

The OSCE's Platform for Co-operative Security

An Opportunity for Multilateral Coherence

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Abstract

The Platform for Co-operative Security was adopted as part of the 1999 Charter for European Security in order to strengthen cooperation between security organizations. Its full potential as an instrument for multilateral coherence, as envisaged by the text of the Charter, remains unexploited, however. This is due in part to the OSCE's peripheral position in the European security architecture and in part to the competition for political influence and resources between international organizations. A more pragmatic approach towards the Platform could help surmount some of the complex political dynamics hampering its full implementation.

Keywords

coherence – cooperative security – comprehensive approach – international and regional organizations – crisis response

Introduction

There is a singular discrepancy between political calls for greater coherence in the multilateral system and the current underutilization of the OSCE Platform for Co-operative Security as a “coordinating framework to foster cooperation”² between international and regional organizations. The Platform was conceived in 1999 as a tool to advance political and operational coherence among intergovernmental security institutions, but that core function has been neglected in most capitals of the OSCE participating States. This is all the more remarkable as the OSCE participating States have reaffirmed that today's risks and challenges “cannot be met by a single state or organization”.³ Furthermore, as the international financial crisis has tightened the budgets of government owned organizations, coherence has become imperative for ensuring increased efficiency and mutually reinforcing policies and practices.

This article outlines the concept of coherence set forth in the Istanbul Charter, gives some of the reasons why the Platform has never been used to its full extent and proposes a pragmatic approach towards its full implementation.

Coherence and Comprehensive Approaches—Conceptual Clarifications

“Coherence”, or “policy coherence” are widely used terms in international policy documents, but they can refer to very different concepts. Hoebink has provided a general definition, which describes policy coherence as the “non-occurrence of effects of policy that are contrary to the intended results or aims of policy”.⁴ His definition proceeds from a rather minimalist position that particularly emphasizes the absence of a cause-effect contradiction. At the other end of the spectrum, coherence would be interpreted in a way that highlights the achievement of symmetry through the integration of diverse elements.

Political scientists have also developed a categorization of several types of coherence, which includes horizontal coherence—defined as the interaction between different policy areas—and vertical coherence—the combined contributions by states towards a specific objective. Coherence can also be pursued at a policy or operational

2 OSCE Istanbul Summit, Istanbul Document 1999, Charter for European Security, sum. doc/1/99, p. 4

3 Charter for European Security, 1999, p. 3, OSCE Ministerial Council, OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century, Maastricht, 1 and 2 December 2003, mc.doc/1/03, p. 9

4 P. Hoebink, “The Coherence of EU Policies: Perspectives from the North and the South”, European Union's Poverty Reduction Effectiveness Programme, Brussels, 2005, p. 13. Retrieved 18 May 2014, <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/r4d/PDF/Outputs/EC-PREP/PolicyCoherenceFinalRep.pdf>

level, internally within a policy field or an agency or multilaterally between several international players.⁵

The classification of the various dimensions of coherence is admittedly an academic exercise. It does help, however, to clarify concepts used by international and regional organizations and—for the purpose of this article—to compare them against the intentions underlying the Platform for Co-operative Security. The distinction is also necessary because international actors use similar terminology to signify different policy tenets. A case in point is the use of the notions of “integrated approach” or “comprehensive approach”. In the United Nations (un), the “integrated approach” refers to internal or institutional coherence across entities and departments of the un. It was developed in the context of peace-building to ensure a common strategy by all un actors at a country level.⁶

The European Union (EU) has employed the term “comprehensive approach” to designate its efforts towards integrating various foreign policy instruments—ranging from diplomatic, security, defence, financial and trade policies to development cooperation and humanitarian aid—into well-coordinated external action. The EU has even gone so far as to enshrine policy coherence in its external relations in the Treaty on European Union (Maastricht 1992) and the Lisbon Treaty, thereby making coherence—both horizontal and internal—a legal obligation⁷: “*The Union shall ensure consistency between the different areas of its external action and between these and its other policies. The Council and the Commission, assisted by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, shall ensure that consistency and shall cooperate to that effect.*”⁸

Within its “comprehensive approach”, the EU has integrated the principle of civil-military cooperation in the context of crisis management.⁹ To a certain extent, this is comparable to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization’s (NATO) Strategic Concept adopted at the 2010 Lisbon Summit, which stipulates a comprehensive approach to crisis management involving political, civilian and military instruments.¹⁰ The key difference, however, is that the EU’s approach is focused on internal co-operation between civilian and military actors, whereas NATO’s concept is outward-looking and concerned with the cooperation with the international community’s larger efforts to contribute to stabilization and post-conflict reconstruction.

As regards the OSCE, its security concept is defined by a “comprehensive approach” encompassing three areas or ‘baskets’, as they were called in the consultation process that led to the adoption of the Helsinki Final Act: the politico-military, the economic and environmental and the human dimensions. The “comprehensive approach” also mandates cooperation among states due to the indivisibility of security. Without stating it explicitly, the OSCE has thus put coherence at the core of its mandate by 1) recognizing the relevance and interdependence of different

5 M. Carbone, “Mission Impossible: The European Union and Policy Coherence for Development”, in *European Integration*, 2008, Vol. 30, No. 3, p. 326.

6 C. de Coning and K. Friis, “Coherence and Coordination. The Limits of the Comprehensive Approach”, in *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 2011, Vol. 15, p. 246f.

7 See M. Cremona, “Coherence through Law: What difference will the Treaty of Lisbon make?”, in *Hamburg Review of Social Sciences*, 2008, Vol. 3, pp. 11–36.

8 Consolidated versions of the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, Article 21, paragraph 3. It is important to note that the English version of the Treaty uses the term “consistency”, while other language versions apply the word “coherence”. Compare this to the French: “L’Union veille à la cohérence entre les différents domaines de son action extérieure et entre ceux-ci et ses autres politiques.” or the German: “Die Union achtet auf die Kohärenz zwischen den einzelnen Bereichen ihres auswärtigen Handelns sowie zwischen diesen und ihren übrigen Politikbereichen.”

9 See for example “European Security Strategy. A secure Europe in a better world”, Brussels, 12 December 2003.

10 NATO Lisbon Summit, “Active Engagement, Modern Defence. Strategic Concept for the Defence and Security of the Members of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization”, Lisbon, 19 and 20 November 2010.

policy areas for security and 2) acknowledging that the security of one state is influenced by that of the others.¹¹

The Concept of Coherence in the Charter for European Security

The 1999 Charter for European Security is one of the few OSCE documents¹² that include an explicit reference to “coherence”. Pointing to the Platform for Co-operative Security, which was annexed to the Charter, the heads of state or government of the OSCE participating States affirm the following: “Through this Platform we seek to develop and maintain political and operational coherence, on the basis of shared values, among all the various bodies dealing with security, both in responding to specific crises and in formulating responses to new risks and challenges.”¹³

The coherence concept put forward by the Charter and its Platform has a clear multilateral dimension aimed at fostering the interrelatedness of the actions of international actors at the strategic and practical levels. It recognizes the institutional diversity of the various bodies and their added value for security in the OSCE area: “[...] various organizations can reinforce each other drawing on their particular strengths.”¹⁴ The texts of the Charter and the Platform also define some of the factors that should help to put the concept into operation; they define the ultimate objective of coherence under the Platform, namely “the promotion of comprehensive security within the OSCE area”¹⁵ and point to a “basis of shared values”¹⁶ being the “glue” of coherence. The OSCE is meant to be a cohesive actor: “[...] recognizing the key integrating role that the OSCE can play”. Although not specifically mentioned, one can assume that this refers to the OSCE’s large membership on the one hand, which includes all the countries of Europe, Central Asia and North America. On the other hand, it underscores the OSCE’s broad approach to security, which potentially comprises the scope of action of most organizations with security-related mandates. The Charter also mentions cooperation with other organizations, which, by suggesting joint action, implies going beyond mere coordination.

The justifications given for the creation of the Platform are the need for consolidated efforts to address security challenges and to react to crisis situations, as well as for the better utilization of the resources of the international community. This indicates that the OSCE participating States were not primarily concerned with attaining consistency between the OSCE’s actions and those of other international organizations involved in security efforts. Rather, a more crucial consideration behind the initiative seems to have been concern about pooling and organizing capabilities and resources in an efficient way. At the same time, the text of the Charter specifies that there is no intention to establish “a permanent division of labour among [the various organizations]”, also that the Platform is conceived “as a flexible coordinating framework”. In this sense, by favouring *ad hoc* and context-specific coordination arrangements over a set structure with an overriding centre, the OSCE participating States have also determined the limits of coherence.

11 Of course many other international organizations have developed approaches to foster coherence, such as, for example, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Since the 1990s, its Development Assistance Committee (DAC) has been striving towards achieving consistency between development goals and non-aid policies and trying to ensure that the collective contributions of donors are in alignment with these objectives. For an analysis of coherence through inter-institutional cooperation between the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization, see for example R. van der Hoeven, “Policy Coherence. The Newest Fad in the International Discourse?” in P. Hoebink (ed), *European Development Cooperation. In Between the Local and the Global*, Amsterdam, 2010, pp. 25–46.

12 This refers to texts adopted by the OSCE participating States by consensus.

13 Charter for European Security, *Ibid*, p. 4.

14 Charter for European Security, *Ibid*, p. 4.

15 OSCE Istanbul Summit, “Operational Document the Platform for Co-operative Security”, Istanbul Document 1999, Charter for European Security, *sum.doc/1/99*, 18 and 19 November 1999, p. 14.

16 Charter for European Security, *Ibid*, p. 4.

The Platform is not only a political pledge by the OSCE participating States to ensure coherence between the organizations of which they are members. It is also a mandate for those organizations to increase their institutional cooperation. More specifically, the Platform proposes five types of cooperation:

1. Institutional contacts between international organizations, *inter alia* through the appointment of liaison officers, regular dialogue, and cross representation at meetings;
2. Cooperation on the ground through common projects, joint assessment missions etc.;
3. Facilitation of the exchange of information and experience between subregional groups;
4. Special meetings to coordinate policies or determine areas of cooperation;
5. Cooperation in responding to specific crises.

The adoption of the Platform gave the OSCE a new basis to set up institutional relations with other international organizations, both politically and on the ground. Although external contacts had been established in the early stages of the Helsinki process, it was through the implementation of the Platform provisions that the Organization managed to develop a network of Secretariat-to-Secretariat contacts, as well as cooperation in the field.¹⁷ The OSCE's dealings with partner organizations currently range from informal, *ad hoc* and needs-based interactions to formalized and structured cooperative frameworks.

At the same time, the provisions related to the coordination of policies, including in the context of crisis response, remained to a large extent unimplemented. In the years immediately following the adoption of the 1999 Charter, a number of conferences were still held under the banner of the Platform, for example to exchange information on international projects in Central Asia or to share experiences and best practices among counterterrorism experts from regional and subregional organizations.¹⁸ Today, while the OSCE's regular annual events routinely include representatives of international and regional organizations as guest speakers and attendees, most of those meetings are not primarily dedicated to ensuring policy coherence through coordination between intergovernmental institutions.¹⁹

In 2003, the principles of the Platform, including political and operational coherence as a key objective, were reiterated in the OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century. The new security strategy further envisaged the creation of a new *ad hoc* consultative mechanism between international organizations mandated to provide threat analysis and response.²⁰ Such a mechanism never came into being,

17 O. Pavlyuk, "The Platform for Co-operative Security: Ten Years of Co-operation", in OSCE Yearbook 2009, 2010, p. 352.

18 O. Pavlyuk, *ibid*, p. 354f.

19 A notable exception is the Alliance against Trafficking in Human Beings, which was set up at the initiative of the first OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings, Helga Konrad, and pursued by her successor, Maria Grazia Giammarinaro. The Alliance is a forum for cooperation, information exchange, and agenda-setting for governmental and non-governmental organizations combating trafficking in human beings. C. Mc Gregor, and V. Gracheva, "Forming a lasting alliance to combat trafficking in human beings", in OSCE Magazine, Issue number 2/2010, p. 19.

20 OSCE Strategy to Address Threats to Security and Stability in the Twenty-First Century, 2003, p. 10. Adopted in Maastricht, the Strategy also mentions the OSCE's interaction with nongovernmental organizations, which is, however, not part of the provisions of the Platform for Co-operative Security.

however, due to a lack of interest on the part of some of the partner organizations.²¹

As a result, the Platform for Co-operative Security has remained an abstract concept, the result of a diplomatic mind game far removed from the operational requirements of international organizations. The text of the Platform is, after all, the outcome of years of consultations. It represents a compromise between 1) initial Russian demands in the early 1990s to pre-assign roles to different regional organizations under the guidance of the OSCE and 2) EU member states favouring a more unstructured system of collaboration, with the OSCE providing a forum for dialogue between international institutions.²²

Impediments to the Full Implementation of the Platform

There are a number of possible explanations for the inability to put into practice the Platform's coordinating role.

A first reason could be that there is simply no need to convene the Platform for co-ordination purposes, or that other existing formats, such as the UN Secretary-General's high-level meetings and retreats with the heads of regional organizations, or different 'groups of friends' configurations, are already fulfilling that duty. At the same time, this would be at odds with the fact that OSCE documents and statements made by representatives of states regularly include calls for increased co-ordination between international actors in order to create synergies and avoid duplication of efforts.

A second explanation is related to the OSCE's position in the wider European security architecture. When the Istanbul Charter was adopted, it was already clear that the OSCE would not be given primary responsibility for security on the European continent, which is why the Platform emphasizes the principle of equality among its participating organizations.²³ In the course of the following years, as the political attention of the Western OSCE participating States shifted to other organizations, the OSCE was pushed into a peripheral position from which it could not credibly establish itself as a hub for strategic discussions between international, regional and subregional organizations.

A third complicating factor is the question of access. The Platform makes OSCE cooperation with other organizations conditional upon adherence to a set of principles and commitments by the organizations' members. Those include 1) the principles contained in the Charter of the United Nations and in other fundamental OSCE documents like the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris; 2) commitments regarding transparency and predictability in the spirit of the Vienna Document 1999; 3) implementation of arms control obligations and transparency about their evolution; 4) membership based on openness and free will; and 5) support for the OSCE's concept of common, comprehensive and indivisible security. The OSCE participating States, however, never defined a method or mechanism for determining which organizations fit the above criteria.²⁴ A straightforward approach to the matter would be to include international and regional groups that coexist in the OSCE area and adjacent regions and have an implicit or explicit security agenda. In practice, the involvement of some regional groups in the workings of the OSCE has led to political controversies among the participating States. In 2006, the OSCE Rules of Procedure introduced a consensus requirement for extending invitations to international

21 O. Pavlyuk, *ibid*, p. 357.

22 O. Pavlyuk, *ibid*, p. 343f.

23 A. J.K. Bailes, J.Y. Haine, Z. Lachowski, "Reflections on the OSCE-EU Relationship", in OSCE Yearbook 2007, 2008, p. 66.

24 O. Pavlyuk, *ibid*, p. 349.

organizations to take part in summit and ministerial council meetings.²⁵ Since then, the annual negotiations on the list of invitees have revealed divergent views about the value systems of other international organizations and the appropriateness of their cooperation with the OSCE.²⁶

Fourthly, inter-agency competition has played its part in preventing the Platform from being fully utilized. Pavlyuk cites “the general reluctance of international organizations to be ‘coordinated’”,²⁷ notwithstanding assertions made in the Istanbul Charter that no organization is in any way subordinate to another. Ultimately, international and regional organizations are bureaucracies concerned with their own survival. This notably entails a certain competition for political attention and resources from their respective member or participating states. This is particularly the case when several organizations work in the same geographical area and/or have operational overlaps.

Incidentally, the search for competitive advantage and the reliance on positive reviews from their member states also has a negative effect on coherence: Most international organizations have relatively short budget cycles—annual in the case of the OSCE—which are indicator-driven and hence require the production of measurable outputs within a given timeframe. Because it is difficult to determine whether policy and policy results are causally linked and also because the effects of longer processes are difficult to measure and to relate back to policy, intergovernmental organizations have to work towards achieving results in the short term. This short-term perspective does not benefit coherence, which has to be seen from a long-term perspective.²⁸

The same dilemma between short-term output and long-term impact is the reason why it proves challenging to ensure coordination among different actors in crisis situations. There is usually an urgent time factor, which might not allow for elaborate response coordination among the members of the international community. Also, a rapid response to a crisis situation provides international organizations with the opportunity to enhance their image and maximize their visibility. Paradoxically, the coordination of international support is most difficult when coherence and cooperation are most essential for strengthening stabilization efforts.

The Way Forward—A Pragmatic Approach towards Multilateral Coherence

How can the function of the Platform as a coordinating mechanism be realized, then?

First, by highlighting the Platform’s potential for multilateral coherence. The OSCE remains uniquely situated to serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas and as a mechanism for coordination in terms of joint responses, resource allocation and shared policies. The OSCE represents the common denominator among the organizations operating in the Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian area, both in terms of its mandate—which covers soft and hard security aspects—and as far as its membership is concerned. Or to say it with the current Secretary General of the OSCE: “As the world’s largest regional security organization, the OSCE is a natural bridging point for co-operation

25 OSCE Ministerial Council, Rules of Procedure of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, mc.doc/1/06, 1 November 2006, paragraphs IV.2(A)6 and IV.2(B)6.

26 See, for example, the interpretative statements made by Azerbaijan, Turkey, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan on the timetable and organizational modalities of the nineteenth and twentieth meetings of the OSCE Ministerial Council, in which they express their dissatisfaction about the exclusion of the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States and the Parliamentary Assembly of Turkic Speaking Countries from the list of international organizations to be invited to OSCE Ministerial Council meetings. OSCE Permanent Council, pc Decision No. 1053 of 29 November 2013 and pc Decision No. 1105 of 28 November 2013.

27 O. Pavlyuk, *ibid.*, p. 357.

28 C. de Coning and K. Friis, “Coherence and Coordination. The Limits of the Comprehensive Approach”, in *Journal of International Peacekeeping*, 2011, Vol. 15, p. 261f.

with other international organizations at both the regional and global level.”²⁹

By now, the OSCE has set up a wide network of external relations, which it can draw upon in convening Platform meetings.

Second, by allowing pragmatism to prevail over procedural considerations. While the OSCE is a consensus-driven organization, meetings of the Platform can take place as events organized by the OSCE Chairmanship or executive structures—outside the strict scope of the Rules of Procedure—thereby enabling the broadest possible participation of regional organizations in coordination efforts.

Third, by adopting a practical stance in light of the fact that all international organizations are operating under budgetary constraints. This requires taking decisions on the prioritization of resources, arranging consultations in early programming stages, sharing information and taking it into account for planning purposes. The bulk of the coordination and cooperation between regional and international organizations takes place at the institutional level and in the field. This is arguably where it is most useful, but it should be extended to include member or participating states. Ensuring coherence is ultimately about making political choices with regard to priorities and the activities needed to achieve them, as well as determining the right actor for a required action. Of course, there will always be instances of political differences hampering intergovernmental collaboration. Without wanting to oversimplify the political considerations around governments’ choices to act through different international organizations, states could nonetheless leverage the Platform as a framework for engaging in strategic discussions about cooperation and the development of joint initiatives.


It is of course unrealistic to expect that a complete synchronization of all activities by international and regional organizations in the OSCE area could be achieved. Indeed, Forster and Stokke note that full coherence would require not only a coherent norms system, it would also have to be built on coherent implementing procedures, as well as coherent institutions for decision-making, enforcement and monitoring.³⁰ Those are parameters that the OSCE cannot possibly fulfil. However, if coherence is conceived as a “scale of relationships”³¹ that aims to achieve a realistic level of coordination and cooperation, the Platform is the appropriate mechanism for allowing international actors with different mandates, variability in available resources and changing political focus to negotiate their functions on a case by case basis. A further benefit is that the Platform can be adapted to specific circumstances as needed, that it can focus on sectoral issues, or can be applied in specific crisis situations.

In the run-up to the 40th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2015, participating States will review the OSCE’s interactions with other regional and international organizations. This occasion also provides an opportunity to reassess the utilization of the Platform for Co-operative Security and—one hopes—to promote its use as a mechanism that can bring together international and regional organizations, as well as the states to which they belong, in order to be able to better tailor partnership arrangements to the requirements of specific situations and political dynamics.

29 L. Zannier, “Strength in Numbers: Co-operating with Other International Organizations”, in OSCE Yearbook 2012, 2013, p. 384.

30 J. Forster and O. Stokke, “Coherence of Policies Towards Developing Countries: Approaching the Problematique”, in J. Forster and O. Stokke (eds), *Policy Coherence in Development Co-operation*, Frank Cass, London, 1999, p. 23f.

31 C. de Coning and K. Friis, *ibid.*, p. 244.



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