversary of the beginning of World War One and the drastic changes European Security has since undergone. Western leaders were concerned that Belgrade could abuse its chairmanship for propaganda purposes in relation to the events of 1914. Furthermore, Albania did not want to reward Serbia for its Kosovo policy with the OSCE chairmanship. Therefore, the US and Germany discreetly approached Switzerland to ask whether it could instead apply for the 2014 chairmanship. This move can be seen as a result of the controversial Kazakh and Ukrainian chairmanship and as an attempt to repair the image of the OSCE by choosing a Western European chair. Initially, Berne declined this delicate offer, but resolved the situation by launching a tandem candidacy for the years 2014 (Switzerland) and 2015 (Serbia).<sup>17</sup>

### 3 From Hungary to Serbia: Motivations of Small States for the OSCE Chairmanships 1995–2015

In June 1991, reunified Germany was the first country to take on the leadership of the CSCE.<sup>18</sup> One week later, the Yugoslav People's Army invaded Slovenia.

German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher tried to coordinate the CSCE's activities with the EC in response to the escalating civil war in former Yugoslavia. However, the newly created crisis response tools of the CSCE proved to be as insufficient as the mediation efforts of the EC. Genscher's visit as head of the CSCE to Yugoslavia in July 1991 primarily served the purpose of raising the profile of Germany's foreign policy.<sup>19</sup>

After Germany, middle-sized countries Czechoslovakia, Italy, and Sweden took over the CSCE chairmanship. During this period, the main criterion for being granted this largely ceremonial post was the readiness to host representatives of the growing number of CSCE member states during Ministerial Council meetings. Sweden and Italy were the first states to enjoy more authority, such as supporting field missions or responsibility for consulting the EC and the UN and integrating many new CSCE participating states.<sup>20</sup>

In retrospect, the 21 OSCE chairmanship candidacies between 1995 and 2015 can be divided into four partly overlapping groups according to their motivations. Firstly, many Central and Eastern European member states, such as Hungary, Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, Slovenia, and Lithuania, applied for the role especially in the first decade. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, many former Warsaw Pact members regarded the OSCE chairmanship

16 M. Rojansky, 'An Opportunity for Ambition: Ukraine's OSCE Chairmanship', in *The Carnegie Papers* (January 2013), pp. 7–10.

17 C. Nünlist, 'Die Schweiz ist eine Mini-OSZE: Perspektiven auf das Schweizer OSZE-Vorsitzjahr 2014', in *Bulletin zur schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik* (2013), pp. 11–42, pp. 22ff.; L. Ferrari, 'Wie die Schweiz den OSZE-Vorsitzergatterte', in *Tages-Anzeiger* (15 January 2014).

18 According to the Charter of Paris, the German foreign minister was a kind of predecessor of the CiO in his function of chairman of the CSCE Committee of Senior Officials between the meeting of the CSCE foreign ministers in Berlin in June 1991 and the next CSCE Ministerial in January 1992.

19 R. Roloff, *Auf dem Weg zur Neuordnung Europas: Die Regierungen Kohl/Genscher und die KSZE-Politik der Bundesrepublik Deutschland von 1986–1992* (Vierow: sh-Verlag, 1995), pp. 364–380; H.-D. Genscher, *Erinnerungen*, Berlin, 1995, pp. 938ff.

20 A. Wenger / C. Breitenmoser, 'Die OSZE-Präsidentschaft 1996: Eine Herausforderung für die schweizerische Aussenpolitik', in *Bulletin zur schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik* (1995), pp. 17–63, pp. 37–40.

as a perfect opportunity to prove to Western countries how strongly they had reformed politically and how well they had implemented the principles of Helsinki 1975 and Paris 1990. Furthermore, the international visibility that comes with the chairmanship carried the potential to raise the credibility of those countries' NATO candidacies. After having experienced the negative consequences of the Warsaw Pact, which was dominated by the superpower USSR, Poland in 1998 wanted to make sure that the OSCE would indeed treat smaller powers equally to large powers like the US, Germany, and Russia.<sup>21</sup> Belgium, host city of both EU and NATO headquarters and deeply anchored in the West, also wanted to prove with its OSCE presidency in 2006 that small states could play a large role in international politics.<sup>22</sup>

Secondly, small states often want to use the platform of the OSCE chairmanship to enhance the international visibility of their foreign policy and to anchor their own foreign policy priorities multilaterally in the OSCE space. In its candidacy, Slovenia deliberately emphasized its status as a new country with little charged history and praised itself as a newcomer in diplomacy. That gave its OSCE presidency a certain naïve charm.<sup>23</sup> Through the OSCE, Slovenia could gain important multilateral experience – similar to Switzerland in the early CSCE process. Denmark, a traditionally EU-critical country, was rather sceptical about the evolving common EU foreign and security policy. Therefore, in 1997, Copenhagen became involved with the OSCE.<sup>24</sup> With its chairmanship in 1999, Norway tried to sustain momentum after its successful mediation in the Israel-Palestine Conflict (1993) and to strengthen its international reputation as a third-party mediator in conflicts and as a traditional 'peace nation'. A priority of the Norwegian presidency was, therefore, to further the moral authority of the OSCE as a community of values.<sup>25</sup> The Spanish chairmanship in 2007 was perceived by the newly elected Socialist government as a vehicle for increasing international awareness of Zapatero's new foreign policy of 'effective multilateralism, shared security, and the defence of international law and human rights and sustainable development'.<sup>26</sup>

Thirdly, many new EU members regarded the OSCE chairmanship as a test run for a future EU presidency, including Slovenia, the Czech Republic, Sweden, Hungary, Poland, and Lithuania. With the 2014 OSCE presidency, Switzerland similarly gained important experience for its planned candidacy to win a UN Security Council seat in 2022/23. Norway, Romania, Denmark, Belgium, Austria, and Portugal have already benefited from synergies between OSCE chairmanships and later seats in the UN Security Council.

Fourthly, some non-aligned European small states volunteer for the OSCE leadership post to compensate for their lack of involvement in EU and/or NATO security policy. These countries include Switzerland, Austria, Finland, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Serbia. Especially for Switzerland, Austria, and Finland, countries cultivating 'CSCE nostalgia' and wishing to remain non-NATO members, the OSCE is an important

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21 A. Kobieracki, 'The Role and Functioning of the OSCE Chairmanship: The Polish Perspective', in *Helsinki Monitor* 10, no.4 (1999), pp. 17–26.

22 E. Drieskens, 'Playing the Russian Card: The Belgian OSCE Chairmanship', in *Helsinki Monitor* 17, no. 1 (2006), pp. 1ff.

23 K.P. Tudyka, 'The Slovenian Chairmanship Has Steered the OSCE into Calm Waters: Is Land now in Sight?', in *OSCE Yearbook* (2006), pp. 23–34.

24 S. Silvestri, 'Albanian Test Case', in *The International Spectator: Italian Journal of International Affairs* 32, no. 3 (1997), pp. 87–98, p. 92.

25 O.H. Skanland, 'Norway is a peace nation: A discourse analytic reading of the Norwegian peace engagement', in *Cooperation and Conflict* 54, no. 1 (2010), pp. 34–54; C. Ingebritsen, 'Norm Entrepreneurs: Scandinavia's Role in World Politics', in *Cooperation and Conflict* 37, no. 1 (2002), pp. 11–23.

26 J.A. Lopez-Jorrin, 'The OSCE 2007 Spanish Chairmanship', in *Security and Human Rights* 19, no. 3 (2008), pp. 220–228.

forum for political consultations in a transatlantic framework. Thus, these small states are also committed to strengthening the OSCE by leading through their chairmanships. The traditional formula of ‘neutrality and solidarity’ is still referred to today, both internally and externally, and these non-aligned countries apply remarkable financial and diplomatic resources for the OSCE. In the cases of Switzerland and Austria, strengthening ‘international Geneva’ and ‘international Vienna’ through their good offices for the OSCE is also a motivating factor for their voluntary engagement. Holland can also be counted among these ‘OSCE romantics’ despite its clear transatlantic orientation, due to its pioneering role in the early Helsinki process pushing for human rights.<sup>27</sup> After several EU and NATO enlargement rounds, non-aligned states have dominated recent OSCE chairmanships, including the Ukraine, Switzerland, and Serbia in the years from 2013 to 2015.

#### 4 Events, Dear Boy, Events! Factors for Successful OSCE Chairmanships, 1995–2015

Revisiting the 21 OSCE chairmanships from 1995 to 2015, one quickly realizes that there are no recipes or guarantees for a successful OSCE presidency. Of course, serious preparation and provision of sufficient personal and financial resources within the foreign ministry increase the chances of success. But in the end, OSCE chairmanships, too, may be scuppered by ‘events, dear boy, events!’, as former British prime minister Harold Macmillan’s is alleged to have said when asked by a journalist what he feared most, also applies to OSCE chairmanships. Most OSCE presidencies are shaped by external crises. How a CiO responds to an unforeseen and unplanned situation largely defines the legacy of a chairmanship. Events do shape an OSCE chairmanship much more than predefined and well-intentioned concepts and creative slogans.

In this respect, both Swiss OSCE presidencies have been model chairmanships: Switzerland took advantage both of the Dayton Agreement for Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1996 as well as of the Ukraine Crisis in 2014 to successfully navigate through its OSCE chairmanship. Through practical leadership, the Swiss also effectively strengthened the OSCE’s role in post-conflict rehabilitation (in 1996) or in acute crisis management (in 2014). Thanks to Switzerland, the OSCE became a central, and in 2014, the only international actor actively engaged on the ground.<sup>28</sup> The Danish presidency in 1997 has also achieved considerable successes in Albania and in Croatia as well as in Chechnya, Nagorno-Karabakh, Moldova, Georgia, Tajikistan, and Belarus.<sup>29</sup> Against the backdrop of the Kosovo War in 1999, it is now mostly forgotten that the OSCE under Polish leadership in 1998 actually sent a large OSCE mission to Kosovo and tried to establish a buffer and to mediate between the conflict parties. Poland’s chairmanship was balanced and impartial, despite the country’s impending joining of NATO, and managed to earn Moscow’s trust.<sup>30</sup>

On the contrary, Norway’s presidency in 1999 was highly volatile due to the wars in Kosovo and Chechnya. Thus, the OSCE summit in Istanbul in late 1999 was marked by high tensions between the West and Russia. While Moscow condemned the NATO war against Serbia as a breach of international law, Western states

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27 F. Baudet, ‘It was Cold War and we wanted to win: human rights, détente and the CSCE’, in A. Wenger et al. (eds.), *Origins of the European Security System: The Helsinki Process Revisited, 1965–75*, London, 2008, pp. 183–198.

28 L. Goetschel (ed.), *Vom Statisten zum Hauptdarsteller: Die Schweiz und ihre OSZE-Präsidentschaft*, Bern, 1997; C. Nünlist, ‘Testfall Ukraine-Krise: Das Konfliktmanagement der OSZE unter Schweizer Vorsitz’, in *Bulletin zur schweizerischen Sicherheitspolitik* (2014), pp. 35–61, pp. 59f.; C. Nünlist / David Svarin (eds.), *Overcoming the East-West Divide: Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis*, Zurich, 2014. See also S. Lehne, *Reviving the OSCE: European Security and the Ukraine Crisis*, Brussels, 2015.

29 N.H. Petersen, ‘OSCE: Developments and Prospects’ in *OSCE Yearbook* (1998), pp. 37–48.

30 A. Kobieracki, ‘The Role and Functioning of the OSCE Chairmanship: The Polish Perspective’, in *Helsinki Monitor* no. 4 (1999), pp. 17–26.



criticized Russia's actions in Chechnya. The heated verbal exchanges in Istanbul provided a bitter foretaste of the Russian-US antagonism in the years to come.<sup>31</sup>

In the eyes of many, Austria had lost the moral authority to lead the OSCE due to the participation of right-wing populist Jörg Haider in the government. The Ministerial Council in Vienna in late 2000 was another failure, mainly because of tensions over Chechnya. For the first time since the end of the Cold War, no ministerial declaration was adopted. In addition, the Russian delegation promptly protested against an Austrian CiO statement.<sup>32</sup>

The tensions between Russia and the West as well as the contempt for multilateral security cooperation, including in the OSCE, by the administration of US President George W. Bush made it impossible for most CiOs to achieve successful OSCE chairmanships in the years between 2001 and 2007. The Dutch chairmanship had to acquiesce to the closure of the OSCE field mission in Chechnya. In Maastricht, Russian obstructionism again prevented the adoption of a political declaration at the OSCE Ministerial Council in late 2003.<sup>33</sup> Due to the 'Russian factor', the OSCE chairmanships of Portugal, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Belgium, and Spain were passive and modest from the beginning, for fear of failure.

The Bulgarian presidency in 2004 was negatively influenced by pogrom-like riots in Kosovo and an escalating crisis in Moldova. Again, no consensus could be found for a political declaration in Sofia in late 2004.<sup>34</sup> The Russian-US tensions also influenced the OSCE Ministerial Council in Madrid in late 2007. US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice demonstratively refrained from attending the OSCE meeting, while her Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov gave an aggressive speech criticizing the 'deep-seated differences in views of the role, purpose, and future of the OSCE', and expressing his regret that the OSCE had developed in a negative direction and lost its relevance.<sup>35</sup> An open rupture between Russia and the OSCE had already taken place in early 2007 in Munich, when President Vladimir Putin had called the organization a 'vulgar instrument' for promoting Western interests with the help of election observation missions and field missions to verify compliance of human rights and civil rights at the expense of Russia.<sup>36</sup> In the Russian-Georgian War of 2008, both conflict parties blatantly breached fundamental OSCE principles. The Finnish OSCE chairmanship sought to mediate in the conflict, but had to defer to the ambitious EU presidency under French President Nicolas Sarkozy.<sup>37</sup>

In 2011, Lithuania defined dozens of priorities for its OSCE chairmanship, including energy security and

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31 E. Kropatcheva, 'The Evolution of Russia's OSCE Policy: From the Promises of the Helsinki Final Act to the Ukrainian Crisis', in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015), pp. 6–24, pp. 11f.; W. Zellner, 'Russia and the OSCE: From High Hopes to Final Act to the Ukrainian Crisis', in *Journal of Contemporary European Studies* 23, no. 1 (2015), pp. 6–24, pp. 11f.; W. Zellner, 'Russia and the OSCE: From High Hopes to Disillusionment', in *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 18, no. 3 (2005), pp. 389–402, p. 393.

32 J. Stefan-Bastl, 'The Austrian OSCE Chairmanship: Assessment and Outlook', in: *Helsinki Monitor* no. 4(2001), pp. 257–271, pp. 259, 263, 268ff.; R. Oberschmidt / W. Zellner, 'OSCE at the Crossroads', in *CORE Working Paper* 2 (2001), p. 3. In Vienna, the US delegation was also against such a CiO declaration, since there was no consensus for this.

33 E. Bakker and B. Bomert, 'The OSCE and the Netherlands' Chairmanship: High Expectations, Realistic Goals', in: *Atlantisch Perspectief* 27, nos. 7/8 (2003), 21–26.

34 K.P. Tudyka, 'The Bulgarian Chairmanship between Crises', in *OSCE Yearbook* (2005), pp. 287–301.

35 K.P. Tudyka, 'The Spanish OSCE Chairmanship 2007', in *OSCE Yearbook* (2008), pp. 339–351; Sergey Lavrov, Statement at the 15th Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, Madrid, 29 November 2007.

36 W. Putin, Rede an der Münchner Sicherheitskonferenz, 10 February 2007, <http://de.sputniknews.com/meinungen/20070213/60672011.html> (accessed on 25 September 2015).

37 J. Taalas / K. Möttölä, 'The Spirit of Helsinki 2.0: The Finnish Chairmanship 2008', in *OSCE Yearbook* (2009), pp. 319–332

freedom of the press. At the Ministerial Council in Vilnius in late 2011, however, two thirds of the Lithuanian draft decisions were rejected, in particular by Russia.<sup>38</sup> Ireland's efforts to transfer its historical experience with solving the North Ireland conflict to frozen conflicts in the OSCE space also failed. The unresolved territorial conflicts again poisoned the Ministerial meeting in Dublin in 2012.<sup>39</sup> During 2013, Ukraine was too busy with its own problems and the struggle between the West and Russia for the country's future allegiance to seriously perform its duties as OSCE chair.<sup>40</sup>

During this period of stagnation, shrinking OSCE budgets, and a return of East-West tensions, the OSCE small states tirelessly tried to reform the organization during their chairmanships. In late 2004, Bulgaria mandated an expert group to prepare a report on the future of the OSCE, which was presented during the Slovenian presidency in 2005. At the Ministerial Council in Madrid in 2007, Spain forced an open discussion during a semi-formal working luncheon to debate the most controversial issues. Nevertheless, about 20 years after the OSCE follow-up meeting, no 'spirit of Madrid' materialised. After the shock of the Georgia War, a war fought between two OSCE participating states, the OSCE reform process set in motion by the Finnish and Greek chairmanships (the so-called 'Corfu process') has to be counted as a success, in particular because it was possible to channel Russian criticism against the OSCE into an internal OSCE reform process with active Russian participation.<sup>41</sup>

Since 1999, a common OSCE view has only transpired when addressing transnational threats. Consensus decisions have only been achieved in the field of fighting jihadist terrorism, organized crime, or cyber-threats. For example, an anti-terrorist charter was adopted in Porto in 2002. Also, with the Afghanistan War, the security situation in Central Asia moved more into the focus of the OSCE after 2001.<sup>42</sup>

It is not without a certain irony that Kazakhstan's incumbency in 2010 marked the first time in the 21st century that a large state had succeeded in conducting a fairly successful OSCE chairmanship. After an extremely controversial candidacy, the first Central Asian country, the first former Soviet republic, and the first country with a Muslim majority at the helm of the OSCE successfully organized an OSCE summit, the first after a 11-year interlude. The political OSCE Commemorative Declaration adopted in Astana in late 2010, which was also supported by the US and Russia, defined the OSCE's goal as the 'vision of a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community from Vancouver to Vladivostok' and stressed that existing human rights and civil rights commitments were sacrosanct and non-negotiable. However, the US as well as Georgia and Moldova blocked the adoption of an accompanying action plan that would have identified concrete steps on how to turn the ambitious Astana vision into reality.<sup>43</sup>

Overall, small OSCE states were unable to prevent the organization's progressive slide into irrelevance due to

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38 T. Janliunas, 'The Lithuanian OSCE Chairmanship: Lessons and Dilemmas', in *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review* 10, no. 1 (2013), pp. 59–86; W. Kemp / R. Paulauskas, 'Adapt or Die: Smart Power, Adaptive Leadership, Lithuanian Chairmanship and the Evolution of the OSCE', in *OSCE Yearbook* (2012), pp. 110–129.

39 D. Ó Beacháin, 'Ireland's Chairmanship of the OSCE: A Mid-Term Review', in *Irish Studies in International Affairs* 23 (2012), pp. 89–109; F. Cogan, 'Reflections on Ireland's Chairmanship of the OSCE, 2012', in *Security and Human Rights* 24, no. 1 (2013), pp. 17–27.

40 M. Rojansky, 'Summing Up Ukraine's 2013 OSCE Chairmanship', in *ISN Blog* (20 December 2013), <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?id=174714> (accessed on 25 September 2015).

41 K.P. Tudyka, 'The Greek OSCE Chairmanship 2009', in *OSCE Yearbook* (2010), pp. 327 – 336; Nünlist, *Schweiz ist eine Mini-OSZE*, p. 19.

42 A.M. da Cruz, 'Foreword', in *OSCE, Annual Report on OSCE Activities 2002* (Vienna, 2003), p. 1.

43 W. Zellner, 'Das OSZE-Gipfeltreffen von Astana im Jahr 2010: Eine vorläufige Bewertung', in *OSZE-Jahrbuch* (2010), pp. 23–31.

newly arisen tensions between Russia and the West. Even under OSCE insiders, defeatism and self-doubt held sway.<sup>44</sup> Only in 2014, with the Swiss chairmanship, did a small OSCE state succeed in putting the OSCE back on the top of the security agenda of the 57 participating states. In the Ukraine Crisis, one of the key contemporary challenges to the modern European security architecture post-1990, CiO Didier Burkhalter mobilized the entire OSCE toolbox available for crisis management – and launched a remarkable comeback of the OSCE after difficult years in the wilderness. CiO Burkhalter convinced Russian President Vladimir Putin in March 2014 to consent to an OSCE field mission in Ukraine. At that point, Putin had little faith in the OSCE, but he trusted the impartial Swiss chairmanship. In April 2014, Switzerland hosted the first bilateral meeting between Russian and Ukrainian foreign ministers after the beginning of the Ukraine Crisis in Geneva and later created the Swiss ‘roadmap’ detailing the steps necessary to implement the Geneva agreement. Also, Swiss diplomat Heidi Tagliavini was closely involved in the ceasefire negotiations between Moscow, Kyiv, and pro-Russian separatists in East Ukraine that led to the Minsk agreements in September 2014 and February 2015.<sup>45</sup>

### **Conclusion: An Audacious German OSCE Presidency in 2016**

In light of the established dominance of small states at the helm of the OSCE, the German chairmanship of the organisation should be considered an anomaly. Is it a good omen for the OSCE that a political heavyweight is steering its activities in 2016? Will the US and Russia take the OSCE more seriously because of German leadership within the organisation? In my view, the fact that Berlin decided in late 2014 to take over this responsibility in light of the Ukraine Crisis and the increased tensions between the West and Russia is definitely a good sign for the OSCE. The German OSCE presidency will sustain the momentum built by the Swiss-Serbian tandem chairmanship and strengthen the comeback of the OSCE in a sustained matter.

However, a statement made by Raphael Naegeli, a OSCE insider in the Swiss Ministry of Foreign Affairs, should raise doubts. Summing up the Swiss 2014 chairmanship in May 2015, Nägeli made the following remarkable observation. He felt that Swiss neutrality had not been the decisive factor for Switzerland’s quite successful OSCE diplomacy in the Ukraine Crisis. Rather, he suggested that an intimate knowledge of the cumbersome bureaucratic decision-making processes of the OSCE had made the difference.<sup>46</sup> It remains to be seen whether Germany, pampered by success and the undisputed leader of the EU not just in economic matters, but since the Ukraine Crisis also in political crisis diplomacy, has the patience needed to shape consensus among the extremely heterogeneous OSCE participating states.<sup>47</sup> Before 2014, the OSCE had not been high on the agenda of the German Foreign Ministry, and there is a genuine lack of experienced OSCE insiders within the ministry.

Small states have invested a tremendous amount of resources to the OSCE chairmanship. Their foreign ministers dedicated up to 50 percent of their working time to the OSCE. Since small states were rewarded with unusual international visibility for their countries, it was well worth the effort. For Germany, which is permanently challenged as the supreme power of the EU, it might be more difficult than for small states to give similar attention and priority to the OSCE – even if the OSCE still enjoys popularity in Germany for

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44 See W. Zellner, Presentation at the International Security Forum (ISF), Geneva, 22 April 2013; D. Trachsler, ‘Die OSZE in Rücklage’, in CSS Analyses in Security Policy no. 110 (2011); Nünlist, Schweiz ist eine Mini-OSZE, pp. 16–22.

45 C. Nünlist, ‘Summing Up Switzerland’s 2014 Chairmanship of the OSCE’, in ISN Blog, 23 December 2014, [www.isn.ethz.ch](http://www.isn.ethz.ch) (accessed on 25 September 2015).

46 R. Nägeli, ‘Die Rolle der OSZE bei neuen Sicherheitsbedrohungen in Europa’, Vortrag an Jahrestagung der Schweizer Helsinki-Vereinigung (SHV), ‘Die neue Sicherheitslage in Europa’, University of Berne, 28 May 2015.

47 C. Nünlist, ‘The West and Russia: Speaking with One Voice?’, in C. Nünlist / David Svarin (eds.), *Overcoming the East-West Divide: Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis*, Zurich, 2014, pp. 13–16, p. 15.

historical reasons, since the Helsinki process ultimately led to German reunification in 1990.

In addition, the international situation is far from ideal for a successful German OSCE chairmanship. In late 2016, presidential elections in the US and parliamentary elections in Russia will be held. This constellation suggests stagnation rather than progress in US-Russian relations in 2016, and the atmosphere between Washington and Moscow usually sets the pace for the OSCE as well. If NATO at its June 2016 summit decides to break off relations with Russia and increases its military presence in the Baltic states and in partner states Sweden and Finland, that could considerably exacerbate East-West tensions.<sup>48</sup>

A German diplomat recently said that the German Foreign Office was quite aware that the German OSCE presidency had only a three per cent chance of success and a 97 per cent likelihood of failure. The fact that Berlin still exposed itself and volunteered to chair the OSCE under the current difficult circumstances deserves respect.<sup>49</sup> Under the leadership of Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, Germany will try to de-escalate tensions between the West and Russia and at the same time strengthen the OSCE. Berlin's courageous OSCE commitment despite adverse circumstances is commendable, also from the perspective of the small OSCE members.

Finally, the difficult task must be solved of finding another country willing to take over the OSCE chairmanship beyond 2017 after the German and Austrian presidencies. A Swiss think tank has suggested, in the midst of the Ukraine Crisis in 2014, that Switzerland should become the permanent OSCE Chair.<sup>50</sup> Such a permanent OSCE presidency, however, would violate the core OSCE principle of equality of all participating states, and Switzerland would anyhow not want to take on such a special responsibility permanently.<sup>51</sup>

Against the backdrop of the previous success stories of OSCE chairmanships outlined in this article, and since future OSCE chairmanships need to be perceived as impartial towards both the West and Russia to be successful, the following 'usual suspects' among the 57 OSCE participating states should move forward and declare their readiness to lead the organisation after 2017. The small states Sweden, Finland, the Netherlands, Italy, Norway, and Denmark are perfect candidates for the CiO job due to their traditional active involvement in the CSCE/OSCE. Sweden and Italy have never held the modern OSCE presidency so far, even if they held the mostly ceremonial CSCE chairmanship in 1993 and 1994 respectively. If the German OSCE experience in 2016 proves to be successful, another big country like France might toy with the idea of taking active responsibility for European security and thus expand the presence of major players at the helm of the OSCE. For the next 12 months, however, the eyes of the OSCE world are on Berlin.


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48 C. Nünlist, 'Keine Schönwetterfahrt für Berlin', in Aargauer Zeitung, 8 July 2015.

49 Ibid.

50 M. Stern and D. Svarin, 'A Permanent Chairmanship for the OSCE?', in Security and Human Rights Blog, 25 June 2014, <http://www.shrblog.org> (accessed on 25 September 2014).

51 S. Liechtenstein, 'A Permanent Swiss Chairmanship for the OSCE: A Viable Suggestion?', in Security and Human Rights Blog, 28 July 2014, <http://www.shrblog.org> (accessed on 25 September 2014).



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