

The 22nd OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Belgrade

An Anniversary Without Celebration

Stephanie Liechtenstein
Website Editor SHRS; Member of the Editorial Board; PhD candidate,
Department of Political Science, University of Vienna

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Abstract

This article analyses the outcome of the 22nd OSCE Ministerial Council (MC) meeting, held in Belgrade on 3 and 4 December 2015, the year that the OSCE celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, its founding document. The article argues that the MC meeting was characterized by entrenched positions and that it illustrated the distrust and deep divides among the 57 OSCE participating States. The article explains that the negotiation process was overshadowed by the ongoing Ukraine crisis and by a number of bilateral conflicts between states. The author specifies some of the bilateral conflicts and shows how they took direct influence on the negotiation process and how they led to the fall of important draft documents. As a result, the Belgrade MC adopted only 5 declarations, among them on combating violent extremism and radicalization and on combating illicit drug trafficking.

Keywords

OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade – Serbian OSCE Chairmanship – Ukraine crisis – East West relations – relations between Ukraine and Russia – Helsinki Final Act – migration – anti-terrorism – OSCE multilateral negotiations – inter-linkage – Helsinki+40 process – countering violent extremism – Transdniestria – protracted conflicts

Introduction

On 3 and 4 December 2015¹, the yearly OSCE Ministerial Council (MC) meeting took place in Belgrade, Serbia.² The MC meeting, which is attended by foreign ministers or their representatives of the 57 OSCE participating States, provides an opportunity to discuss the Organization's yearly achievements and gives overall guidance and impetus for future work.

The MC is mandated to take decisions on any topic relevant to the work of the OSCE. This year's meeting in Belgrade was attended by 42 foreign ministers. The meeting was characterized by entrenched positions and it illustrated the distrust and deep divide among OSCE participating States. The Belgrade MC adopted only 5 declarations, among them on combating violent extremism and radicalization and on combating illicit drug trafficking.

40th Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act

The Belgrade MC meeting took place during the year that the OSCE marked the 40th anniversary of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act³, the Organization's founding document. Yet, the OSCE had to face the fact that many principles contained in this document had been violated in the course of the Ukraine crisis. Hence, participating States did not have much reason to celebrate in Belgrade, as I had stated in a blog entry previewing the Belgrade MC meeting for the Security and Human Rights website on 30 November 2015.⁴

Indeed, this negative assessment turned out to be correct and was even further underlined by the meager

1 This article is a slightly modified version of a blog post published on the website of 'Security and Human Rights' (www.shrblog.org) on 17 December 2015.

2 All documents of the 2015 OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Belgrade can be found at: http://www.osce.org/event/MC_2015.

3 Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe Final Act, Helsinki 1975. Retrieved 7 April, <http://www.osce.org/MC/39501?download=true>.

4 Stephanie Liechtenstein, The Upcoming OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Belgrade: No Reason to Celebrate, Security and Human Rights Blog, 30 November 2015. Retrieved 7 April 2016, http://www.shrblog.org/blog/The_Upcoming_OSCE_Ministerial_Council_Meeting_in_BelgradeNo_Reason_to_Celebrate.html?id=571.

results of the Belgrade MC meeting. The Belgrade MC meeting adopted only 5 declarations in comparison to the 16 substantive texts which were adopted at the 2014 MC meeting in Basel.⁵ Even more problematic was the fact that the Belgrade MC meeting failed to adopt any decisions in the human dimension as well as in the economic and environmental dimension of the OSCE. Hence, the traditional balance between the three OSCE security dimensions was distorted in Belgrade.

That said, the Serbian OSCE Chairmanship made every effort to act as an honest broker and to help participating States reach a consensus. In the end that consensus was hampered because of the wider conflict related to Ukraine as well as a number of bilateral conflicts, which negatively influenced the OSCE negotiation process.

Complex Set of Security Challenges

Throughout 2015, the threats to the security in the OSCE area had gradually increased and had become more complex. While the Ukraine crisis had dominated the debates at the 2014 MC meeting in Basel, ministers in Belgrade had to deal with two additional security-related concerns: The dangerous increase in terrorist attacks as well as the largest influx of refugees in Europe since the end of the Second World War.

Ministerial statements at the MC's plenary sessions were indicative in this regard. While repeating the different interpretations regarding the root causes of the Ukraine crisis, almost all states at the plenary session condemned recent terrorist attacks, spoke about the need to fight terrorism together, and expressed condolences to the United States over the shooting tragedy in San Bernardino, California, which occurred the day before the Belgrade MC meeting. Many foreign ministers also addressed the civil war in Syria and the need to fight the so-called Islamic State. Many statements also referred to the refugee crisis and made suggestions as to how the OSCE could help tackle migration-related issues.

United States (us) Secretary of State John Kerry spoke at length about “the scourge of violent extremism” and of what he called “a distortion, the hijacking of a religion.”⁶ He expressed the determination of the international community to “defeat Daesh together” since “[t]here’s nothing to negotiate about with people who license the rape of women [...]”⁷ Secretary of State Kerry also referred to the need to secure a political resolution of the war in Syria through the Vienna process and the need “to find some ground forces that are prepared to take on Daesh.”⁸

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov referred to ISIS as “[a] dangerous and merciless enemy, aiming to destroy modern civilization [...]”⁹ He also underlined the need to “create a broad international coalition against terrorism with the OSCE and Middle Eastern countries to defeat ISIS and other terrorist groups” and called upon states to “redouble efforts to bring about a political settlement of conflicts in Syria, Libya, Yemen

5 For a more detailed account of the 2014 OSCE Ministerial Council meeting in Basel, see Stephanie Liechtenstein, “The 21st OSCE Ministerial Council Meeting in Basel: Reaffirming the OSCE’s Role as the Main Forum for Dialogue Between East and West”, in *Security and Human Rights*, 2014, Vol. 25, Issue 4, pp. 406-439.

6 Remarks by Secretary of State John Kerry at OSCE Ministerial Meeting, MC.del/60/15, 9 December 2015.

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Statement by Mr. Sergey Lavrov, Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, at the Twenty-Second Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, MC.del/1/15, 3 December 2015.

and other countries.”¹⁰ Lavrov also noted that the current migration crisis was “provoked by gross outside interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states and the subsequent chaos and rampant terrorism.”¹¹

High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission Federica Mogherini stated that “[t]he past year has been marked by focusing on international terrorism and cross-border refugee flows. These are challenges we share: we can only address them together.”¹² She called it a “collective responsibility” to “put an end to the war in Syria and unite forces against Daesh.”¹³ She also referred to the refugee crisis stating that “only together, through cooperation, can we effectively manage the large flows of people, provide protection, and address the root causes of migration and displacement.”¹⁴ She also noted that the OSCE could provide “a platform for dialogue and coordination” in this endeavor and she considered the OSCE’s expertise in border management and in the fight against trafficking in human beings as important in this context.¹⁵

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Pavlo Klimkin questioned how the OSCE could intensify its engagement “on issues high on the OSCE agenda if [the] Organisation is not able to ensure compliance with its own fundamental principles and commitments?”¹⁶ He went on by saying that “[t]he way and scope of how the Helsinki principles were breached have a disastrous effect on the entire system of the European security they underpin.”¹⁷ He regretted “continued Russian aggression” against Ukraine and said that “[b]oth an ISIS terrorist and a Russian proxy are on a crusade against our fundamental values.”¹⁸ Foreign Minister Klimkin called for full implementation of the Minsk Agreements and expressed support for the work of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. He underlined the need to “stay united in seeking access of international institutions to the occupied Crimea.”¹⁹

Difficult Negotiation Process

While ministers delivered their statements at the MC plenary session, negotiations on the various draft MC decisions and declarations continued in the Preparatory Committees. None of the 20 submitted draft documents had reached consensus by the time the MC opened formally. As it turned out, the Ukraine crisis as well as a number of bilateral conflicts negatively influenced the OSCE negotiation process. In fact, a small number of states allowed their differences over other conflicts take a direct influence in the OSCE negotiation process.

More concretely, the Russian Federation and Ukraine were clashing over the Ukraine crisis. In addition, the

10 Ibid.

11 Ibid.

12 Statement by Federica Mogherini, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, MC.del/64/15, 18 December 2015.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid.

16 Statement by H.E. Mr. Pavlo Klimkin, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine at the 22nd Meeting of the Ministerial Council of the OSCE, MC.del/6/15, 3 December 2015.

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Ibid.

Russian Federation and Turkey confronted each other over the downing of the Russian jet by Turkey along the Syrian-Turkish border on 24 November 2015. Also, Armenia's and Azerbaijan's opposing views regarding the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict negatively influenced the OSCE negotiation process.

Finally, Azerbaijan was directly fighting the OSCE institutions, especially the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). Baku's strong opposition to ODIHR has to do with the cancellation by ODIHR of its planned election observation mission of the 1 November 2015 parliamentary elections in Azerbaijan. Baku wanted to restrict the number of election observers, which led ODIHR to cancel the mission altogether as "[t]he restriction on the number of observers taking part would make it impossible for the mission to carry out effective and credible election observation," the ODIHR Director was quoted as saying in an OSCE press release of 11 September 2015.²⁰ As a reaction, Azerbaijan made clear at the first MC plenary session that the recent incident would "not go without consequences for our future cooperation with ODIHR."²¹ Indeed, Azerbaijan refused to agree to any new mandate or tasks for ODIHR in Belgrade and instead proposed its own decision on ODIHR which failed to reach consensus.

What made negotiations even more complicated was the fact that many draft decisions under negotiation were interlinked in the sense that agreement on one or several draft decisions depended on agreement on another decision. In the OSCE, states frequently practice political horse-trading, which means that they will make their agreement on one or a group of decisions dependent on their opponent's agreement on another decision. This practice of logrolling was especially true during this year's MC negotiation process.

Hence, negotiations were very tough and slow. The final Preparatory Committee meeting was called by the Serbian Chairmanship on the evening of 4 December 2015 with as many as 13 draft decisions on the agenda, at a time when the official session should already have been closed. None of these texts had found consensus at this time and as mentioned above, many of the texts were interlinked.

For example, the Russian Federation made their agreement on a number of draft decisions depended on agreement on a draft decision on enhancing efforts to combat intolerance and discrimination against Christians and against Muslims. When it became clear that this latter document would not find consensus, a domino effect led to the fall of many other drafts under negotiation. In addition, the conflict between the Russian Federation and Turkey over the downing of the Russian jet had a negative influence on the negotiations on the draft decision on migration. This decision was particularly important to the Serbian Chairmanship which had hoped to provide an answer by the OSCE to one of the most pressing security and humanitarian challenges of the year. Negotiators testify that while it was possible to smoothen out some of the earlier sticking points, the incident of the downing of the Russian jet finally killed off negotiations on migration altogether.

What came as a surprise was that there was also no agreement on the two draft decisions proposed in the economic and environmental dimension.

The draft ministerial declaration on sustainable development was an uncontroversial text that welcomed un efforts on sustainable development and called for a complementary role of the OSCE in this area. However, the

20 OSCE Press Release, Restrictions imposed by Azerbaijan compel Cancellation of Parliamentary Election Observation Mission, says ODIHR Director Link, Warsaw, 11 September 2015. Retrieved 8 April 2016, <http://www.osce.org/odihr/elections/azerbaijan/181611>.

21 Authors own notes taken during the plenary session as followed via the live link provided via the OSCE website.

op-posing views on the Ukraine crisis between Russia and Ukraine found their way into the negotiations on this text as well and led to the text's failure. On a different note, the draft decision on enhancing co-operation in the field of water governance in the OSCE area was brought down because of a lack of agreement between the Central Asian states and the European Union.

A number of other decisions proposed within the politico-military dimension failed to reach consensus. The draft decisions on 'issues relevant to the Forum for Security Co-operation' as well as on 'small arms and light weapons and stockpiles of conventional ammunition' also became victims of divergent views by Russia and Ukraine regarding the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

Post Helsinki+40 Process

Also, participating States failed to adopt a decision on the post Helsinki+40 process. The Helsinki+40 Process²², which was decided upon at the 2012 Dublin OSCE MC meeting, was supposed to realize the 2010 Astana vision of a "common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community"²³ and develop a concrete action plan to this end. However, participating States failed for the past 3 years to agree on an action plan to implement their common vision of a genuine security community. Hence, the 'death' of the Helsinki+40 process was confirmed officially in Belgrade (although the failure had already become evident at the Informal High-Level Meeting in Helsinki in July 2015) and there was no agreement on a formal continuation of this kind of dialogue. Nevertheless, it has to be recalled that participating States have expressed their determination "to work together to fully realize the vision of a comprehensive, co-operative and indivisible security community [...]"²⁴ in the 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration. Since this vision has not been realized, work on its implementation can theoretically be continued.

The final report entitled 'Back to Diplomacy'²⁵ by the Panel of Eminent Persons, led by Ambassador Wolfgang Ischinger, can serve as a useful starting point in this regard. The final report was presented at a side event in Belgrade and was discussed among foreign ministers during an informal lunch on 3 December 2015. It has to be recalled that the creation of the Panel was not based on a consensus decisions of the 57 states. Instead, the Panel was commissioned by the 2014 Swiss OSCE Chairmanship together with Serbia and Germany. Therefore, the recommendations contained in the Panel's final report do not have to be considered in a formal follow-up process by all OSCE participating States. Yet, the upcoming German Chairmanship can identify individual recommendations contained in the final report that it believes the majority of participating States have an interest in discussing. Some of the recommendations contained in the Panel's final report also overlap with German priorities for its 2016 OSCE Chairmanship.

In any case, the report states unequivocally that a serious diplomatic process to rebuild the foundations of European security can only be started once the Minsk Agreements have been implemented as "it would not

22 For more detailed background on the Helsinki+40 Process, see Stephanie Liechtenstein, Security and Human Rights Blog, The Helsinki+40 Process: Determining the Future of the OSCE, 23 September 2013. Retrieved 7 April 2016, http://www.shrblog.org/blog/The_Helsinki_40_ProcessDetermining_the_Future_of_the_osce.html?id=401.

23 OSCE, Summit Meeting, Astana 2010, Astana Commemorative Declaration Towards a Security Community, sum.doc/1/10/Corr.1, 3 December 2010.

24 Ibid.

25 Back to Diplomacy, Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project, November 2015. Retrieved 7 April 2016, <http://www.osce.org/networks/205846?download=true>.

make sense to discuss architecture while the house is burning.”²⁶ Therefore, the German Chairmanship will first and foremost have to focus on supporting the parties in implementing the Minsk Agreements and on ensuring the prolongation of the mandate of the Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine. The political process also has to continue and the Panel suggests in this context the creation of a Ukraine Contact Group that would bring together the Normandy Group (consisting of Germany, Russia, Ukraine and France) and the signatories of the 1994 Budapest Memorandum on Security Assurances (consisting of Ukraine, Russia, United Kingdom and United States of America) to help deal with political and security issues arising in the implementation of the Minsk Agreements.

Adoption of a Limited Number of Decisions

At the end of a very long day, the Serbian Chairmanship made a plea to participating States at the final Preparatory Committee meeting to adopt a pragmatic attitude and to help make consensus possible. As a result, consensus emerged on the ‘Ministerial Declaration on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that lead to Terrorism’.²⁷ The final declaration is a substantive text that calls upon OSCE participating States to inter alia “further increase their efforts to prevent and counter violent extremism and radicalization; to counter the financing of terrorism; to promote research and information sharing on the conditions conducive to the spread of violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism; to promote public-private partnerships in countering terrorism; to develop community policing approaches to preventing terrorism and countering violent extremism and radicalization; and to empower youth in preventing and countering violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.”²⁸ The declaration also calls upon OSCE executive structures to support participating States in their endeavors to counter violent extremism. The adoption of the declaration – despite considerable problems during the negotiation process – shows that participating States are united in the fight against terrorism and it provides a strong signal from the OSCE community, especially against the background of recent terrorist attacks. In addition, it represents a follow-up to the ‘Ministerial Decision on Countering the Phenomenon of Foreign Terrorist Fighters’, adopted at the 2014 MC meeting in Basel.

The Belgrade MC meeting also adopted a ‘Ministerial Declaration on Reinforcing OSCE Efforts to Counter Terrorism in the Wake of Recent Terrorist Attacks’.²⁹ This declaration is modeled on a previous declaration adopted by the Permanent Council after the 13 November 2015 Paris terrorist attacks.³⁰ The adoption of the declaration on ministerial level again underscored that participating States are united in their condemnation of terrorist acts and are committed to combating terrorism in all its forms together.

The Belgrade MC also adopted a ‘Declaration on Youth and Security’.³¹ Some states questioned the necessity of such a declaration, especially in light of the fact that ministers had already adopted a similar declaration at the 2014 MC meeting in Basel. Consensus on this declaration was nevertheless important to Serbia, which had

26 Ibid.

27 OSCE, Ministerial Council, Belgrade 2015, Ministerial Declaration on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism and Radicalization that lead to Terrorism, MC.doc/4/15, 4 December 2015.

28 Ibid.

29 OSCE, Ministerial Council, Belgrade 2015, Ministerial Declaration on Reinforcing OSCE Efforts to Counter Terrorism in the Wake of Recent Terrorist Attacks, MC.doc/3/15, 4 December 2015.

30 OSCE, Permanent Council, Declaration on the 13 November Terrorist Attacks in Paris, pc.doc/3/15, 17 November 2015.

31 OSCE, Ministerial Council, Belgrade 2015, Declaration on Youth and Security, MC.doc/5/15, 4 December 2015.

appointed the first ever Special Representatives on Youth and Security and invested efforts throughout the year to include the voice of youth in the work of the OSCE. The declaration was watered down considerably and a reference to the Serbian Special Representatives on Youth was deleted from the final version. The declaration nevertheless shows that participating States acknowledged the work done by Serbia (and Switzerland in 2014) on the issue of including youth in the work of the OSCE as they stress “the importance of promoting the implementation of the OSCE commitments on youth, particularly in the area of education and the role young people can play to support participating States in implementing OSCE commitments in all three dimensions of the OSCE.”³²

Ministers also adopted a ‘Declaration on the OSCE Activities in Support of Global Efforts in Tackling the World Drug Problem’.³³ The declaration calls upon participating States to contribute to the preparation for the United Nations General Assembly on the world drug problem in 2016 (UNGASS 2016) being led by the United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs. The issue of combating illicit drugs has been on the Organization’s agenda since 2005. Activities have been mainly focused on helping participating States implement the relevant un anti-drug conventions.

Finally, the Belgrade MC adopted a ‘Ministerial Statement on the Negotiations on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process in the 5+2 Format’.³⁴ It is a positive signal that consensus could be found on this statement, despite the fact that no 5+2 meeting was held in 2015. The statement underlines that all OSCE states support the agreed-upon negotiation format and it can be hoped that this will provide further impetus to a resumption of 5+2 meetings in 2016. The 5+2 format includes the sides (Transdniestria and Moldova), as well as the OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, the European Union and the United States as mediators and observers.

Meetings on the Margins of the MC Meeting

As is general practice, foreign ministers used the opportunity and held a large number of bilateral meetings on the margins of the Belgrade MC meeting.

On a positive note, the OSCE MC in Belgrade offered a venue for bilateral talks between the Russian and the Turkish foreign ministers, who discussed the shooting down of the Russian aircraft along the Turkish-Syrian border. This meeting on the margins of the Belgrade MC was considered very useful as it was the first such meeting since the dangerous incident.

Another incident on the margins of the Belgrade MC meeting led to negative sentiments among many delegations. After their bilateral meeting, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić held a joint press conference at which they seemed to agree on their criticism of the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), Dunja Mijatović. Serbian tv station b92 quotes Vucic as saying that “the first great orchestrated attack with falsehoods on the government of Serbia” from Dunja Mijatović came after last year’s floods in Serbia.³⁵

32 Ibid.

33 OSCE, Ministerial Council, Belgrade 2015, Declaration on the OSCE Activities in Support of Global Efforts in Tackling the World Drug Problem, MC.doc/2/15, 4 December 2015.

34 OSCE, Ministerial Council, Belgrade 2015, Ministerial Statement on the Negotiations on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process in the “5+2” Format, MC.doc/1/15, 4 December 2015.

35 Website of b92 tv station, Lavrov, Vucic praise relations, criticize OSCE media office, 4 December 2015. Retrieved 8 April 2016, http://www.b92.net/eng/news/politics.php?yyyy=2015&mm=12&dd=04&nav_id=96268.

This open criticism of one of the most important, independent OSCE institutions led to a lot of disappointment among a number of OSCE delegations in Belgrade. Some even took to Twitter to vent their anger. For example, Daniel Baer, US Ambassador to the OSCE tweeted that “at close of oscemc15 would be good if Serbia makes clear Serbian government’s strong support for the independent work of RFoM”.³⁶ Similarly, Christian Strohal, Austrian Ambassador to the OSCE, tweeted that “we need clear unequivocal support from Serbia, our Chair, to all OSCE institutions.”³⁷

Closing Session

During the closing session, Montenegro delivered a strong statement on behalf of 43 states as a demonstration of support of freedom of association and peaceful assembly, the safety of journalists and the work of the RFoM. With this statement, the majority of OSCE states wanted to communicate their support for the RFoM as well as for fundamental freedoms that had been addressed in draft ministerial decisions during the past years but had failed to reach consensus every time.

OSCE Chairperson-in-Office (CiO), Serbia’s Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić, used the closing session to read out a statement summarizing the discussions and proceedings.³⁸ In fact, much of that statement was taken directly from the draft political declaration that – as predicted – failed to reach consensus because of the divergent views on the root causes of the Ukraine crisis.

CiO Dačić explained that states continued to disagree on the root causes of the Ukraine crisis but were committed to using the OSCE to deescalate the crisis. In addition, he noted that divergent security perceptions persisted among OSCE states. He also stated that there was agreement among participating States that the ceasefire in eastern Ukraine needed to be consolidated and that a lasting political settlement was necessary in order to avoid further human suffering. Furthermore, CiO Dačić stated that a number of participating States believed that the principles of the Helsinki Final Act had been violated in the course of the Ukraine crisis and that the territorial integrity of Ukraine had to be respected. He also noted that many OSCE participating States acknowledged that a strengthened OSCE could make a better difference in managing the complex security challenges. Furthermore, CiO Dačić stated that many participating States recognized the need to foster military transparency and to update the arms control regime. He also noted that during the MC a lot of attention was devoted to combating terrorism in all its forms as well as to violent extremism and the issue of migration.³⁹

Conclusion

The Belgrade MC meeting ended with a 9-hour delay. The final press conference with a visibly tired Serbian Foreign Minister Ivica Dačić and OSCE Secretary General Lamberto Zannier ended at one o’clock in the morning on 5 December 2015. Secretary General Zannier emphasized the importance of keeping the channels of dialogue open in spite of differences. He commended the Serbian Chairmanship for its role as mediator during difficult times.

36 Baer, Daniel (danbbear). “At close of oscemc15 would be good if Serbia makes clear Serbian government’s strong support for the independent work of RFoM.” 4 December 2015, 4:35 pm. Tweet.

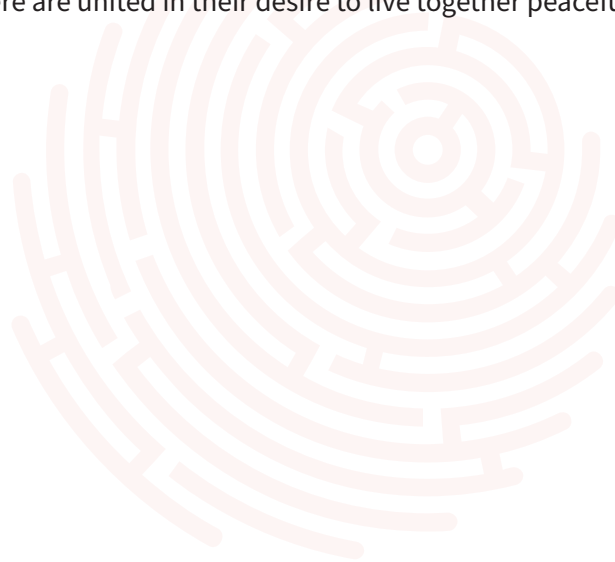
37 Strohal, Christian (cstrohal), “We need clear unequivocal support from Serbia, our Chair, to all OSCE institutions.” 4 December 2015, 4:40 pm. Tweet.

38 Summary by the Chairperson-in-Office of the Discussions at the OSCE Ministerial Council, MC.gal/9/15, 9 December 2015.

39 Ibid.


In conclusion, the Belgrade MC meeting illustrated the deep divide and the distrust among many OSCE participating States. In the end, it was possible to find common ground only on a few areas related to combating terrorism, combating illicit drugs, countering violent extremism and radicalization, as well as on youth and security. No consensus could be found on decisions in the human dimension as well as in the economic and environmental dimension. Decisions on combating torture and on the gender action plan could not be adopted for the second year in a row. As stated at the outset of this article, the divergent views on the root causes of the Ukraine conflict as well as a number of bilateral conflicts negatively influenced the OSCE negotiation process and thus hampered consensus.

As stated by Robert Kvile, Norwegian Ambassador to the OSCE, during the closing session, the failure to adopt decisions “illustrates more than division and different approaches. It illustrates a lack of commitment to the OSCE. Or put differently: It illustrates that too many are committed to themselves only.”⁴⁰ Therefore, the 2016 German OSCE Chairmanship will have to continuously provide a forum for dialogue and act as a mediator among states in order to overcome distrust among participating States. As Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated at the closing session: “As varied and controversial as the positions adopted by governments may be sometimes, people everywhere are united in their desire to live together peacefully. Our shared goal must be to achieve this.”⁴¹



40 Closing Statement as delivered by Ambassador Robert Kvile at the 22nd Meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council, MC.del/43/15, 4 December 2015.

41 Speech by Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier at the Close of the OSCE Ministerial Council in Belgrade, MC.dec/44/15, 7 December 2015.



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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.

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

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