

# **Two cheers for diplomacy, the challenges of survival and efficiency for the OSCE**

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Since the Istanbul Summit of 18-19 November 1999, no meeting of Heads of State and Government of OSCE participating States has taken place. The world at large has changed radically — politically, with 9/11, culturally, with the risk of a ‘clash of civilizations’, and economically, with the global crisis from Iceland to Dubai. The OSCE looked like a broken clock, not relevant for these new issues.

### **From frozen crisis to hot conflicts**

The ‘frozen crises’, which were at the heart of a diplomatic altercation between president Chirac, chancellor Kohl and president Yeltsin who left the meeting in Istanbul — i.e. the military interference of Russia in Moldova and Georgia – are now hot conflicts. The unilateral recognition of the independence of Kosovo by some members of the European Union were made outside the framework of OSCE or of the UN, without taking into account the warnings of Russia. When president Sarkozy mediated between Russia and Georgia in August 2008, with a five point plan, no mention was made of the OSCE principles and commitments — notably the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris for a New Europe — neither of the legal obligations from the UN Charter. And when Georgia more recently tried to find a judicial settlement of the dispute, it introduced its case at the International Court of Justice in The Hague and at the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg. Never has the irrelevance of the Court of Conciliation and Arbitration within the OSCE been better demonstrated in practice. The Convention of Stockholm of 1992, without any client since its entry into force, basically being an empty shell.

The new initiatives on nuclear disarmament take place in bilateral negotiation between the United-States and Russia or in public debates at the UN headquarters in New York. And the agreements on energy cooperation are dealt with between China and Central Asia Republics. There is no more reference to the Energy Charter at the crises which now, by tradition, happen each January. In global security matters, the Member States of the European Union and the United States have very different priorities regarding dealing with Russia or Ukraine. The enlargement of the European Union to new members such as Turkey seems for some partners a goal in itself. The east-west axis of the challenges shift to a north- south gap. The CSCE Summit of Paris in 1990 was symbolically the beginning of the Kuwait war. The geopolitical heart of the world is still Afghanistan, Iraq and their neighbours. The headlines are now Bin Laden followers and debt-laden States and no longer Solidarnosc or Sakharov.

### **From linkage to disuse**

Without political will at the highest level, it is business as usual. The OSCE goes on as a soft organization, with its ministerial councils and its implementations meetings, its technical tools and legal niceties, a lot of quiet diplomacy and of backstage cooperation. But the issue of its historical relevance is on the wall. The CSCE was a child of the cold war and of peaceful coexistence. It was a way to go de la détente à l’entente et de l’entente à la coopération according to the prophetic words of General de Gaulle. The link between the three baskets, the timely quest for consensus and the progressive elaboration of an original corpus of political commitments, confidence-building measures and action-oriented guidelines, were a great success. The OSCE added a great openness to all stakeholders and the leadership of the Chairman in office in safe hands, with a strong consensus to designate candidates with political clouds and diplomatic credentials. Are these winning cards old-fashioned or even obsolete? Is the OSCE an efficient channel for the civil society, including NGO’s on the turf, in areas of conflicts, or is it a club for State apparatchiks? The OSCE ought to listen again to ‘the will of peoples’ as stressed by the Charter of Paris.


At the same time, the European Union with its 27 members is trying a new start with the Lisbon Treaty. The

Council of Europe with its 47 members can exit from its stalemate, if the Russian ratification of Protocol 14 and the Interlaken Conference can give a new life to the European Court of Human Rights. Where is the added-value of the OSCE with its 57 participating States? The global issues are dealt with by the UN and other specialized organization such as the WTO, the IMF or the ILO. We need an enlarged Security Council, a new Economic Security Council, and probably a Human Rights Council, which is really worth its name. Meanwhile, the G8 became the G20, a new example of the survival instincts of great powers, without the inclusiveness, accountability and transparency of democratic institutions.

The best legacy of the Helsinki process is as a model. After the ill-fated improvisation of the Stability Pact, the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM) is a new horizon for a framework of bilateral contacts and multilateral cooperation. The linkage and consensus — or even consensus minus one — can be efficient tools for quiet and efficient diplomacy. When democracy had a bad name, in the thirties,

E.M. Forster wrote an essay 'Two cheers for Democracy'. So we can say also 'Two cheers for Diplomacy'. But Diplomacy can't forget Democracy and the so-called third basket. It is the main challenge for the OSCE as for its clones, as the UfM.





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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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