

Editorial: Rethinking European Security, principles & practice

Edwin Bakker¹

DOI: [10.1163/187502310791306089](https://doi.org/10.1163/187502310791306089)

¹ Dr. Edwin Bakker is editor of Security and Human Rights.

In June 2009, the Operations Service of the Conflict Prevention Centre of the OSCE Secretariat produced 'The OSCE Concept of Comprehensive and Co-operative Security. An Overview of Major Milestones'. This document had been requested by the OSCE Chairmanship in preparation for the 2009 Annual Security Review Conference and the Corfu Informal Ministerial Meeting that took place in June 2009. It outlines the development of the OSCE's approach to security which is based on the idea of cooperative security: i.e. the premise that security is indivisible and that co-operation is beneficial to all participating States while the insecurity in and/or of one State can affect the well-being of all.

At the annual Ministerial Council meeting of the OSCE in Athens in December 2009, the ministers of the 56 participating States charted the way ahead for the so-called Corfu Process on the future of European security in a decision and a Ministerial Declaration. The ministers remained seriously concerned that the principles of the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and subsequent OSCE commitments are not fully respected and implemented. 'Our highest priority remains to re-establish our trust and confidence, as well as to recapture the sense of common purpose that brought together our predecessors in Helsinki almost 35 years ago', the Declaration said. The Ministerial Decision on the Corfu Process aimed to provide a roadmap for the implementation of the above-mentioned commitment.

The repeated commitment to the principles of 'Helsinki' as expressed in Athens is one of many such statements in recent years. This can be interpreted in different ways. On the one hand, the concepts and ideas agreed upon in Helsinki are still considered relevant and useful by the participating States. On the other, it is obvious that the sense of a common purpose and spirit of 'Helsinki' is rather low.

This analysis can also be found in the document prepared by the Operations Service of the CPC: 'While revolutionary at the time, and still innovative today, the OSCE's unique approach to security is a crucial part of its record of achievements. This approach to security has allowed the OSCE to manage change in Europe from one century to the next'. Unfortunately — and perhaps typically for these kind of documents, it says nothing about the level of success of the OSCE to manage change in Europe in the last 35 years. Nor does it explain why it considers the concept of co-operative security to be 'still innovative today'. Given the current challenges to co-operation within the OSCE it seems legitimate to have a critical look at the current state of the concept of co-operative security. The question can be raised to what extent this concept can still be considered as a relevant and innovative principle by the participating States? Or is it simply a question of good principles and bad practice? If so, why does the implementation of these principles seem more difficult today than it was in the past? And if not, what should be the fundamental principles of a new European security system?

Against this background, this special issue of Security and Human Rights focuses on the relevance and effectiveness of the concept of co-operative security in the 21st century as the basic principle of Europe's security system. The authors, including (former) politicians, academics and representatives of non-governmental organisations and think tanks were asked to write a short article on their views on principles and practice of co-operative security in Europe. Each author was specifically asked to bring in their own area of expertise and experience. The articles are listed in alphabetic order of the names of the authors. Needless to say, all their contributions are personal views and not that of the organizations they work(ed) for.

Alyson Bailes and Zdzislaw Lachowski provide a critical review of how the Helsinki legacy has played out in the politico-military dimension since 1975. The scholars of the University of Iceland and SIPRI first focus on the question how well has CSCE/OSCE done in building cooperative security within the limited terms of its

mandate, and in overcoming those limitations when they were part of the problem? Next they focus on the question what other good or bad developments have determined what might be called the overall audit of cooperative security in Europe today, and how have they affected OSCE's relative standing?

The central topic of the article by Sven Biscop and Thomas Renard is the EU's approach to co-operative security. The authors of the Egmont Institute in Brussels argue that in a globalized and multipolar world, cooperative security or 'effective multilateralism' is as important as ever. They explain how and why the EU has developed the concept of 'strategic partnerships' as a new instrument to engage with other global actors, and why these partnerships are potentially very effective instruments of a united European foreign policy.

In his historically oriented article, Ambassador Douglas Davidson, shows that co-operative security arrangements are far from new. He argues that they go back at least as far as the Roman concept of *ius gentium* and, in a way, even to the Delian and Delphic Leagues in ancient Greece.

Under the title 'two cheers for diplomacy', Emmanuel Decaux, Professor of public international law at the University Paris II and member of the UN Human Rights Council's Advisory Committee, wonders whether some of the tools and mechanisms of the OSCE are now old-fashioned or even obsolete? He concludes that the best legacy of the Helsinki process is as a model, and that the linkage and consensus — or even consensus minus one — can still be efficient tools for quiet and efficient diplomacy.

Pál Dunay, faculty member of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP), describes the need for a debate on the current European security architecture. He particularly focuses on the idea of a European Security Treaty as put forward by the Russian President Medvedev. According to Dunay, such a Treaty is not a means to address instability and tensions in the Euro-Atlantic area, but the idea could serve as a basis for further discussion.

Former Secretary General of the Western European Union and Chairman of the Center for European Security Studies in Groningen, Willem Frederik van Eekelen, discusses a number of developments in the field of security in recent years. He shows that changes in the security environment and the way in which we think about security require constant rethinking of European security.

In his speech at a special event to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, held in the Hofburg in Vienna on 6 November 2009, Hans-Dietrich Genscher called the year 1989: 'The happiest year in European history'. The former German minister for foreign affairs also stressed that co-operation is humanity's only promising option and that he hoped the OSCE is aware of its responsibility to continue the processes that have been introduced in the last thirty years and that extend far beyond the OSCE participating States.

Ambassador Istvan Gyarmati focuses on various new threats to security and analyses why security and human rights have never been good friends. Against the background of international criminality and terrorism, the senior political adviser for the Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), explains why we must re-think many existing principles that regulate the functioning of the security sector, the security services in particular.

Neil Melvin, shows that the issue of energy (scarcity) has moved to the centre of the international security agenda. He argues for a neutral mechanism that could do much to prevent the escalation of energy conflicts

to the point where there are supply cut offs. The availability of such a mechanism would also do much to depoliticize energy conflicts by removing them from bilateral relations.


In his article, Danilo Türk, President of the Republic of Slovenia and member of the advisory board of Security and Human Rights, describes the major evolution of the political and security landscape of the OSCE area. He concludes that the developments might amount to updating and the revision of the Helsinki Final Act as we live in a world vastly different from the one existing three and a half decades ago.

Professor Andrei Zagorski focuses on the limits of the cooperative security concept and particularly of the OSCE that has no means to enforce its values and relies on the cooperation of the participating states. According to scholar of the Moscow State Institute of International Relations this does not necessarily imply an ultimate failure. In his eyes, it means that the mission of anchoring the cooperative security within the OSCE has not been accomplished yet. It also means that its accomplishment is going to take longer, and that the road towards building a genuine security community is going to be thornier than initially expected.

Wolfgang Zellner reconsiders the principle of co-operative security and analyzes the relationship between this principle and its implementation. To that end, the head of the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) at Hamburg University, also focuses on the different causes and consequences of non-implementation in a number of areas.

Finally, Marcel de Haas, senior research fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' provides a review of Medvedev's recent proposals for a new European security architecture, which, in the eyes of the author, challenge a number of key Western interests.

The Hague, January 2010



This article was first published with Brill | Nijhoff publishers, and was featured on the Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM) website.

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

© Netherlands Helsinki Committee. All rights reserved.

www.nhc.nl