

CHRONICLE

OSCE Welcomes Its New Secretary General

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1. Italian diplomat becomes the new OSCE Secretary General

On Thursday afternoon, 30 June, the white smoke finally appeared from the OSCE chimney in Vienna: the announcement of the head of UNMIK, Ambassador Lamberto Zannier, as the new Secretary General of the OSCE for the next three years as the successor of the French Ambassador, Marc Perrin de Brichambaut, who had held this position during the past six years.

The appointment was the final result of what turned out to be almost a Greek soap opera and for a while there was a real danger that the OSCE would enter an SG-less period as a result of the lack of consensus among its 56 participating states, or to be more precise, by a lack of consensus within the bloc of EU countries. Interestingly enough, the last blockade was created by France which could look back at having one of its people being the OSCE SG and could, at that time, be looking forward to having one of its citizens becoming the new head of the IMF (in spite of the fact that the previous director of that organization had to leave his post in disgrace as a result of accusations of sexual harassment and assault against a chamber maid in a luxurious New York hotel).

On the 23rd of June the situation still seemed to be clear: the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE had submitted a draft decision to the Permanent Council to recommend the OSCE Ministerial to appoint the Italian candidate. However, just before the start of the PC the surprising news came that France had broken the silence procedure and demanded further clarifications. It came as no surprise that many diplomats in Vienna used the word 'unacceptable' when the news was spreading.

Although it was not officially confirmed, it was obvious that the last French blockade came as a bargaining chip in the game of which country should deliver the new head of the European Central Bank, a position which, interestingly enough, is currently also occupied by a Frenchman (Trichet). Apparently the French wanted something in return from the Italians for their plan to deliver the new director of the ECB (the Italian ECB candidate was appointed a couple of days later), although it is unknown what they wanted (and possibly received). Reportedly, the French wanted another Italian on the board of the ECB to resign from his post (which happened under strong pressure from the Italian Prime Minister) in order to avoid a too strong Italian presence on the ECB board.

The unexpected French move put the OSCE in a difficult position, as the incumbent SG was leaving his position on the 30th of June at midnight, so 'something' had to happen before that date. Pressed by the limited time, the CIO convoked a Preparatory Committee meeting early on Saturday morning, 25 June, in order to launch a new five-day 'silence procedure'. It does not require much imagination to understand that many delegates of OSCE states were not particularly enthusiastic about this Saturday-morning meeting, to put it diplomatically! However, this was the only possibility for the Lithuanian CIO, as it is the OSCE custom that Ministerial decisions (which include the appointment of a new SG) require at least five days as ministers are supposed to need at least that minimum of time to make up their mind. Finally, the relieving news came on Thursday 30 June at noon, when it turned out that, on this occasion, nobody had broken the silence procedure. The price they paid to the French remains unknown, although it is likely that the second Italian on the ECB Board was sacrificed because of French pressure.

The appointment of the new SG was the outcome of a rather lengthy process in which three other serious candidates from Austria, Turkey and Portugal could not master the necessary consensus, although the Austrian candidate did manage to get most OSCE countries to support her. However, she lost the game as she had made fairly derogatory public statements about Turkey during her tenure as the Austrian Foreign Minister, when she

opposed Turkish EU membership. The Turks had not forgotten this, which apparently was reason enough to block her appointment. It is also worth noting that three of the four candidates came from EU countries. The ensuing fight among them clearly demonstrates that the much-lauded Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU which is supposed to govern EU policy in the OSCE is definitely not working when it comes to the appointment of high officials... The new Italian SG is a well-known face in Vienna, as he has been the Director of the OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre (2002-2006) and has built up an excellent reputation amongst delegations and staff. Since mid-2008 he was the head of UNMIK in Kosovo.

2. Belarus: the 'Moscow mechanism' proves the devastating human rights situation

The Presidential elections in Belarus in December last year seem to have become a turning point in the country's history. It became the starting point for a harsh government campaign against the political opposition, worsened by an unprecedented economic crisis. In spite of the fact that the international community is deeply concerned about the developments in Belarus, the authorities do not seem to be impressed and continue with crushing any opposition that they perceive to be present. It seems that the regime is becoming increasingly nervous.

In April this year this international concern resulted in a rather unprecedented measure in the OSCE, where 14 participating States triggered the almost forgotten 'Moscow Mechanism' on the Human Dimension. The Moscow Mechanism was setup in 1991 in order to allow limited groups of OSCE states to establish missions of experts or rapporteurs in cases of serious violations of human rights in a particular country. It is one of the few possibilities within the OSCE where OSCE states can take steps without being blocked by the suffocating consensus principle. Although the mechanism has been largely forgotten, a number of NGOs successfully started a lobbying campaign among the delegations in Vienna to trigger the mechanism against Belarus. Officially, this should have resulted in the establishment of a fact-finding mission of three experts, whereby one expert is appointed by the 14 OSCE states, and one by Belarus, and both members should then appoint a third member. Minsk, however, refused to accept that step with the result that only one mission member was appointed: the French Law Professor Emmanuel Decaux. As the authorities in Belarus refused to provide him with a visa, he could only undertake his investigation outside the country. At the same time this demonstrated that the chances that the mechanism could contribute to an improvement of the situation were virtually absent.

According to his mandate, Professor Decaux had 'to examine concerns regarding the demonstration that took place there on 19 December as well as developments since then'. More in particular, he had 'to investigate all matters relating to the arrest, detention, conviction and sentencing of several hundred of protestors and many journalists; allegations of torture, other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, physical coercion and intimidation; and the apparent harassment of human rights activists, lawyers, opposition political parties, independent media and civil society organizations'.

In June Professor Decaux presented his report to the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna.¹ Drafted in sober language, the report depicts an alarming situation concerning human rights and the rule of law in Belarus, based on information provided to the rapporteur by many organizations. Decaux's report has become a rich source of information about the sad political and legal situation in the country. The rapporteur offers a number of clear recommendations to improve the situation in the country. It does not require much imagination, however, to see that the authorities in Minsk have strongly rejected the report of this fact-finding mission, supported by

1 See: <http://www.osce.org/node/78705>.

some other OSCE countries, such as the Russian Federation, which accuse the Western countries behind the Moscow Mechanism of ‘intervening in Belarus’ internal affairs’. Many hundreds of prisoners, which the report describes as political detainees, including former presidential candidates, continue to populate the regime’s prisons. As such, the triggering of the Moscow mechanism turns out to be not much more than another ineffective protest against the worrisome developments in this country which is proud to see itself as being ‘in the heart of Europe’. Although the rapporteur’s mission did not produce any visible improvements, it remains one of the few political measures which the OSCE has available and it can only be welcomed that enough OSCE participating states found themselves compelled to use it.

At the same time, one may wonder whether this type of action does not simply demonstrate that the OSCE is a toothless organisation. In 2003 a number of OSCE states triggered the mechanism against Turkmenistan with a similar result: Ashgabat refused to cooperate and the (same) lonely rapporteur could only produce a report with findings he made outside the country. No visible improvements could be observed. When the Moscow mechanism was agreed upon about 20 years ago the assumption was that the country concerned would cooperate, at least to some extent. In case a country refuses to cooperate (such as in the cases of Turkmenistan and Belarus) one can say in advance that it is highly unlikely that the findings of the rapporteur’s mission will have a positive impact upon the country concerned. In such cases the triggering of the mechanism is not much more than a political protest, aimed at putting political pressure upon a country. Of course, formally there is nothing wrong with using the Moscow mechanism in this way, but it is definitely different from the original philosophy of cooperative security which underlied the mechanism. However, the ‘cooperative’ times of the 1990s have long disappeared, even though, officially, the OSCE continues to function on the basis of this philosophy. The EU and the USA have imposed sanctions against the Belarusian leaders, including a travelling ban.

3. 15 years of the OSCE summer academy

Although it is not at the centre of public attention, it is worth mentioning that this year it has already been the 15th occasion that the OSCE Summer Academy has taken place in Stadtschlaining, Austria. Every year since 1997 it brings together 20-25 participants from various countries in the OSCE area, mostly originating from the Foreign Ministries and OSCE field presences, whereas some participants also come from academic institutions and non-governmental organizations. This year’s participants represented a wide variety of countries, ranging from Tajikistan and Turkmenistan at one end of the spectrum, and the USA at the other end.


Although the OSCE Summer Academy is closely co-operating with the various OSCE institutions (officially it is organized ‘under the auspices of the OSCE’), it is formally an independent establishment which guarantees a ‘free flow’ of information and ideas about all aspects of the functioning of the organization. It aims to provide the participants with a forum where they can reflect on all important issues relating to the OSCE. In their day-to-day work people are usually so busy with routine issues that there is often hardly time for reflection and this is exactly what the Summer Academy aims to achieve. This year, for instance, vivid discussions took place on issues such as the possible role of the OSCE and its participating States in the Middle East and Northern Africa (MENA), the possible strengthening of the political leadership within the organization and possible improvements to the decision-making process. Also the prospects for the OSCE, which is currently definitely not the main security player in the Eurasian area, were extensively discussed.

The Summer Academy programme has been designed in such a way that allows for extensive discussions by providing (inter-active) lectures, workshops and several simulation exercises. It relies on a vast range of

resource persons both from the OSCE institutions and independent experts. Over the years many members of the various delegations to the OSCE in Vienna or at OSCE desks in the national ministries of foreign affairs have passed through the Summer Academy, often as preparation for their posting to Vienna or to other OSCE bodies. Also representatives of various Partners for Co-operation (Afghanistan, Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Thailand) have participated. Several Academy alumni have achieved high-level positions within the diplomatic service of their countries.

The Summer Academy takes place every year in the idyllic environment of the medieval castle of Stadtschlaining, around a one-and-a-half hour drive south of Vienna and close to the Hungarian border. The castle is the home of the hosting Austrian Study Centre for Peace and Conflict Resolution (ASPR).





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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.

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