



Tearing Down Real and Cognitive Walls Preventing OSCE Compassion For Human Security in South-Eastern Europe

Lars-Erik Lundin
SIPRI

DOI: [10.1163/18750230-02601008](https://doi.org/10.1163/18750230-02601008)

Abstract

The risk of underestimating the security problems which lie ahead in South-Eastern Europe is once more significant. This time the scope is not only the Western Balkans and the appropriate perspective not only on the level of state security. The OSCE and indeed the incoming OSCE Chair for 2016, Germany, is called upon to take this challenge seriously. But the focus of OSCE attention needs to be prioritised in order to focus on the OSCE area itself.

Keywords

OSCE – human security – Balkans – Germany – South Eastern Europe

From what perspective could an overall strategy for south-eastern Europe be elaborated? Several multilateral paradigms could of course be applied ranging from the global outlook of the United Nations and the international community at large, the European Union, or the Regional Cooperation Council in the Western Balkans.

The German Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2016

For the purpose of this article, however, particular emphasis is put on the OSCE perspective and the role of Germany as the incoming Chair. It is proposed that Germany, much in the same way as during its first Chairmanship a quarter of a century ago, uses the political decision latitude of the Chairmanship to point to the future, to show a way forward for participating States in the OSCE which moves beyond what may be seen as current standard operating procedures for the organization, based on the minimum common denominators between its participating States. Once more, developments in this vast region require considerable ‘out of the box’ thinking, mobilising both intelligence and compassion.

As a part of this message a strategic outlook for south-eastern Europe could be communicated by the Chairmanship to open minds - and also hearts - to the difficulties facing people in this region.

Defining the Region of South-Eastern Europe in the OSCE Context

Looking at the map, when defining the region of south-eastern Europe one would find it natural to include the entire area from Turkey to parts of Italy and from Cyprus and Malta to Slovenia, Serbia and Romania.

In the OSCE context, the focus for the last 25 years, for important political reasons, has however been on the Western Balkans, excluding EU member States, first Greece, then Romania and Bulgaria and then later also Slovenia and Croatia. The assumption has somehow been that these countries would be “safe” having become members of the Union and that the remaining countries will be safe once they have also become members. The notion that it would not be appropriate to have OSCE missions on the ground in countries which are already members of the European Union led some candidate countries to the sometimes false assumption that their prospects for membership would improve if they got rid of the OSCE missions on their territories. In reality, as the current author could observe as EU Ambassador to the OSCE, the closure of some issues, for instance in the negotiations with Croatia, were closely related to the existence of OSCE missions in Croatia and in several neighbouring states. Importantly, this was not only an issue of the situation within Croatia but had an important bearing on cross-border concerns.

Many would argue that the EU/NATO accession perspective has helped the OSCE to make a difference to the lives of people in a number of countries, not least in the Western Balkans. The argument of this article, however, is that the time must come to put more emphasis on the very real threats to human security in south-eastern Europe. These threats also refer to the situation within several EU member states. First of all, of course, enormous problems have hit Greece during the financial crisis. Secondly, Romania and Bulgaria remain as EU members seriously impacted by poverty and corruption and not least the Roma problem must be regarded as a major issue not only for the countries themselves but also for the international community.

The way Turkey has – and has not – been included into the OSCE framework is also a highly pertinent issue. On the one hand, Turkey, as a member of NATO and an important regional power, has made sure that it is a full member of the OSCE and an influential negotiating party in elaborating important commitments in the OSCE. At the same time, Turkey has not hesitated in using the veto power of any participating State to minimise the risk of becoming an object of attention. For instance, in the negotiations on confidence and security building measures in the OSCE, only parts of Turkey were defined as being included in the CSCE area of application. When elaborating the mandate for the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, Turkey made sure that this would not open up for too intensive scrutiny of the Kurdish issue. At this point, however, it is not reasonable to exclude Turkey from OSCE attention. The situation within Turkey seems less and less safe from a human security perspective. The issue of how Turkey and the EU can support each other in order to deal with urgent human security issues is at the top of European political leaders' agenda at the time of writing this article. The Turkish leadership will most likely – just as the EU – continue to resist becoming an object of attention in the OSCE. But on the level of strategy from the perspective of the Chair, defining Turkey only as a state actor in the OSCE, excluding the human security perspective from being applied to the entire Turkish area, should already be refuted in principle.

The objection that a strategy cannot be based on assumptions that will not be accepted by participating States may of course be seen as overwhelmingly convincing at the current stage. But this is not the first time that Europe and indeed the OSCE has had to make agonizing reappraisals – towards the end of the Cold War, during the crisis in the Western Balkans and then again during the period starting with Georgia from 2008.

The Risk of OSCE Overextension

Arguably, therefore, the entire population of south-eastern Europe does have the right to pin hopes on the OSCE for its future with or without an accession perspective concerning EU or NATO membership.

For the incoming Chairmanship of the organisation it is at the same time paramount to take a view on the potential of the organisation to make a difference in specific contexts. This article proposes to set energetic negative priorities in terms of operational work in order to allow positive priorities to lead to more effectiveness in contexts where the OSCE can make a difference, in particular on the ground, in a visible way for the local population.

This is a very different approach to the one initially taken in the CSCE where

all commitments were equally applicable across the CSCE area and where a “singularisation” of any particular situation was not acceptable and was strongly resisted also by the Federal Republic of Germany. It is also a very different approach to the initial notion that the OSCE is a format for intergovernmental negotiations and dialogue alone, without missions in the field. This article, again from the human security perspective, sees the

role of the OSCE in the field as a vital complement to the initial set-up of the CSCE as a Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe.

In the widest possible context, this would mean including not only threats to security within the OSCE area of application but also in relation to neighbours to the south and to the east of this area. And this is where some serious delimitations have to be made and some important negative priorities developed. Taking the example of Turkey, it is obvious that the Turkish government has been seriously disappointed in its ambition to develop a “zero problem policy” in its external relations with all neighbours. On the contrary, Turkey finds itself more and more directly involved in conflict management in several directions beyond its borders. It is also severely impacted by the refugee crisis in the Middle Eastern region and by internal unrest as well as by terrorist attacks. This impact of the refugee crisis is also affecting countries such as Greece, Bulgaria, Serbia, et cetera. It has already for a long time been difficult to handle, for instance for Malta.

There is a legitimate concern that the OSCE has been overextending itself in its outreach not only in relation to Afghanistan but notably also towards North Africa and the Middle East. The organisation, for obvious reasons, has been very tempted to develop relationships not only with partner countries in northern Africa and the Middle East but also with regional organisations such as the Arab League. As the political and security situation in the Middle East is gradually becoming ever more complex it is however important to set clear negative priorities. Discussing issues relating to freedom, gender et cetera can be a useful investment in cooperative endeavours with partners for cooperation outside the OSCE area. But more serious considerations must be made once the OSCE promotes the perception that it really can make a difference for people outside its area of application.

There was a period of a certain naivety around a decade ago when the OSCE, under pressure from the American government, endeavoured to make a difference to the populations not only in Central Asia but even inside Afghanistan. Clearly the organisation was not equipped for such an endeavour and no serious impact assessment was made ex ante before ambitions were defined on the general political level. The current security situation in Afghanistan makes such an ambition even less realistic. Several of the countries in the Middle East now experience an imploding security situation similar to the one in Afghanistan. The OSCE is not funded or equipped as an organisation to deploy in such situations.

On the level of relations between participating States of the OSCE it is also, using the example of the current frictions between Turkey, the US and Russia concerning Syria, unrealistic to see an operational role for the OSCE on the ground outside the OSCE area.

At the same time it is vitally important that the Chair energetically promotes political dialogue, precisely on issues concerning territorial integrity, using the example of alleged Russian violations of Turkish airspace.

Overcoming Diverging and Fragmented Views

The Chairmanship will no doubt be told what is important from the perspective of its participating States.

For instance, Russian interlocutors may be assumed to point to what they perceive as a risk of further colour revolutions in the region as has already been done for instance with reference to Macedonia. They will continue to protest against the way in which the European Union and NATO continue to establish their spheres of influence in the region. They will require the Chairmanship to report to the participating States

any incidents which point to inappropriate actions in the region in this regard. They will apply a strategic perspective to the region, notably including energy networks affecting Russia and insist on actions on the part of the OSCE, which do not undermine Russia's objectives to reduce its dependence on Ukraine for the delivery of energy to continental Europe.

The European Union will, as noted above, be strongly against discussing problems which are internal to the Union in the OSCE. These problems certainly include political developments in Hungary, but also Greece, Romania and Bulgaria. Within the EU, Slovenia and Croatia will no doubt insist on a continued focus on the situation in the region outside the EU. The leadership of the European External Action Service will, given its difficulties in terms of multitasking, continue to try to highlight ongoing potential success stories such as the role of the High Representative in the Belgrade – Pristina talks. The Commissioner responsible for neighbourhood policy and enlargement negotiations will continue to focus on the accession perspective and the need for reform in the countries involved in this process.

In the OSCE there is a risk that the organisation will be caught up in what can be called business as usual, reacting to periodic reports from missions still working on behalf of the OSCE in the region, reacting ad hoc to reports from the OSCE Freedom of the Media Representative and from the High Commissioner on National Minorities.

A Multi-Paradigmatic Approach to the Region Including Conflict Prevention¹

The Chairmanship can do more, however. It is now obvious that a wider perspective needs to be taken concerning developments in the region and in order to apply this perspective several paradigms need to be applied using a comprehensive approach methodology.

Germany, together with Canada, already took the lead in the early 1990s to propose the establishment of the Conflict Prevention Centre in the OSCE to be. The conflict cycle paradigm reacting to the failure of the international community to address and prevent tragedies in the region now needs to be revitalised. Clearly conflict prevention is given too little attention at the present time, again using the example of Macedonia.

Conflict prevention furthermore needs to take into account what was missing in the Kosovo context – the possibility that internal difficulties in one country or region may spill over into another. The external dimension of domestic politics needs to be a key concern in this context.

Conflict prevention also requires not being put totally in the shadow of the accession perspective concerning the European Union and NATO. This is a message in two directions: On the one hand, it is important for EU and NATO member states to clearly see the risk of increased fragility due to factors not necessarily related to accession negotiations, for instance social unrest related to corruption. On the other hand, it is also important that Russia not only sees what is happening in Macedonia and some other countries from the prism of EU or NATO enlargement.

It is gradually becoming more difficult to deploy operations and missions on behalf of international organisations and NGOs in quite a number of fragile countries around the world. This now increasingly also includes the presence of humanitarian actors. The OSCE region is not immune to this risk due to terrorism and

¹ For a further elaboration of relevant paradigms see Lundin, L-E: “The EU and Security; A Handbook for Practitioners”, Santérus, Stockholm, 2015.

hostage taking by organised crime. It is important to use the OSCE as effectively as possible to intervene on the ground while there is still a possibility to promote conflict prevention. And this is a need which is visible in quite a number of countries in south-eastern Europe.

Conflict prevention remains as perhaps the most cost-effective type of intervention possible and should largely replace the paradigm of defensive reactions aiming at sealing off Europe from the world.

The common ground should be a focus on conflict prevention from the perspective of the comprehensive concept of security pursued by the OSCE.

Germany has also been, not least as a member of the European Union, an active party to the development of the transnational threats dimension in the organisation. This dimension has resulted in the establishment of several functions in the OSCE secretariat relating to negative flows including trafficking. It has become strongly contaminated by the friction between the Russian Federation, the United States and the European Union in recent years thereby hindering progress. When the issue of human trafficking was recently discussed in Vienna, the focus of the Russian participants, not only working within the OSCE but also within the cis, was on the situation within the area of the former Soviet Union. For other participants, including EU member states, the focus was obviously already on the boat refugees and migration crisis, which very soon after the meeting started to focus on the Western Balkans as one of the few remaining routes for refugees to reach in particular Germany.

The OSCE has however, as one of the first organisations worldwide, together with the responsible UN agency UNODC, taken it upon itself to provide a wider perspective than human trafficking or for that matter migration from any one direction. During the last decade the two organisations have argued in favour of a holistic approach taking into account both positive and negative flows, seeing, together with IOM, migration as a fundamentally positive flow. They have recognised that positive flows need to be protected, including by establishing energy security or cyber security or the safety of migrants. They also recognise that there is an increasing interrelationship between organised crime and terrorism, with transnational organised crime being seen as a differentiated corporate activity using sophisticated methodologies, including measures to counter cybercrime and money laundering.

In this sense a closer relationship between the first and the second basket of the organisation, between traditional security perspectives and economic-environmental issues, needs to be established. Due to the obvious link to corruption and good governance there will be an increasing requirement to focus on governance in all three baskets of the organisation, a view which has been taken for a long time by Germany in the OSCE. South-eastern Europe is now a concern both when discussing positive aspects, for instance energy flows, and negative aspects. So, in sum, the flow paradigm needs to be applied more prominently in any future south-eastern Europe strategy within and outside the OSCE. It will need to include virtual flows, including cultural and religious influences, notably also in terms of radicalisation. South-eastern Europe is certainly not immune to terrorism or radicalisation. Terrible incidents have already frequently taken place, for instance in Turkey. And the flow of foreign fighters to is includes a large number of citizens from south-eastern European countries.

Clearly also the multilateral paradigm needs to be revisited. Sometimes one has had the impression that international organisations have been competing in terms of market shares in the region. OSCE

representatives are known to have protested against the establishment of new EU missions. Capitals in the region, such as Sarajevo, have for some years been flooded by aid agencies seeking to develop projects, which could acquire funding. It was partly for this reason that the European Union ahead of the Istanbul summit in 1999 proposed a platform for cooperative security to which other international organisations could commit. It followed on to a discourse which was developed not least by NATO looking for mutual complementary and reinforcing multilateral cooperation between international organisations.

The current author was tasked by the Irish Chairmanship of the OSCE in 2012 to look into this relationship between global and regional organisations once more.² It was recommended for the OSCE to seek a posture of not competing with other organisations, not focusing too much on its own corporate image but to invite others to see the OSCE as a forum for more cooperation involving both NGOs and participating states. In this sense the OSCE needs to further develop its image as a platform for dialogue where all actors have a possibility to meet, both formally and informally. This is no less relevant for South Eastern Europe.

Against this background the Chairmanship may need to call for a comprehensive approach not only on the part of the OSCE and its participating states. It may benefit from its position as a facilitator of international dialogue to bring a number of international organisations and NGOs to a level of higher situational awareness as regards the role of south-eastern Europe from the perspective of the comprehensive security concept of the OSCE. The issue may not be for the Chair only to recommend action on the part of the OSCE but by the international community. In this sense the OSCE may also take more responsibility as a regional arrangement under chapter 8 of the UN Charter.

The Human Security Perspective

Compassion for migrants and refugees has been seen as a matter of pride in Europe ever since the Second World War. Many citizens of countries which are now particularly reluctant to take this responsibility have themselves benefited enormously from such compassion during earlier periods. It is symbolically particularly depressing to experience that the barbed wire, which was only cut down 25 years ago, is now being once again erected between Middle Europe and the south-eastern part of the region. The pride of many European countries which welcomed hundreds of thousands of refugees fleeing oppression during Soviet times has now been responded to by several governments setting an example in terms of a lack of compassion which has mobilised a sense of shame among many of their citizens. The situation is bewildering. It was relatively straightforward for President Reagan in Berlin to ask President Gorbachev to “tear down this wall”. Given the situation along the US border with Mexico, a repeat performance by one of the successors is perhaps less than likely.


Focusing on the hopes of individuals in the south-eastern European region is not only legitimate from a human security perspective. It can also help to look beyond the borders of any specific part of the region. Arguably, there are not only real but also strong cognitive barriers in place separating the situation in the Western Balkans, on the one hand, and Turkey, on the other, from the situation in countries which are now members of the European Union. The question is whether such a separation at this point is helpful from the perspective of human security. After all, the argument has been, for quite some time, that the notion of a fortress Europe should be resisted. But it is more of an issue than that.

2 The report can be downloaded from <http://www.osce.org/cio/92009?download=true>.

A human security perspective may also be a justified complement to the predominant focus on state security in the CSCE/OSCE from its inception. OSCE commitments, after all, to a very large extent relate to the rights of individuals to be free and to be able to live in peace looking towards improving their lives after the devastating Second World War. OSCE commitments require participating states to look beyond the policies of governments in power in any particular country. It is vitally important that the OSCE further develops into a vehicle to promote friendship and cooperation between peoples just in the same way as new bonds of friendship and compassion were established using the OSCE as a catalyst at the end of the Cold War, with Germany as a strong supporter. As opinion polls now clearly demonstrate in countries such as Russia, the European Union is perceived as being much less sympathetic to the population of those countries than was the case only a few years ago. The mantras promoted widely in the OSCE to counteract enemy images and to avoid zero-sum solutions have been widely forgotten. More focus is put on the policies of governments than the relationships between peoples.

There are several important actual or potential fallacies of the current policies, which more or less directly relate to the cognitive barriers mentioned above. In particular, it must be more clearly recognised that areas of fragility in the sense of the new millennium goals can develop anywhere, in the EU, in the United States, in Russia and, of course, in Turkey. It is a cognitive fallacy to believe that addressing fragility is a matter for development workers in the Third World alone. It may also be a fallacy to elevate to a political principle that the EU alone will be able to manage and prevent fragility inside its own borders. Even if it were true, such an argument would help to perpetuate the notion that also Turkey, and for that matter Russia and the United States, are able to protect human security within their own borders without assistance from the international community, including the United Nations and the OSCE. There are several recent examples illustrating that also the EU needs international assistance, also within its own borders. The situation in some countries in the European Union which are moving away from accepted international commitments relating to human rights etc. requires political attention not only within the EU but in the organisations where these commitments have been undertaken, including notably the OSCE. A second example is the refugee crisis as a manifestation of globalisation. The fact that the European Union decided during one single European Council meeting in September 2015 to allocate €1 billion to the United Nations system to help reduce refugee flows to and within the EU is a case in point.

Human security in this sense knows no borders. It is high time to counteract both real and cognitive barriers hindering the development of a strategy for the entire south-eastern Europe.



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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