

## **COLUMN**

# Back to reality: The 2011 Vilnius Ministerial Council meeting

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After almost two years of high hopes and ambitions -- the Corfu process, the 2010 Astana Commemorative Declaration with its 'vision of a free, democratic, common and indivisible Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian security community' -- the 2011 Vilnius Ministerial Council (MC) meeting has brought the OSCE back to the lowly spheres of European security policy. Although we have become used to Ministerial Council meetings that cannot agree on a political declaration (the last one adopted dates back to the 2002 Porto MC meeting) or on statements on unresolved conflicts, the results of the Vilnius MC meeting are particularly meagre: of course, no political communiqué and no statements on conflicts, but also almost no decisions on human dimension issues and on transnational threats and challenges, although the latter questions should have represented one major area of progress for this MC meeting.

The reasons therefore range from the impact of domestic politics and political sensitivities to what can be called a 're-worsening' of the political atmosphere, after the US-Russian resetting of relations has not produced any concrete results for Europe. A day before the MC meeting, the International Election Observation Mission to the Russian Duma elections issued its 'Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions'<sup>2</sup> that was, as expected, quite critical and summarised its findings as follows: 'This all did not provide the necessary conditions for fair electoral competition.' A day later, almost none of the speakers at the MC meeting mentioned this (at least not explicitly), with the remarkable exception of US Secretary of State Hilary Clinton, whose statement focused largely on human dimension issues including the Duma elections. According to observers, the Russian delegation, in an act of retaliation, blocked consensus on almost all human dimension-related draft decisions.

For a number of Western delegations, the failure of the human dimension decisions destroyed any basis for the adoption of a series of draft decisions related to transnational threats and challenges, all the more so as the discussion on the draft decision on cyber security was itself plagued by disputes over the extent to which human-dimension aspects should be included. In the end, the draft decisions on an 'OSCE Strategic Framework for Police-Related Activities', an 'OSCE Concept for Combating the Threat of Illicit Drugs and the Diversion of Chemical Precursors', on 'Further OSCE Measures for Cyber Security: Confidence-building Measures for Cyber Space' and on an 'OSCE Consolidated Framework for the Fight against Terrorism', which had been expected to provide much of the political substance of the Vilnius MC meeting, could not be adopted.

What remains concerns, with a few exceptions, third-rate issues of a mainly declaratory character from a 'Declaration on Combating All Forms of Human Trafficking' to decisions on 'Strengthening Transport Dialogue in the OSCE', 'Small Arms and Light Weapons and Stockpiles of Conventional Ammunition' and 'Strengthening OSCE Engagement in Afghanistan.'<sup>3</sup> Although Decision No. 7, 'Issues Relevant to the Forum for Security Co-operation', contains an updated Vienna Document 1999 on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (called the Vienna Document 2011), progress was so limited and restricted to technical issues that 39 (Western) States declared in an Interpretative Statement: 'However, it is our view that the Decision falls short of what is necessary in terms of direction to the Forum for Security Co-operation.' And further on: 'We had hoped for strategic direction that could lead to successful work on the Vienna Document, to bring it into line with the realities of the political and military situation that pertains in Europe and across the OSCE space. These hopes remain unfulfilled. We would like to register our concern at a time when arms control and CSBMs in Europe are under strain as never before, that we are unable to look up from our national agendas to engage on work that would

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2 OSCE/ODIHR, OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, International Election Observation, Russian Federation, State Duma Elections, 4 December 2011, Statement of Preliminary Findings and Conclusions, Moscow, 5 December 2011, at: <http://www.osce.org/odihhr/85757>.

3 All documents of the 2011 Vilnius MC meeting are available at: [http://www.osce.org/event/summit\\_2010](http://www.osce.org/event/summit_2010).

benefit us all'.<sup>4</sup> And indeed, with the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) Treaty being increasingly undermined, the whole European arms control regime is substantially endangered.


One of the few decisions which matters politically is Decision No. 3/11: 'Elements of the Conflict Cycle, Related to Enhancing the OSCE's Capabilities in Early Warning, Early Action, Dialogue Facilitation and Mediation Support, and Post-Conflict Rehabilitation'. This decision contains a number of concrete operational tasks for the Secretary General -- from collecting and providing early warning information to preparing proposals on enhancing OSCE fact-finding teams and establishing a mediation-support focal point -- that will significantly strengthen the OSCE's conflict regulation capabilities. Decision No. 12/11, 'Application of Mongolia to Become a Participating State', will probably lead to the accession of Mongolia to the OSCE at the forthcoming 2012 Dublin MC meeting. Mongolia's desire to become an OSCE state expresses, to some extent, its uncomfortable situation of being sandwiched between Russia and China. Another decision, subject to a silence procedure which expired on 10 February 2012 and which has meanwhile been adopted, concerns the consecutive OSCE Chairmanships of Switzerland and Serbia in 2014 and 2015. Originally, Serbia had applied for 2014, which had met with opposition from some States which then urged Switzerland to jump in. Switzerland, however, did not want to stand against Serbia and, in the end, this tandem solution represents a nice combination of the intended and unintended consequences of political action.

A year ago, Walter Kemp finished his assessment of the 2010 Astana Summit meeting by writing: 'Whatever happens in the future, Astana will be considered a turning point in the history of the OSCE. Either it was the beginning of a new era, or the beginning of the end'.<sup>5</sup> The Vilnius MC meeting does not mark the beginning of a new era, but also certainly not the beginning of the end. What it marks is an interim period until around mid-2013, due to elections and the subsequent formation of governments in Russia and in the United States, that has pushed many actors to adopt a wait-and-see attitude. Thus, the severity of the current situation of inactivity and nervousness should not be exaggerated. However, one should be vigilant in seeing that this mix, together with the current chronic neglect of European security issues by the political leaderships, does not again allow for violent conflicts with some escalation potential.

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4 OSCE, Ministerial Council, Vilnius 2011, Decision No. 7/11, Issues Relevant to the Forum for Security Co-operation, MC.DEC/7/11, 7 December 2011, Attachment, Interpretative Statement under Paragraph IV.1(A)6 of the Rules of Procedure of the Organization for Security and Co-operation by the delegation of Germany (also on behalf of Albania, the United States of America, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Canada, Cyprus, Croatia, Denmark, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, the United Kingdom, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Montenegro, Norway, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Sweden, the Czech Republic and Ukraine).

5 Walter Kemp, The Astana Summit: A Triumph of Common Sense, in: Security and Human Rights, vol. 21 (2010), no. 4, p. 263



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