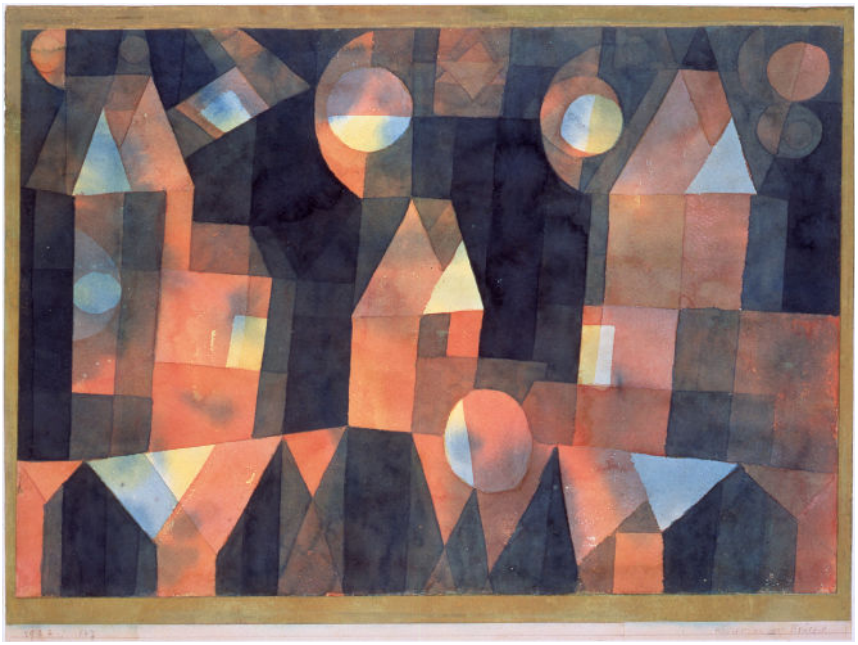
**CSS** STUDY

# Multilateralism in Transition: Challenges and Opportunities for the OSCE



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The **Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zürich** is a center of competence for Swiss and international security policy. It offers security policy expertise in research, teaching and consulting. The CSS promotes understanding of security policy challenges as a contribution to a more peaceful world. Its work is independent, practice-relevant, and based on a sound academic footing.

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# Contributors

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**Thomas Greminger** served as the Permanent Representative of Switzerland to the OSCE, the UN, and the International Organizations in Vienna from 2010 to 2015. During the Swiss Chairpersonship, he chaired the OSCE Permanent Council and played an active role in addressing the crisis in and around Ukraine. From July 2017 until July 2020, he served as Secretary General of the OSCE. On 1 May 2021, he took over as Director of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP).

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# List of Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| ACMF | Advisory Committee on Management and Finance |
| AI | Artificial Intelligence |
| ASEAN | Association of Southeast Asian Nations |
| BLA | Board and Lodging Allowance |
| BMSC | Border Management Staff College |
| BRI | Belt and Road Initiative |
| CAO | Chief Administrative Officer |
| CBMs | confidence-building measures |
| CFE | Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe |
| CICA | Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia |
| CiO | Chairperson-in-Office |
| CIS | Commonwealth of Independent States |
| CMT | crisis management team |
| CORE at IFSH | Centre for OSCE Research at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) |
| CPC | Conflict Prevention Centre |
| CRMS | Common Regulatory Management System |
| CSBMs | confidence- and security-building measures |
| CSCE | Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| CSI | Cooperative Security Initiative |
| CSR | corporate social responsibility |
| CSS | Center for Security Studies, ETH Zürich |
| CSTO | Collective Security Treaty Organization |
| DCFTA | Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement |
| DFS | United Nations Department of Field Support |
| EAEU | Eurasian Economic Union |
| EBRD | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| EECP | Entry and Exit Crossing Point |
| EEF | Economic and Environmental Forum |
| FDFA | Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs |
| FPI | Foreign Policy Instruments |
| FSC | Forum for Security Co-Operation |
| GCSP | Geneva Centre for Security Policy |
| GID | Geneva International Discussions |
| HCNM | High Commissioner of National Minorities |
| HDIM | Human Dimension Implementation Meeting |
| ICC | Indirect Common Cost |
| ICT | Information and Communication Technology |
| IHFFC | International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission |
| INF | Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces |
| IOM | interoffice memoranda |
| IPRMs | Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms |
| LAS | League of Arab States |
| MC | Ministerial Council |
| MGIMO | Moscow State Institute of International Relations |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| MSC | Munich Security Conference |
| MST | Mediation Support Team |
| OAS | Organization of American States |
| OCEEA | OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities |
| ODIHR | Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights |
| OIO | Office of Internal Oversight |
| OMiK | OSCE Mission in Kosovo |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe |
| OSG | Office of the Secretary General |
| PA | Parliamentary Assembly |
| PBPR | performance-based program reporting |
| PCR | polymerase chain reaction |
| PO | Program Outline |
| PPE | personal protective equipment |
| PPPs | public-private partnerships |
| PSEA | prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse |
| RFoM | Representative on Freedom of the Media |
| RIAC | Russian International Affairs Council |
| RMS | Records Management Unit |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organisation |
| SDC | Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation |
| SECI | Southeast European Cooperative Initiative |
| SG | Secretary General |
| SMM | Special Monitoring Mission |
| SMR | Secretariat Management Review |
| SOC | Security Operations Center |
| SOPs | standard operating procedures |
| SPRM | Strategic Planning and Resource Mobilization |
| SPSU | Strategic Policy Support Unit |
| SSR/G | security sector reform and governance |
| SWP | German Institute for International and Security Affairs |
| TAP | Talent Acquisition Program |
| TCG | Trilateral Contact Group |
| TNTD | Transnational Threats Department |
| UfM | Union for the Mediterranean |
| UNDP | United Nations Development Program |
| UNEP | United Nations Environment Program |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| UNODC | United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime |
| USIP | United States Institute of Peace |
| WEF | World Economic Forum |
| ZNG | zero nominal growth |

# Foreword

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), with its 57 participating states, is clearly an organization that would need to be invented if it did not already exist. Its membership includes all European states, all former Soviet Union republics, Mongolia, the US, and Canada. This membership, ranging from Vancouver to Vladivostok, is an asset. It provides all states of the Euro-Atlantic zone with opportunities to make use of the rich OSCE toolbox. Moreover, the OSCE provides an important transatlantic link. Policymakers as well as the general public outside of the OSCE space often envy those within it for having available at any time an organization that is able to deal with all manner of conflicts between its participating states. While the OSCE does not always make the headlines and is often described as a "Sleeping Beauty," when an acute crisis does occur, it is in many cases the first option for governments to deal with the situation. This is why in the past, analysts have proposed "an OSCE for the Middle East." Such ideas have often been promoted because the OSCE has a comprehensive approach to security that encompasses politico-military, economic and environmental, and human dimensions. In other words, the OSCE works on the basis of a wider understanding of security. Its members are not only engaged in confidence- and security-building measures, but they also focus on human rights, national minorities, democratization, policing strategies, counterterrorism, and economic and environmental challenges.

Numerous OSCE field operations assist participating states in implementing OSCE principles, ensuring that they are not only written on paper and discussed among governments but also put into practice. That the 57 participating states take decisions on the basis of consensus is another important advantage of the OSCE. At the same time, and against the backdrop of increasing polarization between OSCE participating states, the consensus rule often prevents the organization from acting more efficiently. Sometimes, the OSCE even seems to be entirely blocked. However, without the OSCE, the Euro-Atlantic area would lose one of its most important instruments for building confidence and addressing all kinds of security challenges.

Switzerland has always been an active OSCE member state. Bridge-building and conflict resolution are central features of Swiss foreign and security policy. Therefore, an active role within the OSCE context fits well with Swiss principles. Hence Switzerland has twice taken over the OSCE Chairpersonship. In 1996, Switzerland's activities focused on the implementation of the Dayton Accords, with the aim of stabilizing Bosnia-Herzegovina after the civil war. In 2014, the year that fundamentally changed the relationship between Russia and Western states due to Moscow's military involvement in Eastern Ukraine and its annexation of the Crimea, Swiss diplomacy provided valuable services in the management of the crisis that followed. This, inter alia, included launching the Special Monitoring Mission, an indispensable instrument to support efforts to facilitate a peaceful settlement of the ongoing war in the Donbas in the Donetsk and Luhansk regions of eastern Ukraine. The CSS at ETH Zürich supports the Swiss Federal Council and the parliament in its commitment to OSCE activities by being a member of the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions, which provides policy-relevant analysis for OSCE participating states as well as the OSCE staff.

In 2017, Thomas Greminger, a Swiss career diplomat with a full range of experience with the OSCE, including his service as the Swiss head of delegation at the OSCE during the first phase of the Ukraine crisis, was elected OSCE Secretary General. His deep inside knowledge of the organization, which he demonstrates in this volume, forms the backbone of this publication. We are enormously indebted to Ambassador Greminger for providing the impulse for this book project, as we are to all the authors for providing such valuable contributions.

The Euro-Atlantic area is confronted with a number of security challenges. Increased tension between Russia and Western states is key. The OSCE certainly is not the only instrument for policymakers when it comes to conflict resolution, but it is still an indispensable one that would certainly be missed if it did not exist. Therefore, moving the OSCE reform agenda forward and making the organization "fit for purpose" must be a central aim, to which we believe the authors of this book make an important contribution, including by providing very useful insights as well as comprehensive analysis.

We would like to thank again the authors and all those that helped to make this book project possible and wish those who pick up this publication an interesting read that hopefully stimulates debate about the future of the OSCE.

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**Dr. Oliver Thränert,**
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**Part I: Introduction and the Big Picture**

# The OSCE in the Stormy Waters of the 21st Century: Introduction and Overview

*Simon J. A. Mason, Lisa Watanabe*

The aim of this book is to bring together different expert and practitioner perspectives on the question of where the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) stands at the beginning of the 21st century. Set against the backdrop of the global crisis of multilateralism and increased geopolitical polarization, it examines the challenges this broad context poses for an institution such as the OSCE and how the OSCE has responded to them. It also highlights the opportunities that have emerged for the organization, often paradoxically as a result of a highly polarized environment. First-hand insights into the challenges faced by Swiss Ambassador Thomas Greminger, who acted as the OSCE Secretary General from 2017 – 2020, and how he sought to navigate the OSCE through stormy waters form the heart of this volume, flanked by analyses of the OSCE's responses "on the ground" to the conflicts in Ukraine and Transnistria. It also aims to look toward the OSCE's possible future development.

In this opening chapter, we first provide a brief summary of the origins of the OSCE. We then summarize the different authors' contributions on the aforementioned questions, before finally highlighting some key messages that can be gleaned from a synthesis of the entire book. The contributions to the volume were written by both practitioners and experts working within think tanks, providing insights into the context, challenges, and opportunities faced by the OSCE today.

## Historical Context

The OSCE traces its birth back to the highly polarized context of the Cold War. In a period of *détente* in the early 1970s, 35 member states of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which was created to provide a multilateral forum for East-West dialogue during the Cold War, agreed on the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. The latter set out a comprehensive approach to security that included not just politico-military elements, but also economic, environmental, and human rights dimensions. The document also established ten core political principles, which became known as the "Decalogue." These principles were intended to govern states' behavior not just toward each other but also toward their citizens, reflecting the visionary and broad definition of security adopted by CSCE member states. This normative consensus was the product of compromise – Western states accepted the territorial status quo in Europe through principles such as the integrity of borders and non-interference in domestic affairs, and Eastern states in turn agreed that human rights and fundamental freedoms were legitimate topics of discussion.[1]

In the final throws of the Cold War, the member states of the CSCE issued the 1990 Paris Charter, a vision for peace and stability in Europe shared by Russia and Western states.[2] At this time, the CSCE underwent a process of institutionalization, which culminated when the CSCE changed its name in 1994 to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe and became a regional organization in 1995 whose tasks subsequently went beyond norms development and included the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts. It was unique among European security organizations in that both the US and Russia were members. Its inclusive membership – today 57 participating states from the Euro-Atlantic area and Eurasia – has since been regarded as an asset, even if consensus-based decision making within the organization also sometimes means that decisions and actions can be easily blocked (see map on page 8).

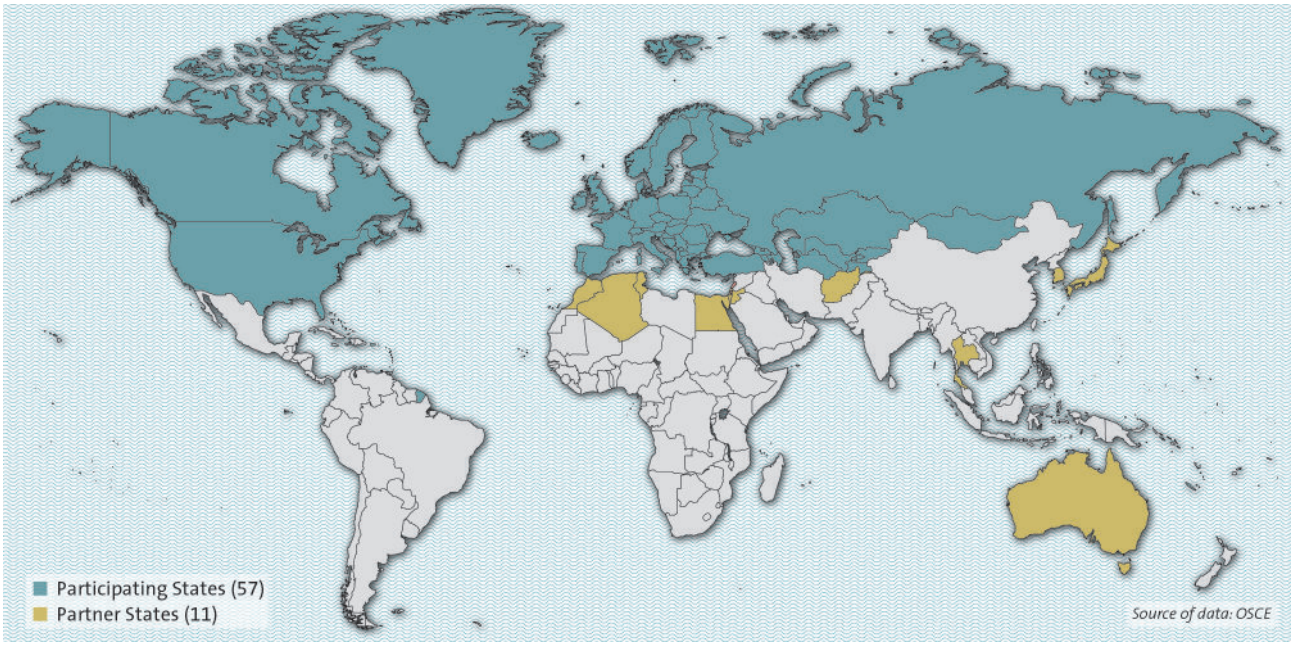
Despite the spirit of compromise and early signs that seemed to hold the promise of some kind of convergence between Russia and Western states, the OSCE would not become the key organization within a pan-European security architecture, much to Russia's dismay. Newly founded democracies and Western states ultimately preferred to prioritize NATO and the EU, of which Russia was not a member. NATO and the EU could offer states advantages that the OSCE could not, notably concrete security guarantees in the case of NATO and economic benefits in the case of the EU. Russia in turn co-founded competing organizations, such as the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organization, which, along with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, contributed to a fragmentation of the OSCE space that famously spans from "Vancouver to Vladivostok."[3] The current lack of strategic understanding between Russia and the West can partly be traced back to Moscow's unmet expectations at this time.

1 Christian Nünlist, "The OSCE and the Future of European Security," *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* 202, February 2017, p. 2; Daniel Trachsler, "The OSCE: Fighting for Renewed Relevance," *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* 110, March 2012, p. 2.

2 Nünlist, *Ibid.*

3 Trachsler, "The OSCE: Fighting for Renewed Relevance."

**OSCE Participating States and Partners for Co-operation**




The rift between Russia and the West has grown ever deeper since, encumbering the OSCE as an organization. Russia increasingly came to believe that Western participating states were using the OSCE as vehicle to promote their values. Western participating states in turn increasingly accused Russia as failing to live up to its commitments to the shared principles set out in the Decalogue, especially following the 2008 military intervention in Georgia and Russia's annexation of Crimea and armed involvement in eastern Ukraine in 2014. These tensions have increased fissures between the OSCE's members, hampering its effectiveness. In addition, the OSCE has also been weakened by a number of states' dwindling commitment to cooperative security provided through multilateral institutions as well as a simultaneous growth of ad hoc coalitions of the willing, themselves sometimes established in response to the impediments to multilateral institutions.

## Aim and Summary of Chapters

The volume opens with a chapter by David Lanz, who looks at the broader context in which the OSCE exists and must contend with. His chapter begins by outlining two macro trends. The first of these trends is increasing geopolitical competition, particularly between Russia and Western states. While the rift between Russia and "the West" has grown significantly since the eruption of the crisis in and around Ukraine in 2014, its roots, as Lanz explains, go deeper and partly relate to the failure to establish a pan-European security order in which Russia is an integral part, as mentioned earlier. The increasingly entrenched geopolitical divide since 2014 has served to heighten polarization and zero-sum thinking within the OSCE, which has made consensus decisions even more challenging. The second trend is the weakening of cooperative security provided by multilateral organizations, linked in part to heightened geopolitical competition, growing unilateralism on the part of some states, a proliferation of ad hoc coalitions to address security questions, and reduced political and financial investment in multilateral organizations.

Lanz then examines the implications that these two macro trends have had on the OSCE in recent years and sets out the challenges the organization faces moving forward. He argues that the OSCE's difficulties in achieving its potential in relation to conflict management are not only linked to polarization and the dynamics of the conflicts themselves, but that they are also connected to the lack of investment in cooperative security through institutionalized multilateral organizations, which is compounded by politically motivated blockages by a small number of participating states.

With the broad picture having been painted by Lanz, we shift to a more operational, practitioner perspective. Fabian Grass, who headed Thomas Greminger's 2017 campaign for the position of OSCE Secretary General, discusses the considerations that formed the backdrop of the campaign, which was unusual in the sense that four OSCE leadership positions became available at the same time and thus meant that the position of Secretary General would form part of a "package deal." The chapter then describes how the campaign unfolded, which tactics were chosen, the hearing, and how the situation finally developed in Greminger's favor, who was successfully

elected in 2017. Grass explains how this was a result of Greminger's impressive track record, which included his intimate knowledge of the OSCE, intertwined with a campaign that successfully combined timing and tactics.

The contribution by Greminger himself provides a critical assessment of the extent to which the goals he set out when he took up his mandate were achieved. These goals included a reform agenda – "Fit for Purpose" – which aimed at improving the organization's effectiveness and efficiency, strengthening and expanding dialogue formats, and deepening the use of partnerships with the UN and regional organizations. His contribution also looks at the support the Secretariat was able to provide to countries holding the Chairpersonships during his mandate and to the organization's executive structures, for example in relation to field missions; its efforts to place new security topics on the organization's agenda; and the challenges posed by the corona crisis.

After three years serving as Secretary General, Greminger is convinced that there needs to be a new and credible recommitment to putting the OSCE's guiding principles into practice. A broad-based dialogue process to achieve this goal is needed, but the prevailing conditions – including the erosion of cooperative security provided by multilateral organizations, tensions between Russia and Western participating states, a lack of unity in the Euro-Atlantic area, etc. – are not conducive to such an ambitious undertaking at this point in time. In his view, it may require a group of committed and perhaps impartial states to lay the foundations.

Greminger reminds us that the crisis of multilateralism needs to be responded to by reforms that increase the effectiveness and efficiency of multilateral organizations, such as the OSCE. The Fit for Purpose agenda proves that such organizations can be reformed, even if only in small steps. A commitment to a compact for a well-functioning organization needs to be used to prevent participating states from linking erroneous issues that block the whole organization. Further, dialogue platforms, such as the Structured Dialogue, should be further strengthened; the Chairpersonships need to be made more attractive; the strategic planning of the organization should be continued to be strengthened; and relations with other organizations, such as the UN and the EU, should be improved to help prevent regional organizations from being played off against one another and to enable them to cooperate with each other better. For all this to occur, the management role of the Secretary General needs to be expanded and its political role clarified. Surprisingly, it is Western states that block a strengthened OSCE Secretary General role more than others. Yet Western states could benefit from a strengthened OSCE, as it can fulfill some roles and functions that no other regional organization can.

After Greminger's political and operational exploration of how the OSCE is responding to current challenges, the last two chapters look at the OSCE "on the ground" in Ukraine and Transnistria. Anna Hess Sargsyan examines the nexus between geopolitical tensions between Russia and Western states and their efforts to manage the crisis in and around Ukraine. She skillfully tracks the evolution of the growing dissonance between Russia and Western states from the end of the Cold War to Russia's annexation of Crimea and military involvement in eastern Ukraine. She then discusses how despite deteriorating relations between Russia and Western participating states, agreement was reached on the OSCE's multi-formatted peace process to address the conflict and to maintain a commitment to it. Hess Sargsyan then concludes by reflecting on the interim lessons that can be gleaned from the OSCE's experience in the Ukraine conflict and what the OSCE's inability to prevent a renewed escalation of the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh could mean for the conflict in and around Ukraine.

Her chapter highlights the paradox of how the crisis in and around Ukraine affected the relations between Russia and Western states, yet managed to generate joint action from both blocs. This, as alluded to by Lanz, was largely due to the Swiss Chairpersonship's commitment to peace mediation, relevant know how, and access and credibility with both Russia and Western participating states. While making the OSCE relevant, the Ukraine crisis also demonstrates the need for the organization to update its mechanisms and instruments to adapt to a new environment. All too often, the institution has become hostage to the priorities of participating states, and how these priorities shape decisions given the consensus-based decision-making principle of the OSCE. That said, the inclusivity of the organization is one of its strengths and something that helped it to become a relevant platform for the conflict settlement efforts in and around Ukraine. Ultimately, the question is how different value systems and their interpretations can co-exist within such an inclusive setting.

Benno Zogg's chapter looks at the OSCE's role in the Transnistria conflict in Moldova, a so-called protracted conflict in which the OSCE has a far-reaching mandate to work toward resolution. Zogg discusses the background to and the current status of the Transnistria conflict, the domestic and external actors involved, their stakes, and how the conflict is connected to the broader geopolitical environment, particularly relations between Russia and the West. He then looks at the OSCE's multifaceted role in Transnistria and its recent emphasis on small pragmatic steps designed to build trust between the parties. Zogg demonstrates the difficulties that have been encountered by the OSCE in facilitating a settlement of the conflict, even though it has, as he points out, contributed to small steps toward cooperation. Yet these small achievements must not gloss over the fact that Moldova and the Transnistrian de facto authorities, as well as external actors, currently lack a common vision for the breakaway region's

final status. Accordingly, further cooperative steps need to lead toward a final settlement, which itself is dependent on continued dialogue and a favorable geopolitical environment. This speaks to the difficulty of making progress in the area of conflict resolution.

## Synthesis of Key Messages

As a form of synthesis, five key messages stand out from the different contributions of this book.

*One: strong minimal consensus on key principles and functions exists, but there are different readings by participating states of the organization's priorities and how to put them into practice:* The OSCE is not just facing a global polarized environment today, it is itself a child of the polarized context that existed during the Cold War. Perhaps as a result, the OSCE is more resilient to polarization than one would expect at first sight. There has thus been a surprisingly strong minimal consensus among the OSCE's 57 participating states as to the key principles the OSCE should be built on, both in the past and the present, and the functions the OSCE should fulfill. At the same time, the reading of these principles and the importance of these different functions differ over time and between different participating states.

*Two: the consensus decision-making principle is key to keeping all participating states involved on an equal footing, but enables the blockage of package deals and limits the functioning of the OSCE in certain situations. When necessary, pragmatic means of making decisions keep the OSCE moving:* The consensus principle of the OSCE is key to the acceptance of the organization by the participating states, but means that they can strongly circumscribe the decision making and action of the organization, especially when the broader environment is highly polarized. It allows states to block package agreements on topics that are seemingly unrelated. Interestingly though, such blocking tactics tend to occur when an issue is of little importance to the larger participating states (e.g. budget or IT agreements) or when these larger states themselves disagree. In other cases, provided there is a commonality of interests among the larger participating states, they can generally put sufficient pressure on the smaller states not to block agreements unnecessarily (for example, as in the case of the funding of the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine, which was deemed necessary for regional stability). Therefore, the OSCE has found pragmatic ways of making decisions on certain important issues. This practice has allowed the OSCE to maintain a certain degree of functionality even during turbulent times. That said, when issues are not deemed relevant enough by larger participating states, the consensus principle is all too often abused by individual participating states and the organization suffers for it.

*Three: the feat of starting to grapple with new challenges, while still not having come to grips with old ones:* Every regional organization is a child of its time and has to keep re-inventing itself to stay fit-for-purpose in an ever-evolving context. Some of the new challenges the OSCE is learning to deal with include transnational terrorism, rapid technical developments, climate change, and how to respond to the growing importance of China. During periods of a heightened focus on crises (e.g., Ukraine), attention generally shifts to the traditional challenges. During periods of relative calm, other, more long-term challenges such as climate change and the role of China come to the fore. It is an ongoing balancing act for the OSCE to respond to these newer challenges while also dealing with the more traditional role of addressing conflicts within and between its participating states. While EU and NATO states prefer to use these platforms to explore how to engage with China, some small states only have the OSCE to examine this or even other questions in a collaborative format. As a result, all OSCE participating states should see the benefit of clarifying how to engage with China's new geopolitical weight in a critical and constructive manner.

*Four: holding on to the longer-term goal of the settlement of conflicts, while mainly working on the prevention of escalation and conflict management:* An evergreen challenge for the OSCE is how far to focus on conflict prevention, management, or resolution. While it makes sense to hold on to the goal of resolution or settlement, in reality, settlement is often a long-term objective. Frequently, the OSCE seems better suited to manage and contain conflicts, even if this role can only be fulfilled to the degree allowed by participating states. In relation to the protracted conflicts in Ukraine, Moldova, and Georgia and between Armenia and Azerbaijan, the divisions between conflict parties and their international backers make it hard to envisage a role for the OSCE that goes beyond containing conflict and which would include the achievement of political settlements. Yet the way the OSCE manages or contains conflict may have an impact on the longer-term chances of settlements. Escalated conflicts generally hinder efforts to settle conflicts. Careful reflection is thus needed as to how short- and medium-term management efforts may be leveraged to lead toward the prospects of longer-term settlements.

*Five: the agency of the OSCE's executive structures needs to be explored and expanded to remain fit-for-purpose in the 21st century:* The OSCE is made up of its participating states as well as OSCE executive structures, which have some agency independent of the participating states. The exploration and expansion of the agency of the executive structures through organizational reform and strengthening the role of the Secretary General will be important for the OSCE if it is to realize the functions its participating states want it to fulfill. Yet current-

ly, participating states are not providing the OSCE with sufficient resources to achieve its full potential. Alliances of smaller states that benefit most from multilateralism are therefore needed to continue pushing for an effective and functional OSCE.

Ultimately, looking at the OSCE against the challenging backdrop of the current context gives cause for hope. Despite the many challenges the organization faces, whether due to heightened polarization, ongoing conflicts, or a lack of sufficient resources, there is broad agreement on the OSCE's purpose and the principles that can form the basis for discussions about its future and how to achieve its full potential.

# The Big Picture: OSCE Conflict Management and the Crisis of Multilateralism

*David Lanz**

## Introduction

International politics is the result of the interplay between agents and structures, as Alexander Wendt reminded us.[1] This means the actions of individuals, groups, states, and international organizations promoting security are shaped by the broader context in which they operate: geopolitics and regional dynamics, but also dominant discourses and the design of international institutions. In turn, these actions shape that very context. Ambassador Thomas Greminger's contribution – the main text of this publication – sheds light on the agency he brought to bear as Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) and outlines the changes he affected during his tenure from mid-2017 to mid-2020. As background for that analysis, the present chapter focuses on the international context – the "big picture" as the title suggests – which Greminger encountered as Secretary General, with which he had to contend during his tenure, and which helps to understand the opportunities he managed to harness and the obstacles that proved insurmountable. Given its brevity, this chapter focuses on the OSCE's role in conflict management, loosely defined as efforts to prevent violent conflict from erupting, contain it once it has erupted, and resolve it through a settlement negotiated by the involved parties.

The analysis proceeds in two steps. It first identifies two macro trends, which in recent years have come to characterize international politics worldwide and within the OSCE area in particular. These trends pertain to growing geopolitical competition – specifically the rift between Russia and the West – and to the weakening of cooperative security provided through multilateral organizations. Based on this, in a second step, the analysis outlines three implications for the specific context of the OSCE. These include the paradoxical consequences of the crisis in and around Ukraine and the often-prevailing zero-sum mentality among participating states. It concludes with reflections about where the organization currently stands and what challenges it has to tackle in the future.

* The author thanks Simon Mason, Lisa Watanabe, Thomas Greminger, and Fabian Grass for their highly valuable comments on draft versions of this chapter, although he alone is responsible for its content.

1 Alexander E. Wendt, "The Agent-Structure Problem in International Relations Theory," *International Organization* 41:3 (1987), pp. 335–370.

## Two Macro Trends

The context of the OSCE is constituted by broader trends of international politics and their ramifications in the Euro-Atlantic space. This section highlights two macro trends in particular. Both were already in place when Greminger assumed office, but they deepened during his tenure.

### Geopolitical Competition and Polarization

The first macro trend is related to a shift of the tectonic plates of international politics and a feeling, in the words of Frank-Walter Steinmeier, that "the world seems to be out of joint."[2] Indeed, the dominance of the US, together with the liberal order it upheld, has given way to a new setup which is fragmented and multipolar, but otherwise does not yet have clear contours. In this context, regional powers have sought to extend their influence, often resulting in competition with states that have similar ambitions. At a global level, expanding powers, most importantly China, are seeking new international arrangements. At the same time, Western powers are absorbed by internal developments – for example Brexit or the legacy of the Trump presidency in the US – while losing influence internationally and facing difficulties defending an international order based on liberal norms. The combination of these factors has led to instability, growing polarization, and flashpoints of conflict.

In the OSCE area, polarization primarily concerns the relationship between the Russian Federation and the amalgam of liberal democracies in Europe and North America often described as "the West." A dramatic deterioration of that relationship occurred in 2014 following the Maidan revolution in Ukraine, Russia's annexation of Crimea, and the outbreak of a Russia-backed separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine. The events in Ukraine in 2014 have thus given rise to a new period of rivalry between Russia and the West. However, the roots of these tensions go deeper, and they precede the conflict in and around Ukraine. They are driven by competition over spheres of influence, in particular Russia's actions against what it perceives as an encroachment in its sphere of influence, but also by fundamentally different narratives about the post-Cold War period and the failure to build a security order spanning the whole of Europe.[3]

Whatever its origins, the rift means Russia and the West have since existed in a state of hostility, seeking

2 The original quote is in German: "Die Welt scheint aus den Fugen geraten zu sein." Frank-Walter Steinmeier, "Vorwort von Bundesaußenminister Dr. Frank-Walter Steinmeier," *Zeitschrift für Aussen- und Sicherheitspolitik* 8:1 Suppl. (2015), pp. 1–3.

3 Former US diplomat and Head of the OSCE Mission to Moldova, William H. Hill, provides a useful account of these dynamics in his book *No Place for Russia: European Security Institutions Since 1989* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

to undermine one another and applying punishments in the form of sanctions and other measures. In this logic, international politics has come to be viewed as a zero-sum game: When the West gains, Russia loses and vice versa. It is obvious that this has deeply affected the OSCE, whose rationale is to promote cooperation on security matters within the pan-European space and which takes decision by consensus. As the second part of this chapter will show, polarization has had many negative consequences, but it has also created some opportunities owing to the OSCE's function as a dialogue platform and a provider of operational conflict management.

### The Crisis of Multilateralism

A second and related macro trend affecting the OSCE pertains to what is commonly called "the crisis of multilateralism." The term is somewhat imprecise because there is no unitary crisis from which all multilateral institutions suffer. Moreover, depending on the issue, region, and specific organization, the crisis is more or less acute. In recent years, we can, however, observe a general tendency toward the weakening of multilateral arrangements and organizations and toward diminished international cooperation in different areas. These areas include trade, development, arms control, international peace and security, and, as we have painfully learned during the coronavirus pandemic, public health. A discussion of the causes of the crisis of multilateralism goes beyond the scope of this chapter, but suffice it to say that the above-described first macro trend toward geopolitical competition, polarization, and a more fragmented international order, which is no longer underwritten by US hegemony and the dominance of the liberal paradigm, certainly plays a role.[4] Also relevant is the rise of populist forces in many countries – notably in the US during the Trump presidency – which promote nationalist solutions and are deeply skeptical of international cooperation.

In the area of international peace and security, the crisis of multilateralism encompasses three trends. The first is that in responding to global security issues, states increasingly opt for unilateral measures rather than collective action negotiated in the framework of multilateral organizations. These measures are often confrontational in place of being cooperative, one example being the growth of unilateral sanctions.[5] A second trend is that states' cooperation on security matters increasingly occurs in ad hoc alliances, which favor transactional deal making, rather than within fully institutionalized multilateral organizations. One example is the Astana process, in which Russia, Turkey, and Iran have negotiated peace deals for Syria, at times at the expense of the UN-led and UN Security Council-mandated Intra-Syrian talks in Geneva. A third trend pertains to the incapacitation or the weakening of cooperative security schemes, either by states that have an agenda to undermine them or, often more problematically, by the complacency of states that are unwilling to accept compromises and invest political capital and resources to ensure their functioning. One example from 2020 is the Security Council's failure for several months to take measures to address the unfolding coronavirus pandemic and to endorse the UN Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire.[6]

The OSCE would appear to be particularly affected by the crisis of multilateralism. The pursuit of the organization's mandate – promoting security through a comprehensive approach – mostly yields long-term benefits for the collective community of participating states rather than tangible short-term rewards for individual states. This underscores the importance of the OSCE's role as a platform for dialogue and cooperation, but this also creates difficulties in convincing skeptics of multilateral cooperation, especially those of a nationalist disposition. Another factor is that the OSCE does not have a foundational charter, and commitments are not legally binding and are therefore easier to ignore. Finally, the OSCE is not as well-known as other organizations and may therefore be more prone to being de-prioritized, as it has less support among the public, politicians, and expert communities.

## Three Implications for the OSCE

Against the background of these macro trends, the analysis now turns to the specific context of the OSCE, focusing on implications across three dimensions of its role in conflict management. The implications discussed here contain aspects that highlight both the possibilities and the limitations that Greminger was confronted with when he took over as OSCE Secretary General in 2017.

### Organization Revived but Paralyzed

The crisis in and around Ukraine and the rift between Russia and the West it deepened have had paradoxical consequences for the OSCE. On the one hand, the 2014 events have boosted the organization's relevance. Indeed, it became the primary political platform for discussions about the crisis. The OSCE also deployed a large-scale monitor-

4 This argument is made by G. John Ikenberry: "The End of Liberal International Order?" *International Affairs* 94:1 (2018), pp. 7–23. For a different perspective, emphasizing the transformation rather than the demise of multilateralism, see Mette Eilstrup-Sangiovanni / Stephanie C. Hofmann, "Of the Contemporary Global Order, Crisis, and Change," *Journal of European Public Policy* 27:7 (2020), pp. 1077–1089.

5 See e.g., David S. Cohen / Zachary K. Goldman, "Like it or Not, Unilateral Sanctions Are Here to Stay," *AJIL Unbound,* 29.04.2019.

6 See International Crisis Group, "Salvaging the Security Council's Coronavirus Response," 01.08.2020.

ing mission to Ukraine, the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM), and it has acted as a mediator in settlement negotiations involving Ukraine, Russia, and the pro-Russian de facto entities from Donetsk and Luhansk.[7] Tellingly, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote in 2014 that the prominent role played by the OSCE in responding to the Ukraine crisis was akin to "waking up Sleeping Beauty."[8] Interest in the OSCE skyrocketed, media coverage increased, participating states' level of representation at the Permanent Council became more robust, and invitations for the OSCE to share best practices in conflict management multiplied.[9] These are just a few examples to show the revival the OSCE underwent in connection with the crisis in and around Ukraine. Indeed, the reputation that Greminger earned for successfully positioning the OSCE as a provider of conflict management in Ukraine during the Swiss Chairpersonship in 2014 was a key factor in his appointment as Secretary General.

On the other hand, the atmosphere within the OSCE further deteriorated and divisions between participating states deepened. Ambassadors reverted to touting maximalist positions, using OSCE meetings for harsh public statements rather than pragmatic problem-solving. A zero-sum mentality often prevailed and many issues, including those of an operational nature, became politicized. Action that required a political decision was often blocked. This was owing to the consensus principle, something which, at the same time, protected the OSCE from being pulled into one or the other camp. The polarization affected the whole organization, including its role in conflict management. For example, political divisions meant that the OSCE's response to the political crisis in Skopje in April 2017, when the parliament was stormed, was not as robust as it could have been had the organization been united. In Central Asia, disagreements prevented a push-back against host governments' efforts to shut down OSCE field offices, such as in Osh in 2017, which had played a crucial role in preventing conflict at the local level. In Ukraine, mutual accusations over ceasefire violations reported by the OSCE SMM prevented more sustained efforts to enable dialogue between the warring parties and to keep civilians out of the line of fire.[10]

To sum up, when Greminger began his term as Secretary General, the OSCE's competence in conflict management was broadly recognized, and its credibility had recently received a boost. However, the ripple effects of the rift between Russia and the West meant the organization was divided and, in many cases, unable to act decisively to prevent conflict and manage crises in the OSCE area. Moreover, three years into the crisis in and around Ukraine, the positive reputational effects of the OSCE's resolute and multifaceted response began to wear off, while geopolitical divisions persisted.

## Conflicts Contained but Unresolved

A strong focus of OSCE conflict management pertains to the so-called protracted conflicts: territorial disputes involving separatist forces in Moldova and Georgia, and between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which all in one way or another are a legacy of the dissolution of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. In these contexts, often falsely called frozen conflicts, the OSCE has for many years convened negotiation formats, which bring together the conflict parties as well as other influential actors, but have not, to date, brought about a settlement. While the conflict in Ukraine is different, it clearly features elements of protraction, as the de facto structures in the separatist-held territories have become entrenched and negotiations are stuck.[11] Despite the absence of conflict resolution, the OSCE has largely managed to contain violence in recent years, albeit with the exception of Nagorno-Karabakh. In Ukraine, the SMM has contributed to de-escalation, both through impartial monitoring and by facilitating dialogue at the local level.[12] Likewise, in Georgia, the OSCE co-chairs a local prevention mechanism, which makes sure that there is regular contact between the Georgian government and the South Ossetian de facto authorities and that incidents along the administrative boundary line do not spiral out of control. In Moldova, finally, the OSCE Mission and the special representative of the Chairperson-in-Office have implemented confidence-building measures and kept the political process between Chisinau and Tiraspol going.[13]

These efforts, which are implemented in difficult political environments characterized by opposing claims of status and territory, have been crucial in preventing conflict escalation and in improving the lives of

7 For a comprehensive account of the OSCE's role in the response to the crisis in and around Ukraine, see the final report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project, which was led by Wolfgang Ischinger: *Back to Diplomacy,* osce.org, November 2015. See also Fred Tanner, "The OSCE and the Crisis in and around Ukraine: First Lessons for Crisis Management," in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2015* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016), pp. 241–250.

8 Stephan Löwenstein, "Erwacht aus dem Dornröschenschlaf," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung,* 05.12.2014.

9 These examples are drawn from the author's experience working as a staff member in the Conflict Prevention Centre within the OSCE Secretariat.

10 On ceasefire monitoring in Ukraine, see the forthcoming report by Alexander Hug, long-time SMM Principal Deputy Chief Monitor: *Ceasefire Monitoring and Verification and the Use of Technology: Insights from Ukraine* (Zurich: CSS, 2021).

11 For background on negotiations to settle the conflict in and around Ukraine, see Anna Hess Sargsyan, "Unpacking Complexity in the Ukraine Peace Process," *CSS Analysis in Security Policy* 243 (2019).

12 See Claus Neukirch, "The Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine in Its Second Year: Ongoing OSCE Conflict Management in Ukraine," in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2015* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016), pp. 229–239.

13 On conflict management in Ukraine, Georgia, and Moldova, see Thomas de Waal / Nikolaus von Twickel, *Beyond Frozen Conflict: Scenarios for Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe* (London: Rowman & Littlefield International, 2020).

civilians living in conflict zones. However, actual settlements have remained elusive; therefore, Victor-Yves Ghébali's 2005 verdict that the OSCE is rather successful in prevention, but unsuccessful in conflict resolution remains valid.[14] This is a dangerous state of affairs, as a lack of resolution poses significant risks. Even when contained, conflicts do a lot of harm. Moreover, in the absence of a settlement, the possibility of violence escalation always looms, with the war in Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020 serving as a striking reminder.

The difficulty of settling conflicts in the OSCE area is not new, but the macro trends described earlier seem to have deepened intractability. In the conflicts mediated by the OSCE, an accommodation of interests between Russia, the US, and the EU is a condition sine qua non for settlement. Not only is accommodation unrealistic in the current context, but the increasing geopolitical antagonism has deepened divides between conflict parties, as in Georgia, and is fueling conflict, as in Ukraine. A second condition for settlement is the investment of significant political capital and resources on the part of OSCE participating states – especially larger ones – making conflict resolution a top priority and bringing other policy instruments in line to shift conflict parties' cost-benefit calculation. That leverage would need to be deployed in a coordinated fashion and within a multilateral framework, ideally the OSCE. This is an unlikely scenario, however, given states' increasing inward focus and lack of prioritization of multilateral issues. Instead, participating states seem to content themselves with the status quo of contained but unresolved conflicts in the OSCE area.

In short, Greminger came to the helm of an organization that had done well in containing conflict, having developed a wide range of preventive mechanisms and a sensitivity, unmatched by any other organization, for operating in contexts with de facto entities whose status is contested. However, the current context implies that it would be very difficult to go beyond containment and achieve settlements, given the divisions between conflict parties and their international backers, as well as the international community's limited interest.

## Capacities Built but Falling Short of Potential

OSCE conflict management is anchored in the founding Helsinki Decalogue, as well as in various Summit and Ministerial Council decisions. The OSCE has the long-standing experience and a wide-ranging toolbox to respond to different types of crises and conflicts erupting in its area. The OSCE's complex institutional architecture is beneficial in this regard, as there is a multitude of players able to respond to emerging conflicts – including the Chairpersonship, institutions, field operations, and the Secretariat.[15] Moreover, at the political level, participating states have different procedures and mechanisms at their disposal to contain violence and promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts.[16] In 2011, participating states added to that toolbox by adopting Ministerial Council Decision No. 3/11 on the conflict cycle. This decision strengthened the Secretary General's role in alerting participating states to potential conflict situations, it paved the way for the establishment of a network of early warning focal points across executive structures, and it led to the creation of a Mediation Support Team.[17]

Despite these developments, the OSCE's capacities in conflict management still fall short. This pertains to field operations, which could do more to prevent conflict at the local level if they had a corresponding mandate and additional resources.[18] It also relates to the OSCE Secretariat. In 2017, the section within the Secretariat dealing with the conflict cycle only had three contracted staff members, six seconded employees, and six local staff. Further, its budget was less than one million Euros[19] – a fraction of the staff and budget dedicated to conflict management in other organizations; for example, the European External Action Service or the UN Department of Political Affairs. This means that in the event of a crisis, such as Ukraine in 2014, conflict management experts are quickly absorbed and unable to provide sustained support in other contexts. The Secretariat also lacks the resources and personnel for a fully-fledged early warning cell and a situation room that uses state-of-the-art technology, as well as for the continuous deployment of experts into mediation teams.[20] Compounding this, political support for conflict management has not been as strong as it could have been in recent years. For example, a proposed Ministerial Council decision on mediation failed in 2014, and another proposed decision on the conflict cycle, which sought to shore up the Secretariat's capacities for early action and crisis response, was rejected in 2016.

In sum, Greminger took over an organization whose toolbox was tried and tested. The limitation, however, is that the OSCE has fallen short of realizing its full potential. The organization could do more to anticipate

14 Victor-Yves Ghébali, *The OSCE between Crisis and Reform: Towards a New Lease on Life,* (Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces (DCAF), 2005), p. 2.

15 See Christina Stenner, "Understanding the Mediator: Taking Stock of the OSCE's Mechanisms and Instruments for Conflict Resolution," *Security and Human Rights,* 27:3–4 (2016), pp. 256–272.

16 OSCE Conflict Prevention Centre, *OSCE Mechanisms and Procedures: Summary/Compendium,* osce.org, 2011.

17 On the development of mediation capacities, see David Lanz, "Charting the Ups and Downs of OSCE Mediation," *Security and Human Rights,* 27:3–4 (2016), pp. 243–255.

18 Wolfgang Zellner / Frank Evers, *The Future of OSCE Field Operations (Options),* osce-network.net, 05.12.2014.

19 See OSCE Permanent Council, *Decision No. 1252: Approval of the 2017 Unified Budget,* osce.org, 01.06.2017.

20 For an overview of the OSCE's toolbox across the conflict cycle, including current capacities and potential for future development, see Michael Raith, "Addressing the Conflict Cycle – The OSCE's Evolving Toolbox," in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (ed.), *OSCE Insights 3* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2020), pp. 1–15.

crises, prevent incipient violence, and support the settlement of protracted conflicts. Yet it does not have the necessary political backing and resources. The reasons for this are varied, but can be broadly linked to the factors mentioned in connection with the crisis of multilateralism. Attempts to expand conflict management capacities have been blocked by a small number of participating states that are skeptical about OSCE action in this area, fearing a loss of control if the OSCE acts outside established formats. Such blockage has also been enabled by the complacency of participating states – including some claiming to be champions of multilateral institutions – which have not considered OSCE conflict management to be a priority and have not been willing to invest additional resources and political capital to expand capacities.

## Conclusion

The most basic conclusion from this analysis is that being Secretary General of the OSCE is no easy task. Global trends, in particular the increase of geopolitical polarization coupled with a decrease in states' commitment to multilateralism, pose serious challenges. In the area of conflict management, they limit scope for action and prevent the organization from achieving its full potential. Given these constraints, it is not surprising why, as Greminger describes in his contribution, a number of objectives he set for the organization remained unattained. In fact, it is remarkable that so many projects did come to fruition, which points to his commitment, perseverance, and intricate knowledge of the OSCE and its structures and mechanisms. That Greminger's mandate, along with that of the heads of institutions, was nonetheless cut short elucidates the problems the OSCE is facing today. Compounding this is the crisis in Belarus and the war in Nagorno-Karabakh, in response to which the OSCE has not managed to play a relevant role.

Even if the OSCE is on the receiving end of global trends that are beyond its control, it is not powerless. The organization is well accustomed to operating in a polarized environment. Indeed, providing operational conflict management despite deep divisions among participating states is one of the OSCE's key comparative advantages, and it has developed a comprehensive toolbox to that end. Responsibility for making use of this toolbox lies, in particular, with the countries chairing the organization – Sweden in 2021, followed by Poland and North Macedonia in subsequent years. It also lies with participating states. Securing the status quo with an OSCE reduced to containing protracted conflicts is not good enough. Ensuring peace and security in the OSCE area requires strong investment into the organization and its work to promote cooperative security. A small step was made by overcoming the leadership crisis and appointing a new Secretary General, Helga Schmid. Building on this, participating states should expand the OSCE's capacities to manage conflict and provide political leadership, allowing for a swift reaction to emerging crises and a renewed effort toward the settlement of existing conflicts.

**Part II: Thomas Greminger as Candidate and Secretary General**

# How Thomas Greminger Became OSCE Secretary General: The Inside Story of a Campaign

*Fabian Grass**

To win an election, you need a good candidate and a good campaign. The former is the most important aspect, while the latter must not be neglected – for personality and qualifications can only too quickly become secondary issues. A good campaign requires a deep analysis of the setting, knowledge of the candidate's strengths and weaknesses, and smart tactics. The challenge is to choose the right moment, to present an advantageous profile, and to carefully plan one's course of action. In the following, I discuss the roles that these and other factors played in Thomas Greminger's campaign for Secretary General of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

## The Starting Point

In 2017, the desire for a strong Secretary General was palpable. Many participating states hoped that a former minister would take over the leadership of the relatively large OSCE Secretariat in Vienna. It was hoped he or she could lead the organization out of political crisis, revitalize arms control, and strengthen the commitment to human rights. However, the perennial question of whether the OSCE needs more of a "general" or a "secretary" remained open to debate. However, at the time, the call for a former minister was remarkable, since no minister had ever been elected Secretary General before. All secretaries general had been experienced career diplomats, like Greminger.

The OSCE is an organization with certain idiosyncrasies. Compared to NATO or the UN, it stipulates a weaker role for the Secretary General. The country holding the Chairpersonship (in 2017, this was Austria) guides the organization's political fortunes, chooses topics and focal areas, and attempts to build consensus around these. However, the Chairperson-in-Office rotates annually, which means that the Secretary General has an important role in ensuring the continuity and stability of the organization. Foreign ministers come and go and are rarely seen in Vienna's Hofburg, the home of the OSCE. This is not so with the Secretary General. Hardly a day goes by in the life of the organization when the incumbent is not physically present. The Secretary General, heading the Secretariat, usually attends every session of the Permanent Council.

The term in office of the then-secretary general, the Italian Lamberto Zannier, ended in June 2017. A further term was not possible, since his three-year mandate had already been extended by another three years in 2014, and a second extension was excluded under the OSCE's rules. This created an opportunity for Switzerland. After its 2014 OSCE Chairpersonship, the country had a clear profile and enjoyed a good reputation. Greminger had been Switzerland's permanent representative for five years and had chaired the Permanent Council in 2014, an extremely challenging year due to the Ukraine crisis. His skills and achievements were unquestioned: The Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) was created in Ukraine in late 2014, not least due to his diplomatic abilities. Thanks to his long years of experience and presence, he knew the OSCE very well, a clear advantage vis-à-vis his competitors. Greminger himself was well known and highly regarded in Vienna; however, he was not a former minister.

But how does one become the OSCE Secretary General? This requires a tailored campaign, a well-considered campaign strategy, and careful timing. Shortly before Christmas 2016, I was asked to lead the campaign. A little earlier, I had completed my training as a diplomat, and in the summer of 2016, I had returned from my diplomatic traineeship in Ottawa. Four years earlier, I had worked in Vienna at the OSCE Secretariat on detachment from Switzerland to work on military confidence-building issues. Although I knew Greminger well from this period, I was nevertheless pleasantly surprised at this request. After half a day's reflection, I agreed. Looking forward to the challenge, I was certain that my network in Vienna could be put to good use. This was important, since the rumor mill in Vienna was constantly churning, and a great deal of critical information could only be obtained via personal contacts.

As of the end of June 2017, in addition to the Secretary General's position, the heads of the three OSCE institutions were also due to be filled: The High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), the head of the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM). Some participating states were, therefore, contemplating the idea that the three institutions ought to be in the hands of "the West" in order to assure their independence, while the Secretary General might for the first time be from "the East." This would have been a first, since the secretaries general had always been from the

* The author is expressing a personal point of view here. The opinions stated in this text should not be regarded as the official position of Switzerland or of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs.

West since the organization's founding in 1995: One from France, two from Italy, and one each from Slovakia and Germany. Moreover, all of them had been men. Thus, there were legitimate voices pointing out that it was high time for a woman to become Secretary General, something which would not happen until German diplomat Helga Schmid became Secretary General in 2020. For many, a woman from the East would have been the ideal successor to Zannier in 2017.

As far as the attributes "female" and "from the East" were concerned, the frontrunner seemed to fit the bill in every respect: Alena Kupchyna, the former deputy minister of Belarus and current head of the Office of Transnational Threats. She had only recently, in 2016, been appointed as the representative of Belarus to the OSCE as well as bilateral ambassador to Austria, which held the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office at the time. Kupchyna was joined by another contender, former Czech foreign minister and EU commissioner Stefan Füle. Given his profound experience, Füle was a solid candidate. However, as he was seen as the candidate of the West, he stood little chance of being seen as electable by the states "east of Vienna", especially Russia. The fourth contender was Ilkka Kanerva. He had served as deputy prime minister of Finland and knew the OSCE well: The previous year, he had been the president of the Parliamentary Assembly, and he had himself once been the Chairperson-in-Office during the Finnish Chairpersonship in 2008. However, he had to vacate that position abruptly in the summer of 2008 after being forced to resign as minister of foreign affairs in the wake of a scandal, according to media reports. Former Kazakh foreign minister Erlan Idrissov also briefly entered the race as the fifth candidate, but withdrew shortly thereafter in March 2017 and became the bilateral ambassador in London.

Further candidates ran for the aforementioned positions in the three OSCE institutions, or rather were nominated by their governments, as individual applications were not admissible. These include too many names and nationalities to mention here. However, this large field of contenders created opportunities for package deals, that is, for putting together a four-way package based on a variety of attributes. Accordingly, the respective considerations focused not only on the abilities of the individual candidates but also on other attributes such as the geographic-political balance or appropriate gender representation.

## Greminger the Candidate

After his return from Vienna, Greminger became the deputy head of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in Bern. He was responsible for the South Cooperation Department, with a budget of 730 million USD and 900 employees. During his career, he had headed what was then the Political Affairs Division IV, which was later called the Human Security Division and today is the Peace and Human Rights Division, making him eminently qualified for the OSCE's comprehensive security concept. As a lieutenant colonel in the Swiss armed forces, he was also a credible interlocutor on military matters.

Based on his performance record and his name recognition in Vienna, Greminger's chances were good, but the dynamic of the election process remained largely unpredictable. This was especially because four positions were to be filled at once and thus a package deal was possible – which in a worst-case scenario could have been to Switzerland's disadvantage. Many states agreed that at least one woman was needed and that at least one candidate should come from "east of Vienna". Of course, this label did not refer literally to the geographic space to the east of the Austrian capital but to the political region ranging from Belarus and Russia to the Caucasus and Central Asia. This also excludes Ukraine and Georgia, which are generally counted as part of the West.

## The Campaign

We had to consider how an effective campaign should be designed under these circumstances. Should the focus be on Vienna or on the key foreign ministries in the various capitals? When would be the right time for diplomatic demarches, for canvassing in Vienna, and for visits to capitals? How should the candidate position himself vis-à-vis his competitors? Would it be better to rely on the candidate's own strengths or to position him in contrast to the weaknesses of others? These were the questions that came up in early 2017.

The scenario of a package deal in conjunction with strong competitors and an unpredictable dynamic in Vienna determined the boundaries of the campaign. Which strategy ought to be pursued in such a situation? Should the bid be announced early to stake out a claim, or would it better to wait and analyze the strengths and weaknesses of others? We chose the former path. Moreover, a strategic decision was taken not to run a "counter-campaign", but one that focused on the strengths of Switzerland's candidacy and its candidate: a credible commitment to a strong OSCE.

Accordingly, on 5 January 2017, Greminger was the first candidate to enter the race. The following day, the Swiss foreign minister at the time, then-federal councilor Didier Burkhalter, sent personal letters to his OSCE colleagues. Some of Greminger's future rivals were visibly surprised, and many of his former colleagues in Vienna were pleased. The challenge now was to make tactical use of this first-mover advantage. But how?

A steering committee consisting of the heads of the relevant two departments of the Swiss Federal Depart-

ment of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), as well as representatives of the foreign minister's staff, was formed in Bern to deal with these and other questions. I myself served simultaneously as the secretary of this committee and as campaign manager. The committee met regularly in Bern to decide on strategy issues. The tactical aspects of the campaign were left to a smaller circle consisting of Ambassador Heidi Grau, who chaired the committee, Greminger, and myself. The OSCE mission in Vienna, headed by Ambassador Claude Wild, was consulted on all matters and supported the local meetings. Moreover, the mission served as our eyes and ears in the salons of Vienna's Hofburg.

## Strategy and Tactics

The strategy was clear: The objective was to win a competitive nomination process in which there could only be one winner. It was important to remain watchful with regard to package deals. But who needed to be convinced? The Heads of Mission in Vienna, who would be working with the Secretary General on a daily basis, or the decision makers in the capitals where important decisions would be made? The answer was "both." In terms of tactics, the question was who first?

Determined to create a positive dynamic as quickly as possible, we decided to meet the Heads of Mission in Vienna first. The sequence was important: Individuals might have felt snubbed if they were the last to be greeted. Yet every major country expected an early courtesy call too. Would it be better first to meet our friends and supporters? Or would it be better to reach out to those who were still wavering but were likely to be swayed or at least to support us with their second vote? We decided on a hybrid approach. The first round of visits was dedicated to the main voices in Vienna, to the most important states (which were not always identical with the former), to good friends, and also to a few potential spoilers. If the latter were considering a veto, we wanted to know as soon as possible.

During the first round in mid-January, Greminger visited 13 representatives in Vienna. The early announcement of his bid and his good reputation on the ground proved to be very advantageous. Of course, none would show their hand at this early stage of the race. Good friends were generous in dispensing constructive advice while also warning that gender and geography would be important factors this time around. We had gotten off to a good start, the initial impression was promising, there were no vetoes in sight, and our chances remained intact.

The second round took place in Vienna in mid-February, a month before the hearing. This time, we talked to 32 Heads of Mission during our three-day sojourn, which was a Herculean challenge for our OSCE mission purely in terms of logistics. Some diplomats were already voicing open support for Greminger's bid or were at least sympathetic to it. This positive dynamic had to be shored up. At this point, it was especially important to keep the main capitals on board or to prevent possible vetoes.

Ahead of the third and final round in Vienna, we paid visits to Kyiv and Moscow in quick succession. No veto was hinted at in either capital. Since the Ukrainians were clearly aligned with the EU/NATO position and thus also considered supporting Füle, they remained uncommitted. In the case of Russia, there was no doubt that support and solidarity would initially be given to the Belarusian candidate. However, we hoped to secure its second vote, which did not seem unrealistic.

In the subsequent third and final round, we visited the rest of the 56 Heads of Mission in Vienna with whom we had previously been unable to meet. Sentiments remained positive, but the situation was volatile – now, the main thing was to avoid mistakes. During these meetings in Vienna, we became aware that the talks, which usually took about half an hour, were greatly appreciated. Some resembled job interviews with a question-and-answer session, while others were more like casual exchanges of views over coffee, and several hosts used these visits to present their own positions. We realized that not all competitors were making the same effort as we were; some lurked about the corridors of the Hofburg, aiming to waylay the Heads of Mission and to grasp an opportunity to talk. Naturally, the dynamic here was a different one – all these maneuvers were observed and registered by other parties. Yet the effect was not comparable to the displays of respect that Greminger bestowed upon the Heads of Mission. We requested formal meetings, and he personally visited their missions. Operational details such as these are important for a successful campaign.

After completing the rounds in Vienna, we visited Ankara and Washington, with the sequence being mainly determined by logistical considerations. Turkey, an important OSCE member, sent positive signals; and Washington, which was undergoing a complete overhaul of the State Department following the election of Donald Trump, also appreciated the visit. The US, too, was positively disposed toward the candidacy.

One important element was the matter of the demarches in the OSCE capitals, i.e., the visits by Swiss ambassadors to the foreign ministries of the host nations to generate support for the bid. They handed over appealing flyers and presented the candidate's advantages based on coordinated speaking points. With keen intuition, they tried to assess the atmosphere in the various ministries: How was Greminger's candidacy regarded? Had certain preferences already been consolidated? Who was to decide on the bid: the foreign minister or the head of government? These were important pieces of informa-

tion for us, indicating where, when, and how to follow up. Where it seemed advisable, the Swiss foreign minister could place a well-timed telephone call to his colleagues. Then-federal councilor Burkhalter never refused such requests and was personally invested in the bid. The memory of his time as OSCE Chairperson-in-Office in 2014 was still fresh, and Burkhalter was very familiar with the dynamics in Vienna. Having laid the foundation with these actions, the tour of four capitals, and the visits to all Heads of Mission, we were now ready for another key juncture: the hearing.

## The Hearing

I recall well how Greminger paced the empty cafeteria of Vienna's Hofburg, going over his speech, which we had rehearsed endlessly the previous evening. He was concentrating on his moment in the spotlight.

But first, it was Kupchyna's turn to speak. Her presentation was captivating. She was charming, frank, and authentic. However, during the question-and-answer session, she was unable to demonstrate detailed knowledge of the OSCE; instead, she was forced to comment on the situation in Belarus. At that very moment, the country was embroiled in protests that were being violently suppressed. For many of the countries "west of Vienna", the Belarusian candidate was thus no longer electable. Kanerva, too, remained non-committal and rather superficial in his comments. Füle touted multilateralism and the willingness to compromise, even referencing Switzerland's favorite metaphor of bridge-building. Greminger read out his prepared remarks. During the question-and-answer session, he came across as competent and displayed in-depth knowledge of the OSCE. In my view, he was the only candidate to present a program or clear cornerstones for how he intended to strengthen the OSCE. His statement that "the OSCE is an organization worth fighting for" convinced many.

## The Final Push

The conclusion of the hearing marked the end of the campaign's main phase. The candidates had presented themselves and submitted to questioning, and the states had had the opportunity to assess the candidates and to analyze their strengths and weaknesses. Most importantly, the states had pondered which contender was most in line with their interests and values. Did they want a strong organization and a strong Secretary General? An OSCE that defended human rights? A body that was focused on European security and would promote dialogue in Vienna as well as foster confidence between the various capitals? Each country had to weigh a plethora of considerations.

This was also the most active period for vote-trading deals, which most candidate countries presumably engaged in. In these types of deals, two countries agree to support each other's candidates, often including those in other bodies and organizations. If a country was already committed to supporting Greminger, but wanted to extract maximum concessions, it could request Switzerland's support for their own candidate in another body in return for their formal support of Greminger. This was not an exception but the rule. Pacta sunt servanda – such horse-trading deals could be relied on. Together with our ongoing assessment of the situation in Vienna, and following demarches and visits to capitals, we gained an increasingly clear picture: The situation was developing to Greminger's advantage.

One week after the hearings, the states submitted their preferences to the Austrian Chairpersonship. Throughout the process, one uncertainty for our campaign had been the question of whether they would be able to name only one preference, or two. While this may not immediately seem like a crucial issue, we were probably right in believing that if states were only to cast one vote, a pattern would emerge in which EU/NATO states would support Füle and countries east of Vienna would back Kupchyna. In such a scenario, Greminger would garner the least number of votes in a first round and be eliminated from the race. Fortunately, this is not what occurred. The Austrian Chairpersonship announced that the states could submit as many preferences as they wished. Under these rules, Greminger was often nominated not only as the first preference but also as the second by numerous participating states.

Approximately a month passed until we received the desired news at the beginning of May: Greminger was in the lead. In mid-May, the other competitors were officially informed by the Chairpersonship. Some were surprised, and one competitor initially refused to believe the numbers were accurate.

We now tried to exploit this situation. From a tactical point of view, but also due to the unclear situation in the three institutions, we advocated an "SG first" approach; that is, the Secretary General should be appointed before the others. This was intended to help us seize the advantage and ensure that our candidacy was not trampled underfoot in another round of bargaining. However, one important country from the West was strictly opposed to this approach. It feared that Russia would block the heads of the three institutions following the appointment of the Secretary General.

Time was running out as the term in office of then-secretary general Zannier would expire at the end of June. The Chairpersonship tried but failed to bring about a consensus by that date. Thus, a four-way package would be required after all. Zannier's term ended, and the Secretary General's functions were entrusted to the two top-

ranking officials at the OSCE Secretariat for a limited time. The OSCE was leaderless once more, as it would again become in 2020.

Although Greminger was the undisputed frontrunner from this point on, the decision on a four-way package could not be made until the informal ministerial meeting on 11 July 2017 in Mauerbach, Austria. Canada's HCNM candidate dropped out due to Russia's resistance and was replaced by Zannier, who had already left office by this point.

Following the breakthrough at Mauerbach, the path was clear for a formal procedure. A so-called Silent Procedure was launched: Unless a veto was cast by 18 July 2017, the candidates would be considered appointed. Since no such veto was forthcoming, Greminger (Switzerland, Secretary General), Ingibjörg Sólrún Gísladóttir (Iceland, ODIHR), Harlem Désir (France, RFoM), and Zannier (Italy, HCNM) were elected. Three men, one woman – four individuals from the space west of Vienna. While the package was unbalanced, it showed that individual competence did remain a pivotal factor. Nevertheless, some states did criticize the fact that the package was geographically unbalanced to a degree that was unprecedented in the history of the organization. Nor, as it turned out, had participating states managed to elect the first woman to head the OSCE Secretariat. At this point, of course, nobody knew that this would happen just three years later.

Greminger was elected, and I continued my career in the FDFA. It was a great challenge, but it was also a tremendous opportunity for me as a junior diplomat to be permitted to head such a demanding candidacy bid. I would like to express my gratitude to Thomas Greminger for trusting me as he did.

It is difficult to extrapolate general suggestions and lessons for future campaigns, since the consensus-based four-way election made for a unique situation. Certainly, good tactics, the first-mover advantage, and the good network of relationships played a role. In retrospect, I believe the mutual trust that prevailed between the campaign's backers, in particular between Greminger and myself, was a key factor. His achievements and reputation were of great importance, as were good instincts for timing and tactics and a bit of luck. In the end, however, the recipe for success may have reflected a culinary truism: Cooking is easy when the ingredients are good.

# Strengthening Cooperative Security in Difficult Times: Three Years as Secretary General of the OSCE (2017–2020) – a Critical Appraisal

*Thomas Greminger**

## Introduction

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) is the largest regional security organization in the world. As the successor to the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), it builds on a long and eventful history. It serves as an inclusive platform for dialogue, with all 57 participating states – hailing from a region that stretches from Vancouver to Vladivostok – sitting around the same table. The OSCE is the protector of principles and commitments in inter- and intra-state relations – principles that the states have agreed to uphold since the Helsinki Declaration was signed in 1975. The OSCE is a pioneer of a modern, broad-based understanding of security, encompassing politico-military aspects, transnational threats such as terrorism, human trafficking, and cyberattacks, alongside economic and ecological concerns. In the so-called Decalogue of Helsinki, the participating states defined the fundamental rules for their future relations. Human rights were considered to be a central element of security. Later on, the rule of law and democratic institutions were also added to this list. The OSCE's activities, particularly its conflict prevention efforts, are highly valued by experts – both in a narrow, operational sense and in a broader, structural sense. The organization uses its various tools and instruments to intervene in the conflict cycle, including with its 16 field operations in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, and Central Asia. It also does this by working through its institutions. These include the Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) in The Hague, and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM), operating out of the OSCE Secretariat in Vienna (see organigram on p. 23). In the broader political sphere, the OSCE is probably best known for its election observation activities and its crisis management in Ukraine.

What are the challenges faced by the OSCE today? Just like other international organizations, the OSCE operates in an environment clouded by skepticism toward a multilateral order and its respective institutions. The deal-making approach is nowadays preferred over a rules-based system. Unilateralism, or at best bilateralism, is prevailing over multilateralism in a political landscape that is increasingly shaped by populism. Another major factor is the growing polarization between the key players in Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian security that has been playing out over the last two decades. The lack of trust, in particular between Russia and the West, has reached a nadir not seen since the end of the Cold War.[1] As a result, the risk of violent conflict – even in the Euro-Atlantic realm – is increasing. Meanwhile, there is an ever-growing risk of accidents and incidents in the air, at sea, or on land, events which can often result in unintended escalation. Large-scale maneuvers near borders, often involving surprise exercises, have grown sharply in number in recent years. Yet despite trust reaching historic lows, there is no agreement as to why this is the case. The contributing factors include different expectations as to how the new European security order should have looked after the end of the Cold War, severe violations of the OSCE's principles and commitments, as well as diverging interpretations of their meaning.[2]

This atmosphere of mistrust is accompanied by an erosion of the complex network of arms control mechanisms that have afforded us relative stability in Europe over the last 30 years. Key events in this regard include the end of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty, the breakdown of the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE), the US and the Russian withdrawal from the 1992 Open Skies Treaty,[3] and the failed revision of the Vienna Document (VD 2011), which was intended to form the basis for confidence- and security-building measures (CSBMs) in Europe. However, on a more positive note, since the new Biden administration has taken office, it has already been possible to secure a five-year extension to the "New START" treaty on the limitation of ballistic nuclear missiles.

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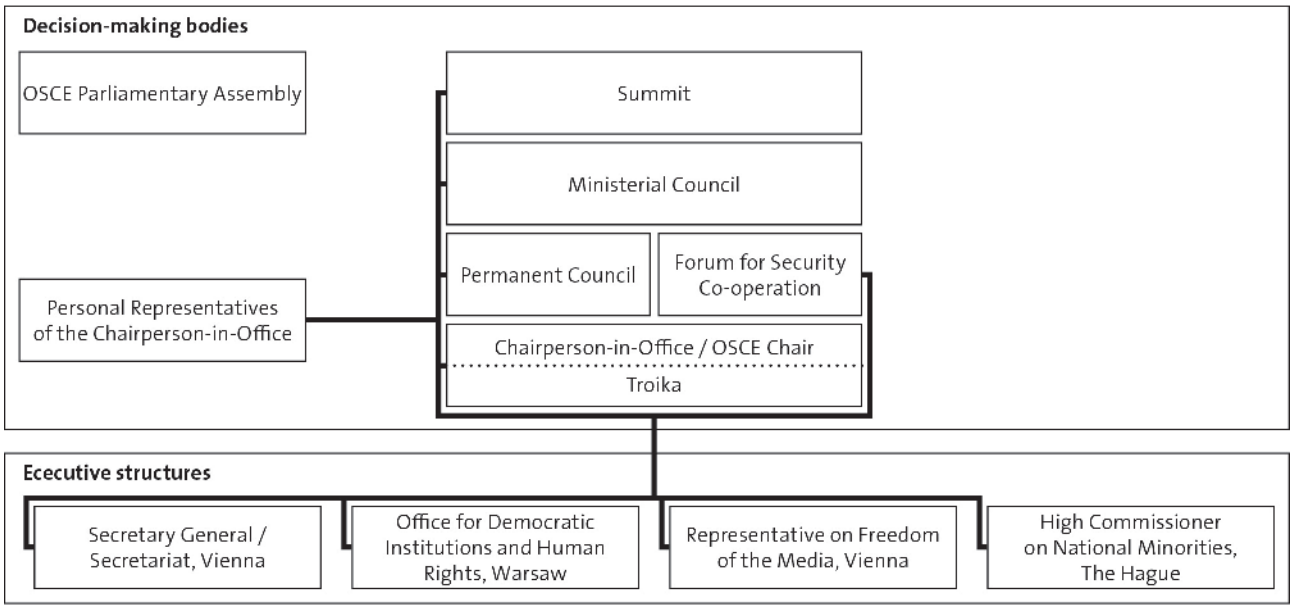
* The author is expressing a personal point of view here. The opinions stated in this text should not be regarded as the official position of Switzerland or of the Swiss Federal Department of Foreign Affairs. The author would like to thank Charlotte Bleisch, Wolfgang Brülhart, Walter Kemp, Anna Ifkovits, Simon Mason, Christian Nünlist, and Lisa Watanabe for their valuable and inspiring comments on a draft version of this text.

1 For a thorough analysis of the relationship between Russia and the West from different perspectives, see: William H. Hill, *No Place for Russia, European Security Institutions Since 1989* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018); Ivan Krastev and Stephen Holmes, Das Licht, das erlosch: Eine Abrechnung *[The light that failed. A reckoning]* (Berlin: Ullstein Verlag, 2019); John J. Mearsheimer, "Bound to Fail: The Rise and Fall of the Liberal International Order," *International Security* 43/4 (2019), pp. 7–50.

2 The Panel of Eminent Persons led by Wolfgang Ischinger gave a striking definition of the various narratives surrounding the development of the European security order. See "Back to Diplomacy, Final Report and Recommendations of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project," OSCE, November 2015, pp. 4–9 and annex, pp. 21–29.

3 US withdrawal completed on 22 November 2020. As of 6 June 2021 Russia withdrew as well.

**OSCE Structure**




*Source of data: osce.org, "What is the OSCE?"*

With politico-military concerns gaining renewed momentum, there is also a host of transnational threats that can only be effectively tackled through cross-border cooperation. These include the fight against terrorism and violent extremism; cyber threats from state-sponsored actors and private groups or individuals; illicit trafficking of human beings, weapons, cultural goods, and drugs; and the challenges surrounding irregular migration. In recent times, climate change and technological transformation – in particular, Artificial Intelligence (AI) – have also had a growing impact on security.

We are therefore confronted with a paradoxical reality in which multilateral cooperation is being called into question, cutting off avenues for dialogue, while circumstances are creating an ever-greater need for international cooperation and real dialogue. It is perhaps no surprise that this situation is reflected within the OSCE itself. The prevailing climate of confrontation and the intense security challenges mean that the organization is needed now more than ever. At the same time, growing polarization has resulted in dialogue platforms being used exclusively for the purposes of public diplomacy – outlining particular viewpoints for communication purposes – rather than for hashing out solutions. A great deal of attention and energy is poured into routine business such as approving conference agendas, budgets, or staffing matters, leaving little room for the organization to grapple with the issues of the future. Fundamental reforms, such as the long-overdue clarification of the legal status of the organization,[4] are outside of its scope – but even minor reform measures often stumble as a result of individual participating states conflating them with irrelevant matters.

In this challenging environment, I acted as Secretary General for the organization between 2017 and 2020. It was an irony of fate that my efforts to extend this mandate by a further three years were thwarted by the weaknesses outlined above. I aim here to provide a critical account of the progress made in achieving the targets set at the start of my mandate. I began my period of office with three overarching goals, which I presented to the Permanent Council in my inaugural address on 31 August 2017:

- To reinforce and reinvigorate platforms for dialogue;
- To strengthen partnerships with the UN and regional organizations, such as the EU, and to leverage these partnerships more systematically;
- To implement reforms aimed at greater effectiveness and efficiency.

I will therefore go into some detail on the objectives and implementation of the reform agenda, which I presented to the participating states in early 2018 under the title "Fit4Purpose." Here, there is a strong focus on questions of organization and management, which would be of primary interest to those within the OSCE. As the Head of Secretariat, the Secretary General plays an important role in supporting the chairing country. A further section of this commentary will thus look at the different ways in which this role was shaped by the four chairing countries during my mandate, namely Austria, Italy, Slovakia, and Albania. In performing the role of the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), the Secretary General offers support to

4 For a more detailed account, see: Thomas Greminger, "The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe," in: Robin Geiß / Nils Melzer (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of the International Law of Global Security,* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming in 2021), pp. 1058–1061.

the executive structures, in other words the field operations, the institutions, and the Parliamentary Assembly. The fourth section analyzes these support activities, with a particular focus on the OSCE's flagship operation, the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine. This is followed by a section on the conflict cycle and the OSCE's role in the various conflict-resolution formats adopted in eastern Ukraine and throughout the protracted conflicts. New security risks that I hoped to introduce to the organization's agenda are the subject of a separate section. These include, in particular, the interface between security and technological advances, migration, and the climate crisis, as well as the involvement of a new actor in the OSCE zone: China. Another section of this contribution looks at how the far-reaching impacts of the corona crisis are being managed. I end with an assessment of the organization's future in light of lessons learned.

## The "Fit4Purpose" Reform Agenda

After six months in office and many discussions with my directors, I asked the leader of my newly created Strategic Policy Support Unit (SPSU), Walter Kemp, to draw up a plan for a reform agenda. The paper presented on 30 January 2018 highlighted three priority areas for reform, based on the objectives that I had presented to the Permanent Council in late August 2017:

- Strengthening the platform for inclusive dialogue and joint action;
- Leveraging partnerships more effectively;
- Making the organization fit for purpose.

The third area for reform was the most fleshed out and contained a total of seven sub-objectives. After further internal discussions, I presented a ten-point reform agenda to the participating states on 14 February 2018, during the "SG's Hour".[5] After the event, this was also made available in written form as a non-paper. The elements of the reform agenda are outlined in text box 1.

**Text Box 1: The Secretary General's Ten-Point Reform Agenda**

1. Using the OSCE as a platform for supporting inclusive dialogue and joint action
2. Working toward a positive unifying agenda
3. Leveraging partnerships

Elements of the "Fit4Purpose" agenda:

4. Management reform in the Secretariat
5. Making a difference on the ground
6. Reform of the budget cycle
7. Investing in staff
8. Fostering inclusivity for women and young people in all three dimensions
9. Technology as an enabler
10. Strengthening and refining the OSCE's profile

On the whole, the response from the ambassadors was encouraging. While some praised the overall package as "excellent and courageous," others regarded the more political aspects of the agenda with some skepticism. For instance, the concept of a "positive unifying agenda" was explicitly criticized. However, the technical and management-related elements of the "Fit4Purpose" agenda were met with unequivocal support. The Chairperson and the Troika signaled their full support, as did the US. Some, however, did express regret that the agenda had been launched by the Secretary General rather than the Chair. In their view, such an important paper should have been drafted at the desk of the organization's political leader. Nonetheless, all parties were unanimous in their call to be involved in the next steps of shaping the reform and to be kept abreast of developments. The next stage was for me to instruct the various departments and units of the Secretariat to write and present concept papers for all the areas of reform. Within the Secretariat, Director of the Office of the Secretary General and Deputy Head of the Secretariat Ambassador Paul Bekkers[6] was responsible for steering the reform process. A steering committee consisting of all directors and the Senior Gender Adviser was consulted at regular intervals for updates on progress. I shall now evaluate the progress made in achieving each of the objectives on an individual basis.

5 The "SG's Hour" is a space for informal dialogue between the Secretary General and the ambassadors of the 57 participating states.

6 Also, his successor, Ambassador Luca Fratini, from the second quarter of 2020 onward.

## Using the OSCE as a Platform for Supporting Inclusive Dialogue and Joint Action

> *"The overriding priority is to support stronger dialogue between the participating States, firstly though existing bodies, processes, and events; improved media support; more active involvement with parliamentarians, civil society, and the public; and secondly through the creation of more informal spaces for dialogue."*[7]

This area of reform focused on three key aspects:

- Creating capacity for strategic planning in the Secretariat;
- Providing effective support for the Structured Dialogue;
- Creating more informal dialogue formats and processes.

When planning and carrying out the appointment of the Swiss Chairpersonship of the OSCE back in 2014, it was already clear to me as the Swiss OSCE Ambassador and Chairperson of the Permanent Council that the Secretariat was lacking medium- and long-term planning capacity. This was because the existing policy and coordination units within the Secretariat were completely tied up with day-to-day business. A project funded by Switzerland and several other countries made it possible to establish a SPSU in order to bring greater continuity to the OSCE's planning processes and to provide better support to the Chairperson and the Troika through strategic policy consulting.[8] The SPSU also played a major role in the strategic design of the Program Outline – an important document in the organization's formal financial planning process – and thus also in bringing resource allocation more closely in line with the priority issues. Thanks to secondments from the US, the Russian Federation, the EU[9], and Switzerland, we were able to bring high-caliber staff into the unit and achieve added value that was also acknowledged by a large majority of the participating states. However, it has also been suggested that a small number of the Heads of Mission believed that the SPSU constituted an overstepping of the Secretary General's role. It is therefore important to stress once again that the purpose of the SPSU is to support the participating states.

In December 2016, the OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg introduced the Structured Dialogue, a new dialogue platform for facilitating discussions on reviving arms control. In reality, this informal format became a vital space for exchanging information on current perceptions of threat, military capacity, and de-escalation measures. Over the last two years, there has been a marked interest in the development of specific tools for improving transparency, such as a template for giving advance warning of large-scale military exercises, or a best practice guide for the prevention and improved management of military incidents. With the Forum for Security Co-Operation (FSC) largely at an impasse, I perceived the Structured Dialogue as the key platform for discussing politico-military issues. Consequently, I made every effort to support the dialogue efforts, both together with the Secretariat and through my own contacts with administrations and security organizations such as NATO, even though certain participating states – primarily those skeptical of the Structured Dialogue initiative – never tired of stressing that the Structured Dialogue should be state-owned and state-driven. It was plain to see that this sentiment was underpinned by a fear of relinquishing control – not just to the Secretariat and the dynamic supporters of the Structured Dialogue at state level, but also to think tanks and civil society.

Even though a clear majority of the participating states continue to view the Structured Dialogue as useful and necessary, it is currently under threat. Key players have conflicting ideas about what the Structured Dialogue's priorities should be. While some want to use the Structured Dialogue exclusively to discuss politico-military issues, others appear to have no interest in this and would prefer to focus on hybrid threats. This in turn is perceived as purely a confrontational tactic by the other side, resulting in discussions of this topic being boycotted. Until 2020, the Chair of the informal working group that leads the Structured Dialogue was held by a different person every year. This also made it difficult to keep up the momentum of the process. Without new political impetus, decisive leadership, and broader-based support, the future of the Structured Dialogue is very uncertain.

Formal dialogue mechanisms such as the Permanent Council or the FSC have largely mutated into platforms for public diplomacy, in which the tone can be harsh and confrontational. Because of this, the Secretariat wanted to create more informal spaces for dialogue. With the series of events titled "Talking Points," we developed a format that gives renowned experts and think tanks the opportunity to discuss new studies and publications with an audience drawn from participating states and the Secretariat. Events featuring political scientist Ivan Krastev, author of *The Light That Failed – A Reckoning,* and William Hill, who wrote *No place for Russia,* were very well received by diplomats and Secretariat staff. This was also the case for the presentation by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, which looked at its study on perceptions

7 The formulation of the objective that was used in the reform agenda. This generally has its roots in the non-paper of 14 February 2018. Minor adjustments were made in places as a result of the thematic concept papers.

8 The SPSU went on to support the 2019 and 2020 Chairpersonships in formulating priorities, help the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC) to develop regional strategies for the Western Balkans and Central Asia, and produce prospective studies on facilitating the Chairpersonship and on China.

9 The secondment was funded by Finland.

of security in Europe, entitled *Security Radar 2019 – Wake-up call for Europe*. Another valued guest was the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zürich, which presented on the strategic trends of 2019. The Pew Research Center also shared the – sometimes surprising – results of its studies on popular opinion in Europe 30 years after the fall of communism and on attitudes toward NATO.

The Perspectives 20-30 initiative[10] was also well received. This scheme brought together 22 carefully selected young individuals from across the OSCE so that they could discuss their visions for security in 2030. Under the direction of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation and with support from the Slovakian Chair, the process identified six thematic clusters with strong potential to drive forward the OSCE agenda. As one might expect, prominent themes included new technologies, AI, cybersecurity, and digital illiteracy. The report was presented on 28 October 2019 at the OSCE-wide Youth Forum and to the Ministerial Council in Bratislava. The initiative also succeeded in achieving its second goal – to further consolidate the issue of "youth and security" on the OSCE agenda.

Another reason for creating informal spaces for dialogue was to bring the concept of cooperative security in an age of confrontation more sharply into focus for diplomats and decision makers. This seemed all the more appropriate against the backdrop of notable upcoming anniversaries, such as the 30th anniversary of the Charter of Paris and the 10th anniversary of the Astana Commemorative Declaration, which was adopted at the OSCE Summit in 2010. At my suggestion and with political support from Miroslav Lajcak, Chairperson-in-Office (CiO) of the Slovakian Chair, a consortium was formed with GLOBSEC and the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. This consortium launched the Cooperative Security Initiative (CSI) and mobilized 18 highly qualified security experts. The aim of the initiative was to bring further attention to an important concept in security policy, ideally leading to new ideas for strengthening multilateralism and cooperation in Europe. Indeed, the final report from the CSI made strong arguments for cooperative security, as can be clearly seen in text box 2. The challenge now lies in ensuring that these are discovered and built upon by policymakers.

**Text Box 2: Arguments for Cooperative Security[11]**

[...] **Cooperative security is both a process and a goal:** States working together constructively and collaboratively toward a common goal.

In contrast to collective security, which is defensive (an alliance against someone or something), cooperative security is a concept that goes beyond a specific alliance. It comes into play when the security question is framed not as "against whom must we defend ourselves?", but instead as "with whom should we collaborate to tackle specific problems?" Climate change and environmental destruction, regulating the impacts of technology (such as artificial intelligence) on our lives, managing large waves of refugees and migrants, pandemics, arms control, cross-border organized crime, cyber threats, and nuclear security are all issues that require states to work together. In fact, for many global problems, cooperation is the only solution. As UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in his speech to the 75th Session of the UN General Assembly, "In an interconnected world, it is high time to recognize a simple truth: solidarity is self-interest."

**Cooperative security is particularly attractive for small and medium-sized countries:** There is safety in numbers and a benefit in pooling resources. And, for neutral countries, cooperative security offers many of the advantages of being in an alliance without the need to take sides. It is no coincidence that neutral countries and those with no formal alignments were the bridge-builders during the Helsinki process and the Cold War.

However, in an interconnected world of large and complex challenges that have no respect for borders, even major powers have a self-interest in cooperation. In short, stronger cooperation between major powers and small and medium-sized states is necessary in order to bring together resources and capabilities for the mutual benefit of all involved.

**Cooperative security works best when shared values are at play.** However, this is not always necessary. To a limited extent or in one specific area, cooperation is possible without the need for shared values. However, partnerships usually run deeper when there is a common understanding of the rule of law, shared principles, and democracy. [...]

10 See: https://www.osce.org/perspectives2030

11 From the final report of the Cooperative Security Initiative (CSI) of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation/GLOBSEC: "Restoring European Security: From Managing Relations to Principled Cooperation. Report of the Cooperative Security Initiative," *Cooperative Security Initiative*, 2021.

**It is also possible to improve security through cooperation:** It is not necessary for parties to feel secure or to have a mutual sense of trust for them to talk to one another and work together. In fact, the very process of dialogue and interaction can build trust. However, relations must be based on shared rules and principles that the parties have developed and agreed themselves, and there must be a shared interest in security. These rules are intended to ensure fairness and provide a certain level of predictability. This is a key element of principled cooperation. [...]

Cooperative security is an approach to creating security policies that encourages states to work together to identify and prevent threats at both the national and transnational level, instead of fighting them with deterrence or the use of force. It is built on defining common elements in the way that threats are perceived; on all parties demonstrating restraint and prioritizing dialogue; on conflict prevention and rules-based interactions; on good neighborly relations, and a gradual working toward, at the very least, peaceful coexistence. [...]

**Cooperative security is based on sovereign equality.** All countries must get involved, while negotiations and decisions should be made on the basis of consensus. Cooperative security requires a certain amount of empathy in order to understand that the other side might have a different history and culture, as well as different interests and ways of perceiving things, but that they still want to be treated with dignity and respect. All sides must approach the situation with a willingness to listen to one another, to be transparent and constructive, and to refrain from improving their own security to the detriment of others. This requires measures to build trust, along with predictability, reciprocity, and pragmatism, all based on shared principles.

The Security Days initiative launched by my predecessor, Lamberto Zannier, has proved to be a valuable instrument for creating informal spaces for dialogue. During my time at the Secretariat, the SPSU gave me the ability to conceptualize events like these with a strong focus on the objectives and to ensure that follow-up measures were implemented consistently. Only then can they be seen as more than just a one-off event and have the power to revitalize an existing dialogue process or ignite a new one. Well-structured Security Days with a substantial agenda were held on five topics:[12]

- Adding Value on the Ground; Enhancing OSCE Assistance, Visibility, and Impact;[13]
- Preventing Military Incidents in the Air and at Sea (a half-day event preceding a meeting of the Structured Dialogue);[14]
- The OSCE and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);[15]
- A Human Rights-Centered Approach to Technology and Security;[16] and
- Revitalizing Trust and Co-operation in Europe: Lessons of the Paris Charter (the event marked the 30th anniversary of the charter).[17]

Although the informal format had its advantages, there was also a downside – namely, its non-binding nature. This was often also reflected in the attendance and contributions of the participating states. Even where significant interest had been expressed beforehand, the Heads of Mission were often only present at the start of the events and contributed little content themselves. This meant that some opportunities to gain a deeper insight were lost. However, the fundamental benefits of the format were never called into question.

## Positive Unifying Agenda

> *"The Secretariat wants to support efforts to identify and cultivate converging interests among participating States, [primarily through Structured Dialog]. In order to promote these interests, measures will be proposed that permit the OSCE to act more strategically and cooperatively. These include encouraging continuity in the Troika, using the budget as a steering tool, and devising regional, country-specific, and topic-related strategies for guiding the program-related activities."*[18]

It goes without saying that working toward a positive unifying agenda is closely linked with the aforementioned goal of promoting dialogue that enables shared interests to be identified despite the existence of divergences that run deep. Operating on this common ground makes it possible to take a cooperative approach to tackling and

12 In connection with the Annual Security Review Conference 2020, an event on strategic foresight was also held. This was attended by policy planners from various ministries and think tanks. However, it was formally classed as a side event and not an official Security Day.

13 OSCE Security Days, 27.04.2018.

14 OSCE Security Days, 18.09.2018.

15 OSCE Security Days, 04.06.2019.

16 OSCE Security Days, 08.11.2019.

17 Planned during my tenure, but not held until 16 October 2020. OSCE Security Days, Summary Report, SEC.DAYS/5/20, 19.11.2020.

18 See footnote 7.

resolving problems, thereby restoring trust. Countries affected by conflict tend to be especially skeptical of this approach. They balk at the adjective "positive" and all its connotations. They also suspect that the underlying intention is to divert attention away from their conflict and return to business as usual. It is therefore vital that the goal of fostering a positive unifying agenda be closely coupled with efforts to resolve existing conflicts within the OSCE space. This applies to the work being done to settle the crisis in and around Ukraine, as it does to the three protracted conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh, Georgia, and Transnistria.

At its heart, however, the concept of putting aside fundamental differences to cooperate in areas of converging interest is nothing new. It underlies all the work done in the early 1970s in the lead up to the Helsinki Accords and the CSCE process that grew out of this. Similar concepts have also been developed more recently, such as the "islands of cooperation" proposed by the Friedrich Ebert Foundation.[19] Within the framework of EU policy toward the Russian Federation in 2016, cooperation in "areas of selective engagement" was called for in much the same spirit.

Converging interests are most likely to be found when talking about reducing military risk and the transnational threats outlined above. The OSCE has in fact succeeded in making astonishing progress in certain areas, even in the highly confrontational atmosphere of recent years. Here, I am thinking in particular of the 16 confidence-building measures for the field of cybersecurity, as well as the progress made in combating human trafficking and in preventing violent extremism and radicalization that lead to terrorism.[20] I will return to some of the aspects relating to transnational threats at a later stage, where I refer to some methodological approaches that are necessary for sustainably promoting a positive unifying agenda.

Central to this progress is greater strategic planning within the organization's actions as well as the related need for longer-term planning horizons. On the one hand, this is a function of planning capacities and methods. On the other, it is a question of policy and practice in the Chair, the Troika, and the participating states themselves. Here we should focus on political attention and the allocation not just of regular budget funds but also extra-budgetary resources, which are becoming ever more important within the OSCE for promoting innovation and exploring new topics. I have already talked in the previous section about the creation of the SPSU in response to planning capacity issues. This has given the Secretariat the capability to provide suitable planning support to the Chairperson and the Troika.

When it comes to the strategic use of extra-budgetary funds, another recently created role comes to the fore: that of the Strategic Planning and Resource Mobilization (SPRM) Coordinator, which has been made possible thanks to a secondment from the US. The SPRM Coordinator's objective is to create longer-term and more systematic frameworks for managing the operational activities of the OSCE that are funded with extra-budgetary resources. At its core, this involves gradually replacing the prevailing project-oriented mindset with a program-focused approach, or at least creating room for the latter to grow. However, this deceptively simple task actually requires a far-reaching cultural transformation that extends to Secretariat staff, field operations, and even donors. The Secretariat Management Review discussed below outlines a number of management processes that were reconfigured for this purpose. I initiated a dialogue process with the 12 largest donors in an attempt to find harmony between their expectations and a sustainable program culture. The most difficult task was fostering a more strategic approach to the way that priorities are set by the Chairperson and the Troika. Understandably, every Chairperson is influenced by the transient nature of their tenure, giving them as it does a mere 12 months of responsibility for the organization. It would be wise to position this short-term view within a longer-term outlook, ideally in a plan that spans three or four years. The consecutive Chairs in Switzerland and Serbia attempted this approach in 2014/2015, drawing up a shared work schedule for these years. Unfortunately, this example has not succeeded in setting a precedent. At present, the conditions for this would be favorable with a Troika (+); in other words, the defined Chairpersonships until 2023.[21] On the other hand, and symptomatically for the OSCE, the organization is often tied up in internal crises that diverts its attention away from long-term planning. In order to support a more strategic approach to policy planning, the regular budget processes must also be based on a longer-term perspective. I made a serious attempt to address this too.[22] It is also interesting to note that, thanks to the decentralized nature of the organization, there are already executive structures in place that operate using multi-year financial plans, such as the OSCE Mission to Bosnia-Herzegovina.

19 Evgeniya Bakalova / Tadzio Schilling, Islands of Cooperation: *A New Approach to Overcoming Geopolitical Deadlock in Europe in Small Steps,* Friedrich Ebert Foundation, March 2018.

20 Violent Extremism and Radicalization that Lead to Terrorism (VERLT) is the official term used by the OSCE. I will use the acronym from this point onward.

21 The Ministerial Council in Tirana has just decided on the North Macedonia Chairpersonship for 2023.

22 See sub-section "Reform of the Budget Cycle" that begins on p. 36.

## Leveraging Partnerships

> *"Practical, results-oriented partnerships can improve the performance of the OSCE by optimizing its comparative advantages. These include strengthening the role of the OSCE as a regional organization of the UN in accordance with Chapter VIII of the UN Charter; reviving the platform for cooperative security; opening liaison offices; strengthening partnerships with other regional and international organizations; supporting the strategies of our cooperation partners [in the Mediterranean and in Asia]; and intensifying our efforts to work with actors in development cooperation and the private sector."*[23]

Fortunately, the organization has succeeded in significantly strengthening its partnership with the UN on both a political and a practical level. By virtue of a political declaration signed by me, the Slovakian chairperson Miroslav Lajcak, and UN Secretary-General Guterres in December 2019, we were able to update the Framework for Cooperation and Coordination between the UN and the OSCE, first established in 1993, to reflect present-day realities. At the same time, we forged or renewed agreements with several important UN organizations such as the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), UN Women, and the United Nations Department of Field Support (DFS). These agreements paved the way for practical cooperation in many areas, allowing the concept of regional organization according to Chapter VIII of the UN Charter to take concrete form.[24] For instance, the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) that I concluded with DFS head Atul Khare at the UN General Assembly in September 2018 gave the OSCE access to UN contracts with major suppliers such as Microsoft, saving the organization millions on its Windows updates. It also opened the doors to UN further training and development modules, including a program aimed at combating sexual harassment. Although the large majority of participating states supported these efforts, there were some critics. Questions were asked, for instance, about the necessity of the MoU with UN Women or the renewal of the work plan with the UNODC.

Another reform proposal for strengthening the partnership with international organizations was the idea to establish liaison offices in important multilateral hubs, similar to those operated by the Council of Europe. The stated aim of these offices was to increase awareness of and access to the OSCE's expertise in the international community, to improve coordination, and to intensify cooperation. A conceptual memorandum presented in August 2018 set out a vision for the gradual purchasing of five offices in New York, Geneva, Brussels, Minsk, and Moscow. Although the plan was to fund this initiative exclusively through extra-budgetary resources and physical contributions such as office space and secondments, it was still met with considerable resistance – some politically motivated and some based on budget concerns. Much of the opposition was focused on individual locations (Minsk, Moscow) and the alleged lack of focus on the organization's core tasks. However, in view of the positive experiences that the Council of Europe has gained from its liaison offices, including in the mobilization of additional budget resources, the decision was made to pursue this project in spite of the dissent. Another argument in favor of this initiative can be found in the benefits of the liaison infrastructure recently obtained in Vienna by the Council of Europe, NATO, and the UN with the OSCE.

Great strides have also been made in improving cooperation between the OSCE and the EU. One important step occurred on 22 June 2018 with the signing of an exchange of letters between then-secretary general of the European Commission Martin Selmayr, former secretary general of the European External Action Service Helga Schmid, and the OSCE. This came as no surprise, being as it was the culmination of the efforts made by three successive OSCE chairing countries in the EU (Germany in 2016, Austria in 2017, and Italy in 2018) and the Secretariat. Above all, however, closer cooperation between the EU and the OSCE is a logical outcome of the overlap in the scope of the two organizations. The foreign policy objectives of the EU in the Western Balkans, Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia are strongly aligned with the OSCE's obligations toward the countries in these regions. When it comes to strengthening democratic and rule of law structures or fighting violent extremism and dealing with foreign terrorist fighters, there is a great deal of harmony between the interests of the EU and those of the OSCE. While the OSCE offers the benefits of impartiality, presence on the ground, many years of strong relationships with local authorities and populations, and specialist expertise, the EU brings political weight and resources to the table. The exchange of letters between the EU and the OSCE laid the foundation for a more structured partnership with regular meetings at the working and leadership level. The effects of this are already being felt, with an increase in larger-scale cooperation projects spanning longer periods of time. This includes the training program for the Turkmen authorities at the border with Afghanistan, an initiative funded by the Service for Foreign Policy Instruments (FPI). Another example is the ambitious monitoring project that follows legal proceedings against the perpetrators of organized crime in the Western Balkans.

23 See footnote 7.

24 See also Greminger, *Oxford Handbook,* pp. 1061/1062.

Thomas Greminger with UN Secretary General António Guterres, New York, 26 April 2018 / OSCE

At a less high-profile level, it has been possible to build on and expand relationships with regional organizations whose members hail from the eastern zones of the OSCE and beyond. Among these are the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Regular criticism in the form of both formal and informal statements has been made about the contact with these organizations by some participating states, since they are seen to represent values that differ from those embodied by the OSCE. However, for reasons of politico-geographical balance, I believe that maintaining relationships with these regional organizations is worthwhile. In terms of the issues addressed by the different organizations, there is at least some convergence of interests. With the EAEU, for instance, there is a shared interest in connectivity in the economic area. With the SCO, there is common ground in the fight against violent extremism and terrorism. As for the relationships with the CIS and the CSTO, commonalities can primarily be found in political and politico-military issues. Cooperation with all four of these organizations is mainly pursued through regular meetings at the Secretariat leadership level, as well as through participation in relevant conferences and seminars. More ambitious plans, such as shared program-related activities along the lines of joint capacity-building projects, have not yet been realized. This is partly due to complex approval procedures, for instance in the SCO; a lack of funding (the Russian Federation makes very few extra-budgetary contributions); and, at a broader level, inadequate capacity within the Secretariats of the partner organizations.

The OSCE has maintained relationships for many years with two groups of partner countries: the Mediterranean Partners for Co-operation (Egypt, Algeria, Israel, Jordan, Morocco, and Tunisia) and Asian Partners for Co-operation (Afghanistan, Australia, Japan, South Korea, and Thailand). Both of these are very interesting groupings, albeit ones characterized by high heterogeneity and diverging interests in and capacity for cooperation. Something very similar could be said from the perspective of the OSCE's participating states: There is a lack of continuity due to the sharply differing interests of the various chairing countries.[25] The level of motivation shown toward the cooperation partners by the 57 participating states also varies considerably. While the Mediterranean partnership traditionally enjoys a great deal of attention in the OSCE's southern realm, it is barely acknowledged in other places. Interest also fluctuates over time. For instance, enthusiasm within the OSCE for cooperation with Afghanistan has waned significantly in recent years. The lack of continuity is further cemented by a lack of resources. The External Cooperation Section of the Secretariat is underfunded, while the regular budget permits the funding of precisely two regional conferences. Nonetheless, the relevance of both partnerships has grown over the years. This is thanks in part to the successful endeavors of individual chairing countries. Germany and Italy must be mentioned here, since they succeeded in elevating the OSCE Mediterranean Conference to the ministerial level. The issue of migration has loomed large in recent years, which doubtless played a part. However, the partners themselves have also done their bit to boost relevance. Some of them – Australia, South Korea, and especially Japan – are now some of the OSCE's major donors. I endeavored to reinforce this positive trend through a number of targeted measures:

25 The newest member of the Troika chairs the Mediterranean Contact Group, while the oldest member leads the Asia Contact Group.

- To use medium-term strategies to give partnerships a longer-term outlook and thus create greater continuity;
- To make the financing of program-related activities more sustainable by mobilizing extra-budgetary resources more systematically;
- To eliminate the "out of area" restriction for program-related activities;
- To build partnerships with selected regional organizations.

With the League of Arab States (LAS), we succeeded in organizing meetings at the Secretary General level, as well as establishing frameworks for cooperating on issues such as human trafficking, mediation support, and preventing violent extremism. It was a similar story with the Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), with which I was able to sign a MoU on behalf of the OSCE Secretariat for the first time. Here, interests were centered on operational cooperation in the areas of climate change and security. Elsewhere, however, the plan of using the Thai Chair of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to consolidate cooperation with the regional organization did not come to fruition. At the crucial moment, there was insufficient awareness and means on both sides.

In order to enable precise control and monitoring of OSCE activities in Afghanistan, a new restriction was brought in whereby program-related activities outside of the OSCE space were only permitted with special approval from the Permanent Council. However, the impacts of this new rule hampered operational cooperation with all partner countries. This was especially notable during the Arab Spring, during which time there was major interest in cooperating with the OSCE in areas such as the rule of law, democratic institutions, small arms, and security sector reform. An attempt by the Italian Chair to eliminate this obstacle to cooperation failed in 2018, owing to resistance from a large participating state. Nonetheless, I remain convinced that passing such a measure is within the realms of possibility, so long as assurances are given that there will be clear guarantees of transparency with regard to projects funded from extra-budgetary resources outside the OSCE space.

As far as longer-term planning of activities with both partnership groups is concerned, there is still a lack of medium-term strategies. These would have to be drawn up by the Troika in close cooperation with the respective partner countries. However, particularly in the Asian partner group, a continuous thematic focus is becoming ever clearer. This is helping to give the partnership a clear profile. For several years now, the fixed thematic pillars of the partnership have been cybersecurity, the prevention of violent extremism, and the topic of women, peace, and security. Unfortunately, when it comes to sustainable funding for the activities of both partner groups, there is not much positive to say about it. The partnership fund is gradually being eaten away, while specific project funding is usually only aimed at the short term.

The ambition to build more effective partnerships had to come from actors who had, up until that point, played a somewhat marginal role in the OSCE despite proclamations to the contrary: the private sector, development and international financial institutions, as well as academia and think tanks. Over the last few years, I have observed a growing interest among representatives of the private sector in supporting or specifically working with the OSCE. This could be attributed to an increasing awareness of corporate social responsibility (CSR), but it may also have something to do with shared interests. The OSCE makes important contributions to the production of public goods, such as stability and solid rule of law institutions, which are relevant to the economy. This explains, for instance, the current interest in the OSCE expressed by the companies of the Southeast European Cooperative Initiative (SECI), which operate in the Western Balkans and Eastern Europe. Experiences with public-private partnerships (PPPs) in recent years have shown that this highly promising form of cooperation – which tracks perfectly with SDG 17 – can yield positive results for both sides as long as mutual expectations are clarified and clearly defined.

The OSCE has a clear interest in deepening its cooperation with actors in the private sector. However, it must adjust its working processes and its corporate culture if it is to do this. The first steps of this process are already under way. It is also necessary to reflect critically on the OSCE's perception of itself as a "political organization." In the 21st century, does "political" really mean remaining only within the circle of government officials? Only taking a short-term view? Ignoring structural aspects? I believe it would be worthwhile to return to the "comprehensive" view of security, of which the OSCE is rightly proud.

There are also preconceptions about the consequences of running a "political" organization. This goes some way to explaining the reticence in the OSCE's dealing with development and international financial organizations, even though there is a great deal of overlap in the operational fields of activity in South-Eastern and Eastern Europe, the Southern Caucasus, and Central Asia. It is possible to name some isolated examples of cooperation with bilateral development organizations, such as the partnership with the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) in fighting corruption in Georgia and the effort to establish a framework for cooperation with the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), which has potential for further development. For the OSCE's part, the processes in the extra-budgetary realm must be steered more decisively away from small projects and toward longer-term programs.

Conversely, the organization has a long tradition of cooperating with think tanks. On the more conceptual side of politics, notable partnerships include those with the Wilson Center in Washington and the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO). Meanwhile, the partnership with the Centre for OSCE Research (CORE) at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH) covers the entire spectrum of the OSCE's activities. So far, the idea of using the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions, established in 2013, to expand OSCE-related research activities and spread them across all regions of the OSCE space has only been partly successful. Although the network now has more than 100 members, it is more or less always the same institutions that are actively involved in research projects due to financial reasons. Core funding that is not tied to any specific project and is supported by a wider group of countries would help here. This kind of structure is commonplace among major international research programs. It is undeniable that the network produces studies that are highly relevant to the OSCE's agenda. For instance, research has been published on the road that led to the Paris Charter and related historical narratives (2017), the reduction in the risk of conventional deterrence in NATO-Russia contact zones (2018), and the creation of an informal platform of local peacebuilders (2019). However, there is no established framework that would make it possible to present the research results to Track 1 actors and thereby open the door to real dialogue between research and diplomacy.

## Management Reform in the Secretariat

> *"The management review aims to provide evidence-based analyses and options for the Secretary General in order to improve the effectiveness, the agility, and the flexibility of the Secretariat in carrying out priority actions for the benefit of the participating States."*[26]

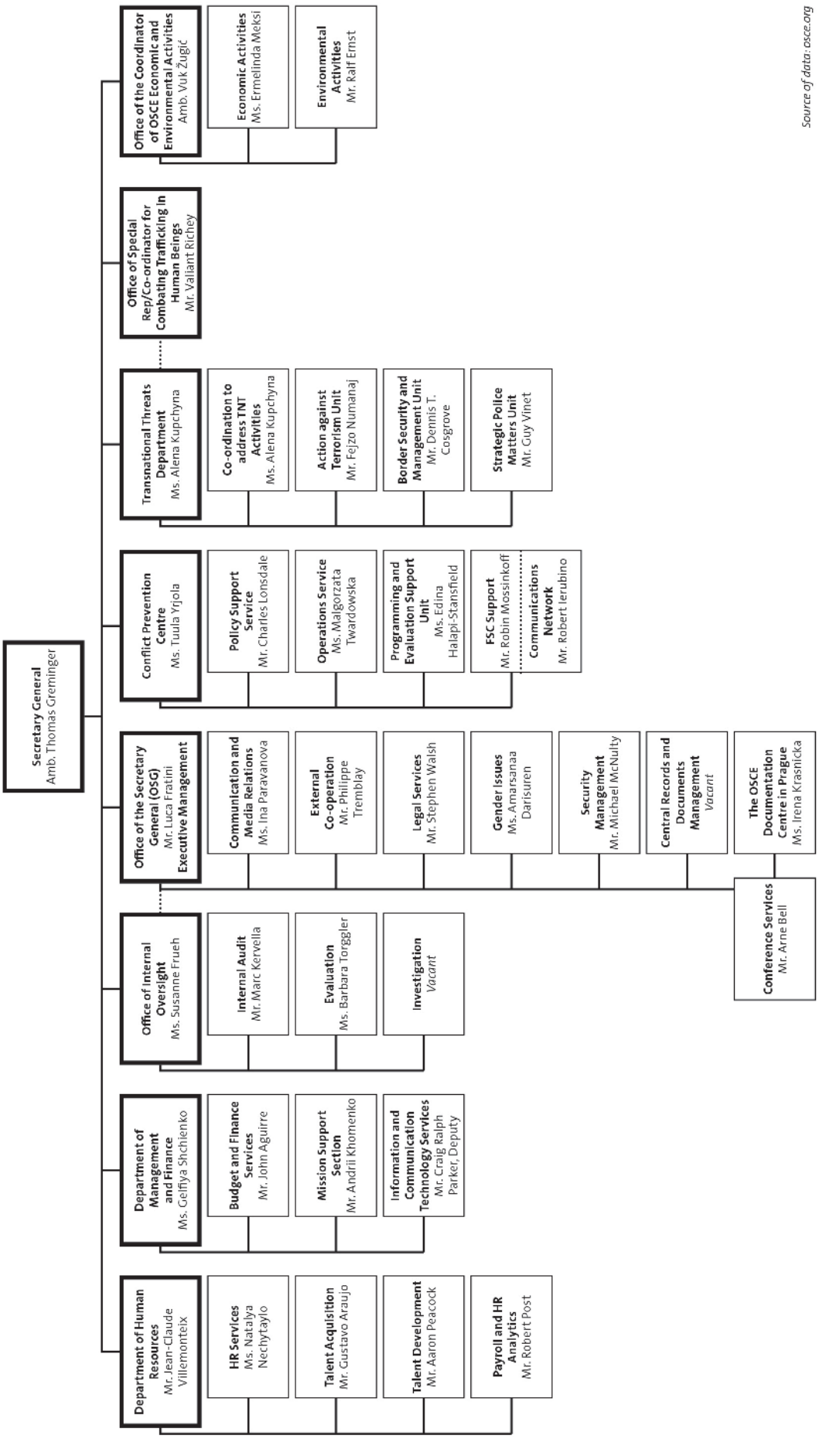
The OSCE Secretariat has grown organically over a period of more than two decades. The management processes have had to adapt to new challenges, the increasing workload, the shifting priorities of the participating states, and ever-tighter budgets. They have done so in an ad hoc manner. In addition to this, the realities of daily working life have been transformed by new technologies and modern business practices. It is therefore high time that the central management processes of the Secretariat undergo a systematic review so that measures for improving efficacy and efficiency can be identified. In April 2018, the Secretariat Management Review (SMR) started. This process was broad in scope and required the involvement of all the staff at the Secretariat, with the entire management committee acting as its steering body. A leading consulting firm provided considerable assistance over the first one-and-a-half years of the SMR. All in all, some 80 optimization measures were pursued. At its sixth and final meeting on 8 July 2020, the steering committee established that 68 out of 77 measures had been implemented, two had been abandoned, and seven had been continued in separate processes. The complexity of the different measures varied considerably. The Secretariat deliberately started with the simpler ones, giving us room to create the necessary dynamic that would enable us to tackle the more challenging measures too. Text box 3 lists some of the measures implemented.

**Text Box 3: Selected Implemented Measures of the SMR**

- In the controlling and budget sphere, cost transparency has been improved significantly thanks to better controlling and reporting tools.
- A new travel management tool has reduced the amount of time spent on travel administration and travel costs.
- A new online registration tool and conference management guidelines have been created for more efficient conference management.
- In the procurement sphere, framework agreements and an increase in the threshold for low-value contracts has reduced administrative outlay.
- A new electronic recruitment platform has been introduced, freeing up resources that could then be used to create more robust selection processes for upper management positions.
- The induction process for new OSCE staff has been moved online, and it now includes all new starters and not just international staff.
- The approval process for extra-budgetary projects has been overhauled, and it is now able to distinguish between low- and high-risk projects. This has also made it possible to bring in an accelerated process for urgent cases. As a result, a further training workshop costing 10,000 EUR is no longer treated in the same way as a small arms program costing several million Euros and spanning multiple years.

26 See footnote 7.

**OSCE Secretariat**
As of July 2020




*Source of data: osce.org*

Areas targeted by SMR optimizations also included logistics, building management, internal coordination, communication, and the digitalization of personnel management and payment processes. In relation to many of these measures, a pattern began to emerge: Introducing digital technology made it possible to improve performance while saving costs. Even though the SMR was not intended as a cost-cutting initiative, but rather as a way of adjusting the strategic direction and creating greater added value, it led to savings of around 300,000 EUR in 2019. Thanks to the wealth of management information it generated, the SMR has also provided a more useful starting point for making the cutbacks required under the nominal zero-growth strategy imposed by the participating states.

There is considerable potential for savings in one area that, owing to its complexity, has not been fully realized: the creation of shared service centers, which can be set up in cost-efficient locations. At its final meeting, the SMR steering committee agreed that it would pursue the creation of shared service centers for four areas, while rejecting the idea for others.[27] However, these approaches are not entirely new, even for the OSCE itself. IT support for the Secretariat is already provided mainly from Sarajevo. Furthermore, one of the first SMR measures to be implemented was to merge the Records Management Unit (RMS) in Vienna with the OSCE Documentation Center in Prague. The merged unit would then remain in Prague, the more cost-efficient of the two locations. Another major area where SMR initiatives have yet to come to fruition is the strategy for resource mobilization. This covers extra-budgetary funding, as well as non-cash contributions from state and non-state actors. Work is needed here to create a more strategic framework for using extra-budgetary resources – in view of budgetary realities, this is the only opportunity for expansion within the organization. A further goal is to cooperate more often and more systematically with new actors such as development agencies, private foundations, and the economy at large. In addition to a resource mobilization concept, an action plan has been drawn up for implementing the new strategy and for consolidating internal coordination mechanisms.

The SMR shone a light on issues surrounding process organization. However, initial observations also focused on the organizational structure. A quick win, the aforementioned merging of the RMS with the OSCE Documentation Center in Prague, was achieved. Similar decisive action was taken with the pooling of ICT functions within the relevant unit of the Department of Management and Finance (DMF). Moreover, it was agreed that the ethics coordinator and the gender equality unit should answer directly to the Secretary General. However, resistance from the participating states during the budget process continues to hinder the implementation of these measures. Other ideas remain that require further fleshing out, such as the possibility of creating a unit for internal justice issues and defining its place in the hierarchy, or pooling the support functions in a unit for resource mobilization and programming.

By their very nature, any changes to the organizational structure of the Secretariat – no matter how plausible – are politically contentious. This is because they fall within the scope of the post table[28] and are therefore in a part of the budget that requires consensus. Another fine example of the difficulties experienced in this regard was the attempt to formalize the position of a second Deputy Head of the Secretariat in the 2020 budget process. Because the OSCE does not want to fund a full-time Deputy Secretary General, the tasks of the deputy formally fall solely on the shoulders of the Director of the Conflict Prevention Centre (CPC), who already has numerous responsibilities. For this reason, I made the Director of the Office of the Secretary General (OSG) a second Deputy Head of the Secretariat. The division of tasks came naturally: The Director of the CPC took on the deputy role for external matters relating to the conflict cycle, while the OSG Director was responsible for internal and management-related issues. This arrangement proved effective in practice and was never questioned by any of the participating states. Yet despite its resounding success, when I sought to formally transfer this structure into the organization chart (which was, in effect, synonymous with the post table), one Head of Mission and their delegation took it upon themselves to bury it under procedural pretenses. Sadly, this is a characteristic example of the limited scope for action available to the Secretary General, even where management matters are concerned.

27 1) Standardization/automation of accounts payable; 2) Pooling supplier data management; 3) Standardize/relocate HR administration; 4) Relocating non-core IT functions. Meanwhile, following a detailed review, it was decided not to go ahead with centralizing the procurement activities in a center of excellence and relocating the payroll system to a more cost-efficient site.

28 The post table is a list of all staff positions and is annexed to the Unified Budget.

## Making a Difference on the Ground

> *"In order to preserve the comparative advantage that the OSCE has in its ability to make a difference on the ground, it is imperative that we discuss how its impact can be maximized, and how effective cooperation can be ensured through existing and new models [of the OSCE's presence]."*[29]

On the positive side, the pressure under which many OSCE field operations had been working over the last decade has largely eased off. There are many reasons why the OSCE's presence has been called into question by its various host states. The decision to end the missions in Baku and Yerevan was made for purely political reasons, and it was ultimately forced by the conflict. Resistance to a mission mandate seen as outdated and paternalistic was a common story among many of the missions. Political reporting became emblematic of this, which resulted in the affected state regularly being pilloried in the Permanent Council. Meanwhile, in the Western Balkans in particular, some administrations believed that there was a stigma attached to the presence of the OSCE, and that this would damage the reputation of their country and region. Interestingly, these voices have since faded away.

In my opinion, there are three factors behind this shift in sentiment toward the OSCE. Firstly, new governments such as those in North Macedonia or Uzbekistan, which are much more open to cooperation than their predecessors. Secondly, a cycle of successful mandate overhauls in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. These newly negotiated mandates are, of course, less "political," meaning that the flurry of reporting on these regions has died down. From an objective standpoint, however, this did not have a negative impact on the quality and scope of the cooperation pursued across all aspects of the OSCE's view of security. In fact, quite the opposite is true: The volume of cooperation saw a slight increase, while the early warning mechanism continues to function via the internal Early Warning Focal Points system. Thirdly – and this was a key concern for me – efforts to frame the cooperation between the host state and the OSCE presence as a partnership were successful. Nowadays, the prevailing opinion held by these countries is that having the OSCE present is an advantage because it helps to implement important national reforms. Of course, in reflecting on our 16 existing field operations, we must not allow ourselves to rest on our laurels. Partnerships need to be cultivated and constantly renewed. There are still locations where the OSCE could be positioning itself more effectively as a catalyst of central reforms. Experience has also made it very clear that a cooperation portfolio with some pro-government aspects also endures more sensitive aspects, which are usually found in the areas of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy.

Alongside a strong sense of local ownership, other important factors for the OSCE's success and efficiency in the field are a clear profile and coordination with other international actors. From what I have seen, local information exchange with international partners is working well in most places. I would also say that there is a general consensus on political dialogue with the various governments. However, when it comes to strategic coordination in certain areas, such as strengthening the rule of law or preventing violent extremism, I do still see room for improvement. Who does what, and on what comparative advantages is this based? This question needs to be discussed more transparently and rationally among international partners and with local authorities. OSCE field operations are underpinned by a broad view of security, and their activities must be aimed at all three dimensions. The OSCE also holds a comparative advantage in its relative proximity to national governments and in its ability to be able to respond quickly and flexibly to their wishes. Both of these factors, however, contribute to a situation where OSCE field operations constantly face the risk of their efforts becoming fragmented. It is therefore important for Heads of Mission and participating states to work toward a clear profile that adopts a medium-term perspective and is drawn up in close cooperation with the host state. The associated strategy defines how the majority of the resources will be used and where expertise will be built up. This does not mean being less flexible or responsive.

The main challenge lies in contemplating new ways to operate on the ground. The first Security Day under my aegis, which was held on 27 April 2018, brought up some interesting ideas in this regard. During the event, we reflected on ways to better support countries that are very interested in cooperating but have no formal OSCE presence. Belarus, Armenia, and Azerbaijan undoubtedly fall into this category. In the first two of these three, initial efforts have already been made to group together individual projects in coherent national programs. However, the experiences of recent years have also uncovered difficulties that must be resolved:

- Resource mobilization: There is a medium-term need for resources from the regular budget, since sustainable partnerships are not possible with extra-budgetary funding alone;
- Relationship with the host state: Even in the absence of a formal presence, there is a need for defined rules of the game that allow the OSCE to carry out simple tasks, such as executing bank transactions locally and protecting its staff;
- Country program and policy dialogue: These require coordination between all executive structures of the OSCE.

29 See footnote 7.

Suggestions have also been made as to new formats for the OSCE's presence on the ground. The idea of thematically focused centers of excellence or hubs first entered into discussions some time ago. Italy has also made repeated calls for the OSCE to establish a physical presence west of Vienna too. The idea of a center of excellence focusing on migration was put forward, but it was never pursued any further.[30] The Kazakh diplomacy also favored the hub idea, proposing that a center for sustainability and connectivity be established in the buildings formerly used for the 2017 International Exposition in Astana (now Nur-Sultan). Beyond that, however, the concept remained vague for a long time. A feasibility study funded by several participating states then sought to determine the fundamental utility of thematically focused centers of excellence. The analysis, edited by longstanding OSCE diplomat Ivo Petrov, drew mainly positive conclusions and listed a number of possible approaches. However, it also outlined very clearly two specific caveats. The first was that a center of this sort should not be seen as a replacement for an existing field mission that is active in all three dimensions. The not-so-hidden subtext here was that the plan should not endanger the OSCE program office in Nur-Sultan. The second was that, at least in the short term, there is no willingness to fund such a center from the regular budget.

Following the publication of the feasibility study and against the backdrop of negotiations over the 2019 budget, the Kazakh delegation stepped up its consultations and even presented a draft decision to the Permanent Council. However, skepticism prevailed, particularly among Western participating states. The Kazakh representatives decided not to push for their proposals to be enshrined in the draft budget, stating that they were happy to continue with consultations. The discussions surrounding the thematically focused hub in Nur-Sultan was a perfect example of how establishing new ways for the OSCE to be present on the ground is a challenging task and one that can only be achieved with sustained momentum. The initiating state must be armed with a compelling concept and prepared to test the new format in a multi-year pilot project with extra-budgetary funding. In light of the tough lessons learned on funding from the OSCE Academy in Bishkek and the Border Management Staff College (BMSC) in Dushanbe, such states must also be prepared to invest considerable resources themselves.

30 Political interest in the topic of migration was not sufficiently sustained, even during the Italian Chairpersonship (see sub-sections "The Italian Chairpersonship in 2018 under CiOs Angelino Alfano and Enzo Moavero Milanesi" on p. 46–50 and "Migration and Climate Change: Two Issues that Have an Important Interface with Security", on p. 70–72). Consequently, the question of how such a center would distinguish itself from existing institutions such as the International Organization for Migration or the International Centre for Migration Policy Development (ICPMD) was never answered.

## Reform of the Budget Cycle

> *"Moving toward multi-year strategic planning and a two-year budget process is necessary in order to better respond to the priorities of the participating States and showcase the impacts of the OSCE. Below are some suggestions for aligning the extra-budgetary funding process more closely with the strategic goals and leveraging partnerships more effectively."*[31]

On a fundamental level, the participating states agree that reform is needed in the budget process. Firstly, the current process is complex and unwieldy. It encourages states to micromanage the financial matters of the Secretariat and the wider executive structures of the OSCE. Secondly, a budget cycle with a longer-term outlook would naturally act as a key pillar for strategic planning within the organization. I was therefore pleased to see a widely supported reform dynamic gain ground in the first half of 2018. A reform draft presented to the Advisory Committee on Management and Finance (ACMF) in early June was based on two main elements: extending the Program Outline (PO), in other words the strategic plan, to four years and introducing a two-year budget. Although the precise budget allocations would continue to be approved by the states every year, they would now be based on a budget drawn up for a two-year period. This proposal was met with a very positive reception in the ACMF, thanks in no small part to the thorough groundwork laid by a "group of friends" within the committee. One key actor, despite not being fundamentally opposed to the idea, imposed a couple of major constraints: The entire exercise would have to be trialed on a time-limited basis and the PO limited to just two years, since there was insufficient trust in the institutions for a four-year plan. We at the Secretariat were prepared to make these compromises and wanted to present the reform proposal to the Permanent Council before the summer break. In an unexpected but not entirely surprising turn of events, a new obstacle suddenly sprung up: the so-called "disclaimer," which would end up stalling this decision, and others proposed by the Secretariat, for almost three quarters.

The inclusion of this disclaimer in all documents published by participating states via the official OSCE distribution system had nothing to do with the content of the budget reform. However, it stoked the ire of one participating state, which suspected another of using this maneuver to specifically target it. In fact, there were several participating states that regularly complained to the Chairperson and Secretariat that others were "misusing" the OSCE distribution list in order to publish information from de facto administrations. Even though the disclaimer introduced in June 2018 was supported by a decision

31 Insert footnote 7.

made years earlier by the Permanent Council and was placed on all documents without discrimination, the participating state in question could not be dissuaded from its view that this was a hostile act of the Secretariat. Endless talks at all levels, from the ambassador to the foreign minister, could not convince the participating state to lift its blockade. This situation also affected reform measures in the Human Resources (HR) realm, as well as a time-critical project for the entire organization – the Microsoft update project costing 2.7 million EUR.

It was only in the first quarter of 2019 that the stalemate could be broken, thanks to the intervention of the Slovakian Minister of Foreign Affairs. This was achieved in time to allow the Microsoft software update to go ahead, but the momentum for budget reform could not be revived – not least because the Slovakian Chair of the ACMF was still occupied with approving the regular budget and, nolens volens, the reform of the scales of contribution.[32] In the end, all that remained of the first attempt at budget reform was a significantly pared-down budget document and a more user-friendly form of performance-based program reporting (PBPR).

A second attempt was set to be launched in 2020. However, the window of opportunity once again opened late, since the regular budget would not be approved until May. In addition, the coronavirus pandemic was draining resources and making it more difficult to hold discussions with the states. Nonetheless, the new Director for Management and Finance Gelfiya Shchienko restarted the conversation on moving to a two-year budget and a multi-year PO. A key element of the reform – the introduction of a capital investment plan with a longer-term outlook – had already been discussed in the ACMF and had received support. Unfortunately, momentum was then quashed once again by the emerging leadership crisis.

## Investing in Staff

> *"The OSCE's framework conditions for human resources must be overhauled in order to boost the organization's image, enabling it to attract and retain the highest-caliber staff from across the OSCE region. Particular attention must be paid to ensuring gender equality."*[33]

The OSCE is a non-career organization that traditionally relies heavily on secondments and is restricted by a tight budget. Thus, the OSCE faces significant challenges, particularly in HR, in remaining an attractive prospect on the employment market. My HR reform proposals focused on three areas: a) modernizing the contract policies, i.e., the rules for contract staff; b) making changes to the secondment system; and c) achieving gender parity in all personnel categories and at all levels.

Personnel fluctuation encompasses both the opportunities and the vulnerability of a non-career organization at once. Although a certain amount of staff turnover is healthy because it brings new talent into the organization, it must be kept in check in order to preserve continuity, experience, and institutional knowledge. If the organization is recruiting new staff to 60 per cent of its upper management positions (P5 and D) in the second half of 2019, then something has gone wrong. A better balance therefore needs to be struck between staff leaving and staying at the OSCE. With this goal, I wanted to create room to improve the contract policies, which had been unchanged for 30 years, without in any way calling the non-career nature of the organization into question.[34] Three measures are described below that were positively received in initial consultations with participating states in 2018:

- Setting a maximum duration of ten years for all engagements (at present, this is only seven years for the field missions);
- Providing a right to return after a cooling-off period of one to five years. This measure would allow anyone who had completed their first ten years with the OSCE early on in their career to return at a later stage;
- Increasing the term of office for directors from a maximum of four to five or six years.[35]

These measures would make it possible to improve the efficacy of the organization while making significant cost savings, estimated at around 400,000 EUR per year.

The crisis inherent in the secondment system is evident in several respects. Posts are going unfilled increasingly often. This is problematic in the Secretariat, but even more so in the field missions where 95 per cent of international posts are seconded positions. Particularly striking is the unequal treatment of the organization's seconded staff – more than half of the people in this personnel category come from countries that do not pay a salary for seconded positions. In the missions, a juxtaposition has therefore arisen between staff who have to make do with just the Board and Lodging Allowance (BLA)

32 The formula that defines the contributions from the participating states to the regular budget is complex and, above all, outdated. Various attempts to modernize the scales of contribution and adapt them gradually to match the current economic power of the respective states have failed. Since one participating state in particular was insisting ever more vehemently that the scales of contribution be revised as a precondition for their approval of the budget, the Chairpersonships were forced to begin tackling this daunting undertaking. Even though the attendant changes to the states' budgets would be marginal, this was still a thankless task because the two largest contributors to the budget were not prepared to adjust their contributions.

33 See footnote 7.

34 I instructed the HR department to produce a four-page paper outlining proposals for both areas (21 September 2018).

35 In reality, experience has shown that with a maximum term of office of three years plus one year, directors tend to start looking for a new job after two years and often leave the organization before three years have passed.

and those who are being paid a salary by their sending state, as was the original intent of the secondment scheme. It is also notable that women are underrepresented among seconded staff, while a lack of geographical diversity is particularly evident in the Secretariat and institutions. Since the discussions with the participating states over the years on how to rectify this had been fruitless, I suggested proceeding in two stages: Phase one would involve discussing and deciding on measures that did not have any cost implications. Then, buoyed by the positive dynamic thus created, we could move onto the second phase of more in-depth proposals that would require a certain amount of additional funding. Unfortunately, the first measure in the first package – a modest proposal to extend the secondment period for missions from seven to ten years – was blocked twice in 2018 for the reasons outlined in the previous section. Renewed attempts in 2019 were thwarted by an odd coalition of two participating states.

However, there was a more successful outcome for a pilot project allowing individuals to apply for seconded positions directly through the OSCE. Twenty-one states got involved with this project, which led to a strong increase in applications from qualified candidates – including significantly more applications from women. The pilot program has since been made standard practice on an opt-in basis. Another element of the first package was the deactivation of a recruitment program (REACT) rendered obsolete by the introduction of the new recruitment platform. This has since been done. It was also important not to delay tackling the second package, since it had the potential to resolve several of the structural deficits in the existing secondment system at a relatively modest cost. One key measure was the creation of a new personnel category similar to the UN Volunteer concept. Volunteers would be brought into difficult-to-fill posts and paid a stipend roughly in line with the BLA by the OSCE. In this way, it would also be possible to make a clear distinction between these posts and the conventional seconded positions, which are supported by their sending states. Other measures proposed include a more family-friendly structuring of the BLA in order to attract more women and the introduction of an allowance similar to the BLA in order to increase geographical diversity among seconded staff in the Secretariat and institutions.

Although the changes over the three-year period within these first two areas of HR were extremely modest, much greater strides were made in gender parity, as I will explain below. However, I would first like to address a few matters relating to what has been an enduring challenge in the HR realm: that of geographical diversity. The states "east of Vienna" tend to be underrepresented in the executive structures, as evidenced by the personnel statistics. The underlying causes are manifold and vary from country to country, including lower capacities within the country, difficulties in mobilizing existing talent, bureaucratic obstacles, and a lack of willingness to make top talent available. The much lower rate of secondments from these countries, especially for positions in the Secretariat and the institutions, is also reflected in the personnel composition. Geographical diversity is important not just because it can be used as leverage in negotiations, but also because it has a significant impact on the perception and ownership of the organization. I therefore made plenty of space for this question within the political dialogue, advising ministers to devise a strategy for increasing their representation among OSCE staff. Over the three years of my mandate, the HR department led by Directors Jean-Claude Villemonteix and Gustavo Araujo developed a comprehensive Talent Acquisition Program (TAP) that places the focus on geographical diversity and gender. This program includes a series of outreach activities as well as visits to capital cities in order to give advice to delegations and national HR authorities. Further measures that have helped to improve geographical diversity include young talent development programs, targeted measures to help candidates prepare for positions, and conscious longlisting and shortlisting. I am also pleased to report that the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Sergey Lavrov, recently acknowledged in an interview that some progress had been made in this area.[36]

## Fostering Inclusivity for Women and Young People in All Three Dimensions

> *"By implementing more effectively the 2004 OSCE action plan for promoting gender equality, as well as the agenda for women, peace, and security, the aim is to strengthen the capacities of the staff concerned, to improve institutional policies, and to aspire to strong leadership and accountability for gender equality. A greater focus will be placed on the priorities relating to young people and security."*[37]

Admittedly, gender mainstreaming and youth mainstreaming are two very different issues. However, they share the concept of mainstreaming as a methodological approach, which enables a certain degree of knowledge transfer between the two areas – in particular, from gender-related issues to many of the newer issues that fall under the youth and security umbrella.

36 Interview with Sergey Lavrov on Internet TV channel RTVI, 17.09.2020 (BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union, 19.09.2020): "Former OSCE Secretary General made an effort with this for the past three years but not everything depended on him..." In fact, the statistics paint a picture that has changed little over the years: Between 2014 and 2019, there was constant representation of 50 or 51 countries among all OSCE staff (seconded and contract staff) (Secretary General, "Report to the Permanent Council on the Implementation of OSCE Recruitment Policies 2019," SEC. GAL/191/20, 24.12.2020, p. 11).

37 See footnote 7.

Senior Management set about implementing the gender mainstreaming agenda with great enthusiasm and resolve. This was given a crucial boost by the Gender Senior Management Coaching initiative, which was conducted in 2017/2018 and involved the entire management committee. This process helped to create a *unité de doctrine* and spark the sense of determination needed among the Secretariat's management. The benefits of this could be seen in the implementation plans for the 2004 OSCE action plan, which needed to be actioned by all areas of upper management by the end of 2017. Beyond this, it also laid the foundations for further significant steps, such as the rollout of the OSCE Gender Parity Strategy, the zero-tolerance policy on sexual harassment, and greater representation of women at management level in the Secretariat.[38]

The OSCE Gender Parity Strategy was published in July 2019. It set out an overarching goal of achieving gender parity in all personnel categories by 2026. Although this may not appear particularly ambitious at first glance, it also includes the category of seconded staff, where inequality is greater and the targets are only achievable if the participating states are also fully committed to the cause. The strategy includes ambitious interim goals and defines specific measures in three thematic areas: a) creating an enabling and bias-free environment; b) measures relating to talent management; and c) improving leadership and accountability.

It is telling that these are the areas where the most progress has been made, since most of these steps could be implemented without the need to obtain formal approval from the participating states. Out of the 27 measures defined in the strategy, 20 have been implemented so far. Here are a few figures for illustration: In the first 12 months after the strategy was published, 35 international positions were newly occupied, with 51 per cent of the new staff being women and 49 per cent men. A new female Head of Mission was appointed, and out of nine new senior managers (P5 and D positions), six were women and three were men. This means that the new management committee of the Secretariat has now also achieved gender parity. However, the numbers also reveal challenges yet to be surmounted: Out of 1,815 nominations for secondments in 2019, only 31 per cent were women. On a more positive note, the data also shows that many of the measures implemented in the area of recruitment are already having an effect. These include formulating job profiles and advertisements to be more gender-sensitive, training the recruitment panel on unconscious bias, introducing a diversity scorecard, extending the deadline for job applications, and setting out clear requirements for longlisting and shortlisting.

I am also confident that the structured selection process for Heads of Mission that I introduced, as well as the improved selection procedure for senior managers, is helping to achieve the goal of gender parity. However, the organization is still reliant on the participating states nominating a greater number of strong female candidates.

Two studies have revealed essential information for the promotion of an enabling and bias-free working environment. The first of these investigated the causes of the significant drop-off in the number of women between the hierarchy levels P3 and P4 (the "glass ceiling"),[39] while the second analyzed the experiences of women working in the first dimension of the OSCE.[40] Both studies highlighted the importance of more family-friendly environments (work/life balance, flexible working hours, home working) and the fight against everyday sexism, gender bias, and sexual harassment. A workplace analysis (the "Safe Space Survey"), which employed methodology used by the UN, indicated that in the OSCE, too, there is a need for action in these areas.[41] With this in mind, I made tackling sexual harassment a high priority and implemented a zero-tolerance policy. I adopted an action plan whose measures included an overhaul of the relevant personnel regulations, mandatory training, and improved procedures. However, the plan to strengthen the position of the ethics coordinator, who should play an important role in these matters, received patchy support from the participating states and was stifled in the 2020 budget. This reflects a contradiction between the discourse of participating states, which rightly promote robust measures for combating sexual harassment, and their financial willingness to do so.

Two important areas of reform that were not part of the original Fit4Purpose agenda have picked up speed since 2019. Both of these are essentially connected, directly and indirectly, with creating an enabling and bias-free working environment. The first is aimed at developing OSCE guidelines for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA); put another way, this is the external counterpart to the mechanisms for combating sexual harassment within the organization. An OSCE policy was developed in an interdisciplinary working group with financial backing from the UK and strong involvement of the field operations, in particular the SMM and the OSCE Mission in Kosovo (OMiK). Recent experience from other international organizations has shown just how much of a bearing this issue has on the reputation and credibility of a multilateral institution.

38 See the evaluation in the final report on the OSCE Third Gender Equality Review Conference, 27–28 October 2020, Final Report SEC.GAL/4/21.

39 Leslie Groves Williams, "Myth Busting: Women, Gender Parity and the OSCE," July 2019.

40 Sandra Sacchetti, "'Prove Yourself!' Women's Experiences inside the OSCE's First Dimension," September 2019.

41 Deloitte, *Safe Space Survey Level 2: Report for the OSCE*, February 2019.

The second, highly topical, area of reform aims to modernize the OSCE's internal justice system. The OSCE did not score well in a comparative study on the internal governance structures of international organizations.[42] Stronger processes and greater energy to deal with the situation are needed in order to correctly handle complaints about the working environment (harassment, retaliation, discrimination), grievances, and disciplinary procedures. However, more must also be done to prevent and work through internal conflicts, ideally by way of an ombudsperson. Finally, the OSCE must also take steps to foster an organizational culture that is more open to dialogue. A highly accomplished expert from Hungary has made a start on the work that is needed.

As examples of the mainstreaming efforts pursued in many of the OSCE's action areas, several measures relating to the conflict cycle can be mentioned: At the 2019 OSCE Ministerial Council in Bratislava, a new toolkit was introduced that offers practical mechanisms for including women more systematically in peace and mediation processes. It was with precisely this in mind that the Mediation Support Team at the CPC compiled proposals and materials for the Co-Chairs of the Geneva International Discussions (GID), the process aimed at conflict management in Georgia. The team also offered support to Heidi Grau, the OSCE mediator in the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) addressing the conflict in the Donbas.

During the consecutive Chairpersonships of Switzerland and Serbia in 2014 and 2015, the first systematic efforts were made to anchor the issue of youth and security in the OSCE agenda. Over the last three years, further steps have been taken in order to integrate the perspectives and participation of young people more effectively into the OSCE. This builds on the UN's youth, peace, and security agenda, which has been developed in recent years through Security Council resolutions.[43] Important drivers of these efforts are the ever more active networks for youth focal points in field operations and institutions, as well as the Special Representatives for Youth and Security, a position that has now become a fixed part of the Chairpersonship. A further decision of the Ministerial Council in Milan in 2018 lent political weight to the agenda. Together with the Secretariat, I developed guidelines intended to bring structure and direction to the mainstreaming efforts, as well as impetus and new ideas.[44] With support from the Swiss peacebuilding foundation PeaceNexus, the OSCE Mission to Serbia launched a pilot project to develop a comprehensive approach to implementing the youth agenda in a field operation. The Perspectives 20-30 initiative, which was presented earlier[45], was another shining example of how young people can bring new ideas, fresh energy, and a broader public to the OSCE.

## Technology as an Enabler

> *"Information technology should be used consistently as a tool for innovation and productivity. With this in mind, proposals are to be developed for improving the security of the ICT infrastructure, the provision of ICT services, ICT governance, and standardization across the decentralized OSCE system."*[46]

Accordingly, the goal here was to effect a digital transformation within the OSCE to make it safer and more efficient and to enable the organization to boost its efficacy by making use of technological advances. This was to be achieved on the basis of the following four pillars:

- Reinforcing ICT and information security;
- Using automation to digitalize business processes;
- Bringing about a digital transformation of the workplace;
- Improving ICT governance and consolidation.

In just two and a half years, considerable progress was made in all four areas despite tight budgets. With regard to information security, for example, the monitoring mechanisms were improved throughout the OSCE system. Meanwhile, the ability to respond to security incidents was improved significantly through the creation of a Security Operations Center (SOC) in Vienna and Sarajevo. The introduction of cloud-based systems made it easier to automate workflows in many areas of business. For instance, the online event registration system has made OSCE event management simpler and more customer-friendly. Cloud-based systems are currently also being used for travel management, personnel recruitment, and for budget preparations and forecasts. The situation room at the CPC has been equipped with a new database that enables faster and more comprehensive media monitoring and reporting. In addition, there is now an automated solution for calculating the overheads associated with extra-budgetary projects, the Indirect Common Cost (ICC), which I introduced in 2018. As for governance throughout the OSCE, a second Shared Service Desk for the missions in Central Asia has been established in addition to the Shared Service Center in Sarajevo. The SOC ensures that security services are provided to the entire organization, while both the server equipment and the software architecture have been standardized.

42 Council of Europe, Centre of Excellence on International Administrative Law, *International Justice Systems of International Organizations Legitimacy Index 2017,* p. 5.

43 UN Security Council Resolution 2250 (2015) and UN Security Council Resolution 2419 (2018).

44 OSCE, *Working with Youth and for Youth: Framework for Strengthening OSCE Efforts on Youth and Security,* March 2019.

45 See sub-section "Using the OSCE as a Platform for Supporting Inclusive Dialogue and Joint Action" that begins on p. 25.

46 See footnote 7.

Technology is also increasingly helping the executive structures of the OSCE to implement their mandates. This is particularly true of the Mission to Ukraine, the SMM, which uses an entire fleet of drones for short-, medium-, and long-distance monitoring and has more than 20 cameras along the contact line. This technology serves to complement the activities of the monitors, allowing them to see into inaccessible areas and enabling 24-hour monitoring. Biometric tools are used to fight terrorism and improve border security.

Modern technologies are often a blessing and a curse. The Internet has proved extremely useful to human traffickers and terrorists, for instance. However, we also have opportunities to use the web to our benefit in order to prevent and fight crime.

## Strengthening and Refining the OSCE's Profile

> *"The focus here is on branding, messaging, and targeting, as well as on more capable use of all media formats, in order to clarify the work, relevance, and effectiveness of the OSCE, to improve its visibility, and to promote the concept of cooperative security."*[47]

Even though the number of staff in the Secretariat's communications department has hovered steadily around the 13 mark for two decades, the OSCE has succeeded in achieving remarkable visibility in the media, as can be seen in the monthly Media Digest and Visibility Reports from the participating states. Proficient use of social media is a major part of this. In the last year alone, visitors to the website and followers on Facebook and Twitter increased by 5 per cent, while the number of LinkedIn followers rocketed up 50 per cent. It is therefore clear that social media mainstreaming is a success factor whose potential has not yet been fully realized. Directors, Heads of Mission, and everyone at senior management level within the organizations must commit to using social media far more systematically. A more user-friendly website also promises a quick win.

I was also keen to raise the question of messaging from the outset in all strategy and policy processes. New dimensions such as youth, gender, and the OSCE as the "partner of choice for implementing SDGs" have become part of the OSCE narrative. Further training on communications at the head office and in the executive structures places a great deal of emphasis on storytelling. This means the ability to tell success stories relating to extra-budgetary projects or human-impact stories from the field, thereby illustrating the real impact of the multilateral campaign in a simple and plausible manner. Another successful avenue has been using trips made by the Secretary General – and hopefully this will extend to the other Senior Managers more in future too – for media messages. For instance, my appearances at the Munich Security Conference (MSC), the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos, GLOBSEC in Bratislava, and the security conferences in Warsaw and Moscow generated more than 120 media interviews in total. In retrospect, however, I was unable to work sufficiently systematically with the correspondents in Vienna and the communication officers of the various diplomatic missions.

In addition to having insufficient human and financial resources for a modern communications policy, the OSCE continues to lack contemporary branding. There is no shortage of content that the OSCE could use in this regard. These include the OSCE as a guarantor of peace and security in the Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian realm; as an indispensable actor in conflict prevention; as an implementer of the SDGs; or as an advisor in tackling modern security challenges. Owing to the heterogeneous structure of the organization and the annually rotating Chairpersonship, defining a pithy and credible brand image that everyone can get behind is no mean feat. However, it is not impossible – especially when we reflect on the 50-year anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act. Is it therefore time to revise the 2002 decision of the Permanent Council[48] that forms the basis of the organization's communication activities? This would certainly make things easier, since it is worded in a restrictive manner and ultimately permits little more than the pure dissemination of information. If the Chairperson and the Troika were to express strong political will to move toward a modern communications policy, this would in turn create more room for maneuver.

## On Balance

In spite of a polarized environment, the OSCE has been able to maintain its position as an inclusive platform for dialogue, and even expand it somewhat through informal dialogue spaces. Strategic planning capacities have been created to benefit the Chairperson and the Troika, though there is still potential to exploit them. Partnerships with other international organizations in the entire OSCE space and beyond have been deepened. A particularly significant development has been the strengthening of the OSCE in relation to the EU and the UN and its sub-organizations and special organizations. A critical analysis of the outcomes achieved under the Fit4Purpose reform agenda shows that it has been possible to implement a considerable number of measures aimed at boosting efficiency and efficacy.[49] This should dispel any notion that the OSCE

47 *Ibid.*

48 OSCE, Permanent Council, *Decision No. 485: OSCE Statements and Public Information,* PC.DEC/485/2002, 28 June 2002.

49 See the text box 8 on p. 81 in the final section.

is incapable of or immune to reform. That is the positive message for the future. However, many reforms that are essential to the proper functioning of the organization have not yet begun. This is particularly true of budget reform and the reforms concerning contract and seconded staff. The plan to create shared service centers also offers a great deal of potential. It is essential that the organization continues to strengthen its internal governance structures, the key principles being internal justice, conflict prevention, and ethics. The organizational structure of the Secretariat is fit for purpose and does not require any radical changes. However, a few improvements to the organization chart – some proposed and some already put into practice – would make it easier for the Secretariat to function effectively. Across the board, rather than descending into micromanagement, the participating states would do well to give the Secretariat the space it needs to enact management reforms.

# The Support of the Chairperson-ships – from Austria to Italy and Slovakia to Albania

## The Mandate of the Secretary General

My letter of appointment lists seven Ministerial Council decisions, five decisions of the Permanent Council, and the OSCE regulations on personnel and funding as the bases for the mandate of the Secretary General. This makes it clear that the understanding of the Secretary General's role has evolved over time. The original mandate was defined in Stockholm in 1992. Key additions then followed by way of the decisions of the Ministerial Council of Porto in 2002 (10/02), Sofia in 2004 (14/15/04), and Brussels in 2006 (18/06), as well as with the most recent addition – relating to early warning competence for conflicts – being adopted in Vilnius in 2011 (3/11). Broadly speaking, the mandate includes management activities on the one hand and political and diplomatic tasks on the other.

As a manager, the Secretary General is Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) and thus responsible for the effective and efficient use of all human, financial, and material resources of the whole organization. The Secretary General is required to make sure that the provisions of the Common Regulatory Management System (CRMS) are implemented and all Fund Managers are supported through the budget process in planning, implementing, and evaluating program activities. In this role, the Secretary General is also Head of Secretariat/Program and Fund Manager and thus responsible for leading the Secretariat and implementing its programs. He or she is also required to promote gender equality. Lastly, the individual in question is also given the task of coordinating and consulting the OSCE institutions. However, the Secretary General must respect their mandates. The Secretary General oversees management of the field operations and coordinates their operational activities.

As a diplomat, the Secretary General is the representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, and supports them in all activities aimed at achieving the OSCE's objectives. This also explicitly includes public outreach, as well as cooperation with other international organizations. He or she is required to support political dialogue and negotiations among participating state. The Secretary General is also the guarantor of the institutional memory and the continuity of the OSCE's activities across Chairpersonships.[50] Finally, he or she is responsible for conflict prevention: In coordination with the Chairperson, the Secretary General gives early warnings to the participating states and suggests possible actions in response to tensions and conflicts.

50 Cf. Article 3, MC(10).DEC/8: The – underacknowledged – decision of the Ministerial Council in Porto makes reference to this and explains why the Secretariat should support the States in their strategic planning.

Opinions on the role of the Secretary General vary among the participating states. In my experience, there is a clear majority that wants a Secretary General who is active and fundamentally diplomatic in nature. However, they do not want to change the Secretary General's present mandate. A few participating states, mainly in the West, believe that the Secretary General should focus solely on management tasks and, in particular, should not encroach on the institutions and field operations. In stark contrast to this, others – largely states to the east of Vienna – want to strengthen the Secretary General's mandate, for instance, by expanding its authority to issue directives to other executive structures. In view of these differences[51], it must therefore be assumed that the formal mandate of the Secretary General is unlikely to change in the short to medium term.

In practice, there are two areas where considerable room for maneuver is available: The first of these is the coordination role that the Secretary General takes on as the CAO. With the complexity of modern security threats requiring responses of an ever more interdisciplinary nature, the need for coordination has increased too. The EU-funded trial monitoring program in the Western Balkans is a perfect example of this. Here, the OSCE can offer comparative advantages as a partner to the EU if it succeeds in unifying its contextual knowledge of the region and the proximity afforded by its presence on the ground with its thematic expertise in monitoring judicial processes. This requires coordination – which is to be provided by the Secretariat. The same is also true when managing crises such as the coronavirus pandemic, which is affecting the entire OSCE space. Only through strong coordination on the part of the Secretariat can it be ensured that the two foremost objectives – protecting staff and fulfilling mandates to the greatest degree possible – can be pursued consistently throughout the organization.

As highlighted above, a variety of decisions by the Ministerial Council offer a rough framework for the political and diplomatic role of the Secretary General. However, it is ultimately the CiO who defines their scope, with opinions on this matter varying considerably from one Chairpersonship to the next. Some foreign ministers are only willing or able to spend a limited amount of time on their duties as CiO, and they therefore welcome the Secretary General taking on as many tasks as possible. Others acknowledge that there is a lot to do and are determined to achieve a clear division of labor. There are also situations where there is no acting or fully fledged foreign minister for long periods of time. This results in very differing expectations being placed on the Secretary General, who must adapt to these accordingly. I will illustrate this in the following sub-sections on the basis of my work with four chairing countries.

## The Austrian Chairpersonship under CiO Sebastian Kurz

In its year of holding the Chairpersonship, Austria tackled three well-chosen priorities: defusing existing conflicts, combating radicalization and violent extremism, and restoring trust.[52] "Austria as the bridge-builder" was the image that then-foreign minister Sebastian Kurz returned to time and again in his presentation to the Permanent Council on 12 January 2017 and over the course of the year. Indeed, Austrian diplomacy did manage to score some major victories in a challenging international environment.[53] In the area of conflict management, the Special Representative of the Chairperson-in-Office, Wolf-Dietrich Heim, and the OSCE Head of Mission in Chisinau, Michael Scanlon, wanted to bring a positive dynamic to the Transnistrian process. They initiated the implementation of several substantial confidence-building measures, together referred to as the "Berlin+" package. A particularly symbolic moment was the reopening of the bridge over the Dniester River between Gura Bicului and Bychok, which had been closed for 25 years. In the efforts to prevent the conflict in the Donbas from escalating, the Austrian Chairperson succeeded in raising the SMM budget so that drones and cameras could be used for 24-hour monitoring.

Thanks to sizeable investments from Austria, it was possible to further consolidate the prevention of radicalization and violent extremism on the OSCE agenda. Kurz nominated leading terrorism expert and King's College professor Peter Neumann as the Special Representative for this issue. In late September, Neumann presented an excellent 80-page report. However, it was met with a more critical reception than expected, because important delegations felt they had not been sufficiently well prepared for it. This was followed even more disappointingly by a lack of consensus on the Ministerial Council decision being pursued. However, one major success in the promotion of dialogue was the launch of the Structured Dialogue initiative, and with it an important mandate of the Hamburg Ministerial Council. The newly created dialogue platform gave rise to relatively constructive discussions on current perceptions of threat – in particular, but not

51 There are two main explanations for these diverging points of view: 1) the role originally conceived for the OSCE as the only security organization in the Euro-Atlantic realm versus the OSCE as one among multiple regional organizations that focus on security issues (EU, NATO); 2) a central structure with a powerful Secretary General who is above the other executive structures in the hierarchy versus a deliberately decentralized organizational architecture with powerful, autonomous institutions and field operations. The latter is also invoked as a means of protecting the "watchdog" functions of the ODIHR, RFoM, and HCNM.

52 *OSCE Annual Report 2017*, Vienna 2018, pp. 7–11.

53 Cf. Florian Raunig / Julie Peer, "Chairing the OSCE," in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg / IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2018,* (Hamburg: Nomos, 2019), pp. 67–78.

exclusively, in the politico-military realm.[54] A diplomatic stroke of genius was needed to resolve the leadership crisis in the OSCE: Extensive diplomatic consultations in Vienna and in the respective capital cities, and finally bilateral talks in what was dubbed the "endgame" in Mauerbach, between CiO Kurz and Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov finally opened up the path to my nomination and that of the heads of the three OSCE institutions.

On balance, however, 2017 was another difficult year for multilateral diplomacy and cooperative security. Rather than resetting US-Russian relations, the surprising outcome of the US presidential election in November 2016 had led to quite the opposite: This relationship, which had always been so crucial to the Helsinki Accords and the OSCE, deteriorated further. Neither president appeared willing to invest political capital in a return to diplomacy and mutual building of trust.[55] Austria was therefore unable to fulfill its wish of revisiting the historic legacy of its successful mediation efforts between East and West during the Cold War. Furthermore, despite the backing of a dedicated team behind the two ambassadors Clemens Koja, Chair of the Permanent Council, and Florian Raunig, Head of the OSCE Taskforce, the Austrian Chairperson had to expend an inordinate amount of time and energy on ensuring the simple functioning of the organization. For instance, the regular budget for 2017 was not passed until 1 June. Conference agendas, especially the one for the Human Dimension Implementation Meeting (HDIM), required lengthy negotiations and often were not agreed until the very last minute, even though such agendas ultimately always end up taking a largely identical form. A situation like this leaves no time for reflection on more substantive or longer-term questions.

Sebastian Kurz had clear ideas about the political messaging from the OSCE Chairpersonship and across the departments in which he wanted to make an active contribution. Thematically, this messaging focused on conflict management and the fight against radicalization and violent extremism. For instance, he traveled to the Donbas at the very beginning of his mandate on 3 January

**Text Box 4: Excerpt from the Secretary General's 2017 Agenda**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 11.7. | Mauerbach | Elected SG by the Informal Ministerial Gathering |
| 20.7. | Vienna | Welcome by CiO Sebastian Kurz and PC presentation on the priorities of the Italian Chair by Foreign Minister Angelino Alfano |
| 6.9. | Berlin | Conference on conventional arms control and meeting with FM Sigmar Gabriel |
| 8.9. | Prague | Economic and Environmental Forum (EEF) |
| 12.9. | Warsaw | HDIM and meeting with FM Witold Waszczykowski (Poland) |
| 13–14.9. | Kyiv | First SMM visit, meeting with President Petro Poroshenko, FM Pavlo Klimkin |
| 18–22.9. | New York | UNGA High Level Segment: meeting with NATO SG Jens Stoltenberg, EU HR Federica Mogherini, UNGA President Miroslav Lajcak, UN USG Abdul Karre, FM Sergey Lavrov, Ivica Dacic, Ditmir Bushati, Mevlut Cavusoglu |
| 2.10. | Bratislava | President Andrej Kiska, FM Lajcak |
| 23–24.10. | Palermo | OSCE Mediterranean Conference; meeting with FM Alfano |
| 2–3.11. | Moscow | FM Lavrov |
| 9.11. | Warsaw | Warsaw Security Forum |
| 9–12.11. | Tashkent/ Samarkand | Conference on Security and Sustainable Development in Central Asia, and meeting with President Shavkat Mirziyoyev, FM Abdulaziz Kamilov and Sodiq Safoyev |
| 14.11. | Rome | FM Alfano |
| 16–17.11. | Skopje | Visit to field mission and meeting with PM Zoran Zaev, FM Nikola Dimitrov, President Gjorge Ivanov |
| 28–30.11. | Ashgabat | President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, FM Rashid Meredov |
| 7–8.12. | Vienna | Ministerial Council with host Sebastian Kurz, SoS Rex Tillerson, FM Lavrov, Vladimir Makei, Sirojiddin Aslov, Erlan Abdyldaev, Mikheil Janelidze, Salahuddin Rabbani |

54 See also sub-section "Using the OSCE as a Platform for Supporting Inclusive Dialogue and Joint Action" on p. 25.

55 Christian Nünlist, *Bridgebuilding without Foundations: Reflections on the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship in 2017*, CSS/ETHZ, 20.12.2017.

Thomas Greminger meeting with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, Moscow, 2 November 2018 / Flickr / Russian MFA

2017, thus sending a clear message. This was followed by a visit to Georgia in early February. Another focal point was the work carried out in the wake of the conflict in the Western Balkans, where he visited several field missions. However, a visit to Central Asia was not possible in the end due to Kurz's prior commitments to the election campaign – at the time, he was running for the position of Federal Chancellor. Instead, he asked me to set my priorities accordingly. All in all, my relationship with him was one of partnership, even if it was not especially close. This partnership was evident in our joint conference appearances, particularly during the Ministerial Council in Vienna, where we greeted the incoming ministers together and faced questions together in the media conference that followed.

The support given to the Austrian Chairperson was therefore a prominent feature during the first few months of my tenure. This was made possible by coordinating services from the Secretariat, making available the necessary subject-specific and process expertise and supporting decision-making processes led by the Chairperson through dialogue with the delegations. To this end, there was a great deal of informal contact between the Secretary General and the Chairpersonship, as well as a joint meeting every Tuesday. As mentioned above, important trips were also coordinated with the Chairperson. Text box 4 provides a glimpse of the missions undertaken and meetings with key actors.

I viewed my participation in the major conference on arms control, which was held by the German Federal Foreign Office in Berlin on 6 September 2017, as tacit support for the Structured Dialogue, the OSCE's new flagship dialogue platform. Also notable were the talk and meeting with the then German foreign minister, Sigmar Gabriel. The main topics of discussion were the Ukraine crisis and the idea that had been floated just days earlier by Russia of establishing a limited peacekeeping operation along the contact line in the Donbas.[56] Participating for the first time in the High-level Segment of the UN General Assembly in New York left a lasting impression. The true value of this event comes not so much from the official talks that one attends as a representative of a regional organization, watching from the back rows of a packed hall, but from the program of side events and bilateral meetings that occur on the fringes. These bilateral meetings – humorously but aptly dubbed "speed dating" – made it possible to forge a large number of valuable contacts with foreign ministers of OSCE participating states and representatives of international organizations in a short space of time.

In late fall, I began visiting the OSCE field missions. The first of these took me to Central Asia, which has seen regional cooperation blossom since the transition in Uzbekistan. The immediate motivation for this visit was in fact a regional conference in Samarkand organized by the UN, which was to be attended by the foreign ministers of all five Central Asian states and Afghanistan's then-foreign minister, Salahuddin Rabbani, for the very first time. While attending the conference, I had the opportunity to meet important representatives of a country undergoing an astonishing transition. In addition to Foreign Minister Abdulaziz Kamilov, I enjoyed memorable conversations with Sodiq Safoyev, the formidable reformer and deputy chairperson of the Senate, and President Shavkat Mirziyoyev. Upon entering the presidential meeting room, I was reminded by the Chief of Protocol that

56 See sub-section "The Trilateral Contact Group and Developments in Eastern Ukraine" on p. 64 for more details.

this would be merely a 20 minute courtesy call. In fact, we talked for almost two and a half hours. The president used the first hour of the meeting to explain the logic of his reforms to me. His aim was to radically transform the economy. However, this would require the creation of new rule of law structures. I pointed out some ways in which the OSCE could support the reforms, placing strong emphasis on reinforcing the rule of law, respect for human rights, and maintaining democratic institutions. To close our meeting, the president expressed his desire for an action plan to be developed within the month, which would significantly expand the scope of cooperation with the OSCE. At my request, he decided that the local staff of the OSCE and other international organizations would no longer be taxed, which saved the OSCE 300,000 EUR per year. The presidential order was taken seriously, and precisely one month later, a deputy foreign minister appeared at the Secretariat on Wallnerstrasse ready to sign the action plan, which received the green light.

My first mission to Southeastern Europe took me to the city of Skopje and a country that had just overcome a severe political crisis. Earlier that year, the OSCE had successfully implemented de-escalation measures through the Austrian Chair. I met with representatives of the new government, Prime Minister Zoran Zaev and Nikola Dimitrov, the highly dedicated then-foreign minister. Both appeared very interested in working closely with the OSCE and its field operation on the reform path. I was impressed by the large amount of media attention generated by my visit.

Russia's dealings with the OSCE are probably best summed up as a love-hate relationship. Weighed against the historical frustration that the OSCE did not become the only major security organization in Europe is a more positive sentiment of great respect for this unique dialogue platform with the West, which has weathered many a storm. There is also some appreciation of the conflict management tools that have been agreed upon by consensus. This was made clear during my first visit to Moscow. Over a solid three-hour period – a working meeting followed by a media conference and a working lunch – I was able to discuss a wide range of OSCE topics with Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov. Discussions on conflicts took up much of our time, in particular the crisis in and around Ukraine. I used the opportunity to put forward concerns expressed by the SMM and the TCG on Ukraine. I also began to prepare the ground for my own reform ideas, namely strategic planning and budget reform. Conversations such as these often do not progress much beyond a mutual acknowledgment of viewpoints, and no distance between the positions is actually surmounted. However, in a dialogue characterized by mutual respect, this is still important as it creates transparency. This paves the way for the small successes where one reaches mutual understandings.

## The Italian Chairpersonship in 2018 under CiOs Angelino Alfano and Enzo Moavero Milanesi

After a mixed result for the Ministerial Council in Vienna, Italy took up the Chairpersonship in a similarly challenging political environment. Well-prepared, with a motivated foreign minister in Angelino Alfano and a strong team in Vienna led by Ambassador Alessandro Azzoni, the Italians chose the striking motto of "Dialogue, ownership, responsibility" for their time at the helm. They sought to achieve continuity, focusing on continuing and consolidating important processes. This included crisis management in Ukraine, as well as the continuation of the Structured Dialogue. Their central political priority was security in the Euro-Mediterranean region, a priority that had already been made clear in Italy's committed chairing of the Mediterranean Contact Group, the speech to the Permanent Council by Minister Alfano, and above all the Mediterranean Conference in Palermo the previous year. This Mediterranean-centric approach also meant a revival of the discussions surrounding migration, which had not been prioritized by the Austrian Chairpersonship. Strengthening perspectives on the Mediterranean and the migration agenda were also the order of the day at the informal Ambassadors' Retreat in Trieste on 7–8 June 2018. This was intended to lay the groundwork for decisions in this realm by the Ministerial Council. Indeed, a declaration on security and cooperation in the Mediterranean was successfully passed in Milan. However, this declaration was relatively non-binding and offered no resolutions to any of the structural obstacles impeding greater OSCE cooperation in the Mediterranean, such as the lack of resources or the "out of area" restriction on program work.

Meanwhile, the topic of migration had lost momentum during the four-month government crisis in Italy, after which it was never again pursued with the same vigor by the Chair. Despite valiant efforts, it was not possible to reach a consensus in Milan on the consolidation of this important issue in the OSCE agenda. Even if the Italians did not achieve the political breakthrough they had hoped for, major progress was still made at the program level. The Special Representative for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings worked closely with the Italian *Carabinieri* to develop a simulation-based training program focused on fighting human trafficking along migration routes. This interdisciplinary training program has since evolved into a flagship training initiative of the organization, and it has already been delivered in several sub-regions and run with the involvement of the Mediterranean partner countries.

Despite an unfavorable environment, the Italian Chair also achieved some notable successes in other areas. For instance, the confidence-building measures

Thomas Greminger with Chairperson of the Permanent Council, Alessandro Azzoni, 16 July 2018, OSCE / Micky Kroell

agreed in the Berlin+ package continued to be used in the Transnistrian conflict. Furthermore, thanks to the efforts of former Italian foreign minister Franco Frattini, the first joint vehicle registration offices were set up, allowing international travel to be opened up to Transnistrian vehicles once more. As the Special Representative on Combating Corruption, former minister of justice Paola Severino gave renewed impetus to this important second-dimension issue. One result of this was new program work, such as support for creating a national anti-corruption agency in Armenia. In the area of transnational threats, the Italian Chair once again teamed up with a special unit of the *Carabinieri* to launch systematic measures for combating the illegal trade in cultural goods, one of the major sources of funding for terrorism. Meanwhile, for the first time since the 2014 Basel Ministerial Council, the Milan Ministerial Council also adopted decisions related to the human dimension. A major gap in the OSCE's obligations was closed with the decision on combating violence against women, while the decision on the protection of journalists – an issue so vital to the freedom of the media – was updated for the first time since 1994 with new obligations.[57]

More than just tackling such challenges the Italian Chair also found itself operating in a political vacuum for quite some time. The early re-elections in March brought the tenure of CiO Alfano to an end. It took four months to form a new administration. The new CiO, Enzo Moavero Milanesi, only appeared on the OSCE's radar when he gave his presentation to the Permanent Council on 30 August 2018. "I missed having the political weight about me that could have taken action when the purely diplomatic work was at an impasse," says Alessandro Azzoni, who was Permanent Council Chair at this time.[58] He tried to compensate for the political vacuum by seeking solidarity within the Troika and working even more closely with the Secretariat. Text box 5 provides an overview of missions undertaken as well as some of the meetings with key actors

During a political vacuum in the chairing country, the role of the Secretary General takes on a new importance both in terms of the external perception and for the leadership of the organization. It is then necessary to act in the interests of the Chair and of continuity. The more clearly the Chair's intentions and the organization's strategic planning are defined, the easier this becomes. Fortunately, I had already attended several meetings with Alfano and his chairing team in the previous year. Our meeting in Rome on 14 November 2017 proved especially useful. This gave me the opportunity to draw attention to the relevance of ongoing processes – crisis management in Ukraine, the Structured Dialogue, ongoing housekeeping issues such as the scales of contribution, non-governmental organization (NGO) access to human-dimension events, and so on – while also encouraging the Italian team to pursue its intended focus on the issues of Euro-Mediterranean security and migration. During Italy's year in office, I also endeavored to vigorously support these priorities. These efforts included, in particular, close cooperation with the partner countries in the Mediterranean, as well as the creation of a structured partnership with the LAS and the UfM. In February, I visited Cairo and met LAS Secretary General Ahmed Aboul Gheit, as well as the

57 Cf. *OSCE Annual Report 2018*, Vienna 2019, pp. 6–11.

58 Stephanie Liechtenstein, "Interview with Ambassador Azzoni on the 2018 Italian OSCE Chairmanship," *Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHRM)*, 14.02.2019.

**Text Box 5: Excerpt from the Secretary General's 2018 Agenda**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 11.1. | Vienna | Launch of the Chairpersonship with FM Angelino Alfano |
| 12.1. | Vienna | President of the Swiss Confederation Alain Berset visits the Secretariat |
| 25–26.1. | Davos | World Economic Forum (WEF) 2018 |
| 29.1. | Rome | Antisemitism conference in Rome with FM Alfano, Ronald S. Lauder; audience with Pope Francis |
| 9–10.2. | Cairo | Visit to the Arab League, Secretary General Aboul Gheit; FM Sameh Shoukry (Egypt) |
| 15.2. | Vienna | Japanese FM Taro Kono visits the Secretariat |
| 16–18.2. | Munich | Munich Security Conference (MSC): FM Chrystia Freeland, Kurt Volker, FM Lavrov, Lajcak, PM Pavel Filip, FM Alfonso Dastis, Abdyldaev, CP International Criminal Court Fatou Bensouda |
| 20–22.2. | Sarajevo | Visit to Bosnia-Herzegovina, field mission |
| 26.2.–1.3. | Washington | State Department: AS A. Wess Mitchell, Michael Kozak, Andrew Schofer, Bruce Turner; Wilson Center: Jane Harman, Matt Rojansky; United States Institute of Peace (USIP): Nancy Lindborg; Women's Foreign Policy Network: Jenna Ben-Yehuda; Senator Roger Wicker; Congressman Chris Smith; Helsinki Commission Staff |
| 1.–3.3. | Cambridge, Boston | Harvard University, Kennedy School of Government; Boston University, Pardee School of Global Studies |
| 6.3. | Brussels | HR Mogherini, DG NEAR, DG DEVCO |
| 7.3. | Vienna | President Alexander Van der Bellen |
| 14.3. | The Hague | Anniversary of the Helsinki Committee, HCNM, FM Stef Blok |
| 4–5.4. | Moscow | Moscow Security Conference; DM Sergey Shoygu, FM Lavrov, interview with Rossya 24 |
| 23–24.4. | New York | Prevention of Conflict conference held by UNPGA Lajcak; UNSG Guterres |
| 2–4.5. | Dushanbe | Anti-terrorism conference; President Emomali Rahmon, FM Aslov |
| 18.5. | Vienna | Signing of the Headquarters Agreement with Austria |
| 28–29.5. | Tirana/ Durres | President Ilir Meta, FM Ditmir Bushati; Regional Conference of the OSCE Heads of Mission |
| 11.6. | Tashkent | Conference on youth and the prevention of violent extremism; FM Kamilov |
| 12–13.6. | Green Tree | UN retreat for heads of regional organizations with SG Guterres |
| 19–20.6. | Oslo | The Oslo Forum "The end of the Big Peace? Opportunities for mediation"; FM Ine Soreide |
| 22.6. | Brussels | Exchange of Letters; HR Mogherini; High Level Event on Climate, Peace and Security |
| 9.7. | Ankara | Inauguration of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan |
| 11.7. | Berlin | Summer Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE |
| 26–27.7. | Donbas | SMM visit with Deputy FM Guglielmo Picchi |
| 30.7. | Vienna | FM Karin Kneissl |
| 30.8. | Vienna | FM Moavero Milanesi |
| 4.9. | Yerevan | PM Nikol Pashinyan, FM Zohrab Mnatsakanyan |
| 7.9. | Prague | Economic and Environmental Forum; FM Tomas Petricek |
| 10.9. | Bled | Bled Forum; FM Karl Erjavec |
| 11–12.9. | Baku | President Ilham Aliyev, FM Elmar Mammadyarov |
| 12–13.9. | Tbilisi | President Giorgi Margvelashvili, FM David Zalkaliani; EUMM |
| 21.9. | Warsaw | HDIM; FM Jacek Czaputowicz |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 23–29.9. | New York | UNGA: Achim Steiner (UNDP), Antonio Vittorino (International Organization for Migration), Frans Timmermans (EU), President Donald Trump, FM Klimkin, Dacic; AS A. Wess Mitchell (US) |
| 2.10. | Stockholm | Gender conference of the Ministry of Defense; DM Peter Hultqvist; FM Margot Wallström |
| 4.10. | Vienna | Signing of MoU with USG Vladimir Voronkov UNOCT |
| 9.10. | Minsk | President Alexander Lukashenko, FM Vladimir Makei |
| 10.10. | Astana | Congress of Leaders of World and Traditional Religions; President Nursultan Nazarbayev; FM Kairat Abdrakhmanov; 20 years of OSCE presence |
| 14.10. | Vienna | US Deputy Secretary John Sullivan |
| 17.10. | Vienna | LAS GS Aboul Gheit |
| 22–23.10. | Oxford | President of St. John's College; speech at Harris Manchester College, Lord Alderdice, Sundeep Waslekar |
| 25–26.10. | Malaga | Mediterranean Conference; FM Josep Borrell, Lajcak; MoU with the UfM |
| 31.10./1.11. | Minsk | MSC Regional Conference |
| 2.11. | Moscow | FM Lavrov, PA Vladislav Surkov; GS Sargsyan (EEC) |
| 22–23.11. | Helsinki | FM Timo Soini, Martti Ahtisaari |
| 6–7.12. | Milan | Ministerial Council; FM Moavero Milanesi, Borrell, Heiko Maas, Lavrov, Petricek, Aslov, Zalkaliani; Chingiz Aidarbekov; Carmelo Abela; Mnatsakanyan, Mammadyarov, Bushati, HR Mogherini, Rose Gottemoeller |

Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry. This resulted in cooperation between the two secretaries in the areas of fighting human trafficking, preventing violent extremism, and mediation support. During the Mediterranean Conference in Malaga, I signed an MoU with the UfM, which served primarily as the basis for cooperation in the areas of climate change and security.

In 2018, I continued to visit the OSCE field missions in the Western Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina, Albania) and in Central Asia (Dushanbe, Tashkent, Astana [now Nur-Sultan]). In late July, I returned to Ukraine with Guglielmo Picchi, then the Italian deputy foreign minister, for a two-day visit to the SMM in the Donbas. We flew in an Antonov An-30 from Kyiv to Dnipro, and from there we took a helicopter for a low-altitude flight to Kramatorsk, where we were greeted by then-chief monitor Ertugrul Apakan. We met with the entire staff of the Patrol Hub in Kramatosrk, watched the launch of a long-range drone at the launch site in Stepanivka, and were even allowed to try out piloting a short-range drone for ourselves. I was especially struck by my conversations with civilians at one of the few crossings over the contact line, the Entry and Exit Crossing Point (EECP) in Maiorsk. This allowed me to experience a small part of the humanitarian drama that has been playing out in eastern Ukraine since 2014 as a result of the conflict.

In September, I traveled to the Southern Caucasus. In all three of the conflict-hit countries, I attended long working meetings with the foreign ministers. I also held substantial talks with the heads of state, including the then newly elected Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev, and former Georgian president Giorgi Margvelashvili, shortly before he left office. However, the purpose of the visits to these three countries was not just to fly the OSCE flag and to discuss the usual political topics, but most importantly it was to gauge interest in deeper cooperation on programs beyond the conflicts. In addition to determining the possible content of these programs, it was also necessary to clarify some practical questions surrounding operational cooperation, since the OSCE no longer has a field presence in these countries.

In Armenia, I sensed the spirit of the Velvet Revolution in some areas of the administration and particularly among civilians. This also manifested itself in the form of a real interest in returning to working closely with the OSCE and its institutions. However, transforming these intentions into a real partnership is a challenging prospect. Nonetheless, the blueprints for initial approaches may be found in the program portfolio of the previous field operation, as well as the new anti-corruption project. In Baku, I succeeded in mobilizing presidential support for an ambitious project in the second dimension: The "Greening the Ports of the Caspian Sea" project. This aims to bring sustainability to the operation of ports in the Caspian Sea, as well as a standardized approach to

digitalization, which should make it easier to trade with the EU. Meanwhile, the Azerbaijani side also signaled interest in cooperating on matters relating to election reform and the prevention of violent extremism. In Georgia, I noted a strong willingness to continue working with the ODIHR in the areas of democratization and the rule of law. There was also interest in working together to fight transnational threats, in particular in the realm of cybersecurity.

In 2018, I also worked toward another long-term goal, namely improving the positioning of the OSCE and cooperative security on relevant international conference and dialogue platforms. The responses from the participating states indicate that this was largely successful. While the doors to major events such as the World Economic Forum or the Munich Security Conference are opened wide for the leaders of the UN, the EU, and NATO, the same cannot be said for the OSCE. Gaining access requires considerable preliminary investment and perseverance. One must first prove oneself at various side events and in various processes at the fringes of the main event before access to the main stage is granted. The growing tendency in recent times for conferences on security policy to act chiefly as forums for discussion among like-minded actors does not work to the OSCE's advantage either. For events with a strong transatlantic focus, the OSCE is not included in the main program or may not even be invited at all. The OSCE is represented at the Moscow Security Conference, but always on a panel with strange bedfellows and consistently placed below the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.[59] Nonetheless, platforms such as these offer interesting networking opportunities at their fringes, just as at the MSC as at the WEF. The Moscow Security Conference gave me two opportunities to talk to Defense Minister Sergey Shoygu about the Structured Dialogue, the Vienna Document, and the crisis in and around Ukraine.

A longer-term plan is needed for the positioning of the OSCE, as well as continuing dialogue with the event organizers. I am confident that the OSCE is in a strong position on a number of relevant platforms such as the MSC, the WEF, the Wilson Center in Washington, the Bled Forum in Slovenia, and the Warsaw Security Forum, which will enable it to return to its high-profile status once the lean period caused by the corona crisis is over.

## The Slovakian Chairpersonship in 2019 under CiO Miroslav Lajcak

At my first meeting with future CiO Miroslav Lajcak, then the outgoing president of the UN General Assembly, he assured me that he wanted to put the Slovakian Chair to work entirely at the service of the organization, eschewing the stubborn pursuit of national priorities in favor of supporting the OSCE's central processes in the interests of continuity. During his tenure, this intent was reflected consistently in his actions. He saw the Slovakian Chairpersonship primarily as a contribution to the urgently needed efforts to improve multilateralism. The Slovakians offered up a three-pronged motto: "For people, dialogue, and stability." This in turn was underpinned by three goals: The first of these centered on "preventing, mediating, and mitigating conflict and focusing on the people it affects."[60]

There was a clear focus here on conflict management in eastern Ukraine. The Chair proposed a catalog of nine confidence-building measures with a humanitarian character – all elements that already appeared on the agenda of the TCG in some form. These included demining, opening further crossings in the contact line, and repairing the only crossing in Luhansk Oblast. This crossing, the defective pedestrian bridge of Stanytsia Luhanska, had become an emblem of the needless human suffering in the Donbas. Lajcak himself visited Ukraine four times in order to break the deadlock in implementing the provisions of the Minsk deal. For a long time, nothing happened. However, the election of the new president, Volodymyr Zelensky, brought fresh resolve. At last, breakthroughs were being made in areas where combat-related moves and tactical considerations had been blocking progress for years.[61] The famous bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska was repaired in a joint effort. Agreements were also struck on three pilot disengagement zones near Stanytsia Luhanska, in Zolote, and in Petrivske. A consensus was reached, albeit tentatively, on the sequencing of important political measures, known as the "Steinmeier formula." The special status legislation, as provided for by the Minsk deal, was to enter into force on a provisional basis the day after the local elections. It would then take definitive effect once the OSCE/ODIHR had confirmed that it was compliant with the relevant international regulations and with Ukrainian law.

The positive dynamic culminated in the "Normandy Four" summit in Paris in December 2019. There were no losers at this summit – which was especially im-

59 In 2019, the roster included the army chief of Myanmar, former Serbian defense minister Aleksandar Vulin, and the Saudi Deputy Defense Minister, alongside CIS Executive Secretary Sergey Lebedev, the Russian Chief of Staff Valery Gerasimov, and the Defense Minister of Belarus ("Conference Proceedings: VIII Moscow Conference on International Security," *Ministry of Defense of the Russian Federation,* 23–25 April 2019, p. 4).

60 *Programme of the Slovak OSCE Chairmanship 2019,* CIO.GAL/3/19, 10.01.2019.

61 The year before all of this, I had a memorable conversation in Vienna with the then-representative of Ukraine in the TCG, Yevgeny Marchuk. He showed me a map of the area surrounding the Stanytsia Luhanska bridge and explained to me in detail the tactical and combat-related reasons why the military was refusing to withdraw from the region.

portant for President Zelensky – but it did highlight just how difficult the next stages of the process would be. All in all, it was a combination of the political will of the parties, the impetus provided by the Normandy Four summit, and the combined efforts of the OSCE actors – the TCG, the SMM, the Chair, and the Secretariat alike – that made this progress possible. Meanwhile, the Slovakian Chair also had two major transitional processes to manage on the staffing front. Replacements needed to be found for the long-serving chief monitor Ertugrul Apakan and the special representative for Ukraine, Martin Sajdik. Both positions were filled without any significant problems, with Turkish diplomat Halit Cevik taking up the mantle in the SMM in late May and former head of the Swiss OSCE Task Force, Heidi Grau, stepping into the negotiator role in the TCG in December.

The Slovakian Chair also turned its attention toward long-running conflicts. In addition to visiting 15 out of the 16 field operations, the highly motivated Lajcak also made appearances in all the conflict regions in the first half of the year. Implementation of the Berlin+ package of measures was continued and was further consolidated at a "5+2" meeting in Bratislava in October. However, the process had slowed considerably, at least in part due to the political developments in Chisinau.

"Providing for a safer future" was the second goal of the Slovakian Chair. This included efforts to move forward a number of processes relating to specific topics, mostly in connection with a conference focusing on these issues in Bratislava. At the front and center of these efforts were youth and security, tolerance and non-discrimination, the prevention of violent extremism, and cybersecurity. The Slovakian Chair also invested a great deal in bringing security sector reform and governance (SSR/G), a long-running foreign policy priority, higher up the OSCE agenda. Despite the broad portfolio of programs operated by the OSCE, and a multitude of SSR/G activities launched by the Slovakian Chair, it was not possible to achieve the original goal of uniting all the participating states in a consensus-based decision to anchor the concept at the political level. Is the SSR/G approach only relevant to post-conflict situations, and therefore mainly a matter for Africa and Asia? Is it simply another Western instrument for pointing the finger at Russia and other participating states to the east of Vienna? Whatever the answers to these questions may be, it was not possible to overcome all the reservations regarding the concept, especially those held by one large participating state in particular. This would require more political dialogue at the highest level.

A particularly forward-looking element of the second goal from the Slovakian Chairpersonship was the call to confront the impacts of technological change on issues of security. In their words: "Rapid technological change, digitalization, and innovation provide us with immense opportunities. However, they could also pose challenges and threats. To provide a secure future for all, we must ramp up our efforts to advance the security and prosperity of our citizens across all dimensions."[62] This program-related objective enabled the Secretariat to take an in-depth look at the issue of technological change and its impacts on security. In addition to concept-related work in in the Secretariat, another outcome of this was the Security Days event with the title "A Human Rights-Centered Approach to Technology and Security" on 8 November 2019, which provided an opportunity to begin mapping out the potential fields of work to be undertaken in this area.

The third goal of the Chair was centered on promoting "meaningful and comprehensive dialogue among states, as well as with non-state actors." Here, too, the then-foreign minister Lajcak provided a great deal of personal input. In the lead-up to the informal ministerial meeting in the High Tatras, he led discussions with the diplomats from Vienna in three groups. On 8 and 9 July, in the picturesque Strbske Pleso, 34 ministers and deputy ministers answered his call. At least some of these also departed from their prepared statements and made interesting suggestions. Particularly notable was the brilliant exchange at the informal lunch between Sergey Lavrov and the then-foreign minister of Sweden, Margot Wallström: a perfect microcosm of two opposing worldviews. For me as the Secretary General, the High Tatras also offered a platform where I could – with Lajcak's encouragement – present some issues that were not yet fixtures on the OSCE agenda. I touched on the security impacts of climate change and technology, as well as the matter of China as a relevant actor in the OSCE space.

This informal meeting of ministers also gave me the opportunity to speak with the foreign ministers of North Macedonia and Estonia about the possibility of an OSCE Chairpersonship. For Estonia, this was a case of putting out feelers at this stage. I gave then-foreign minister Urmas Reinsalu some encouragement and documented his interest. During this discussion, I outlined some of the proposals that had just been published by my SPSU on how to reduce the political and material complexity of the Chairpersonships.[63] In North Macedonia, the reflection process had already reached a much more advanced stage. Nikola Dimitrov announced that he would submit his candidature for the Chairpersonship as soon as Brussels had given the green light for accession talks. He wanted to know whether this made sense to me, and what year might be a suitable one. Since I had already received the go-ahead from then Polish foreign minister Jacek Czaputowicz for 2022, the next possibility was

62 *Ibid.*, p. 7.

63 OSCE Strategic Policy Support Unit, *Leadership, Continuity and Creativity: Towards a More Attractive Chairmanship Model Based on Lessons Learned: Discussion Paper,* June 2019.

**Text Box 6: Excerpt from the Secretary General's 2019 Agenda**

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|---|---|---|
| 10.1. | Vienna | PC: launch of the Slovakian Chairpersonship; CiO Miroslav Lajcak |
| 14.1. | Basel | Basel Peace Forum |
| 23–25.1. | Davos | WEF 2019 |
| 16–17.2. | Munich | Munich Security Conference; CP International Criminal Court Bensouda, Kurt Volker; FM Dimitrov; FM Freeland, USG Voronkov; USG Jean-Pierre Lacroix, Acting FM Gent Cakaj; panel with President Poroshenko, Manfred Weber, PM Andrej Plenkovic, moderated by Ian Bremmer |
| 21.2. | Vienna | Winter Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the OSCE |
| 1–2.4. | Podgorica | Montenegro; PM Markovic, President Milo Djukanovic, Speaker Ivan Brajovic |
| 7–8.4. | Copenhagen | OSCE PA office meeting; State Secretary Bering Liisberg, President Meta |
| 16–17.4. | Ashgabat | President Berdimuhamedov, FM Meredov; 20 years of OSCE presence |
| 24–25.4. | Moscow | Moscow Security Conference; DM Sergey Shoygu, FM Lavrov, PA Surkov; PC CSTO; MGIMO speech |
| 7.5. | Vienna | FM Beibut Atamkulov, Kazakhstan |
| 16–17.5. | Helsinki | 70 years of the Council of Europe, President Sauli Niinisto; FM Cavusoglu; FM Mnatsakanyan |
| 27.5. | Vienna | 40 years of the UN in Vienna; SG Guterres |
| 29–30.5. | Vienna | Farewell event for CM Ertugrul Apakan, welcoming of CM Halit Cevik |
| 6–7.6. | Bratislava | GLOBSEC |
| 11–12.6. | Washington D.C. | National Security Council (NSC): Fiona Hill, Jim Gilmore; State Department: David Hale, Phil Reeker, Alice Wells, John Cotton Richmond; Senator Chris van Hollen; Wilson Center: Cathy Ashton |
| 20–22.6. | Ulaanbaatar | FM Damdin Tsogtbaatar; FM Peter Szijjarto; PVE conference |
| 25.6. | Vienna | Annual Security Review Conference (ASRC): Cathy Ashton, FM Lajcak, ex-President Heinz Fischer |
| 7.7. | Luxembourg | OSCE PA Summer Session |
| 8–9.7. | High Tatras | Informal OSCE ministerial meeting; FM Lajcak, Dimitrov, Abela |
| 10.7. | Vienna | Acting FM Cakaj |
| 31.7./1.8. | Bussnang/ Meilen | Swiss National Day addresses |
| 23–25.8. | Alpbach | European Forum Alpbach |
| 2–4.9. | Minsk | Anti-terrorism conference with UNOCT; President Lukashenko, FM Makei; visit to the Maly Trostenets concentration camp |
| 11.9. | Prague | Economic and Environmental Forum; FM Tomas Petricek |
| 16.9. | Warsaw | HDIM; ex-President Lech Walesa |
| 18/19.9. | Chisinau/ Tiraspol | Moldova; President Igor Dodon; Chief Negotiator Vasilii Sova, DM Pavel Voicu; Transnistrian leaders (Vadim Krasnoselsky, Chief Negotiator Vitaly Ignatiev) |
| 23–27.9. | New York | UNGA; SG Stoltenberg, FM Makei, Aslov, Aidarbekov, Mukhtar Tileuberdi, Kamilov, Pekka Haavisto, Vadym Prystaiko, Mammadyarov, Mnatsakanyan, Nicu Popescu, SG Marija Pejcinovic Buric, USG Atul Khare, USG Voronkov |
| 2.10. | Warsaw | Warsaw Security Forum; FM Czaputowicz |
| 9–10.10. | Belgrade | President Aleksandar Vucic, PM Ana Brnabic, FM Ivica Dacic |
| 22–23.10. | Washington D.C. | Wilson Center: FM Lajcak / Cathy Ashton; State Department: Bruce Turner, Michele Markoff, Robert Destro; Truman Center: Nathan Sales, Alice Wells |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 25.10. | Tirana | Mediterranean Conference; PM Rama, President Meta, Acting FM Cakaj |
| 31.10./1.11. | Moscow | FM Lavrov; PA Surkov; Deputy FM Andrei Rudenko |
| 5–7.11. | Amman | Amman Security Colloquium; FM Ayman Al-Safadi; Zaatari refugee camp |
| 11–13.11. | Paris | Paris Peace Forum, dinner with President Emmanuel Macron |
| 27/28.11. | Dublin | FM Simon Coveney, SG Niall Burgess |
| 5–6.12. | Bratislava | Ministerial Council; FM Lajcak, Ann Linde, Tsogtbaatar, Aslov, Aidarbekov, Aureliu Ciocoi, Dimitrov, Laurent Anselmi, Ine Soreide, Dep. SG Mircea Geoana |

2023. I pointed out that Uzbekistan had already expressed an interest in the Chairpersonship for that year.

Lajcak continued his efforts to promote substantial dialogue. On the eve of the Ministerial Council meeting in Bratislava, he sent out an invitation to an informal dinner in order to mobilize as much support as possible for his Bratislava appeal. At the heart of the appeal drawn up by his team was the call for greater flexibility and willingness to compromise in order to lend further strength to the OSCE and to multilateralism in general. On the first day of the Council meeting, too, the Chair-in-Office invited the approximately 50 ministers and representatives to the lunch for delegation heads, in the interests of informal dialogue. Although the previous evening's event had made it clear that there was plenty of support for the OSCE, the efforts to build a bridge to the diplomats' negotiations did not succeed. As a result, a rather more sobering picture had been painted by the end of day two. A consensus was reached on just six decisions and declarations. The only development of any real significance was the decision on the Chairpersonships for 2021 and 2022, Sweden and Poland. On the whole, a poor reward for a dedicated Chair.[64]

The Secretariat worked very closely with the Slovakian Chair right from the planning phase. At Lajcak's invitation, the SPSU wrote a paper early in the first six months that set out possible priorities. The focal points ultimately chosen ended up being very close to these. In the second half of 2018, too, I met with the Slovakian foreign minister several times, including during the UN General Assembly in New York. During Slovakia's year in office, we exchanged information at regular intervals on the ongoing processes, harmonized procedures, and coordinated our travel plans. This was done chiefly through brief meetings on the fringes of the many conferences attended, two bilateral working breakfasts in Bratislava, and numerous WhatsApp messages. We held weekly meetings with the Chair of the Permanent Council, Ambassador Rado Bohac, in order to coordinate our day-to-day activities.

There was only one area in which the Secretariat was unable to see eye-to-eye with the Slovakian Chair: budget issues. As already mentioned[65], one participating state was putting the Chair under significant pressure to revise the OSCE scales of contribution. It rightly argued that the current model was completely outdated and inadequate because it did not reflect the present economic power of the countries involved. However, revising the scales of contribution remains a mission impossible so long as key actors show no willingness to change their contributions or, in this case, to increase them. Under pressure, the Slovakian budget team presented a poorly fleshed-out proposal that would leave it up to the states to decide whether they were prepared to pay the higher contributions. Not only would the new system have been complex, it would have also resulted in income that fell short of the expenditure approved in the budget. Despite my repeated objections, Slovakia attempted to use a diplomatic process led by the responsible state secretary to push the proposal through. Ultimately, their attempt failed when it met resistance from several major capitals.

The Slovakian Chairpersonship almost went ahead without Lajcak for internal political reasons. The Slovakian Parliament refused in late November 2018 to send a delegation to the conference in Marrakech on 10–11 December, at which the Global Compact for Migration was to be adopted. As a result, Lajcak – who had personally advocated very strongly for this Pact – decided to hand in his resignation. As soon as I heard about this, I contacted him and tried to dissuade him from resigning. He expressed understanding but urged me to take up the issue with the Slovak prime minister and the president. On the morning of 3 December, I thus traveled to Bratislava, where I enjoyed a friendly and constructive meeting with then-prime minister Peter Pellegrini. We both came to the conclusion that, in view of the challenges facing the OSCE and Slovakia as a future chairing country, we

64 Cf. *OSCE Annual Report 2019,* Vienna 2020, pp. 7–12.

65 See the sub-section "Reform of the Budget Cycle" that begins on p. 36.

had to convince Lajcak to reverse his decision. Pellegrini believed that it would also be important to make this argument to the Slovakian media. After the meeting in the Episcopal Summer Palace, which houses the Slovakian government, I was greeted by more than 30 journalists and numerous TV cameras. I communicated my message that only Lajcak could take on this Herculean challenge, and that the OSCE needed strong leadership now more than ever. The following day, I had a very similar telephone conversation with then-president Andrej Kiska. I will never know precisely how important these steps were for changing Lajcak's mind. In any case, we were all relieved when, a few days later, we learned that he had withdrawn his resignation.

Bolstered by good coordination with the Chair and accompanied by a Slovakian diplomat, I visited two more field missions in the Western Balkans in 2019, namely in Montenegro and Serbia. The administrations in both countries value the OSCE as a partner. In early April, I traveled to Podgorica to meet President Djukanovic, then-prime minister Dusko Markovic, and several key ministers. At the Parliament of Montenegro, I spoke not only with the then-speaker Ivan Brajovic, but also all the opposition leaders. In a lively exchange, they made it quite clear to me that they saw the OSCE Mission and its head as partial and too close to the current administration.

During my visit to Belgrade in the fall, too, I found myself in a politically highly polarized society. I held talks with President Aleksandar Vucic, Prime Minister Ana Brnabic, and then-foreign minister Ivica Dacic. In a pattern typical of the region, the government insists on its democratic legitimacy while the opposition feels powerless because it perceives the administration, electoral institutions, and media as being controlled by the government. In Serbia, the OSCE has deftly managed to position itself as an honest broker between the political parties, as I learned in a memorable meeting with all the relevant representatives of the opposition. The Mission is attempting to use its role in media legislation reform to level the playing field for all political actors. Yet it too has been unable to break the behavior patterns endemic among opposition parties within the region who, as a result of believing that they have no chance of success, boycott elections or parliament.

Back in mid-September 2020, I visited Moldova with the intention of getting the Berlin+ package back off the ground, since progress had stalled following the drastic changes in government in Chisinau. With excellent support from Claus Neukirch, the OSCE Head of Mission on the ground, I had engaging discussions on both sides of the Dniester River. I praised the implementation of the Berlin+ measures as marking substantial progress in the conflict resolution process and encouraged both sides to take a pragmatic approach to completing the first package of measures, taking them further in places if need be. After this, they could begin to think about a new set of actions. We discussed measures relating to banking, human rights, and a trolleybus line.

Two months after Russian Defense Minister Shoygu had signaled in Chisinau that he wanted to clear the munitions depot in Cobasna, I spoke with then-president Igor Dodon, then-defense minister Pavel Voicu, and Vadim Krasnoselsky in Tiraspol how the OSCE could support this process and make it a success for all involved. All the participants in the discussion expressed a strong interest in the OSCE playing a role. During my trip to Moscow some two months later, Lavrov finally signaled, after a long discussion, that he would give serious consideration to the matter. It became clear that a solution for Cobasna involving the OSCE would have to be conceived and presented as one that took Russian interests into consideration.[66]

In the previous year, I had been encouraged by the US State Department to visit Washington every six months or so. I began to do this in 2019. My positive meeting with then-secretary Rex Tillerson at the Ministerial Council in Milan gave me hope that I would enjoy a similar welcome in Washington in the future too. Unfortunately, following Tillerson's departure, this was not to be.[67] However, I always found plenty of people in the US capital who were very interested in discussing the OSCE, not just in the State Department and the National Security Council, but in Congress too, especially among members of the Helsinki Commission. I also enjoyed regular meetings with their staffers, who hold an impressive institutional memory of the OSCE, as well as with representatives of the diverse think tank community. During my visit in early June, it just so happened that the newly appointed US Ambassador to the OSCE, Jim Gilmore, was receiving his introductory briefings. The two of us and Fiona Hill met for a long meeting in the National Security Council. Gilmore then invited me to the Republican Club, where he was still greeted with great reverence as the former governor of Virginia. All in all, it was a veritable three-hour crash course on the OSCE.

During drinks with Lady Ashton, who was working at the Wilson Center, we arranged for Lajcak and me to visit the Wilson Center in order to raise the OSCE's profile in Washington. We also met to agree to work together on the "Tech4Peace" initiative, which I will describe in more detail in the section below on "The New Security Risks on the OSCE Agenda." The OSCE panel with Lajcak and myself took place on 22 October during my second

66 Unfortunately, there has been no further progress to date on reaching a consensus – at least as far as can be surmised from official statements. It therefore appears that Russia is continuing to plan the clearing of Cobasna as a unilateral action, thereby missing out on a unique opportunity for a confidence-building measure.

67 This has a lot to do with the not especially prominent role that the OSCE currently plays in US foreign policy, but is also the result of a very intentional formal hierarchy: The Secretary receives the CiO, while the Secretary General has to make do with the top civil servants.

2019 visit to Washington. In addition to the usual discussions on Ukraine, the topics of cybersecurity, Central Asia, and anti-terrorism also came to the fore in my meetings with the State Department. In all three areas, my counterparts from the US expressed an encouraging willingness to invest more extra-budgetary resources into the OSCE.

## The Albanian Chairpersonship of 2020 under CiO Edi Rama

Albania was aware that the Chairpersonship would be a great challenge for the country and that they would need support. The Albanian team, led confidently by Ambassador Igli Hasani, did indeed cooperate closely and effectively with the Secretariat from the outset. In the previous year, I had met with Prime Minister Rama twice in Tirana, and our interactions helped to ensure that he would begin his year at the helm motivated and willing. Even one of his major political rivals, President Ilir Meta, took a very constructive view of the Chairpersonship. Unfortunately, it was not possible to formally appoint then-acting foreign minister Gent Cakaj in order to give Albania's Chair more effective leadership in foreign policy matters. Interestingly, Cakaj played a very active role in the preparation phase, but then all but disappeared from Chairpersonship activities in 2020.

In terms of substantive priorities, Albania had its sights firmly set on continuity, declining to bring any unorthodox national interests to the table. They defined three main objectives: 1) making a difference on the ground; 2) implementing the OSCE's commitments; and 3) building stability through dialogue. Their key areas of focus were conflict management in Ukraine and protracted conflicts; politico-military issues, including the Structured Dialogue; transnational threats; and human rights.[68] Gender issues featured heavily in the program of the Albanian Chair, which addressed the "Women, Peace and Security" agenda, combating violence against women, and promoting women in leadership positions. Interestingly, there was also a focus on areas where Albania itself still has work to do, but on which it can help by contributing positive experiences and best practices. These include fighting corruption and organized crime, as well as promoting tolerance and non-discrimination, including through the combating of antisemitism.

Against all the odds, Albania began its Chairpersonship on 10 January 2020 well prepared and with an evidently motivated prime minister. However, the course of events unfolded very differently than expected, forcing the Albanian team to spend its time putting out fires on three fronts: the OSCE budget, the corona crisis, and the leadership crisis. Ultimately, this left little time and energy for addressing the topics originally defined as priorities, let alone focusing on "longer-term strategic planning" or "new and evolving security challenges."[69] I will return to Albania's excellent management of the corona crisis later on.

Unfazed by the pressure that the pandemic was exerting on the organization's functional processes, the participating states allowed themselves to be drawn into a protracted and petty discussion of the budget. Despite a process led skillfully and enthusiastically by the Chair, the organization adopted its regular budget a full five months behind schedule, in late May 2020. This time, it was not just the usual suspects, i.e., the largest participating states or those embroiled in conflict, which were causing problems. In fact, EU member states and states from the so-called "like-minded" group were making life difficult for the Chair. Nonetheless, there was an enduring hope that for the first time in nine years, it would be possible to adopt a budget that would take a modest but highly symbolic step beyond the "zero nominal growth" (ZNG) strategy. This hope was also fed by signals from the US ambassador suggesting that he would personally lobby for a non-ZNG budget in Washington,[70] should one materialize. However, a draft budget which positioned a half of a percentage point above nominal growth was ultimately not adopted. The final verdict was once again returned in favor of zero nominal growth, with the organization losing some two per cent in real purchasing power as a result.

At the same time, the very same states demonstrated just how differently the process could have unfolded. The budget for the SMM was approved on time, despite a respectable increase of eight and a half per cent. However, unlike the regular budget, clear political signals were made here by the capitals.

The leadership crisis in the OSCE began with the surprising announcement by Azerbaijan that it did not want to extend the mandate of RFoM Harlem Désir.[71] The bad news was received in the second half of May and confirmed in early June following hearings with the four office holders. It had not yet become fully clear just how serious Azerbaijan was about this matter: Perhaps it was just diplomatic posturing. A number of participating states duly undertook demarches on an ambassadorial level in Vienna and Baku. CiO Edi Rama phoned President Aliyev, who responded negatively but without giving a

68 *Programme of the Albanian OSCE Chairmanship 2020,* Vienna 2020.

69 *Ibid.,* pp. 5 and 7.

70 Ambassador Gilmore tried this again – this time successfully – for the 2021 budget process, enabling the US to move away from the ZNG dogma prevalent in the OSCE. In his intervention before the Permanent Council on 14 January 2021 in response to the statement from the new Chairperson-in-Office, Foreign Minister Ann Linde (Sweden), he made reference to the "persuasive" argument for adequate resources put forward by former secretary general Thomas Greminger.

71 To begin with, Azerbaijan's main argument was that Harlem Désir lacked impartiality, accusing him of having directed "excessive criticism" at their country. Over the course of time, the criticism grew more specific, citing Désir's resistance to the planned extradition of a journalist to Azerbaijan.

**Text Box 7: Excerpt from the Secretary General's 2020 Agenda**

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| 10.1. | Vienna | Launch of the Albanian Chairpersonship by PM Edi Rama |
| 20–23.1. | Davos | WEF 2020; resident Andrzej Duda, FM Linde, DM Viola Amherd, EC Maros Sefcovic |
| 27.1. | Auschwitz | 75th anniversary of the liberation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp |
| 30.1. | Vienna | Swiss President Simonetta Sommaruga, lunch with Austrian President Van der Bellen |
| 31.1. | Berlin | Roadmap 2024 Conference on SALW in the Western Balkans |
| 10–11.2. | Vienna | FM Mammadyarov, Bogdan Aurescu, Szijjarto |
| 12.2. | Vienna | CT Conference on Foreign Terrorist Fighters, USG Voronkov |
| 13–16.2. | Munich | Munich Security Conference; FM Dimitrov, PM Rama; FM Haavisto, Mnatsakanyan, Arancha Gonzalez Laya, President Dodon, President Zelensky, DM Peter Hultquist |
| 18.2. | Vienna | FM Alexander Schallenberg |
| 20.2. | Vienna | Swiss Federal Councilor Ignazio Cassis visits the Secretariat; EC Margaritis Schinas |
| 24.2. | Vienna | US Congressman Alcee Hastings |
| 4.3. | Geneva | USG Tatiana Valovaya, Olga Algayerova (UNECE); signing of MoU with Filippo Grandi (UNHCR) |
| 15.3. | Vienna | SG Vladimir Norov (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) |
| From 16.3. | Vienna | Coronavirus crisis lockdown |
| 16.7. | Vienna | Farewell PC and reception |

conclusive verdict. Then, Tajikistan and Turkey also leapt into the breach, declaring that they too were taking issue with a mandate extension, the target this time being the ODIHR Director, Ingibjörg Gisladottir. This complicated the situation and gave the impression of a concerted attack on the human dimension. However, it was not clear here either whether this initiative would be supported at the political level in Dushanbe and Ankara.

The belief prevailed that Azerbaijan was the key to the renewal of the mandates for all three institutions and the Secretariat, together termed the four-party package deal. With time running out and Tirana yet to receive a response from Aliyev, isolated attempts were made to intervene at the ministerial level. Swiss Federal Councilor Ignazio Cassis and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas spoke to then-foreign minister Elmar Mammadyarov, but to no avail. In Vienna, the French delegation made it clear that they would only approve the extensions for the Secretary General and the High Commissioner if the four-party package was extended in its entirety. Canada, Norway, and Iceland supported this view. Ambassador Hasani kept stalling the formal decision-making process in order to buy time for high-level demarches. Simonetta Sommaruga, then-president of the Swiss Confederation, and the Albanian Chair Edi Rama held further telephone conversations with Aliyev. However, these were not backed up by any of the medium-sized or major powers. It is also interesting to note that both Washington and Moscow expressed very explicit support for the four-party package, but neither was prepared to expend political capital on it.[72]

During this period, the diplomacies of the EU member states were busy preparing for the EU summit on the coronavirus recovery plan, which was held on 17–18 July 2020. Ultimately, there was no concerted political initiative to ward off the leadership crisis. In the week of 6 July, all attempts to obtain a second mandate for the Secretary General, the Director of the ODIHR, the HCNM, and the RFoM via consensus of the 57 participating states failed. The Albanian Chair then spent the weekend attempting to prepare a decision on at least a provisional renewal of the mandates before the Ministerial Council in Tirana. However, on the Monday, this fell at precisely the same hurdles as the previous week's efforts. This final attempt to prevent a leadership vacuum in the OSCE was made all the more difficult by severe violations of the ceasefire along the contact line in Nagorno-Karabakh between 12 and 16 July. As a result, the Permanent Council had its farewell meeting on the 16 July, and on 19 July the organization found itself rudderless.

Most of the capitals only realized the scale of the disaster once it had already happened. There was a

72 They most likely had different reasons for doing so: In Washington, the OSCE was barely on the radar, while Moscow simply did not see why it should go to bat for an all-Western leadership roster.

similar story in the media too: Thanks to the efforts of journalist and OSCE expert Stephanie Liechtenstein, a few Swiss newspapers reported on the unfolding fiasco,[73] but outside the German-speaking world, there was scant mention of the events in the press. In the days that followed, however, expressions of regret did begin to appear in relevant publications, such as the *Financial Times,* the *Spiegel,* and the *Kommersant*.[74] The crisis was reported widely in the Swiss media, which expressed a great deal of sympathy for the deposed Secretary General, who was the collateral damage in a power struggle.[75]

Nonetheless, as a result of superb diplomacy, the Albanian Chair succeeded in ending the leadership crisis after a four-month interregnum, with a new quartet being nominated by the Ministerial Council in Tirana.[76]

## On Balance

Each Chairpersonship arises in its own particular set of circumstances, causing them to place different expectations and demands on the Secretary General. However, one unwavering principle is the Secretary General's role as the guarantor of the institutional memory and the continuity of the OSCE's activities. The more clearly the strategic planning for the organization is defined and the better acquainted the Secretary General is with the Chair's intentions, the easier it is to perform this role. Despite difficult times for multilateral diplomacy, all the Chairs succeeded in achieving some specific successes in particular areas – be that in conflict management or in the thematic dimensions of the organization's policies – thanks to their considerable efforts. This they did despite having to spend a disproportionate amount of time on making sure that the organization could simply continue to function (the main sticking points being the budget, conference agendas, and senior staff). Efforts, such as those made by the Slovakian Chair, to put the OSCE firmly back on the political radar of capital cities and foreign ministers must be continued in order to reinforce the institutional backbone of the organization and to bring cooperative security further into the mainstream of security politics.

73 Stephanie Liechtenstein reports: "Schweizer Top-Diplomat wackelt: Dem Generalsekretär der OSZE droht die Abwahl," Aarg*auer Zeitung / Luzerner Zeitung,* 27.06.2020.

74 Walter Kemp, "Executed Structures: Leadership Crisis in the OSCE," *Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHR),* 14.07.2020; Alexander Sarovic, "Chaos bei den Friedenswächtern," Der Spiegel, 29.07.2020; "OSCE faces crisis as infighting leaves it rudderless," *Financial Times,* 27.07.2020; and Kommersant, 22.07.2020; Stephanie Liechtenstein, "How Internal Squabbling Paralyzed Europe's Most Vital Security Organization," *World Politics Review,* 05.08.2020.

75 Stephanie Liechtenstein, "Schweizer Diplomat wird Opfer eines Machtspiels," *Aargauer Zeitung,* 11.07.2020, p. 5; "Le Suisse Thomas Greminger n'a pas été réélu à la tête de l'OSCE," *Le Matin Dimanche,* 12.07.2020, p. 6; Marc Allgöwer, "Thomas Greminger, victime du duel Est-Ouest," *Le Temps,* 14.07.2020, p. 3 and interview in the same newspaper on 15.07.2020, pp. 2/3; Ivo Mijnssen, "Kopflose OSZE," *NZZ,* 17.07.2020, p. 5; Hubert Mooser, "Unerwünschter Friedensstifter," *Weltwoche,* 23.07.2020, p. 39; "Wie es bei der OSZE zum Eklat kam," *Tages-Anzeiger,* 04.08.2020, p. 6.

76 See the nuanced evaluation of the Albanian Chair by Stephanie Liechtenstein, "The OSCE Ministerial Council and Year in Review: Virtual Diplomacy and the Limits of Cooperative Security," *Security and Human Rights Monitor (SHR),* 16.02.2020.

# Support to the Executive Structures: Field Operations, Institutions, and Parliamentary Assembly

As explained earlier[77], there are differing opinions on the conceptual front regarding the extent to which the coordination mandate applies to the field operations. In practice, however, the responsibilities of the Chair, the Secretariat, and the OSCE field missions are effectively distributed. Formally speaking, the field operations are accountable to the Chair and the participating states. This is reflected in the approval of reports by the Chair and the regular reports made by the Heads of Mission to the Permanent Council. The CiO has authority for selecting the Heads of Mission, while the selection process in the reformed procedure is led by the Secretary General. In day-to-day business, the field missions are given administrative and substantive support and advice by the various departments of the Secretariat. The CPC is responsible for coordination, with the Chair only getting involved in the case of clearly political issues. Nonetheless, regular visits by the CiO are a sensible idea because they strengthen the OSCE's profile in the host country and are a means of conveying political messages.

In principle, the missions of the Secretary General fulfill precisely the same purpose and must therefore be well coordinated with the Chair. In addition to this, I set myself the goal of meeting with staff on the ground, partners, ministries, and civil society actors in order to gain an understanding of the program portfolio. I was impressed by the work that is carried out by the missions in all three dimensions. I encouraged them to focus their efforts even more strongly and to refine their thematic profile, moving away from a large number of small projects and instead focusing on important reform programs. Discussions with the local staff committees was another integral element of all my field trips. Listening and showing support are important from a psychological standpoint. Moreover, they also make it possible to identify structural problems, such as deficits in the secondment system or the lack of competitiveness on the local employment markets. Another fixture of my field trips and ministerial discussions was high-level troubleshooting. I revived deadlocked negotiations on signing MoUs with host countries, for instance, in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. I also clarified questions surrounding the taxation of local personnel in Uzbekistan and Ukraine, and I brought forward the purchase of long-promised new premises for the operation in Ashgabat.

77 See the sub-section "The Mandate of the Secretary General" that begins on p. 42.

## The Flagship: Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine

Brought into existence on 21 March 2014 during the Swiss Chairpersonship, the SMM is a vital de-escalation tool for the crisis in and around Ukraine, and is the OSCE's largest operation by far.[78] Not only does it serve as the eyes and ears of the international community, but it also mediates local ceasefires. These windows of silence prevent local ceasefire violations from spiraling out of control and create opportunities to repair destroyed water, gas, and power lines. In this way, the SMM has made life easier for hundreds of thousands of people on both sides of the contact line. With more than 1,300 staff, including some 800 monitors, it also requires more support from the Secretariat than any other operation. Just like the other field operations, support is also guaranteed here through close working contacts between the Secretariat and the Mission.

In contrast to the large majority of operations, however, the SMM sits high on the agenda of the Chair and the Troika. Meanwhile, an active "group of friends" made up of Western participating states is always interested in highly operational matters, such as those concerning the duty of care, or technical equipment such as drones and cameras. Since it forms part of the management of the Ukraine crisis, the SMM is on the political radar of the capitals. As outlined above, this has a very positive effect on the mandate renewal and budget processes. For example, when negotiations had appeared to reach an impasse in March 2019, mere days before the expiry of the mandate, I pointed out to the participating states on the Permanent Council that the SMM would stop its monitoring activities on the subsequent Sunday afternoon if the mandate had not been renewed by then. A few frantic phone calls between capitals and the Viennese delegations ensued, after which we were able to get the budget approval and mandate extension back on track.

When it comes to the SMM, the Secretary General's authority to issue directives is limited to financial and personnel-related aspects, including the duty of care. However, the latter is inextricably bound up with substantive issues of deployment, and the SMM operates in a highly volatile and dangerous environment, at least as far as eastern Ukraine is concerned. For this reason, close dialogue between the Head of Mission, the Chief Monitor, the Chair, and the Secretary General is an absolute necessity. Beyond the main objective of protecting staff, I also endeavored to create as favorable an environment as possible for the SMM. In doing so, I focused on three elements:

78 On the OSCE's role in managing the Ukraine crisis, see: Thomas Greminger, "The 2014 Ukraine Crisis: Curse and Opportunity for the Swiss Chairmanship," in: Christian Nünlist / David Savarin, *Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis,* (Zurich: CSS/ETH, 2014), pp. 11/12.

**OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine**
As of June 2020

- Interfaces with political processes; i.e., ensuring that the operation was coordinated as seamlessly as possible with the work of the TCG and the Normandy Four (see section on "The Conflict Cycle and the Conflict Resolution Formats");
- Strong administrative support, be that in the recruitment process, complaint and disciplinary procedures, or procurement;
- The management and support of two key processes: adjusting the security and risk management systems after 23 April 2017, and crisis management against the backdrop of the corona crisis.

On 23 April 2017, in a non-government-controlled area near Pryshyb in Luhansk Oblast, an SMM patrol vehicle hit an anti-tank mine. US paramedic Joseph Stone lost his life, and two monitors were injured. This was the first ever fatal incident for the SMM, and it plunged the operation into a state of shock. Was the mine intended for the SMM? Were mistakes made in the deployment planning and risk assessment? Were the SMM's safety provisions and procedures adequate? All these questions and more were playing on everyone's minds. The tragic event was carefully analyzed by an internal investigation led by the Office of Internal Oversight (OIO) and an external investigation delegated to the International Humanitarian Fact-Finding Commission (IHFFC).

The report from the IHFFC concluded that, in all likelihood, the mine was not targeted at the SMM. The internal report did not identify any serious planning errors. However, it concluded that the patrol planning and risk assessment procedures could be improved and that these should be monitored more systematically by the patrols too. In light of this, an important priority would be to take the concepts that largely dated back to the early pioneering era of the SMM and adapt them to the new realities of a significantly expanded mission scope and a radically different environment.

In a letter dated 21 July 2017, I instructed then-chief monitor Apakan to initiate suitable processes imme-

diately. The SMM developed an extensive response plan, which was presented on 25 September 2017 and also came to the attention of the participating states. Security experts from the Secretariat had a close hand in implementing the plan, including reviewing it multiple times in the field. The plan began by devising three new concepts: an SMM framework of security, a standard procedure for integrated patrol planning, and a standard procedure for risk assessment during patrol planning. The next step was to provide training on these new procedures and to check that they were being followed. On 22 April 2019, Apakan reported to me that the process was complete and the task force created for this purpose had been dissolved.

A similarly formidable challenge presented itself in March 2020, when the corona crisis forced the organization to adapt to a drastically changed reality on every level. The first priority was to make changes to working practices in order to protect staff. The number of patrols, the number of monitors per vehicle, and the overall staffing levels in Ukraine were reduced to the absolute minimum; the use of technology was ramped up; and medical evacuations were planned. These changes were complicated by the extreme restrictions on freedom of movement in the non-government-controlled territories. The result was a complex and politically sensitive process that required many late nights of videoconferencing between the Chief Monitor, the Secretary General, the Director of the CPC, and the Chair of the Permanent Council.[79]

The safety of the SMM monitors and respect of their technological resources were my key concerns in all instances of political contact. I insisted particularly strongly on this message in my talks with Russian partners such as Lavrov and Vladislav Surkov, aide to the Russian President; with Ukrainian foreign ministers Pavlo Klimkin, Vadym Prystaiko, and Dmytro Kuleba; and with former US special representative Kurt Volker. In my fortnightly meetings with the Ambassadors of Russia, the US, and the EU, as well as in regular meetings with the Ukrainian Ambassador in Vienna, this issue was always at the top of my agenda. I am convinced that this message did not go unheard. In a meeting with Surkov, I put forward clear examples in order to take issue with the lack of respect shown by the armed units toward SMM monitors, and the ever more intensive and sophisticated jamming of our long-range drones. In return, he argued – and justifiably so – for the importance of outreach, i.e., dialogue between the SMM and the local population. He also commented that it was difficult to prove who was destroying the drones, and he was at pains to point out that the Armed Forces of Ukraine were also doing this. However, he had no intention of simply denying the problems raised and promised a follow-up on both counts.

Coincidentally or otherwise, no more long-range drones have been destroyed since mid-2019. Against this backdrop, it was important for me to be as well informed as possible about the circumstances surrounding incidents that endangered the lives of the monitors or the SMM's equipment. In a polarized political climate, echo chambers prevail. Each side is convinced that a negative incident must be the fault of the other, encouraging mutual accusations of blame. The SMM exercises extreme caution when attributing blame for incidents. It often knows much more than it lets on. This is why I asked questions regularly as well as organized to have military expertise in my immediate environment. I will outline a few examples for illustration purposes.

On 4 July 2019, the SMM reported an incident in the non-government-controlled area of Zolote/Pervomaisk, in which an SMM drone had been shot at from a relatively large distance by machine gun and light weapons fire. Shots flew approximately 10 to 15 meters over the heads of the personnel on patrol. A few seconds later, gunfire was returned from the checkpoint, some five meters from where the SMM patrol was staying. The SMM monitors were put in significant danger by this exchange of fire, owing to the scattering of bullets from this distance and the shots flying past.

In June 2020, the SMM lost three expensive cameras to gunfire. According to the information available, one was lost on 2 June in Petrivske due to direct and intentional light weapons fire, and another was lost on 22 June in government-controlled Shyrokyne, in what was presumed to be an accident related to an unexploded anti-tank guided missile that had been aimed at three armored personnel carriers that were impermissibly close to the camera. Yet another camera in non-government-controlled Oktyabr was accidentally destroyed by mortar fire. I always passed on such information in my political dialogs with the Chair and the key actors, along with the key message of the need to protect SMM monitors and equipment, which included the implicit suggestion that the reality is more complex than it first appears.

Over its seven years of existence, the SMM has succeeded in being if not loved, then at least accepted by the local population, despite a highly polarized environment on the ground. The explicit support from the Ukrainian and Russian administrations has undoubtedly helped with this. However, there is still work to be done in terms of cultivating this attitude. The Chief Monitor is very aware of this, which is why the reports from the SMM are also a highly sensitive matter. This is especially true of the thematic reports, because uncomfortable truths are only reluctantly shared and taken to heart.

The regular report on the restrictions on freedom of movement falls into this category. Although a re-

79 See the sub-section on "The Coronavirus and Conflict" that begins on p. 76 for more details.

port in the first half of 2019[80] recorded 37 per cent fewer restrictions than in the previous year, refusals of access occurred 290 times, or almost 90 per cent of the time, in non-government-controlled areas. There has been little change in this pattern since. The same is also true of the systematic refusal of access to border regions in the non-government-controlled southern regions of Donetsk and Luhansk. The Chair and Secretariat also need to do more to empower the SMM when it comes to publishing reports on civilian casualties. The second such report was published in November 2020.[81] It stated that there were approximately twice as many civilian casualties in non-government-controlled areas (657) as there were in the government-controlled zones (270). This is partly related to the settlement structure along the contact line, as well as the fact that armed units frequently establish their firing positions in densely populated areas. Mines and other explosive objects proved the most fatal. They were responsible for 81 deaths, followed by grenade fire (66) and light weapons fire (11). Three-quarters of all civilian casualties from direct combat, in other words grenade and light weapons fire, were concentrated on four hotspots along the contact line: 1) Avdiivka, Yasynuvata, and parts of the city of Donetsk; 2) the western suburbs of the city of Donetsk; 3) Horlivka and its environs, as well as the Luhansk region; and 4) the Zolote area.

On a positive note, the number of civilian casualties has decreased every year since 2017. Since the reinstatement of the ceasefire on 27 July 2020, only one civilian casualty of direct combat has been recorded, but there have still been eight victims of mines and other explosive objects. This throws into sharp relief just how important it is for demining to be carried out rapidly and extensively, as was also agreed at the Normandy Four summit in Paris. However, the TCG still cannot agree on the specifics. All the while, the SMM reports newly laid mines almost daily.

## The OSCE Institutions – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM).

The three OSCE institutions, the ODIHR, HCNM, and RFoM, are often referred to as the jewels in the crown of the OSCE. Indeed, when it comes to the organization's comprehensive view of security, they play an important role and represent instruments *par excellence* of structural conflict prevention. They are rightly viewed as centers of excellence in their respective areas and offer up their expertise for the participating states to make use of. In this way, they make an important contribution to the strengthening of national institutions in the areas of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy, thereby building resilience against destabilization and conflict. However, they also serve as the "watchdogs" for the obligations within their scope. The results of their monitoring are communicated to the participating states in the Permanent Council at regular intervals. Both the RFoM and the ODIHR often communicate their messages directly to the general public. By contrast, the HCNM mainly works through quiet diplomacy.

Through the decision of the Informal Ministerial Council in Mauerbach in June 2017, the appointments to the four top roles of the OSCE were made at the same time. The four of us saw this as an opportunity to intensify the cooperation between our executive structures. Just a short while later, on 1 September 2017, we met for a one-day retreat on Tulbingerkogel in the Vienna Woods. Together, we agreed on "open, considerate, mutually supportive communication with no surprises." We decided to divide up travel plans and mission reports systematically and to meet four times a year for a personal exchange. Looking back on our three shared years in office, I feel that our information exchange was fruitful and fully met our expectations, to the extent that we even began to meet every two months in 2020.

However, when it came to strategic planning and the coordination of program-related activities, we did not always get it right. On a positive note, thanks to significant coordination efforts, we succeeded in submitting a joint project proposal to the EU for the complex trial monitoring in the Western Balkans. In our first major PPP project, we agreed that the ODIHR would lead the Democracy Workshops funded by the ERSTE Foundation[82] for young people in Southeastern Europe, rather than this being done, for example, by the Secretariat under the "Youth and Security" banner.

On the other hand, the ODIHR was not prepared to contribute to joint regional strategies for Central Asia or the Western Balkans.[83] These sorts of medium-term concepts for regions or countries are useful tools for both planning and marketing, in particular when approaching major donors such as international financial institutions, the EU, and the US. It therefore seems strange that an OSCE medium-term concept for Central Asia would leave out the issues of human rights, the rule of law, and democracy.

80 SMM, *Thematic Report: Restrictions of SMM's freedom of movement and other impediments to fulfilment of its mandate, January–June 2019,* 24.04.2020.

81 SMM, *Thematic Report; Civilian casualties in the conflict-affected regions of eastern Ukraine, 1 January–15 September 2020,* 09.09.2020. The first report was published in August 2017 and covered the year 2016.

82 The foundation of a major Austrian bank.

83 On the one hand, the ODIHR argued that it had been brought into the corresponding processes too late. On the other hand, it proposed a different methodological logic that is focused on instruments and not on specific geographies.

Thomas Greminger visiting the SMM in Donbas, 26–27 July 2018 / OSCE

In the context of the corona crisis, information exchange was handled exceptionally well and practical support was provided for crisis management. At an early stage, the Secretary General, the Chair of the Permanent Council, the heads of the three institutions, and the Chair of the Parliamentary Assembly banded together to appeal to the "OSCE community" for solidarity and respect toward the OSCE's committments.[84] On the other hand, the ODIHR was reluctant to work with us on the conceptual nexus issues between security and the pandemic.

This also means that we did not really succeed in creating a culture of cooperation between the ODIHR and the Secretariat. In view of the substantive complexity of modern security risks and the critical mass of operational units, the executive structures of the OSCE would do well to cooperate and to allow themselves to be guided by the UN's maxim of "delivering as one." However, this is not the tenor that is heard the most clearly from among the participating states. The institutions' autonomy is brought up time and again, and it has become something of an empty mantra while virtually no-one is calling for cooperation and coordination. In fact, quite the opposite is true, especially when it comes to debating the budget. The executive structures are divided up into good and evil depending on the political standpoint of the participating state, and they are pitted against one another, with all-too-familiar results: zero nominal growth for everyone over the last ten years.

## Cooperation with the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly

Many positive things can be said about the cooperation between the Parliamentary Assembly (PA) and all the OSCE's executive structures, in particular the Secretariat and the ODIHR. The tension-laden and often confrontational relationship that I experienced during my time as a multilateral ambassador of Switzerland has given way to constructive, intensive cooperation in many areas. There are several reasons for this. For instance, there has been a change in the PA's fundamental attitude. Under past leaders, it focused mainly on the idea of parliamentary control over the OSCE's executive arm. However, when Roberto Montella took the helm, he introduced a philosophy of cooperation. The PA's new Secretary General also brought with him valuable experience from his time with the field operations in Bosnia-Herzegovina, Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro. This cooperative approach was also actively encouraged by PA presidents Christine Muttonen (Austria, 2016–2018) and George Tsereteli (Georgia, 2018–2020) in a testament to how individuals can make all the difference. I got along excellently with the PA's new leadership. This enabled us to join forces in our efforts to place the focus squarely on working cooperatively. Eventually, this change of mentality spread to staff on both sides.

The guiding principle was simple: to enable the entire OSCE to reap the benefits of the added value created by parliamentary work. This was underpinned by effective coordination of all important dossiers; the exchange of analyses, research reports, and notes; and close coordination on politically sensitive matters. One example that comes to mind is the intensive coordination in-

84 CIO.GAL/41/20, 26.03.2020.

volved in the dialogue with representatives of Albania's political parties. The PA's benefits often lie in its flexibility, untethered from rigid administrative structures, and in its ability to keep pace with the times. At the thematic level, the PA is the trailblazer of the OSCE. It discusses new challenges to security in the OSCE space long before they arrive on the official OSCE agenda. Here, I am thinking in particular of issues that I will describe in more detail later on, such as the security impacts of climate change, AI, or the role of China.

In crisis and conflict management, the PA often has access to segments of society that are crucial for constructive dialogue but are off-limits to actors at the OSCE's executive level. These may, for instance, include representatives of the opposition. It is also easier for the PA to communicate difficult messages to participating states. For this reason, sending a PA delegation can be a very effective way of reminding a state of its duty to comply with a particular OSCE obligation. The PA is also an ideal partner when it comes to raising the OSCE's profile among national electorates or communicating a particular concern. An excellent example of this is the letter published on 4 December 2020 calling for greater political commitment to the OSCE, which was signed by more than 50 former OSCE leaders.[85]

To the general public, the complementary nature of the PA and the executive structures of the OSCE is particularly evident in the organization's election observation activities. More specifically, this concerns the cooperation with the ODIHR (which puts its trusted methodology for election observation into action through its long-term and short-term monitors) and the PA (which provides short-term monitors through its members, offers a political perspective, and leads the joint delegation on election day and when the verdict is announced). To my satisfaction, the relationship that was once characterized by rivalry and conflict has improved considerably since 2017.

## On Balance

A decentralized structure runs in the very DNA of the OSCE. However, close cooperation is needed between the Secretariat and the executive structures in order to guarantee effective support, coherent crisis management, and coordinated responses to complex security challenges. This applies to all the institutions and field operations, especially those missions such as the SMM that are heavily exposed to political and safety hazards. In this regard, cooperation with the institutions has improved in recent years. However, there is still significant potential to build an even stronger culture of solidarity. The greatly improved relationship with the PA is a shining example of this. Participating states would do well to champion not just the autonomy of the executive structures but also cooperation and coordination within and between them.

85 OSCE PA, *OSCE Call for Action: Reaffirming a Common Purpose*, PA.GAL/25/20, 04.12.2020.

# The Conflict Cycle and the Conflict Resolution Formats

Since the landmark decision of the Ministerial Council in Vilnius in 2011 (MC 3/11), the OSCE has continued to refine its instruments for intervening in the conflict cycle, as well as to strengthen them as much as the available means have allowed. One such example of this is the early warning system, which uses a network of early warning focal points drawn from all the executive structures, and crucially also the field missions, to analyze information in the OSCE space that is relevant to security policy. This information is then compiled in a suitable form and disseminated through the Secretary General, who was specifically given this task by the decision MC 3/11, to the Chair, the Troika, and the participating states. Every six months, the CPC provides the Secretary General with a situation report for the entire OSCE space, which uses a traffic-light system to signal significant changes. Other useful reports come from the unassuming yet effective situation analysis center (the SitRoom), which focuses on areas where tension is rising and is able to do so over very short timescales.

The early response tools are well documented within the OSCE, and their deployment is ultimately a matter of political will.[86] However, it is also important for OSCE actors to be familiar with these tools so that they can offer them to the parties involved in crisis or conflict situations. It is for this reason that, in a convention that started with the Swiss Chairpersonship in 2014, the Secretariat meets with the future Chair for a one-day crisis management exercise based on a fictional scenario. The purpose of this exercise is to encourage the Chairpersonship teams in Vienna and at their head office to get to grips with the early response tools. Mediation support has also evolved over the years. Regarding this, there is the Mediation Support Team (MST). Though the team may be small, it is highly effective.[87]

Just like many other organizations, the OSCE has had to face the challenge of mainstreaming its services. But how can mediation support be made an integral element of the mediation format? The TCG and the Transnistrian Process have made much more progress with this challenging undertaking than the Geneva International Discussions (GID) concerning the conflicts in Georgia and the Minsk Co-Chairs for the conflict surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh. In the following sub-sections, I provide a more detailed explanation of these formats and the OSCE's role. The MST has also trained and supported the field operations in facilitating dialogue on the ground, which is just as important from a conflict prevention standpoint. In addition, 2021 marks the tenth anniversary of the groundbreaking decision in Vilnius. Thus, this is the perfect opportunity to take stock of where the OSCE is now in the development of tools for the conflict cycle and to think realistically about two to three areas where further improvements could be made. This could include a moderate expansion of the MST's capacities, which would give the team greater scope to embed itself directly in mediation processes.

## The Trilateral Contact Group and Developments in Eastern Ukraine

The institutional architecture for the conflict resolution process is complex. First, there is the political level: the Normandy Four format with Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France. By its own reckoning, the Normandy Four is external to the OSCE and operates on three levels: presidents, presidential advisors, and foreign ministers. It gives political impetus and – de facto, at least – orders to the OSCE-directed mechanisms, the SMM, and the TCG. The TCG is a negotiation platform consisting of representatives from Ukraine and Russia, with the OSCE as mediator. It also brings to the table the other two co-signatories of the Minsk agreements, the de facto authorities of Donetsk and Luhansk.

Looking at how the TCG is composed, it is no surprise that a great deal of time and energy is given over to status questions: Who is the conflict party and who is the mediator? Who is authorized to negotiate with whom? The TCG operates in plenary mode and has four working groups that deal with security, political, economic, and humanitarian issues. The Chair and Secretariat are encouraged to offer strong support to all OSCE actors. Although the complexity of this architecture does indeed serve a purpose, it necessitates a highly developed flow of information and a great deal of coordination. This is particularly important in times of rapid developments, as was the case in the summer of 2019.

I therefore took it upon myself to improve the information flow and coordination among and between the relevant OSCE actors – the Special Representative, Chief Monitor, Chair, and Secretariat (Secretary General, CPC). Some measures were successful, such as regular, substantial meetings of the aforementioned parties on the eve of the Permanent Council reports on the TCG and the SMM. The aim of these meetings was to bring everyone up to speed while also building a shared understanding of the central political messages. During the coronavirus pandemic, these meetings continued to take place online. However, I was unable to establish fixed, standard procedures for mutual information exchange and coordi-

86 The OSCE Secretariat's Conflict Prevention Centre, Operations Service (CPC/OS), Planning and Analysis Team, "Compendium of OSCE Mechanisms and Procedures," *OSCE*, 2011; the CPC has also produced a clearly structured checklist, but this can only be accessed by the Secretariat and the Chair: "Early Warning-Early Action Matrix," 13.11.2018, SEC/CPC/OS/011/18.

87 The Mediation Support Team (MST) consists of three seconded employees and is part of the CPC.

nation. No such standard operating procedures (SOPs) exist between the OSCE and the Normandy Four actors either. Of course, this does not preclude good ad hoc relationships between particular individuals and capitals.[88] Nevertheless, an example demonstrates the potential difficulties that can arise. In 2019, it was unclear in OSCE circles what medium- and long-term expectations for the SMM had been discussed at the Paris Summit. This made anticipatory planning impossible, and it could also have painted the OSCE in a bad light if it had been unable to "deliver" on time. Therefore, there is potential for improvement and more effective structuring in order to handle the more dynamic times in the conflict resolution process.

A further Normandy Four summit in 2016 generated a small amount of momentum. However, in 2017, the TCG's work on implementing the Minsk agreements ground almost entirely to a halt. The violations of the ceasefire had escalated to a relatively high level, the economic blockade was deepening the divide between the sides, and the political working group led by top French diplomat Pierre Morel was at a complete deadlock. As a result, the idea of eliminating the blockade by negotiating through a UN peace operation seemed appealing. The general expectation was that then-president of Ukraine Petro Poroshenko would request just this at the UN General Assembly in September 2017. Yet in a move possibly intended to pre-empt this, Russian Federation President Vladimir Putin suggested in early September – at a meeting in Xiamen, China – that a peacekeeping contingent be established along the contact line in the Donbas in order to protect the SMM. Even though nobody fully understood the true value of such an operation at the time, the initial reactions were ones of showing an interest.[89] As it happened, Kyiv's request for a peace operation came just a few weeks later. It soon became clear that a large-scale operation was intended here, possibly with a military peace enforcement component in accordance with Chapter VII of the UN Charter, or at least a very robust mandate and a civil administration. A few months later, a study that came to similar conclusions was published by a think tank close to the government, under the leadership of ex-NATO secretary general Anders Fogh Rasmussen.[90] This multidimensional operation was to involve at least 20,000 people.

Needless to say, the Russian and Ukrainian positions were diametrically opposed. Government-allied think tanks on both sides attempted to bridge the gap between the two concepts with their own suggestions. The Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), led by Andrey Kortunov, proposed a gradual build-up of the mission scope that would be tied to the progress made in implementing the political obligations of the Minsk agreements.[91] Meanwhile, under the leadership of former US ambassador to Ukraine Bill Taylor, the United States Institute of Peace (USIP) had also been working on a compromise. News from the official level was that Kurt Volker and Vladislav Surkov had succeeded in closing some of the distance between the two opposing viewpoints. The then OSCE Special Representative to Ukraine, Sajdik, and the then chief monitor, Apakan – both having an impressive UN pedigree – also contributed a pragmatic proposal to the discussion.[92]

For the part of the OSCE Secretariat, I was open to the idea of a peace operation from the very beginning. If negotiations over the mandate were to lead us out of the dead end that the Minsk agreements were currently facing, this would be a positive step. I also signaled to the UN that we had three years of experience in the field that we could bring to the table, and I offered up OSCE instruments for all civil components of the operation. Furthermore, I suggested that the mission could be run jointly, following the example of the operations between the Joint African Union and the UN. This latter idea was also adopted by Sajdik and Apakan. However, I insisted at every step of the way that a peace operation must also have the implementation of the Minsk agreements as its goal. It was becoming apparent that, in some circles, this operation represented an opportunity to discard some of the more uncomfortable elements of the Minsk agreements, such as the sequencing of measures to regain control over the Ukrainian-Russian border. However, the attempts to reconcile the fundamentally divergent philosophies of a peace operation ultimately ended up failing for exactly the same reasons as those that had caused the deadlock in the TCG. The question in the end was one of the conditions under which Ukraine could regain control over the territories currently held by the separatist republics. The de facto authorities and Moscow would only permit this if the political measures, such as special status, amnesty, and voting, were decided in their favor, basing their demand on the sequencing of measures defined in the

88 For instance, we were able to create a good informal link between the Secretariat and the Chancellery.

89 During our meeting in Berlin, Foreign Minister Sigmar Gabriel expressed a strong interest in responding constructively to this proposal.

90 Richard Gowan, "Can the United Nations Unite Ukraine?," *Hudson Institute,* February 2018.

91 Andrey Kortunov, *Is a compromise on the Donbass peacekeeping possible?* Background note ECFR EU-Russia Strategy Group, Stockholm, 23.10.2017.

92 *Joint UN/OSCE Mission to Eastern Ukraine/UNMEUK,* no date or place. Further interesting contributions to the discussion on a peace operation in Donbas: International Crisis Group, *Can Peacekeepers Break the Deadlock in Ukraine?,* Report 246, 15.12.2017; Robert Serry, *Blue Helmets in Donbass? A phased and Sequenced Scenario to Unlock the Minsk Agreements and Restore Peace in Ukraine,* UPEACE Centre The Hague (UPH), October 2018.

Minsk agreements.[93] In future, too, it will be difficult to approach this in any other way – as understandable as that may seem from the Ukrainian perspective.

In 2018, tensions within the Ukrainian conflict began to build again. The stagnation in the TCG and the sustained violations of the ceasefire were followed by further developments, such as the laws passed in the areas of education and language, the bid for independence by the Orthodox Church of Ukraine (autocephaly),[94] and escalating tensions in the Azov Sea region. Tit-for-tat actions began to be observed in this region in May 2018, culminating on 25 November 2018 in three Ukrainian ships being seized by the Russian border guard. Twenty-seven sailors were captured and accused of entering Russian territorial waters without authorization. Ukraine had already complained about the harassment of ships in the Kerch Strait on 92 occasions, while the Russians had taken issue with 15 ships detained because they had entered Crimean ports illegally. On 26 November, then-CiO of the OSCE Enzo Moavero Milanesi and I called for restraint and for a dialogue on de-escalation measures.[95]

At the same time – and for the only time in my entire tenure as Secretary General – I issued a formal early warning to the 57 participating states because of how high I deemed the risk of escalation to be. On 27 November, I met Milanesi in Rome to discuss possible de-escalation and risk-reduction steps, not least in view of the upcoming Ministerial Council in Milan:

- As an immediate confidence-building measure, the release of the sailors, and the return of the ships;
- Bilateral dialogue, facilitated by a third party if desired, with the aim of agreeing on practical arrangements for restoring navigational freedom in the Kerch Strait and in the Azov Sea (on the basis of the bilateral agreement signed in 2003);
- Multilateral dialogue platforms based on Chapter III of the Vienna Document or on the CSBM for shipping in the Black Sea that were agreed in 2003;
- A fact-finding mission by the OSCE;
- Good Offices by the OSCE Chair on the fringes of the Ministerial Council;
- Creation of a dialogue process to run in parallel with the TCG;[96]
- Monitoring via a separate mission, because the SMM had only limited access to the region and no marine component.

The Ministerial Council presented a good opportunity to discuss the de-escalation agenda with the parties. Similar proposals were made not just by Milanesi and I but also by then-high representative of the EU Federica Mogherini and German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas. However, Russia appeared to have no interest in internationally mediated de-escalation measures. Nonetheless, it did manage to avoid adding any further fuel to the fire. The sailors were only released several months later – after President Zelensky had taken office – as part of a large exchange of prisoners.

The new Ukrainian president brought fresh momentum to the conflict resolution process. A meeting between the presidential advisors of the Normandy Four in Paris on 12 July 2019 was especially productive. The TCG was instructed to ensure that troops and material were withdrawn from the disengagement zones that had already been agreed upon, to identify further disengagement zones, to agree a ceasefire to allow the annual harvest to go ahead, and to develop and implement a gradual de-escalation along the entire contact line as well as demining plans. Additional objectives included a comprehensive exchange of prisoners within the month; the development of a plan to resume socio-economic relations; concrete steps for improving the humanitarian situation, including repairing the bridge in Stanytsia Luhanska; and preparing the political aspects of the legal framework needed for governing special status areas, including the Steinmeier formula, amnesty, and local elections. As mentioned earlier, the TCG succeeded in making progress on some elements of this ambitious agenda. For instance, the exchange of prisoners took place, work on the Stanytsia Luhanska disengagement zone advanced considerably, and an agreement was reached on the Steinmeier formula.

However, there was a limit to how much could be achieved, even under President Zelensky. One stumbling block was the political resistance in Kyiv from the *Verkhovna Rada,* the Ukrainian parliament. Meanwhile, the Russians were also reluctant to make any accommodations. Even though Moscow now had a committed partner in Kyiv in the form of Zelensky, the tone toward him was not especially conciliatory. This in turn limited the Zelensky administration's room for maneuver in domestic policy matters. The results of the Paris Normandy Four summit are an accurate reflection of the overall situ-

93 Article 9 of the package of measures for implementing the Minsk agreements states the following: "Reinstatement of full control of the state border by the government of Ukraine throughout the conflict area, starting on day 1 after the local elections and ending after the comprehensive political settlement (local elections in certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions on the basis of the Law of Ukraine and constitutional reform) to be finalized by the end of 2015, provided that paragraph 11 [constitutional reform] has been implemented in consultation with and upon agreement by representatives of certain areas of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions in the framework of the Trilateral Contact Group." cf. *Package of measures for the Implementation of the Minsk agreements.*

94 See Cora Alder / Palwasha Kakar / Leslie Minney, "Ukraine: The Religious Dimension of the Conflict," in: *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* 259 (2020).

95 Even the *Washington Post* cited the OSCE in its issue of 27 November 2018.

96 Russia argued that the developments in the Azov Sea had nothing to do with the Minsk agreements and, consequently, that the TCG could not be responsible for them.

ation: Progress was being made, but only in small steps that had to be fought and negotiated for hard at the political level. Despite the skillful diplomacy of Special Representative Heidi Grau, the TCG can make little progress without the necessary political impetus.

This was also apparent in the first half of 2020. Progress on meeting the targets agreed at the summit was painstakingly slow, while the forced move to online meetings due to the coronavirus was not helping to create a productive climate for negotiations. It is possible that a meeting of the presidential advisors in July helped to revive the proceedings. One thing that can be said with certainty is that through Heidi Grau's mediation, the TCG was able to achieve a significant partial success: At the meeting held on 22 July 2020, it agreed to reaffirm the ceasefire. This entered into force on 27 July, and violations of the ceasefire were reduced to a minimum. For instance, there have been no more violations at all by weapon systems that are not permitted in the security zone. This pleasing progress has helped to create an environment in which there is a greater chance of positive developments in relation to political issues too. The main stumbling block in this regard is still the sequencing of the measures set out in the Minsk agreements, in spite of the ostensible agreement on the Steinmeier formula. A concern regularly heard from the Kyiv administration is that elections cannot be held until Ukraine regains full control over the Ukrainian-Russian border, and that the situation has changed since the Minsk agreements were signed so they should not be set in stone. Ultimately, it is now up to the heads of state of the Normandy Four to decide whether there is any scope for departure from the sequence prescribed by the Minsk agreements. It may be more expedient to work on meeting the conditions that are set out by the Steinmeier formula.

If, after local elections have been held, the OSCE is to reach the verdict that elections were conducted in compliance with international standards and Ukrainian law, the necessary conditions for achieving this must first be created in the non-government-controlled areas. This would require freedom of movement and freedom of speech and association for Ukrainian citizens, who must be able to carry out an election campaign. Although this would not bring access to the Ukrainian authorities (including the army, police, and border protection service), it would result in freedom of movement for political actors, also allowing for more contact between the populations.[97] With regard to an even more fundamental substantive issue – that of determining exactly how the special status will look, which is the key to decentralization – the main dispute between the sides is currently over how and whether it is to be enshrined in the constitution. Here, too, the Minsk agreements are clear, since they call for a reference in the constitution. Ultimately, however, the deciding factor will be how the content of the special status is defined. I believe that this will require political guidance from the Normandy Four at the heads of state level on more than one occasion.

## Protracted Conflicts

The OSCE plays very different roles in the negotiation formats for the three protracted conflicts: 1) the Transnistrian conflict, 2) the conflicts in Georgia, and 3) Nagorno-Karabakh.

*The Transnistrian conflict:* In what has been termed the 5+2 process,[98] the OSCE has the strongest mandate. Indeed, it acts as the official mediator through the Special Representatives of the Chair and the Head of Mission in Chisinau. The progress made in resolving the Transnistrian conflict through the implementation of the Berlin+ package has been exemplary. I made reference earlier to some of the measures involved.[99] The measures agreed, most of which have been implemented, include the reopening of a bridge over the Dniester River, which had been closed for many years; the regularization of Transnistrian license plates; granting farmers access to their farmland (Dubasari) on the left-hand side of the Dniester; formally acknowledging university diplomas; and others concerning the functioning of Latin-script schools in Transnistria and mobile telephony. Further tasks – some easier than others – have also been largely completed, such as enabling the use of credit cards for banking transactions and constructing a trolleybus line between Gura Bicului-Bychok and Bender. The process of agreeing on and implementing these measures was neither easy nor linear. However, it did make it possible to build trust in small steps and highlight the principles of coexistence for both sides, which will also determine the final outcome of the conflict resolution process. Over the years, the OSCE mediation team has deliberately refrained from forcing the discussion on the substantive parameters of a final settlement, because a favorable environment has to be created first. This involves placing a certain degree of trust in the other side as well as coming to the negotiations from a starting position that has gained sufficiently broad political support.

*The conflicts in Georgia:* The OSCE, the UN, and the EU are the Co-Chairs of the GID. However, the GID does not get involved with the actual conflict resolution process; instead, it focuses chiefly on conflict manage-

97 I spoke about these considerations in various interviews. However, I also had the opportunity to discuss them in Vienna with Andriy Yermak (14 January 2020) and, albeit much more briefly, with President Zelensky himself (Auschwitz, 27 January 2020).

98 The process is given this name because it is led by Moldova, Transnistria, Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE, plus the US and the EU.

99 See sub-sections on "The Austrian Chairpersonship under CiO Sebastian Kurz" that begins on p. 43 and "The Slovakian Chairpersonship in 2019 under CiO Miroslav Lajcak" starting on p. 50.

ment. Nonetheless, it is an important platform for dialogue and has a stabilizing effect. This is thanks in no small part to its Incident Prevention and Response Mechanisms (IPRMs), which are highly practical instruments that resolve specific problems along the administrative boundary line.[100] Between 2017 and 2020, the GID gave the impression of being a barely productive, highly precarious construct, which is prone to being knocked off course by isolated incidents. I got the impression that the GID was often less about achieving a result through compromise and creative ambiguity and more about an exercise in conveying clear positions to the outside world. It seemed a place for face-offs between the East and the West; a place where points could be scored on the home front. The discussions surrounding the non-use of force agreement, which ultimately failed by a narrow margin, are a perfect illustration of this. The dedicated work of former OSCE special representatives Günther Bächler and Rudolf Michalka, supported by top experts in the CPC, therefore primarily served the purpose of ongoing crisis management. However, the attempts to develop the GID should be continued, with the aim being able to implement substantial confidence-building measures that would greatly benefit the population, both on a humanitarian level and in terms of development policy. In the medium to long term, this could also create the necessary conditions for tackling the fundamental matter of resolving the conflict between Georgia, the de facto entities, and Russia on a suitable negotiation platform.

*Nagorno-Karabakh:* In the conflict surrounding Nagorno-Karabakh, the three Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, i.e., in 2020 representatives of France (Stéphane Visconti), the US (Andrew Schofer), and Russia (Igor Popov), take on the role of mediator. Furthermore, Andrzej Kasprzyk, the personal representative of the OSCE Chair, is responsible for conflict management. Kasprzyk has been using his contacts and the monitoring activities along the contact line to prevent, or at least curb, violations of the ceasefire. Thanks to his time in office, he also represents the group's institutional memory. As the Secretary General, I met with the four parties regularly (three to four times a year), offered support, and reinforced their political messages in my contact with the parties and the participating states. All four parties valued the logistical support,[101] but – on balance – they did not ask for any substantive mediation support.

During my tenure, the conflict resolution process was buoyed by the hopes that had sprung forth from the election of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan. In contrast to his predecessors, Pashinyan had no direct personal connections with Artsakh, as the Armenians call the disputed territory. An initial informal meeting with President Aliyev in Dushanbe in the fall of 2018 struck an optimistic note. The Minsk Co-Chairs did everything they could to capitalize on the apparently good relations between the two heads of state. Following the meeting with the foreign ministers in Paris in January 2019, a sensational joint statement was issued that called upon the parties to prepare their populations for peace. However, in the time that followed, there was no real change in the aggressive rhetoric, nor any greater openness to confidence-building measures, on either side. Both heads of state also made it known that they did not feel obligated to comply with the Madrid Principles of conflict resolution agreed in 2007. The only positive note was the temporary stabilization of the situation along the contact line and the attendant decline in deaths and injuries. Fresh hope was brought by the constructive meeting between the Co-Chairs and the two ministers in Geneva in January 2020. There were plans for a retreat with a focus on conflict resolution issues, or in other words, the implementation of the Madrid Principles. Then came the coronavirus pandemic, significant violations of the ceasefire in July, and the dramatic escalation between 27 September and 10 November 2020.[102]

## On Balance

In light of the complex institutional architecture of the conflict resolution process in eastern Ukraine, a good flow of information and equally effective coordination among the OSCE actors – including the Special Representatives, Chief Monitor, Chair, Secretary General/CPC – is imperative. Between the Normandy Four and the OSCE, too, standard communication procedures would be highly beneficial. In response to the tensions in the Azov Sea in late November 2018, it was important and correct that the OSCE issue a formal early warning and offer up a range of de-escalation instruments. Even though no de-escalation measures with multilateral support were implemented in the end, the parties did avoid any further escalation. The TCG, a tricky format mediated skillfully by the OSCE, also operates the most successfully when it has political guidance from the Normandy Four format to use as a springboard.

The OSCE takes on very different roles in the negotiation formats for the three protracted conflicts, those in Transnistria, Georgia, and Nagorno-Karabakh. Although it is barely noticed or appreciated by the general public, conflict management is nonetheless important owing to its stabilizing and humanitarian effect. The OSCE is able to support progress toward conflict resolution, but ultimately this remains dependent on the political will of the parties involved.

100 Even if, at present, only the IPRM in Ergneti (with South Ossetia) is operational.

101 This ranged from help with navigating OSCE bureaucracy by way of Exception Reports (ERs) through to using links with the Swiss Mission in New York to secure accommodation for use during the pricey High-level Segment of the UN General Assembly.

102 See also sub-section "The Coronavirus and Conflict" that begins on p. 76.

# The New Security Risks on the OSCE Agenda

How did the OSCE handle "emerging" security risks during my mandate? In order to analyze this question, I will take a look at the issue of cybersecurity, which falls within the scope of the Transnational Threats Department (TNTD). I will also discuss an area in which the OSCE has taken some particularly innovative steps, notably the fight against human trafficking. However, there are three major global challenges that will take center stage in this section, since the way they intersect with security will be of great interest to the OSCE in the future. These are migration, climate change, and rapid technological change, with a particular focus on AI. In addition, I will discuss the nexus between security and the pandemic in another section. Finally, I would like to draw attention to a new actor from outside the OSCE, which is nonetheless highly relevant to security in the OSCE space, namely China.

## Transnational Security Risks: Cybersecurity and Technological Change

Before any other regional organization, the OSCE wanted to agree on confidence-building measures in the area of cybersecurity. Discussions to this effect began in 2011, gained momentum with the creation of an informal working group on "the development of confidence-building measures for reducing risks arising from the use of information and communication technologies" in April 2012,[103] and led to the adoption of eight confidence-building measures (CBMs) in 2013 and eight more in 2016.[104] Broadly speaking, the CBMs can be divided into three categories. The first, "Posturing", primarily concerns the exchange of information on national perceptions of risk, terminology, and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) policies. The second category, "Communication", is the most important and contains the elements of a crisis communication system. The third category, "Preparedness", covers preventive and preparatory measures. These measures have been acknowledged as best practice by the relevant UN mechanisms, and parts of them have been adopted by two regional organizations, namely the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Organization of American States (OAS).

Since 2016, the main challenge has been actually implementing these measures. By mid-2019, the implementation rate across all 16 CBMs was 43 per cent. However, monitoring is made more difficult by a lack of jointly agreed indicators and the absence of a review mechanism. Hungarian OSCE Ambassador Karoly Dan, the proactive Chair of the Informal Working Group, came up with a novel "adopt a CBM!" initiative in order to encourage the participating states to choose a particular CBM and make sure it gets put into practice. Several states, including the Czech Republic, Romania, Hungary, and the Netherlands, were especially interested in adopting CBM 16, which aimed to promote dialogue with the private sector in ICT weaknesses and possible countermeasures. The US adopted CBM 13, which promoted protected communication channels for crisis communication. The Secretariat supported the implementation of these measures through scenario-based exercises, as well as a range of projects with extra-budgetary funding that were aimed at building up capacities in the participating states. CBM implementation roadmaps were used to provide support tailored to the specific needs of individual participating states, such as Ukraine, Uzbekistan, and Montenegro. I also convinced the administrations of Turkmenistan and Belarus to get involved with this program.

However, during my appearances at the cybersecurity-focused events run by the WEF and the Think Tank Summit 2020 organized by *Avenir Suisse,* I noticed that the wider public is still largely unaware of the OSCE CBMs. For this reason, outreach remains a central challenge. In my opinion, it is also important that the crisis communication network is not just used for exercises but also tested soon in real-life scenarios. This is the only way to get the CBMs onto the radar of decision makers.

However, cybersecurity is just one aspect among an array of ever more complex and often interrelated transnational security challenges. New technologies have the potential to amplify these threats, but also to counteract them. They offer powerful tools to criminal networks and malicious non-state actors, but also to government security providers. AI, for example, will have a profoundly transformative impact in the digital realm as well as in the physical world – something that we are only now, and only slowly, beginning to realize. New technologies will have a significant effect not just on the malicious use of cyberspace but also on terrorism and violent extremism, human trafficking, media freedom, and warfare with autonomous weapon systems. As noted earlier, rapid technological change brings new challenges and opportunities alike.

However, it is clear that no single state, not even the most powerful, can successfully counter these transnational threats alone. It is only through cooperation between states and other relevant actors that effective responses can be developed. I am certain that the OSCE offers a suitable platform for systematically discussing the impacts of new technologies, identifying challenges, researching innovative ways to overcome them, and exchanging information on tried-and-tested methods and experiences gained.

There are some areas in which the OSCE has already made further progress in this regard. These include

103 PC.DEC/1039, 26.04.2012.

104 PC.DEC/1106, 03.12.2013 and PC.DEC/1202, 10.03.2016.

the fight against human trafficking. Human traffickers use modern information technology to recruit and exploit their victims, as well as for the associated financial transactions. The potential offered by technological developments can also be used by those seeking to put a stop to these criminals. In order to make this possible, OSCE Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings Val Richey began working closely with the tech industry. This is how, in 2019, I found myself in the Hofburg giving the welcoming address at the Advisory Group meeting of Tech Against Trafficking, a coalition made up of leading technology firms such as Microsoft, Amazon, AT&T, Salesforce.org, and BT.[105] This cooperative endeavor with the tech industry provides support to the law enforcement agencies where it is requested, implements measures to ensure that tech tools and platforms are not misused by criminals, and actively mobilizes human and financial resources for combating human trafficking. A recently published analysis aims to help successful tech tools gain currency in the fight against human trafficking.[106]

In order to create an OSCE platform for investigating the impacts of new technologies on cross-border threats, I launched the Tech4Peace initiative in 2019. Over the following two years, the aim is to hold a number of Tech4Peace forums that use a multi-stakeholder approach to bring together political decision makers, the private sector (in particular the tech industry), and civil society. These forums are designed first and foremost to promote dialogue between the East and West, and they will be run in cooperation with local think tank partners in Washington, Moscow, Brussels, and possibly also Berlin and Vienna.[107] The forums will concentrate on the topics of cybersecurity, human trafficking, and the fight against terrorism and extremism. Initial responses to the initiative from Washington, Moscow, Brussels, and Berlin have been encouraging. Leading think tanks such as the Wilson Center, the RIAC, and the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) have already signaled an interest in hosting the forums.

The Security Day event of 8 November 2019 on the interface between modern technology and security made it clear that states are still lacking comprehensive strategies for addressing the impact of AI on security and stability, although strong concepts do already exist in some sub-areas. This also reflects the current status at the multilateral level. For instance, the Council of Europe has already made good progress in analyzing the impacts of AI on human rights, and it offers policy guidance in this area.[108] Meanwhile, the Special Procedures of the UN Human Rights Council have partnered with the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in order to tackle the topic, working closely with the private sector in the process. The AI recommendations from the OECD are wider ranging but are not specific to security.[109]

The OSCE has begun to address certain facets of AI. For instance, the RFoM launched an initiative in 2019 titled "Spotlight on AI and Freedom of Expression" (#SAIFE), which investigated the impact of AI on the work of journalists and the media.[110] A major question here is how to handle fake news, from the dissemination of simple lies via social media to the production of doctored videos known as "deepfakes."[111] The 2019 edition of the OSCE Annual Police Experts Meeting looked at the risks and opportunities presented by AI for law enforcement. On the one hand, it is possible to use AI algorithms to uncover indications and evidence of crime when examining large quantities of data or to use recognition tools to find objects, criminals, or missing persons. On the other hand, there is a risk that criminals will use ever more sophisticated cyberattacks, spread disinformation via deepfakes, or use automated drones to commit murder.[112] These are all strong arguments for continuing to keep a close eye on the AI-security nexus.

## Migration and Climate Change: Two Issues That Have an Important Interface with Security

Another very broad topic that has a relevant interface with security is migration. This was a marginal issue in the OSCE for many years, but it was propelled very suddenly to the top of the agenda with the advent of the migration/refugee crisis in 2015/2016. Under the German Chairpersonship, an informal working group was created to look at the issue, with Swiss Head of Mission Claude Wild at the helm. Filippo Lombardi, the former representative of Ticino in the Swiss Council of States, also led an active group in the OSCE's Parliamentary Assembly. Both forums endeavored to foster a cooperative approach toward migration governance. It became clear that the OSCE had a comparative advantage in some areas that made it a

105 OSCE, *2018–19 Report of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings,* 2019,

106 OSCE Office of the Special Representative and Co-ordinator for Combating Trafficking in Human Beings and Tech Against Trafficking, *Leveraging innovation to fight trafficking in human beings: A comprehensive analysis of technology tools,* May 2020.

107 The aims of Tech4Peace are: 1) a better understanding of which new technologies will have major impacts on peace and security; 2) a shared understanding of the challenges and opportunities that these technologies will bring; and 3) a space for exchanging best-practice examples and lessons learned in the use of modern technology for the benefit of security and stability, as well as in effectively combating the malicious use of technology by non-state actors.

108 Cf. CoE Commissioner for Human Rights, *Unboxing Artificial Intelligence: 10 steps to protect Human Rights,* May 2019.

109 OECD.ai Policy Observatory, *OECD AI Principles Overview.*

110 OSCE, *Impact of Artificial Intelligence.*

111 Cf. James Andrew Lewis, "Trust Your Eyes? Deepfakes Policy Brief," *Center for Strategic & International Studies,* 23.10.2019.

112 OSCE, *Artificial Intelligence and Law Enforcement: an Ally or an Adversary? Key findings and Outcomes,* OSCE Annual Police Experts Meeting, 23–24 September 2019, CIO.GAL/148/19, 26.11.2019.

Thomas Greminger meeting with former-HR Federica Mogherini, 22 June 2018, EU/OSCE

sought-after partner in policy consulting and capacity building. These areas include protecting the human rights of migrants, for which the ODIHR acts as a center of excellence; fighting crime along migration routes; dealing with foreign terrorist fighters; and the advice offered by the Office of the Co-ordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities (OCEEA) on successful integration policies. As explained earlier[113], despite the efforts of the Italian Chair, a move to enshrine the topic in the OSCE agenda by way of a Ministerial Council decision and define the OSCE's niche ultimately failed. Migration policy is yet another area where the differences between the OSCE participating states appeared insurmountable. This is especially regrettable since the topic is set to remain highly relevant in the future, in view of the sustained migration pressure from Africa and the Middle East.[114]

The Helsinki Final Act of 1975 was highly innovative not just as a driver of the organization's comprehensive and cooperative security concept. It was also one of the first internationally agreed documents to explicitly call for the study of climate change. The Final Act urged the participating states of the CSCE to work together on researching "adaptation to climatic extremes," several years before the first World Climate Conference in 1979. Since then, a number of OSCE documents have made reference to climate change and global warming. For instance, the Madrid Declaration on Environment and Security of 2007 acknowledged that the OSCE has a "complementary role" to play in addressing climate change. Several other decisions by the OSCE have also referenced climate change in relation to aspects such as migration, energy, or reducing the risk of catastrophes.

There is no doubt that climate change is one of the greatest challenges of our time. Scientists from more than 150 countries recently declared a climate emergency. They warned us that we will see more frequent and severe floods, droughts, storms, and heatwaves, as well as an accelerated rise in sea levels. This in turn will lead to increasing scarcity of and growing competition over vital resources such as water. Climate change and its impacts are no longer an imaginary future scenario. In spite of this, the relationship between climate and security is not yet an established fixture of the OSCE's security agenda. Early warning systems and prevention are among the cornerstones of the OSCE's comprehensive approach to security, and it is for precisely this reason that the organization must step up its efforts to support participating states in evaluating climate-related security risks. This work has already begun in some sub-regions. In addition, field operations can play an important role in promoting regional and cross-border cooperation. In my view, however, it falls very clearly to the OSCE to develop climate-sensitive approaches to conflict prevention while also ensuring that climate protection measures are designed with a sensitivity toward conflict-related issues.

While not establishing a direct causal link between climate change and conflict, a climate security dialogue on the OSCE platforms could help to increase political awareness and make it easier to search for common approaches. The challenge now is to win over the skeptics. It is especially important to me that addressing the climate-security nexus should become part of a unifying agenda for the OSCE – in other words, an "island of coop-

113 See sub-section "The Italian Chairpersonship in 2018 under CiOs Angelino Alfano and Enzo Moavero Milanesi" that begins on p. 46.

114 Cf. Eduard Gnesa, "Veränderungen in der europäischen und schweizerischen Migrations- und Flüchtlingspolitik seit 2015, unter Berücksichtigung der Auswirkungen der Covid-19-Pandemie," in: Alberto Achermann / Véronique Boillet / Martina Caroni / Astrid Epiney / Jörg Künzli / Peter Uebersax (ed.), *Jahrbuch für Migrationsrecht 2019/2020*, (Bern: Stämpfli, 2020), pp. 4–32.

eration" and not another topic that deepens the East-West divide. As I have already mentioned, the intersection between climate and security is not completely new territory for the OSCE. For a decade or so, it has been leading projects relating to climate change in close cooperation with other regional and international partners, including the EU, the UNDP, and the United Nations Environment Program (UNEP). At the High-Level Meeting on Climate, Peace, and Security, which was organized by Mogherini and held in Brussels on 22 June 2018, I listed these projects with a certain level of pride. The moderator of the event, then-foreign minister of Sweden Margot Wallström, commended the OSCE for its lead over other international organizations.

In 2019, the OSCE started an important follow-up project in cooperation with the German think tank adelphi: "Strengthening Responses to Security Risks from Climate Change in Southeastern Europe, Eastern Europe, the South Caucasus, and Central Asia." The project promotes a regional approach to climate protection measures that unites national and global initiatives. Its aim is to heighten political awareness of the impacts of climate change on security in the four regions. It also hopes to support dialogue on climate-related security risks at the regional level and to identify measures that will enable neighboring countries to address these risks together.

The work began in Southeastern Europe with a consultation process in order to identify and map climate security hotspots. Actors from governments, NGOs, and higher education institutions took part in this. The next step involved developing cross-border adaptation measures for selected, high-priority hotspots. This undertaking also boosted cooperation at a regional level, thereby helping to build confidence and prevent conflict. The OSCE developed a similar program in partnership with the UfM, which is aimed at the partner countries in the Mediterranean area. Taken together, these initiatives represent an endeavor to turn climate risks into opportunities for cooperation that will strengthen security and stability in the OSCE space.[115]

## China as a Security-relevant Actor in the OSCE Space

Interest in the "China factor" is growing: Today, there is almost unanimous agreement that China's role in the OSCE space also has significant implications for security and stability. However, there is still no consensus on whether or how this issue should be tackled by the organization. My impression was that this is something of a taboo topic that nobody dares discuss. Skeptics assert that China is just another distraction from the "organization's core issues." This usually brings to mind a lack of respect for obligations toward the third dimension, and the matter of conflicts. It is also argued that there are other forums for addressing China. For many of the participating states, this is indeed true. There are many platforms for discussion about, and sometimes with, China – normally among like-minded actors. NATO and the EU both do this in separate processes. The UN, the G20, and the "17+1" process offer further channels for discussions about China, although they do not cover issues relating to security and stability. Yet states outside of the EU and NATO lack a space for discussing these topics. It is very telling that I was informally encouraged by representatives of these very regions to bring China onto the OSCE agenda.

The reluctance to address China in the OSCE from a security perspective undoubtedly also has something to do with the difference of opinion among key actors. While Russia has developed close relations with China, Sino-American relations in recent times have been marked by confrontation and tension. In the struggle for global supremacy, economic and otherwise, competition is the dominating force and a zero-sum logic prevails. Another major reason for skepticism toward the idea of talking with and about China in the OSCE is the uncertainty surrounding how this could be done. I will return to this point later.

China's relevance for security and stability in the OSCE space is closely linked to its growing influence as a result of its "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The BRI was launched in 2013, with the aim of tackling China's domestic problems, such as its excess industrial capacity, and strengthening regional and inter-regional economic cooperation. However, when viewed in the context of China's "community of common destiny for mankind" foreign policy goal, the BRI also reflects the country's ambition to play a larger role on the global stage, in keeping with its growing economic potential and political aspirations. In this regard, China is undoubtedly making a major contribution to connectivity in the OSCE area, in particular in connecting European and Asian markets. The BRI has also enabled China to become a very prominent actor in Southeastern Europe, Central Asia, and Mongolia. This has brought new opportunities for the countries and regions concerned thanks to increased investment and accelerated infrastructure development. However, it is also creating growing dependencies due to rising debt and the loss of control over key infrastructure such as ports and key transport routes. As a result, activities of a predominantly economic nature also take on political and security dimensions.

Equally important on an economic and security policy level is the "Digital Silk Road." This is providing a huge boost to digitalization, but it also harbors risks to security and human rights. Launched in March 2015, the

115 Cf. Thomas Greminger, "The Role of Multilateralism and Multi-Level Governance: An Interview with OSCE Secretary General Thomas Greminger," in: Alexander Carius / Noah Gordon / Lauren Risi (ed.), *21st Century Diplomacy: Foreign Policy is Climate Policy,* 30.09.2020, pp. 71–76.

Digital Silk Road initiative is the part of the BRI that is focused on strengthening Internet infrastructure, promoting Chinese technology companies, and developing common technology standards for the countries involved in the BRI. The main components of the Digital Silk Road include establishing a physical infrastructure in the digital realm, including next-generation mobile networks, such as fifth generation (5G) technology; fiber-optic cables for data transfer via the Internet; and computing centers for data storage. Other elements relate to the development of technologies such as AI or quantum computing, the promotion of digital trade through free-trade zones, and the definition of international standards for cyberspace.

Interest in the Digital Silk Road is high: According to estimates, 16 countries had already signed MoUs with China on cooperation in these areas by late April 2019. Of course, a dynamic of this magnitude is also beginning to generate resistance on competitive grounds. However, many experts view the introduction of 5G technology by Huawei as a strategic challenge with security policy implications, since it could lead to a loss of control over the digital infrastructure that is so fundamental to our modern societies. There are fears that this would leave the West vulnerable to blackmail by China, diminishing its security and its ability to cooperate on security matters.[116] Further problems lie in the area of human rights, where there is potential for such technology to be misused – for instance, through face recognition and state surveillance tools. Following from this is the fear that China's practices involving these new technologies will strengthen autocratic systems and could undermine agreed human rights standards.

Another relevant question in the realm of security policy is that of China's current level of security cooperation with the OSCE participating states. There is evidence that China is stepping up its cooperative endeavors with OSCE countries in this regard. Among these efforts, the most progress has been made with Russia, although the two countries have so far avoided any sort of partnership that looks like a formal military alliance. China also conducted a joint anti-terror training exercise with Kyrgyzstan in August 2019, dubbed "Cooperation 2019," in the autonomous region of Xinjiang in north-western China. Meanwhile, according to media reports, China has been helping Tajikistan to construct border guard posts along the border with Afghanistan, and it has set up a secret outpost at the eastern point of the Afghanistan–Tajikistan border.

China has also been involved in multilateral security cooperation in the region since the early 2000s. It is a founding member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Both organizations illustrate China's approach to multilateral security cooperation, with a strong focus on fighting terrorism, extremism, and separatism – the "Three Evils" according to China. Thus far, however, military cooperation has been relatively modest and has not gone beyond training and anti-terror exercises. The third dimension of the OSCE's view of security is completely absent.

In the past, there was little contact between the OSCE and China, and neither side expressed a clear interest in building closer relations. In clarifying whether this should change in the future, it is imperative to proceed gradually and with caution. In order to build a solid basis for this process and generate some ideas for the initial steps, I instructed the SPSU to produce a paper on the issue in 2019. The result was a 55-page document that offers an excellent starting point for initial informal discussions between the Chair, the Troika, and the participating states on identifying potential routes forward.[117]

In my view, there are several options:

- Using informal platforms to work with the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions to map out opportunities and risks and to discuss potential platforms for dialogue and cooperation;
- Seeking dialogue with the OSCE PA, which is already involved in the China sphere, for instance, through the Silk Road Support Group;
- Re-establishing informal contact with China through the Chair and/or Secretariat and sounding out converging interests;
- Inviting Chinese participants and experts more frequently to OSCE events in areas of converging interest – transnational threats being one such possibility;
- Consolidating the existing relationships with the Secretariats of the SCO, and, if necessary, the CICA, and seeking to cooperate in specific areas such as fighting terrorism and extremism in Central Asia.[118]

Should an interest in dialogue and cooperation be confirmed, this will also lead inevitably to the question of China's formal status in relation to the OSCE being raised at some point. It cannot be assumed that partner status is a realistic option. However, one possibility would be to introduce an observer status, which is already used by other international organizations to define China's relationship with them.

116 Cf. Kadri Kaska / Henrik Beckvard / Tomáš Minárik, "Huawei, 5G, and China as a Security Threat," *NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE),* 2019.

117 Strategic Policy Support Unit, *China in the OSCE Area: Implications for Security and Cooperation,* February 2020.

118 In my third year of office, I met the Secretary General of the SCO, Vladimir Norov, three times. He expressed a clear interest in cooperation, but bringing this to bear would require a great deal of effort and patience due to complex decision-making structures on the SCO's side (see also sub-section "Leveraging Partnerships" on p. 29). The same should also be true for the CICA, whose new Executive Director Kairat Sarybay is a long-serving OSCE Ambassador of Kazakhstan.

### On Balance

Thanks to its CBMs, the OSCE is well positioned to tackle the challenges of cybersecurity. What it needs to do now is to focus on greater communication and practical use of the crisis communication network in order to raise its profile with key decision makers. The rapid pace of technological changes brings both opportunities and risks, putting new, powerful tools into the hands of benevolent and malicious actors alike. It is only through close cooperation between states and other relevant actors, in particular the tech industry and civil society, that the benevolent forces will prevail. This cooperation is already beginning to bear fruit in the fight against human trafficking. The OSCE's comprehensive view of security makes it ideally placed to play a vital role in overcoming the security-related challenges presented by AI. In addition, the organization has proved that it has comparative advantages at the interface between migration and security, for instance, in protecting migrants' human rights, fighting crime along migration routes, and dealing with returning terrorist fighters. In the dialogue on climate security, the OSCE can build on the valuable program work that it has already begun. However, it is important to direct and shape the dialogue so that this becomes a unifying topic and not one that leads to further divisions between East and West. There is no doubt that the China factor is highly relevant to security in the OSCE space. A cautious, gradual process is the way to ensure that the OSCE can talk constructively about – and, when the time comes, with – China.

## The Coronavirus: OSCE Crisis Management and the Nexus between the Pandemic and Security

I will begin this section with a few general thoughts on the coronavirus pandemic and multilateralism. I will then describe the way that the organization has managed the crisis, in view of the competing demands of business continuity and the duty of care. I will also look at the impact that the pandemic has had on conflicts in the OSCE space and on other areas that fall under the OSCE's comprehensive view of security.

One effect of the coronavirus pandemic has been its tendency to accelerate trends. Mistrust and polarization are flourishing: Within states, this can be seen between different social groups, between the so-called elite and the general population, and between the government and the governed. Between states, too, rifts are growing – one notable example is that between China and the US. The pandemic has also accelerated the pace of digitalization and the adoption of new technologies. The Internet has, without doubt, shielded our national economies from even greater damage. However, the ways in which some countries are using AI and big data to control the spread of the virus have raised important questions. For example, are they compatible with fundamental human rights, including the right to privacy? It is clear that the pandemic will have consequences that extend far beyond public health. Unemployment has risen sharply in almost every country, causing millions of people to be suddenly confronted with economic crises that threaten their very survival. Democracy has come under pressure too. The restrictions on human rights and basic freedoms have not always been proportional and time-limited. All of these factors are potential triggers of social unrest and political instability, with the capacity to fuel existing conflicts and spark new ones.

Meanwhile, pressure on multilateral institutions is also growing. Unsurprisingly, unilateral approaches to crisis management dominate in many spheres. At the very start of the pandemic at least, political leaders generally pursued national solo efforts. National borders were closed without coordination, export bans were placed on medicines and protective equipment, and exclusive access to potential vaccines was sought. Meanwhile, another form of political leadership was gathering strength – one that sought to strengthen international cooperation in order to overcome the crisis. This was symbolized in the agreement reached at the EU summit of 17–19 July 2020 in Brussels, which saw the approval of the largest budget and financial package in the Union's history. This included 750 billion EUR for a stimulus package and investment program aimed at combating the consequences of the pandemic. Efforts were also pooled at a phenomenal scale in the race to create a widely avail-

able vaccine as quickly as possible. There is no denying, then, that encouraging signs of a trend reversal can be seen. Between the two poles of unilateralism and multilateral cooperation, we therefore find ourselves at a crossroads: Will the "me first" attitude prevail, or will there be a new dawn for international cooperation? It is too early to say for certain.

## The OSCE's Crisis Management

The OSCE's crisis management focused primarily on working closely with the Chair to navigate a particularly tricky dilemma. A balance needed to be struck between conflicting goals. On the one hand, this involved business continuity, the need to keep operations going and continue to fulfill mandates with as little disruption as possible. On the other hand, there is the duty of care, concerning the safety of our staff, delegates, and partners in the field. I would venture to say that, in comparison with other organizations, the OSCE was very successful in reconciling the two.

As for the specifics: From 26 February 2020 onward, I sent regular interoffice memoranda (IOM) to the Secretariat containing updates and instructions on how to handle the pandemic. For the other executive structures, the IOM were phrased as guidelines that were to be implemented in consideration of the local situation and requirements of the various OSCE locations.[119] On 13 March, I established a crisis management team (CMT) in the Secretariat. This drew up the guidelines that would ensure that we upheld the duty of care toward our staff while enabling us to continue our work. Taking account of the lockdown requirements issued by the Austrian authorities, I instructed the entire Secretariat to move to remote working on 16 March. The only exceptions were a handful of staff in security and building management and in the IT department. The Secretary General also remained on site as the "captain of the ship." However, my main reason for continuing to work from Wallnerstrasse was that I needed access to the IT equipment and the fast Internet connection available on site. With the new measures in place, all the relevant meetings and workflows could be shifted online and continue uninterrupted. On 3 April, remote working also became the rule for all the OSCE's executive structures. There were exceptions in some areas, for instance, field operations such as the SMM, which were carrying out monitoring activities. Clear and confidence-building communication within and outside the Secretariat was one of my top priorities in all the phases of crisis management. For this reason, I recorded regular video messages addressed to all the staff.

From late May, we gradually began to allow staff to return to the Secretariat on a voluntary basis. By mid-June, around 100 out of the 400 or so Secretariat staff could be found in the Secretariat building, at least some of the time. In Vienna, as was the case elsewhere, the lockdown restrictions were eased cautiously in stages. We wanted to act in accordance with the rules and recommendations issued by the national authorities, as well as coordinate with other international organizations. It was also important for us to acknowledge the physical and psychological barriers that had developed. The Palais Palffy, a building with historic significance, only has enough space to house a small proportion of the Secretariat staff if the rule of ten square meters per person is respected. More importantly, however, a considerable number of employees did not feel mentally ready to return to the office while the pandemic was still raging. The heads of department confirmed that productivity had not been impaired by remote working – and for some work, mainly that of a conceptual nature, it had even increased. Equally pressing was the need to acknowledge the extra burden on people with children, who now found themselves juggling home working, homeschooling, and household duties.[120] It is certain that remote working will continue to be much more widespread throughout the OSCE even once we have overcome this crisis. This in turn will contribute to a better balance between work and family commitments.

The lockdown could not stop the OSCE's conference activities for long.[121] Thanks to the clear determination shown by the PC Chair and the Secretariat's management team, and the hard work of the conferencing and voice services and IT specialists, many events were able to go ahead online just one week after the spring recess. These included the meeting of the Permanent Council, the Forum for Security Co-Operation, and the meetings of all the important committees and working groups. To begin with, many delegations were skeptical at the prospect of doing everything digitally. IT security regulations in many places did not permit the use of popular online conferencing platforms such as Zoom and Webex. But in the end, the proverb "where there's a will, there's a way" rang true once again. In mid-June, the Permanent Council returned to the Hofburg, albeit in a hybrid format. This meant that many ambassadors went back to appearing in person, while others attended virtually. Mixed meeting formats of this kind, with some attendees physically present and others taking part online, have since increasingly become a standard practice. This meant that the direct personal contact that is so vital to diplomacy could be resumed, albeit in a restricted form. The hybrid format also

119 One exception to this was the IOM of 1 April 2020, which was a binding instruction that everyone had to follow. This was because I had come to the conclusion that the remote working rule had been implemented too inconsistently by some field operations.

120 Early on in the crisis, we issued relevant tips: OSCE, Infographics – Remote Working: Gender-Sensitive Tips for Managers.

121 No OSCE meetings were held between 16 March and 3 April 2020 (CIO.INF/29/20, 13.03.2020).

offered another advantage for OSCE events, in that it allowed for closer involvement of the capitals. The Swiss Head of Mission, Ambassador Wolfgang Brülhart, proved that it is also possible to conduct diplomatic processes digitally. As the chair of the Informal Working Group on Civil Society Participation, he steered the process of dialogue and negotiations with the aid of four Webex and Zoom plenary meetings and more than 200 bilateral WhatsApp meetings. He also closed with the presentation of the final report, which laid out all the elements involved in solving the difficult problem of facilitating access for civil society organizations to OSCE events in the human dimension. In order to avoid falling into the common trap of monotonous and uninspiring all-online dialogue, he introduced emotionally engaging elements such as a virtual morning tea and virtual shared meals. Another element in his digital repertoire was organizing discussions in breakout groups.[122]

The field operations also adapted quickly to the new situation. A Working Group on Covid-19 Contingency Planning for OSCE Field Operations, overseen by the Crisis Management Team (CMT) and led by CPC Director Tuula Yrjola, systematically tracked the situation in 16 fields of activity. Their monitoring work looked at local responses and coronavirus regulations, the protective measures implemented, support needs, and impacts on the ability to fulfill mandates. In the first few weeks of the crises, I conducted personal conversations with all the Heads of Mission. In many cases, the field operations were able to provide rapid support to the authorities in their host states in managing the corona crisis. For instance, they provided personal protective equipment (PPE) to project partners, such as the border police in Albania and the health authorities in Kyrgyzstan, and assisted minority groups that had been particularly badly affected. Awareness campaigns were carried out through several field operations in order to highlight the elevated risk of violence against women during lockdown and to implement countermeasures.

The missions also began to discuss issues with their host countries that were likely to gain significance in the medium term and/or could be exacerbated by the coronavirus. These included crisis preparedness, corruption prevention, combating human trafficking, and issues surrounding border management, particularly in Central Asia. The cooperation programs in many countries had to be put on hold, or at least heavily reduced, due to lockdown conditions. In many places, training activities were able to continue as online courses. The longer the pandemic went on, the more divergent the situation became in the countries with which we were involved. In the Western Balkans, for example, the authorities reacted rapidly with drastic measures, meaning that – with the exception of Serbia – the first wave was brought under control relatively quickly and with comparatively few victims. Central Asia appeared initially to have avoided the high case numbers seen elsewhere, but this proved to be false when national healthcare systems suddenly found themselves overwhelmed – in the very countries that had previously disputed whether the coronavirus even existed at all. In countries with weak healthcare systems, planning medical evacuation operations was one of the most pressing challenges. In normal times, there is a standard procedure for these via a contract with International SOS. To this end, partnerships were sought at the local level with major bilateral or multilateral presences. Unsurprisingly, our largest operation – the SMM – was also the most complex by far in terms of crisis management. I will go into more detail on this in the next section.

A tool that proved very helpful in the crisis management process was the agile auditing concept that was introduced to the Secretariat by Susanne Früh, the new director of the Office of Internal Oversight (OIO). By conducting half-dozen audits within one or two weeks, we were able to learn very quickly whether we had done the right thing and whether the implemented measures were having the desired effect. One audit looked at the connectivity of employees working remotely. We established that by the end of April, 85 per cent of all staff had full remote access to the OSCE systems. However, we also identified missions where improvements were still needed. Another one of the reviews compared the data material used by our Security Management team against other available data, concluding that our analysis tools were accurate. A further audit looked at whether all the relevant personnel-related risks had been included in our risk matrix. Between 15 and 17 April, we asked all OSCE staff to complete a quick survey. With 1,899 responses, or 48 per cent of staff in total, the response rate was impressive. The answers to questions on topics such as working modalities, system access, personal protective equipment, social distancing, and support needs painted a generally positive picture, but it also highlighted some areas and missions where there was room for improvement.

## The Coronavirus and Conflict

In a joint statement with the heads of the ODIHR, HCNM, and RFoM and the Chair of the Permanent Council, made on 26 March, I gave my explicit support to the call from UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres for a global ceasefire.[123] However, this plea did not have any immediate effect in the OSCE space. All in all, the pandemic has had a negative impact on existing conflicts and the various formats in which the OSCE is involved, to say nothing of the civilian populations affected. There was no sign that the crisis was bringing people closer together. Nor

122 Chairperson IWG CSO, *Final Report*, Vienna, 13.01.2021.

123 CIO.GAL/41/20, 26.03.2020.

was there any indication of attempts being made to establish joint responses to the coronavirus pandemic as a way of building confidence.

In Ukraine, the pandemic hampered the OSCE's operations, but it did not bring them to a complete standstill. The SMM, the office of the OSCE project coordinator, and the monitoring missions at the two Russian border control points were able to continue carrying out their mandates, albeit with some restrictions. Violations of the ceasefire remained a daily occurrence well into July. We also noticed an alarming trend of warning shots being used to intimidate and endanger monitors, even to the point of large-caliber weapons being fired in the immediate vicinity of the patrols. Worryingly, attacks on drones and cameras were also increasing.[124] However, the greatest challenge proved to be the restrictions imposed on the SMM's freedom of movement by the armed units. Under the pretext of coronavirus risk management, the monitors were being de facto denied access to the non-government-controlled areas. The imposition of an unfeasible two-week self-isolation after crossing the contact line made it impossible to carry out the planned rotations in Donetsk and Luhansk. Over the month of June, the number of SMM personnel in the non-government-controlled areas dropped so low that the operations were at risk of being called off.

Back on 23 March, Prime Minister Edi Rama and I had issued a press statement calling for the immediate restoration of the SMM's freedom of movement in eastern Ukraine. In the following weeks and months, numerous public and confidential interventions were made by the Chair, the Troika, the Normandy Two, and the Secretariat, including a letter from me to Foreign Minister Lavrov. However, the situation remained unchanged. A dispute arose over how to respond to the intransigent stance of the de facto authorities. Should a hard, principled line be taken or a more diplomatic and pragmatic approach? The Chief Monitor Halit Cevik and I opted for the latter, and eventually we prevailed. We suggested that the monitors on the contact line could take polymerase chain reaction (PCR) tests and therefore enter the non-government-controlled areas without needing to quarantine. Despite needing considerable diplomatic efforts to get it over the line, this face-saving proposal was finally adopted and continues to be practiced successfully to this day.

Since the start of the pandemic, the TCG and its four working groups have met exclusively via video conferencing. This online format appears to have further exacerbated the already polarized climate, with the majority of meeting time being lost to formalistic quarrels over status-related issues. The optimistic spirit of the Normandy Four format's December summit was at risk of evaporating altogether. However, then, as explained earlier, a breakthrough was achieved. This was the result of new political impetus from the Normandy Four camp – in particular, a productive meeting between the Ukrainian and Russian negotiators Andriy Yarmak and Dmitry Kozak – and successful negotiations in the TCG. The recommitment to the ceasefire on 27 July brought ceasefire violations to an all-time low,[125] which made it possible to turn the focus back to the political aspects of the Minsk agreements. However, it is reasonable to assume that ceasefire violations will again rise in future if no real progress is made here.

Negotiations on the resolution of the Transnistrian conflict have also been heavily affected by the pandemic. Here, too, the coronavirus was used as a pretext for introducing severe restrictions on people's freedom to move across the administrative boundary line. All the planned formal and informal meetings for the 5+2 format were postponed. Despite the valiant efforts by the OSCE Head of Mission, the meetings of the working groups and between the two chief negotiators were also suspended. Plans had been made for a summit meeting between Vadim Krasnoselsky and Igor Dodon. This was the work of the highly motivated Special Representative Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting. Unfortunately, the meeting did not go ahead because none of the actors involved could make any guarantees in regard to the desired results.

It was a similar story for the international discussions in Geneva on managing the consequences of the Georgian conflict. Despite the efforts of the Co-Chairs – the OSCE, the UN, and the EU – this meeting was postponed indefinitely. However, the IPRM hotline remained operational and efforts to cultivate bilateral contacts within the GID network continued apace. It was even possible for a physical IPRM meeting to take place in Ergneti for its 96th edition on 30 July 2020.

The Co-Chairs of the OSCE Minsk Group (on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict) kept the channels of communication open through regular online meetings with the two foreign ministers. However, they were unable to stop the slowdown of the positive momentum gained in Geneva in January. The tone became much harsher and patience was wearing thin. The confidence-building monitoring operations along the ceasefire line had to be suspended by the personal representative of the OSCE Chair, Ambassador Andrzej Kasprzyk, due to coronavirus regulations in Armenia and Azerbaijan. Of course, he continued to use digital means to maintain contacts on both sides. As mentioned above, events took a dramatic turn between 12 and 16 July with the severe violations of the ceasefire that left at least 18 people dead, including a general on the Azerbaijani side. However, this paled in

124 See sub-section "The Flagship: Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine" that begins on p. 58.

125 On 3 November 2020, the Ukrainian presidential administration lauded the fact that the ceasefire was still holding after 100 days, and that the number of casualties among the Ukrainian troops had decreased by 88.9 per cent (Interfax.ua).

comparison to the escalation of violence that occurred in the fall of 2020. On 10 November, a ceasefire brokered by Russia ended a six-week war that had resulted in several thousand fatalities among the armies of both sides, as well as hundreds of civilian casualties. Russian peacekeeping forces operate in the Nagorno-Karabakh region. However, there is still no peace agreement and the status of Nagorno-Karabakh remains unclear. It would therefore be expedient for the peace process to continue under the direction of the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group as soon as possible.[126]

## The Nexus between the Pandemic and Security

While crisis management was ongoing, we at the Secretariat began to consider what impact the pandemic might have on the various aspects of the OSCE's comprehensive view of security. Early on in the crisis, we had already worked with the institutions to put some initial ideas down on paper. We would have liked to have discussed these with the participating states, with the involvement of the capitals and possibly also the ministerial ranks for visibility reasons. However, there was some resistance to this idea. It was argued that the OSCE is not a health organization, and that the coronavirus should not be allowed to become an all-encompassing issue. The Chair therefore opted for a bottom-up approach and initially threw the nexus question over to the specialist committees for discussion – but always with the intention that this would lead to a wider debate later on. Unfortunately, the leadership crisis put a stop to this.

All three committees subsequently went on to hold meetings focusing on the coronavirus pandemic. In the Security Committee, the central topics were border management, cybersecurity, cybercrime, and the fight against terrorism. The Transnational Threats Department quickly produced background papers on these issues, although these were never published. Nonetheless, the key messages were conveyed in the committees and in a coronavirus blog. For instance, the paper on the links between the pandemic and violent extremism highlighted the risk that terrorist groups would exploit the societal uncertainty and vulnerability caused by the pandemic to recruit new members and incite hatred. They would also adapt to the new security environment, developing new operational capabilities and identifying new targets. This would mean a greater risk to 'soft' targets and critical infrastructure.[127]

In the Economic and Environmental Committee, as well as in the meetings leading up to the Economic and Environmental Forum, the focus was on digitalization and fighting corruption in corona times. The Coordinator of OSCE Economic and Environmental Activities also organized a series of webinars on relevant topics in the context of the pandemic. The Human Dimension Committee looked at media freedom, protecting minorities from discrimination, and, in particular, the restriction of basic freedoms by emergency laws. It quickly became clear that in the OSCE space, too, the requirement for such laws to be proportional and time-limited was not always being met. The institutions and the PA contributed actively to discussing these issues and defined clear areas of focus. For example, the HCNM published a paper on 21 April detailing coronavirus measures that support social cohesion.[128] The ODIHR's work in this area culminated in the report "OSCE Human Dimension Commitments and State Responses to the Covid-19 Pandemic" published on 17 July.[129]

The pandemic had a considerable impact on electoral processes in the OSCE space[130] – which naturally also affected another of the OSCE's core practices, namely election observation. The OSCE PA listed a series of the typical adjustments made to its observation missions:[131]

- All observers had to be tested for the coronavirus before traveling to the mission location. In Georgia, the host authorities offered all international election observers a test upon their arrival.
- Some missions were intentionally scaled down in order to respect the travel restrictions in the guest country.
- The Secretariat worked with the participating states on overcoming travel restrictions related to the pandemic.
- Local regulations on gatherings were strictly adhered to, which meant that the majority of meetings were held in a hybrid format.
- Larger vehicles were procured for transporting personnel.
- Staff hired locally, such as drivers and interpreters, were tested for the coronavirus before commencing work.
- All observers were given masks and hand sanitizer, and they were informed of the local pandemic guidelines. This meant that here, too, the OSCE was able to fulfill its mandate in a manner appropriate to the circumstances.

126 A good analysis of the events and possible next steps can be found in the report from the International Crisis Group, *Improving Prospects for Peace after the Nagorno-Karabakh War,* Briefing 91, 22.12.2020.

127 OSCE Transnational Threats Department (TNTD), *Impact of COVID-19 pandemic on efforts to address violent extremism and terrorism,* IOM, 30.04.2020.

128 OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, *Streamlining diversity: COVID-19 measures that support social cohesion,* HCNM.GAL/2/20, 21.04.2020.

129 OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights, *OSCE Human Dimension Commitments and State Response to the Covid-19 Pandemic,* OSCE/ODIHR, 17.07.2020.

130 International IDEA led investigations into the impacts of COVID-19 on elections and electoral administration: International IDEA Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, *Global overview of COVID-19: Impact on elections,* 10.02.2021 https://www.idea.int/news-media/multimedia-reports/global-overview-covid-19-impact-elections

131 Email from Andreas Baker, Head of Elections, OSCE PA, to the author, 15.12.2020.

The first Structured Dialogue event of 2020 in the capital city format took place in early June. Thanks to the online format, a large number of high-ranking representatives from the respective capitals were able to attend. It was with a sense of disillusionment that the participants established that the majority of CSBMs and disarmament activities had been temporarily suspended due to the pandemic. Many of the participating states stressed that this situation could not be allowed to become permanent and that more flexibility was needed to resume verification measures as soon as possible. I agree that this is important in order to prevent a de facto suspension of politico-military obligations.

In summary, we can see that there is barely a single aspect of security that has not been affected by the pandemic. Looking to the WHO or other organizations, it is clear that the issue cannot simply be ignored by the OSCE. At some point, the participating states will have to start considering the longer-term implications of the coronavirus pandemic on security. This means they will also have to think about how high up the OSCE agenda the pandemic-security nexus should be. Unfortunately, the decision that the Ministerial Council in Tirana had been working toward did not come to pass because one participating state refused to join the consensus. Nonetheless, the Chairpersonship Statement on COVID-19, which was approved by 56 of the participating states, is a substantial and important step in the right direction.[132]

## On Balance

The pandemic has served to accelerate existing trends. This is just as much the case for the polarization between states and within societies as it is for digitalization. It has brought us to a crossroads where we must choose between unilateralism and multilateral cooperation. The OSCE demonstrated successful crisis management in that it struck a good balance between protecting staff and fulfilling its mandate, thereby allowing it to continue its tasks in a format appropriate to the circumstances. This could be seen not only in its conference organization activities, where the Chair and the Secretariat initiated a real push toward digitalization, but also in the activities of the field operations and institutions. The hope that the common fight against the coronavirus could be used in conflict management as an opportunity for CBMs was never realized. In fact, quite the opposite occurred. Certain parties appeared to use the pandemic as a pretext for further restricting the freedom of movement of populations and OSCE actors. The verdict on how the coronavirus has been handled in the various negotiation formats is mixed at best. For the TCG and the Co-Chairs of the Minsk Group, the online nature of the negotiations made it difficult to establish a constructive and trusting dynamic. The conceptual work undertaken on the interface between the pandemic and security underscores the significance of this nexus. This work must be continued, and its value must be formally recognized in the Chairpersonship Statement and beyond.

132 OSCE, *Chairmanship Statement on COVID-19,* MC.27EW20, 15.12.2020.

# Final Analysis and Conclusions

In the introduction, I used keywords to sketch a rough outline of the political environment in which the OSCE is currently active: low levels of trust in multilateral institutions and mechanisms for solving global problems, with the political winds blowing in favor of unilateral and transactional approaches. The key state actors in Euro-Atlantic security are growing ever more polarized. Acutely violent conflicts have become a reality in the OSCE space, arms control regimes are in disarray, and the risk of military incidents is growing. Let us hope that the new Biden administration can stop or maybe even reverse some of these trends. This is especially important since transnational security threats, which can only be tackled by working together across borders, are growing in number. We are confronted with a paradox in which multilateral cooperation is being called into question and avenues for discourse are being cut off, all while the need for cooperation and real dialogue grows ever more urgent. This situation is mirrored within the OSCE.

We will only find our way out of this dead end if we re-establish cooperative security as one of the central approaches to security in the OSCE space. This requires a new narrative that makes it clear that the security risks of the 21st Century can only be sustainably overcome through international cooperation. Political leadership is needed in order to bring about the thoughts and actions required to achieve this. Policy based on this philosophy must be accompanied by a wide-ranging movement within society.[133] As is often said, peace and stability are too important to be left to the diplomats. A resounding and impressively substantial affirmation of this philosophy can be found in the petition to the German *Bundestag* titled "The 45th Anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act and the 30th Anniversary of the Charter of Paris – Strengthening the OSCE for the Tasks that Lie Ahead"[134], which gained broad support by all major political parties except the one on the far right.

Although new security risks call for new policies, there is no need for a complete reinvention of the principles of security cooperation in the OSCE space. They can already be found in the key documents of the CSCE/OSCE process: the Helsinki Final Act, the Charter of Paris, and the Istanbul and Astana Summit Declarations. In fact, what is needed is a process that enables the participating states to agree on what these principles mean today so that they can credibly reaffirm their commitment to uphold them. Such a process must also create space for constructively tackling the dilemmas inherent in the principles and rules laid down. The right of the people to self-determination versus territorial integrity; the non-interference in domestic affairs versus the direct and legitimate concern of all the participating states regarding compliance with human dimension commitments; and the indivisibility of security versus the right of each state to choose its security arrangements freely – these are just a few important principles with the potential for a serious conflict of objectives. A broad-based diplomatic process that will prepare us well for the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act in 2025 is the most promising way forward.

However, it is also clear that the preconditions for launching such an ambitious process have not yet been met. Key actors show no interest, while the states affected by conflict would not tolerate such a process. Over the next two to three years, therefore, fewer wide-ranging goals should be pursued. Ideally, and so long as progress is also made in resolving conflicts such as in and around Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh, and Georgia, this will lay the foundations on which to start building the process outlined above. Hopefully, this can ultimately lead to a credible reaffirmation of the Helsinki Principles. The objectives in the initial, preparatory phase would focus on strengthening institutions and improving the OSCE's capacity for action. It is also crucial that the process gains political support in this first phase. Past processes, including the "Helsinki+40" process led by Switzerland, have shown that – in addition to having a fair political wind, which is not something that can be controlled – the factors for success are a substantive focus, a carefully considered process design, and, in particular, political support. In a similar way to the CSCE era, what may be needed now is a group of committed countries who are prepared to initiate and support a process. In the past, these have often been the neutral and non-aligned countries (N+N). Of course, such an undertaking would require close coordination with the Chair and Troika, and it would need to be, at the very least, tolerated by the key actors.

If I take a critical look at my time as Secretary General, on balance, it was inevitably mixed. A critical analysis of the outcomes achieved under the Fit4Purpose reform agenda shows that it has been possible to implement a considerable number of measures aimed at boosting efficiency and efficacy (see also text box 8).

133 Cf. Günther Bächler, "Kriegsgefahren in Europa mit kooperativer Sicherheit begegnen (Gastkommentar)," *NZZ*, 17.01.2020.

134 19th Bundestag, Petition by the CDU/CSU, SPD, FDP, and BÜNDNIS 90/DIE GRÜNEN, "45 Jahre Schlussakte von Helsinki, 30 Jahre Charta von Paris – Die OSZE für künftige Aufgaben stärken," 17.11.2020.

**Text Box 8: Implementation of the Ten-Point Reform Agenda: Results and Goals Yet to Be Achieved[135]**

| Objective | Results | Not yet achieved |
|---|---|---|
| Using the OSCE as a platform for supporting inclusive dialogue and joint action | Supporting the Structured Dialogue; consolidating/creating informal spaces for dialogue; initiatives for promoting cooperative security | The resilience of the Structured Dialogue; the use of dialogue platforms for purposes beyond public diplomacy |
| Positive unifying agenda | Strategic planning capacity created; relevance of this approach confirmed; modern security risks moved up the OSCE agenda | Broad political support for the approach, but the terminology needs to be reviewed; creating a more systematic framework for strategic planning tools |
| Leveraging partnerships | Various MoUs with UN organizations, UfM, LAS; exchange of letters with the EU | Creating liaison offices; eliminating the obstacles to cooperation with partner countries in the Mediterranean and Asia; clarifying cooperation with the private sector |
| Management reform in the Secretariat | 68 of 77 measures implemented; substantial savings and efficiency gains | Implementing the planned shared service centers; finalizing the resource mobilization strategy and action plan; implementing changes to the organization chart |
| Making a difference on the ground | Local ownership strengthened; clearer profiles and longer-term planning | "Light" presence (cooperation on programs without a formal presence on the ground); thematic hubs |
| Reform of the budget cycle | Budget documentation streamlined; more user-friendly performance-based program reporting (PBPR) | Two-year budget; longer program outline periods and use of a strategic steering instrument; capital investment plan; reform of the scales of contribution |
| Investing in staff | Pilot project for direct applications for seconded positions; talent acquisition program | Contract staff: longer terms of office for directors, gap between appointment periods; both reform plans for seconded staff |
| Fostering inclusivity for women and young people in all three dimensions | Balanced managerial team; Gender Parity Strategy; studies on the glass ceiling and on women in the first dimension; Safe Space Survey; action plan for combating sexual harassment in the workplace; process for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse<br><br>Youth and Security Framework; mainstreaming pilot for Serbia mission | Review of the implementation of action plans; more female candidates for HoM positions; more female Chairperson-in-Office Representatives |
| Technology as an enabler | Information security; automating work processes; workplace transformation; technical equipment for the SMM; cooperation with the tech industry | Consolidation of ICT governance; insufficient human/financial resources |
| Strengthening and refining the OSCE's profile | Social media presence; storytelling/human impact stories; media presence through missions by the Secretary General | Modern brand; revision of PC/DEC 485/2002 |

This should dispel any notion that the OSCE is incapable of or immune to reform. That is the positive message for the future. However, it must also be noted that some reforms essential for the proper functioning of the organization are stuck in the early stages, or at the very least, they have not yet been pushed over the finish line. This is particularly true of budget reform and the reforms concerning contract and seconded staff. The plan to create shared service centers also offers a great deal of potential.

We have achieved commendable progress in the area of gender parity. I am particularly proud of the new managerial team, in which women are equally represented. Here, I can also mention the approval and rapidly

135 For the period from 14 February 2018 to 18 July 2020.

progressing implementation of the Gender Parity Strategy, the action plan for combating sexual harassment in the workplace, and the work on preventing sexual exploitation and abuse. However, the successful consolidation of this progress is dependent on the organization continuing to strengthen its internal governance structures (the key principles being internal justice, conflict prevention, and ethics). The organizational structure of the Secretariat is fit for purpose and does not require any radical changes. However, a few improvements to the organization chart – some suggested and some already put into practice – would make it easier for the Secretariat to function effectively. The participating states would do well to give the Secretariat the space it needs to enact management reforms rather than descending into micromanagement.

Thanks to the support of a dedicated Secretariat team, we succeeded in providing valuable assistance to four very different Chairs, thereby guiding the OSCE through stormy waters.

In a polarized world, the OSCE has been able to maintain its position as an inclusive platform for dialogue, and even expand it somewhat through informal dialogue spaces. Strategic planning capacities have been created in the Secretariat, to the benefit of the Chair and the Troika. However, there is still potential to exploit these more systematically. Partnerships with other international organizations in the entire OSCE space and beyond have been deepened. A particularly significant development has been the strengthening of the OSCE in relation to the EU and the UN and its sub-organizations and special organizations.

The Secretariat was able to provide significant support, both in substantive and logistical terms, to the formats aimed at resolving the conflict in eastern Ukraine and the three protracted conflicts. This is especially true for our flagship operation, the SMM. However, the flare-up in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has revealed the limits of the OSCE's conflict management abilities. If the parties do not find the will to make progress in resolving the conflict, there is a considerable and enduring risk that it will escalate further. Should one party choose the path of military escalation, the OSCE has no means of stopping the violence.

Last but not least, I was able to put some momentum behind getting newer transnational security risks onto the OSCE agenda, or at least preparing the organization for them. Here, I am thinking in particular of the interfaces between security and migration, climate change, and rapid technological change such as the advancements in AI – as well as the "China factor." We have also successfully weathered the storm of the pandemic and the challenges it has posed in our offices and out in the field. This has been achieved by striking a good balance between protecting staff and fulfilling our mandate.

Admittedly, there have been long periods where the question of my mandate was of little concern to me. It was specific events such as a particular SG's Hour, one OSCE focus seminar, and the renewal hearing of 5 June 2020 that really forced me to study the various requirements intensively.[136] It was usually obvious to me what needed to be done: making management decisions, showing leadership, and representing the organization confidently at all levels. However, it was also clear that it would not be sufficient simply to lament the crisis facing multilateralism – the organization would need to undergo reform in order to remain "Fit4Purpose." Even though there were some dissenting voices, I was convinced that the participating states generally saw the value in reform. This ties in with how I perceive the role of Secretary General – obligated to remain impartial at all times, of course, but not forbidden from speaking up. Nonetheless, I am convinced that if the participating states had a clearer understanding of the Secretary General's role, this would enable its potential to be leveraged more systematically. While participating states do not dispute the management responsibilities at a conceptual level, they do not provide the Secretary General with the necessary room for action. Another issue is the much more broadly defined tasks of the CAO under the executive structures, which become all the more significant in crisis situations and in response to complex security risks. Finally, this, of course, also concerns the politico-diplomatic functions performed as a representative of the Chairperson-in-Office. A suitable process for clarifying these roles with the participating states and the Chair therefore appears to me to be expedient (see text box 9).

As far as conclusions are concerned, I have formulated several recommendations. Here, I differentiate between mostly technical and mostly political measures, in the full knowledge that this distinction is somewhat arbitrary. I have intentionally limited my recommendations to what I believe is "within range" for the organization. Therefore, measures that are necessary but have been deadlocked for many years, such as clarifying the OSCE's legal status or creating a constituent document, have deliberately been left off the list.

In the case of the more technical recommendations, which are listed in text box 9, the main priority is completing and consolidating the Fit4Purpose reform agenda that I initiated. These recommendations are particularly relevant where they relate to strengthening the organization at the institutional level.

136 See sub-section "The Mandate of the Secretary General" that begins on p. 42.

**Text Box 9: Technical Recommendations**

- Consolidate the informal dialogue platforms such as the "Security Day" and "Talking Points" events; give further encouragement to Track 2 platforms such as the Cooperative Security Initiative or the Perspectives 20-30 initiative; guide the dialogue with the OSCE Network of Think Tanks and Academic Institutions more systematically.
- Further clarify and strengthen the general conditions for cooperating with the OSCE's non-traditional partners – the private sector, international funding organizations, and bilateral development organizations.
- Improve coordination and cooperation between the Secretariat and the institutions under the motto of "to deliver as one," without undermining their autonomy. Create a culture of unity.
- Complete the management reform process by creating the shared service centers, finalizing the resource mobilization strategy, and making minor adjustments to the organizational structure.
- Carry out budget reform by giving the program outline a longer-term perspective, introducing a two-year budget, and creating a capital investment plan.
- Undertake the HR reforms for seconded and contract staff in order to boost the OSCE's competitiveness on the job market.
- Actively implement the gender policies by conducting mid-term reviews of the Gender Parity Strategy and the action plan for combating sexual harassment in the workplace, adjusting the action plans accordingly, and adopting the strategy for the prevention of sexual exploitation and abuse.
- Clarify and improve the communication channels in the conflict management architecture (Normandy Four, TCG, SMM, Chair, SG/CPC), and create standard operating procedures.
- Strengthen the OSCE's tools for the conflict cycle in the context of the ten-year anniversary of Ministerial Council decision 3/2011 and improve awareness of the early response toolbox among OSCE actors.
- Modernize the OSCE's communications policy by defining a modern OSCE brand that revises PC decision 485/2002 and increases human resources.

The ten political recommendations are as follows (summarized in text box 10):

1. Against the backdrop of the 50th anniversary of the Helsinki Final Act, a diplomatic process should be launched within the OSCE that strengthens the concept of cooperative security and makes it possible to credibly reaffirm the fundamental principles of cooperation.
2. The Ministerial Council should agree on a "compact for an efficient organization": It should make the provision of a timely and adequate budget for the organization a political concern; eliminate the time-consuming obstacles that stand in the way of adopting agendas for routine OSCE meetings (resolving the CSO access problem, introducing standard agendas); and support further measures that improve its capability to act. Greater political commitment here would also, at the very least, prevent individual participating states from constantly making links between unrelated topics and thereby bringing the entire organization to a deadlock.
3. The OSCE's flagship dialogue platform, the Structured Dialogue, should be strengthened by means of a higher public profile, a term of at least two years for the Chairpersonship and the work plan, and the involvement of non-state actors (academia, think tanks, civil society).
4. The OSCE's Chairpersonship model should be made more attractive and straightforward in line with the suggestions made by the SPSU.
5. The organization's strategic planning should be further supported by consolidating capacities in the Secretariat (SPSU) and further developing the available tools (four-year program outline, multi-year plan for the Troika).
6. The strategic partnerships with the UN and its sub-organizations and special organizations, the EU, and – if the interest is there – with other international organizations should be strengthened (multi-year campaign/work plans, straightforward liaison offices). This also involves aligning the OSCE's work more clearly with achievement of the SDGs.
7. Cooperation with the OSCE partner countries in the Mediterranean and Asia should be intensified by topping up the partnership funds with regular and extra-budgetary resources, removing the "out of area" restriction, and having the Troika put forward multi-year plans.
8. In addition to the existing field operations, a new cooperation model ("light footprint") should be created that will enable multi-year programs of cooperation without a formal presence on the ground and with funding from the regular budget.

9. The role of the Secretary General should be clarified through pragmatic discussions with the participating states and a clarification of the political role with the CiO and the Permanent Council Chair. Specific objective: The Secretary General should be given more freedom to act in the management sphere and their political role should be clearly defined as a function of the Chair's expectations.
10. The nexus issues that are vitally important for the future should be given the due importance, attention, and resources. Specifically, this concerns the interfaces between security and pandemics, migration, the climate, and rapid technological change, including AI. Fear of the "China factor" should be dispelled.

**Text Box 10: Summary of Political Recommendations**

- "Helsinki+50" process
- "Compact for an efficient organization with the capability to act"
- Innovative Structured Dialogue
- A more attractive OSCE Chairpersonship model
- Further development of strategic planning
- Expansion of strategic partnerships with international organizations, development organizations, and the private sector; keeping sight of the SDGs
- Strengthening partnerships in the Mediterranean and in Asia
- New "light footprint" cooperation model for joint program work
- Leveraging the potential of the Secretary General more systematically
- Anchoring new nexus issues (technology/AI, climate, migration, pandemic) on the OSCE agenda; dispelling fear of the "China factor"

The OSCE is a unique organization. As an inclusive forum for dialogue, as a manager and mediator of conflict, and as a provider of support in tackling security threats and implementing OSCE commitments, it plays a vital role in preserving security and stability in the Euro-Atlantic and Euro-Asian realm. However, its potential as a producer of cooperative security has long gone underused by the participating states. In today's highly polarized environment, the organization must tread carefully. In this respect, working to achieve effective multilateralism represents a determined commitment to creating an organization with the capability to act. In my time as the Chair of the Permanent Council and as the Secretary General, it became clear to me that the OSCE best achieves its potential when the participating states and the executive structures – Secretariat, institutions, PA, and field missions – all pull together in the same direction and strive for cooperation with one another and within themselves. Needless enmity and competition are counterproductive. In both roles, I also gained an understanding of what the Secretariat can achieve. Not only does it have an institutional memory and diplomatic and technical expertise, it is also fully capable of taking action. Respecting and using this immense resource properly will pay dividends.

**Part III: The OSCE on the Ground**

# OSCE Mediation in Ukraine: Challenges and Opportunities

*Anna Hess Sargsyan**

## Inclusivity of the OSCE: An Asset and a Liability

When it comes to analyzing conflicts and relevant peace processes, one of the key elements along with actors and issues is the context within which both conflicts and peace processes unfold. Contextual factors tend to have a tangible impact on both conflict dynamics and peace processes, since neither of these happen in a vacuum. These factors can cover a wide spectrum, ranging from big power politics and environmental phenomena to internal political and socio-cultural idiosyncrasies, within which all relevant peace and security processes evolve.

The crisis in and around Ukraine, as well as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) mediation efforts to address it, is no exception. When talking about the causes of the conflict, as well as the setup and progress of the peace process dealing with it, one cannot emphasize enough the relevance of geopolitical tensions between Russia and the Western powers as a key contextual factor, as David Lanz mentions in his chapter. The long-standing divergence of geopolitical interests and value systems between the two can be seen as a factor that not only had an impact on the outbreak of the conflict but also as one impeding a solution. These interests became more divergent after the Ukraine conflict erupted, bringing relations between Russia and the West to their lowest levels since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, some analysts have been talking about the return of the Cold War since 2014, when the crisis in and around Ukraine unfolded and Russia annexed Crimea.

Geopolitical tensions are back in the game, impacting not only military dynamics on the ground but also diplomatic efforts. The renewed rivalry between the two power blocs has been nowhere more evident than in the OSCE, paradoxically the only organization well suited to deal with the crisis. Despite this and diverging interests and perceptions, both Russia and Western states seem to agree that the OSCE is the only organization that should be mandated to deal with the crisis in and around Ukraine.

It is against this backdrop that this chapter will analyze the efforts undertaken by the OSCE to deal with the crisis in Ukraine. First, the chapter will unpack the different interests of the two camps and how this plays out in both their attitudes toward the OSCE and what they expect from the organization. The second part of the chapter will briefly touch upon the multifaceted and multi-formatted peace process that was put together under the OSCE umbrella despite the increasing hostility between Russia and Western participating states. Finally, the chapter concludes by identifying key interim lessons learned from the Ukraine experience – interim because it is still going on – and by analyzing the repercussions of the 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh in 2020. This conflict has not only challenged multilateral diplomacy by the OSCE but essentially rendered the organization's mediation efforts irrelevant, at least in the Nagorno-Karabakh context.

## The OSCE: Hostage to Perceptions

Established in 1975 as the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) to bridge the ideological divide between the Soviet Union and the Western bloc by promoting a sustainable dialogue, the OSCE remains the only cooperative security organization to date that spans from "Vancouver to Vladivostok." Through the Helsinki process, and after two years of negotiations, the two blocs of the then 35 member states agreed on a core of 10 binding political principles for peaceful co-existence in Europe, based on an innovatively defined, broad and comprehensive conception of security.[1] These came to be known as the Helsinki Decalogue[2] – which includes respect for territorial integrity, the right to self-determination, the inviolability of borders, the peaceful dispute of settlements, among other principles[3] – and they were to guide and regulate relations between the participating states in the decades to come. At the time of the *détente,* this was a major achievement and was consolidated in the Helsinki Final Act, a document based on compromise – namely, the West would accept the territorial integrity and the borders of Europe as they were then, while the East would agree to negotiate the human dimension of security,[4] which extends the definition of security beyond militaries to incorporate fundamentals such as democracy and human rights.[5]

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* The views of this contribution correspond to the perspective of the author. They do not reflect the perspective of the author's institution.

1 Christian Nünlist, "The OSCE and the Future of European Security," *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* 202 (2017).

2 OSCE, *History,* osce.org.

3 CVCE, *Helsinki Decalogue (1 August 1975),* cvce.eu, 2016.

4 Daniel Trachsler, "The OSCE: Fighting for Renewed Relevance," *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* 110 (2012).

5 OSCE, *What Is the Human Dimension,* osce.org.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought the Cold War to an end, but a wave of ethno-political and ethno-territorial conflicts erupted in the wake of this event, something which became the focus of the OSCE's conflict settlement efforts. The end of the Cold War was also followed by a wave of democratization, bringing to the fore the need for establishing democratic processes and political traditions in participating states transitioning from communist to democratic regimes. As these internal political and socio-economic transitions occurred within its participating states, the OSCE developed from a conference into a full-blown organization with independent institutions.

For most Western participating states who happen to be members of NATO and the EU, the OSCE has never been an institution strictly focused on military security. This is why their predominant focus in the organization has been on the human dimension of security. While the EU and NATO offered more exclusive alliances for Western states, for Russia the OSCE remains the only regional security platform where it stands on an equal footing with Western states when it comes to decision-making procedures. However, over time, the OSCE's focus in countries "east of Vienna" on issues such as election monitoring and the promotion of human rights came to be seen by Russia and some other states as an encroachment on domestic politics, with the perception of there being an uneven geographic and thematic focus. In short, the West saw the OSCE as a platform for the democratization of Eastern European states, while Russia saw the organization as a common security platform.

In the face of EU and NATO enlargement, as well as the continued Western focus on the human dimension in the newly independent states of the post-communist bloc, these perceptions were confirmed. From the Russian perspective, the West was trying to bring in regime change in the Eastern bloc and was essentially using the OSCE as an instrument to promote its interests in Russia's traditional sphere of influence. For Western states, this expansion was about promoting the human dimension of security, which was seen by Russia as a clear threat to its interests and to exclude Russia from a common European security architecture. This was not what Russia had initially hoped for.[6] In their turn, Western states viewed Russia's long-standing interests in the OSCE "as a vehicle to advance Russia's goal of having a *droit de regard* on all security decisions in Europe."[7]

It is in this logic that Russia has been pursuing the consolidation of its political-military interests in its sphere of influence by creating alternative alliances and pursuing integration projects such as the Eurasian Economic Union. The aspirations of former Soviet Republics to move closer to the EU through deep and comprehensive trade agreements have hence been viewed by Russia with a lot of caution. The more some of the post-communist OSCE participating states aspired to join the European or Euro-Atlantic political and security alliances, the more acutely Russia perceived them as moving out of its sphere of influence and, as a result, a direct threat to its interests. Georgia and Ukraine were no exceptions to this. It is thus no surprise that after the 2008 Georgia-Russia war, Russia-West relations were at an all-time low in 2014 when the Ukraine crisis erupted.

East-West cooperation within the OSCE has never been smooth and the divide has essentially never been fully bridged. This is due to key factors including the participating states' political-military development and orientation, especially in the post-Cold War period; the primary focus of the member states being on either the political-military dimension or the human dimension; and, related to these primary concerns, the geographical focus of the organization's activities.

For a better understanding of the full dynamics of East-West tensions within the OSCE, it is also essential to look at the impact of these tensions on the organization's conflict settlement efforts. Across time and space, this fluctuating antagonism between Russia and the West has played out differently in different protracted conflicts, including those in Nagorno-Karabakh, Transnistria, Abkhazia and South Ossetia, and Ukraine.

Within the OSCE Minsk Group, which deals with the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, there seems to have always been close cooperation and an agreement between the Russian, US and French Co-chairs of the group, at least nominally. This is due to a number of factors, the most important of which is that cooperation in the group is tightly linked to the vested interests of the mediating countries in the South Caucasus. Drawing parallels between the Ukraine and Nagorno-Karabakh processes is a subject for a more nuanced study, but it is important to highlight that cooperation in a mediation format does not necessarily translate into a successful management of a conflict, as seen by the war of 2020 in Karabakh. Nor does it translate into the settlement of conflict, as demonstrated in Ukraine. Despite the increasing tensions between the big powers, there has been a continued commitment to the conflict management process regarding Ukraine, even if a settlement is still far off. In the Karabakh case, the seemingly seamless cooperation between the powers within the mediation format has borne very little fruit, if any. Both cases offer significant lessons learned and tangible consequences for the OSCE's future mediation work, namely that the OSCE can support the voluntary conflict management and settlement efforts among its participating states, but it cannot stop violent escalation if one or more sides seek a military solution.

6 William H. Hill, *No Place for Russia: European Security since 1989* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2018).

7 Philip Remler, "OSCE Mediation in an Eroding International Order," *Security and Human Rights* 27:3–4 (2016), pp. 273–288.

## Ukraine Crisis: Test for the OSCE's Endurance

After three years of intense negotiations, former Ukrainian president Viktor Yanukovych decided against signing a deep and comprehensive trade agreement with the EU in 2013, which led to mass protests and discontent in Ukraine. The Ukrainian public took to the streets and demanded a more pro-EU and pro-Western socio-economic, foreign, and security policy orientation from their government. Peaceful protests turned into violent clashes in Kyiv, leading to Yanukovych's ousting and an outbreak of an large scale violent conflict in eastern Ukraine, with strong Russian military involvement and support for the breakaway Donetsk and Luhansk regions. This led to the erosion of Ukraine's sovereignty and stability. As a result of the high-intensity conflict, Ukraine has lost control over its 410-kilometer-long border with Russia, all of Crimea, and parts of the Donetsk and Luhansk regions, whose political status still remains an issue of contention (See map on p. 59).

International mediation efforts were underway rather early on. However, the violent phase of the conflict that lasted until the end of 2017 turned into a low-simmering conflict, and there is still no political settlement or definitive ceasefire in place. The sequenced settlement and prioritization of the political (status of the breakaway republics) and security (border control, definitive ceasefire) issues remain key factors that impede progress in the Minsk talks aimed at addressing the conflict. To illustrate this,[8] the rest of the chapter will look at the geopolitical tensions that might have partially caused the outbreak of the conflict and how the relevant geopolitical actors dealt with the conflict within the OSCE mediation framework.

As mentioned earlier, apart from the 2008 Georgia-Russia war, antagonism between Russia and the West hit a historic high in 2014. This challenged the relevance of the OSCE as a conflict management and cooperative security institution, the key principles of which were violated by Russia's annexation of Crimea and its military involvement in the east of Ukraine. According to the OSCE's then-secretary general, Lamberto Zannier, "since the Ukraine Crisis began, dialogue within the OSCE has been extremely tense, often undiplomatic and sometimes marked by very serious mutual accusations."[9] Yet, the organization has provided both an outlet for tensions and a tool for engagement, enabling the OSCE participating states to take joint action on issues. Paradoxically, the OSCE space was needed the most at a time when it was rapidly shrinking due to the open antagonism between Russia and Western states. It is important to note a difference here with the situation in 2008, when the OSCE was sidelined and the EU, under French leadership and driven by its own geopolitical interests and dynamics in the South Caucasus, took a more prominent role in dealing with the Georgia-Russia war. After the Ukraine conflict unfolded in 2014, and despite increased hostility, the two camps agreed that the OSCE would be the only platform to deal with the crisis in and around Ukraine.[10] Regarding Ukraine, it was clear to all parties that the OSCE was the favored multilateral framework of communication and, eventually, cooperation.[11]

It would not be an exaggeration to say that when the crisis in Ukraine erupted, by sheer luck the leadership of the organization happened to be in the able hands of Switzerland, with its established expertise and commitment to peace mediation. Switzerland's role as a bridge-builder was a blessing for the organization. Due to its non-aligned nature and access to key players, Switzerland, while holding the OSCE Chairpersonship, managed to initiate and consolidate a multifaceted and multi-formatted peace architecture from the early days of the conflict. The OSCE is criticized for its lack of efficiency when it comes to conflict settlement. However, under the Swiss Chairpersonship, the organization nonetheless managed to react to the crisis in and around Ukraine with an unprecedented efficiency.

The Chairpersonship of the OSCE offers a space for launching initiatives by the Chairperson-in-Office (CiO), and Switzerland showed apt and ample leadership by offering the conflict parties a platform for dialogue and operational crisis management through the OSCE mechanisms.[12] One of the key contributions included the rapid deployment of the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) in Ukraine with an initial mandate to contribute to the stabilization of the security situation, which later developed into one of ceasefire monitoring and verification.[13] The SMM remains a good example of a civilian monitoring mission, serving as the "eyes and ears" of the OSCE when it comes to the situation on the ground in the east of Ukraine.

The establishment of the SMM was followed up by setting up the Trilateral Contact Group (TCG) for repre-

8 For a comprehensive analysis of the multi-layered conflict and the peace process in Ukraine, see Anna Hess Sargsyan, "Unpacking Complexity in the Ukraine Peace Process," *CSS Analyses in Security Policy* 243 (2019) and Sabine Fischer, "The Donbas Conflict: Opposing Interests and Narratives, Difficult Peace Process," *Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP),* April 2019.

9 Lamberto Zannier, "Preface," in: Christian Nünlist / David Svarin (eds), *Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis* (Zurich: Center for Security Studies at ETH Zurich and foraus, 2014), pp. 7–8.

10 For a comprehensive account of the OSCE's role in responding to the crisis in and around Ukraine, see the final report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on European Security as a Common Project, which was led by Wolfgang Ischinger: *Back to Diplomacy,* osce.org, November 2015.

11 Pál Dunay, "The OSCE and the East: The Lesser Evil," in: Nünlist/Svarin (eds), *Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis,* pp. 17–22.

12 Thomas Greminger, "The 2014 Ukraine Crisis: Curse and Opportunity for the Swiss Chairmanship", in: Nünlist/Svarin (eds), *Perspectives on the Role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis,* pp. 11–12.

13 For more on SMM and its work, see Hilde Haug, "The Minsk Agreements and the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission: Providing Effective Monitoring for the Ceasefire Regime," *Security and Human Rights* 27:3–4 (2016), pp. 342–357.

sentatives from Ukraine, Russia, and the OSCE. This mediating body later developed into a fully-fledged platform for biweekly meetings between Ukrainian and Russian delegations and the de facto authorities of the so-called Luhansk and Donetsk Republics under the coordination of the OSCE CiO representative.[14] The TCG serves as the only inclusive platform for talks between Ukraine, Russia, and representatives of the de facto authorities. It also aims at the implementation of the key provisions of the Minsk agreements that serve as the basis for the peace process.[15]

Beyond these efforts, the Swiss Chairpersonship managed to apply a wide range of OSCE mechanisms and tools to deal with the crisis in Ukraine, namely the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) for election monitoring, the High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM), and the Representative on Freedom of the Media (RFoM). In addition, the Office of the OSCE Project Co-ordinator in Kyiv has been supporting Ukraine in launching a national dialogue.[16]

In 2021, despite the initial rapid deployment of the SMM and the setup of a multi-formatted peace process, the Ukraine conflict seems to be immune to a political settlement. Even the most sophisticated peace architecture and seasoned diplomats seem to have limited success in moving forward in contexts where there is a lack of sufficient political will among the parties to settle their differences through peaceful means. The Ukrainian context is no different in this respect.

A constellation of factors has an impact on the Ukraine peace process, including internal political and socio-economic dynamics, the conflict parties' political will, their balance of power calculations, and maximalist expectations for a potential settlement. The impact of these factors should not be underestimated when looking at the effectiveness of the OSCE peace architecture in dealing with the Ukraine conflict. However, when strictly seen from the point of view of how Russia-West tensions have impacted the process, it is important to highlight that despite increased antagonism, there has been a joint commitment and action to move the peace process forward within the established OSCE framework. In and of itself, this can be seen in a positive light, even if over the long term it might make the peace process a "hostage" to the organizational limitations of the OSCE and ongoing geopolitical rivalries. Another important question that remains is one of sequencing – would there need to be rapprochement between the big powers, as well as more generally between East and West, in order for the Ukraine conflict to have a final settlement, or could such rapprochement follow the final settlement of the conflict? Or would it be necessary to have both processes parallel to each other to ensure a more efficient approach to settlement?

Currently, with a number of contextual factors in flux, it is difficult to predict which turn the Ukraine peace process will take, especially in the wake of the recent war between Armenia and Azerbaijan over Nagorno-Karabakh, which erupted in September 2020. Despite its two-decades-long engagement and conflict management efforts, the OSCE has been unable to prevent a second war in Karabakh, long considered a protracted conflict. The 44-day war between Armenia and Azerbaijan, with direct military engagement from Turkey, may not only discredit the OSCE as a conflict management platform, but also devalue peace mediation as a valuable tool for conflict settlement. Russia, with all its commitment to the OSCE, took on the role of stopping the war itself, and essentially bypassed the Minsk Group. By deploying peacekeepers in Karabakh, Russia consolidated its strategic stronghold in the South Caucasus, especially vis-à-vis the renewed Turkish geopolitical assertiveness in the region. A joint Russo-Turkic monitoring mission has also been established to monitor the ceasefire in and around Nagorno-Karabakh, an unprecedented move that can be seen as a challenge to Russia's geopolitical interests in the region.

This is yet another case where OSCE participating states not only violated the key principles of the Helsinki Decalogue – namely, the non-use of force – but also bypassed the multilateral setup for the peaceful settlement of conflicts within the framework of a cooperative security organization. If the Ukraine conflict settlement process derails, or falls short of a comprehensive political settlement in the near future, the result could be renewed escalation, as in the case of Nagorno-Karabakh, thus jeopardizing cooperative security in Europe even further.

## An Uneasy Path Ahead

Throughout the course of its 40-year history, the OSCE as an organization has at times become hostage to seemingly mutually exclusive perceptions and interests of what the organization is about as well as periodic crises. This in turn has an impact on the relations between the West and Russia, which as discussed in this chapter fluctuates between transactional cooperation and antagonism, depending on a number of factors.

At times of relative calm, such as between 1996 and 2008 or 2009 and 2014, the organization seems to have fallen into slumber, focusing on internal reforms, a challenging task in itself given both the political interests

14 For more on the Trilateral Contact Group, see Christian Schläpfer, "Ukraine Crisis and Mediation: Not Business as Usual," *Security and Human Rights,* 27:3–4 (2016) pp. 327–341.

15 For background on negotiations to settle the conflict in and around Ukraine, see Hess Sargsyan, *Unpacking Complexity in the Ukraine Peace Process.*

16 Zannier, "Preface" and Greminger, "The 2014 Ukraine Crisis", in: Nünlist/Svarin (eds), *Perspectives on the role of the OSCE in the Ukraine Crisis.*

of its members as well as its consensus based decision-making procedures.[17]

In a rapidly eroding multilateral world order, the crisis in and around Ukraine heightened tensions between Russia and the West. Yet in a paradoxical manner it also brought the two camps together under the OSCE umbrella to undertake joint action. The Ukraine crisis in essence rendered the organization more relevant than ever, by increasing its visibility and by tapping into its potential for conflict management. Among many other factors, the Swiss Chairpersonship – with its commitment to peace mediation, relevant know-how, access to the two blocs, and respect – made this cooperation in the Ukraine context possible. Contingencies may shake up the institution and "wake up the Sleeping Beauty" in the short run. However, in the long run they divert the organization's resources and energy away from the long overdue yet stalled institutional reforms. The OSCE's inclusive nature and consensus-based decision-making procedures are a curse and a blessing, remaining an asset and a liability for the organization. Given the geopolitical and procedural restrictions, the OSCE's peace mediation efforts risk falling short of their end goals and can be seen as conflict management at best.

Created to bridge the divide between different value systems and interests, there is still a common agreement by all participating states on the ten principles of the Helsinki Decalogue. Yet the respective priority of these principles and their implications for practice are debated. This is also reflected in the changing space for dialogue and cooperation over time. The following questions may help the relevant actors reflect on how to enhance the space for dialogue and cooperation: 1) How can the OSCE's institutions maintain and increase their agency independent of East-West polarization? 2) How can participating states move away from biased language and perceptions to allow for the exploration of commonalities despite differences in values, norms, and priorities? 3) Would this lead to a common recommitment to a norms-based value system that would prevent individual participating states from adopting strategies that violate the fundamental principles at the core of the organization?

The answer to these fundamental questions largely depends on the individual participating states, their commitment to a multilateral- and norms-based world order, and their political will to settle political and military differences through dialogue and cooperation. In the end, the OSCE as a multilateral institution is at the mercy of its participating states' whims and can only be as efficient as they wish it to be. If the situation goes unaddressed, we run the risk of creating, as Philip Remler remarks, a "neo-Westphalian world in which ethnically defined nations advance their individual interests through bilateral relations dictated by relative strength and weakness." [18] This would not only paralyze the OSCE as a cooperative security organization and render human security-centric values obsolete, but it would also essentially bring about a pre-Helsinki world order where might is right and only the fittest can survive.

17 For a detailed overview of the challenges of internal reforms, please see Thomas Greminger's contribution in this volume.

18 Remler, *OSCE Mediation in an Eroding International Order.*

# The OSCE in Transnistria: Pragmatic Cooperation in a Protracted Conflict

*Benno Zogg*

## Introduction

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) has assumed its most tangible and prominent role in European security when dealing with the continent's many, albeit often neglected, conflicts. The resumption of open war in 2020 in Nagorno-Karabakh served as a striking and tragic reminder of the existence of protracted conflicts and that perceiving them as indefinitely "frozen" may be erroneous. The OSCE has a negligible role in Nagorno-Karabakh. However, in another protracted conflict, which has witnessed pragmatic steps of cooperation and hardly any instances of violence, the OSCE has assumed its most far-reaching mandate for conflict resolution: Transnistria.

Transnistria is a de facto state on the recognized territory of Moldova. It serves as a prime example of several factors in European security and the OSCE's role in it: the persistence of disputes that are a legacy of the Soviet Union's dissolution; the difficulties for international efforts to manage, alleviate, and resolve such conflicts; and the prominent, multi-faceted, and unique role of the OSCE in these efforts. The Transnistrian case is also a function and an indicator of the wider geopolitical context and of Russian-Western relations and their influence on efforts toward peaceful settlements.

This chapter serves as an example of the "OSCE on the ground." It will elaborate on the background and current status of the Transnistrian conflict, the actors involved, and its linkages with geopolitics and Russian-Western relations. Based on this, it will discuss past and ongoing attempts toward conflict resolution, with a focus on the OSCE and unpacking its role, as well as criticism thereof. The OSCE's participating states have largely cooperated on Transnistria despite differing (or a lack of) visions about what a final political settlement of the conflict could look like. As such, the Transnistrian conflict serves as a limited success story for the OSCE's work despite an increasingly polarized international setting. To round up this assessment, the conclusion will consider potential future OSCE efforts in this context.

## The Transnistrian Conflict

### Evolution

The Republic of Moldova (and its predecessor, the Moldovan Socialist Soviet Republic [SSR]) comprises territory formerly belonging to Romania and the Russian Empire. Its ethnic composition is mixed, with more than two-thirds of the population being Moldovan and sizeable minorities of Ukrainians, Russians, Turkic Gagauz, among others. The territory of Transnistria (or "Transdniestr") composes a narrow strip of Moldovan territory to the east of the Dniester River, plus the territory around Bender west of the Dniester. After suffering repeated conquests throughout World War Two, Transnistria was incorporated into the Moldovan SSR in 1946. Under Soviet rule, it became Moldova's most industrialized region. Transnistria developed a new, influential urban elite that was largely Russian speaking, in contrast to Moldovia's largely rural Romanian-speaking population.[1]

When the Soviet Union dissolved, the leadership of the Moldovan SSR declared the Republic of Moldova's independence in 1991, and – as part of the widespread empowerment of the national idea in that period – it opted for using the Romanian language and for dropping the Cyrillic alphabet. Fearing a potential unification with Romania and marginalization, the east bank of the Dniester declared independence. Transnistria attempted to cement its position through raids on Moldovan police stations and clashes with Moldovan security forces. In this, Transnistria was supported by former Soviet troops based in Transnistria. The separatists' superior numbers and equipment quickly overwhelmed the Moldovan forces. A ceasefire ended the two-month conflict, in which around 1,000 people lost their lives. The conflict also led to today's borders and the displacement of 25,000 people.[2]

### Status Quo

Transnistria (officially the Pridnestrovian Moldovian Republic) has been effectively an independent territory ever since. It has its own currency and a population of below half a million, compared to Moldova's three million. Transnistria's population is largely Russian speaking and consists of ethnic Moldovans, Russians, and Ukrainians, each comprising roughly one-third of the total.[3] The separatist territory has infamously maintained many elements and symbols of the Soviet period: The center of Transnistria's

1 Thomas de Waal, *Uncertain Ground: Engaging with Europe's De Facto States and Breakaway Territories* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2018), pp. 38–40.

2 James J. Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars and Frozen Conflicts* (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), p. 164f.

3 Thomas de Waal / Nikolaus von Twickel, *Beyond Frozen Conflict: Scenarios for the Separatist Disputes of Eastern Europe* (Brussels: CEPS, 2020), p. 147.

capital Tiraspol is reminiscent of a Soviet-themed park, with Lenin statues, Soviet monuments, and hammer-and-sickle flags.

As a non-recognized de facto entity, Transnistria is a legal black hole for international and humanitarian law. Transnistria has seen genuine changes of government. However, the Freedom in the World reports consistently rate its political system as "not free." Furthermore, it has one of Europe's highest prison populations per capita; there are regular reports about arbitrary detention, ill-treatment, and even torture;[4] Non-governmental Organization activity is highly restricted; and many organizations are politicized and de facto controlled by the Transnistrian authorities.[5]

The Transnistrian conflict itself has seen virtually no hostilities since the early 1990s. Furthermore, Transnistria is highly interconnected with Moldova's territory when compared to other contexts in the post-Soviet space: thousands of people cross the border every day and Transnistria can trade through Moldova. Moldova and Transnistria were even described as a de facto confederation, given that 187 agreements exist between them.[6] In fact, the conflict is not salient in Moldova's political discourse. Moldova spends less than 0.4 per cent of its GDP on defense.[7] There is also little enthusiasm for reintegration – one per cent of young Moldovan's consider it a priority.[8] The Moldovan government's Bureau of Integration is poorly funded and understaffed. Further concessions to Transnistria are not popular in Moldova, nor is Transnistria keen to join a Moldova marked by domestic political struggles and instability.[9] Nevertheless, the conflict and its foreign policy dimensions continue to create a climate of rivalry and insecurity.[10]

Most Moldovans and Transnistrians have generally adopted a pragmatic stance toward the conflict and issues of nationhood: dual or even triple citizenship (involving Romanian, Ukrainian, or Russian passports) is widespread, as is the parallel use of the Moldovan and Russian language and of the Latin and Cyrillic alphabet. Linguistic or cultural concerns alone fall short of explaining the conflict. Rather, different mobilizing factors overlapped, particularly the instrumentalization of historical narratives.[11]

An issue of joint concern on both sides of the Dniester is economics. Moldova proper and Transnistria are marked by high levels of poverty, emigration, and population decline. Transnistria's economy has long been notorious for its illicit activities – most notably cigarette smuggling. Its industrial base is slowly crumbling. Transnistria even saw protests, usually a rare occurrence, in Tiraspol in 2015 against austerity, price increases in health and education, and against political elites.[12] The state of its economy would be even more dire were it not for it having essentially free energy. Through a pipeline, Transnistria receives gas from Russian energy giant Gazprom – the bill for which is sent to Chisinau. On top of this, Transnistria uses gas to generate electricity, of which a large share is subsequently exported, mostly to Moldova proper. Parts of Moldova's business elite also benefit from corrupt arrangements around this issue.[13]

## Actors and Their Stakes

The *Republic of Moldova's* domestic political landscape has been troubled: alternating between a presidential and parliamentary political system, witnessing a series of scandals due to corruption or the misuse of office, and being marked by popular protest. Moldova has declared the pursuit of a neutral foreign policy. At the same time, several political parties have competed for electoral (and external) support by framing themselves as pro-Russian or pro-European.[14] In November 2020, Maia Sandu was elected Moldova's first female president based on a campaign against corruption and building on the country's close ties with the EU.

The *Transnistrian de facto authorities* have introduced virtually all elements of statehood and regularly held elections. In 2006, in a referendum not recognized by the OSCE, 97.1 per cent of Transnistrians voted to join the Russian Federation.[15] Its economy is largely stagnating, particularly after Russia reportedly cut its support substantially in 2015. The share of Transnistria's shadow economy has decreased in recent years, and large parts of the economy are now dominated by the Sheriff conglomerate, which has used its influence to make Transnistrian politics more pro-market.

*Russia* has acted as Transnistria's patron. Until 2015, it provided up to 70 per cent of Transnistria's bud-

4 Lia Neukirch, "'Frozen' Human Rights in Abkhazia, Transdniestria, and the Donbas: The Role of the OSCE in a Shaky System of International Human Rights Protection Mechanisms," in: Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy (IFSH) (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2017* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018), pp. 182–88.

5 Matthew Frear et al., "Report on Complementary and Alternative Modes of Engagement with the Eastern Partnership Countries," *EU-STRAT,* July 2018, p. 13.

6 De Waal, *Uncertain Ground,* p. 35.

7 The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), *The Military Balance 2020,* iiss.org, 2020.

8 Stanislav Secrierui, "The Transnistrian Deadlock: Resolution Impalpable, War Improbable," *Carnegie Moscow Center,* 22.11.2017.

9 De Waal, *Uncertain Ground,* p. 41.

10 Dmitri Trenin, "European Insecurity: From Managing Adversity to a New Equilibrium," *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace,* 2018, p. 8.

11 Kamil Całus et al., "Interdependencies of Eastern Partnership Countries with the EU and Russia: Three Case Studies," *EU-STRAT,* April 2018, p. 11.

12 Samual Goda, "The Current and Future Challenges for the OSCE Mission to Moldova," in: IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2015* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2016), p. 207.

13 Całus et al., *Interdependencies of Eastern Partnership Countries,* pp. 22f.

14 Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars,* pp. 161f.

15 Goda, *Challenges for the OSCE Mission to Moldova,* p. 208.

get.[16] Despite several promises to pull out troops, up to 2,000 Russian troops have remained in Transnistria, 500 of which as "peacekeepers." Russia also plays an important role for Moldova proper in the energy sector and as a destination for 60 per cent of Moldova's many migrant workers. Furthermore, Moldova is an observer state of the Russian-dominated Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). However, Russian-Moldovan relations have seen regular trade disputes.[17]

Meanwhile, Moldova's reliance on the *EU* as a source of investments, as a destination for labor migration, and as a trade partner has strongly increased over the past few years. It has concluded a Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA) with the EU and is part of the EU's Eastern Partnership format. The DCFTA also allows Transnistrian companies to trade through subsidiaries in Moldova, which has boosted Transnistria's exports to the European market. Regarding efforts to deal with the Transnistrian conflict, the EU and EU member states have largely taken a back seat.

Lastly, *Ukraine,* as Moldova and Transnistria's eastern neighbor, has played a delicate and multi-faceted role regarding the conflict. Its port of Odessa has been a lifeline for supplies to Transnistria and for the territory's trade in contraband. Since 2014, Ukraine has put a squeeze on Russian supplies entering Transnistria. In 2017, Ukraine established joint customs posts with the Moldovan authorities.[18] Considering its own territorial conflicts with Russian involvement, Ukraine has kept a close eye on processes and progress in conflict resolution on Transnistria.

### Interplay with Geopolitics

The presence of Russian troops, Ukraine's changed role, the DCFTA with the EU, and Moldova's very location on a geopolitical fault line indicate that the Transnistrian conflict is interlinked with the international context. So are efforts to resolve it.

Major Russian pushes to reinvigorate political negotiations around Transnistria were initiated in 2003 and 2011 during periods of more amiable Russian-Western relations. Notably, Western and Russian diplomacy has been conducted on a consensual basis on Transnistria, even following the Crimean annexation, albeit with the caveat that no progress has been made toward a political settlement or Transnistria's status. This is remarkable given 2016 saw NATO troops exercise in Moldova and Russian troops show increased activity in Transnistria. Yet pragmatic measures were agreed to manage the conflict.[19]

In 2019, then-Russian deputy prime minister Dmitriy Kozak tried to negotiate with the West on Transnistria. In Moldova, the summer of 2019 also witnessed a political coalition of pro-Western and pro-Russian parties ousting an oligarch, Vlad Plahotniuc, who had been the gray eminence of Moldovan politics.[20] This emphasized that Russia and the West were able to agree on issues in that context, but also that forces in Moldova with different foreign policy visions can, at times, pragmatically cooperate. It has even been suggested that the Kremlin may probe certain foreign policy elements in Moldova and Transnistria that may be applied in the conflict in Ukraine at a later time.

Domestic factors may now be most conducive to steps forward on cooperation on Transnistria. While influenced by Russian-Western relations, it should not be forgotten that Moldova and Transnistria are actors in their own right. The years 2015 to 2018, for example, entailed deep and bitter political and economic crises in both Moldova and Transnistria, including changes of power. Transnistria – up until then more hesitant to compromise than Moldova – was under increasing economic pressure as Moldova and Ukraine assumed more control over Transnistria's external trade.[21] As the economic elite in Transnistria entails elements relying on both Russia and the EU, and as the effects of the coronavirus pandemic further exacerbate economic difficulties, business interests may favor pragmatic, cooperative steps and amiable ties to East and West.[22]

## Conflict Resolution Efforts and the Role of the OSCE

### Unpacking the OSCE

The OSCE is considered crucial for efforts to manage and resolve the Transnistrian conflict and the pragmatic success stories that have been achieved. However, there are several actors at play with different roles at different levels within the OSCE.

The *OSCE Mission to Moldova* has been a fixture in this context. Its mandate was drafted in 1993 and was created to work toward a lasting political settlement

16 Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars,* p. 169.

17 Całus et al., *Interdependencies of Eastern Partnership Countries,* p. 13.

18 William H. Hill, "Current Trends in Transdniestria: Breathing New Life into the Settlement Process," in: IFSH (ed.), *OSCE Yearbook 2017* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2018), p. 151.

19 *Ibid.,* p. 152. Also see sub-section "The Italian Chairpersonship in 2018 under CiOs Angelino Alfano and Enzo Moavero Milanesi" on p. 46 in Thomas Greminger's contribution to this volume.

20 Vladimir Socor, "Russian Minister Kozak's Mission in Moldova Unveils Kremlin Vision for Forced Non-Alignment for Europe's East," *Eurasia Daily Monitor,* 27.06.2019.

21 Hill, *Current Trends in Transdniestria,* p. 143.

22 Magdalena Dembińska / Frédéric Mérand, "The Role of International Brokers in Frozen Conflicts: The Case of Transnistria," *Asia Europe Journal* 17, (2019), p. 24.

based on the territorial sovereignty of Moldova. The Mission currently has 53 staff, a budget of around 2 million EUR, and field offices staffed with locals in Tiraspol and Bender in Transnistria. Much of the Mission's work relates less to the settlement of the conflict and more to conflict prevention and preparing the groundwork for reconciliation. For example, it engages in shuttle diplomacy between Chisinau and Tiraspol and implements projects with civil society actors from both entities on topics ranging from the environment to the engagement of youth. It also conducts such projects on top of activities in Moldova unrelated to the Transnistrian issue.[23] The advantage of the Mission is its access to the region and thus its ability to report to the international community generally and other OSCE institutions specifically, such as the Permanent Council in Vienna. It has also served as a link between the political and the more technical level by organizing annual meetings in Bavaria between Chisinau and Tiraspol on confidence-building measures, alongside other "1+1" meetings between specific counterparts.[24]

The annually rotating *Chairpersonship of the OSCE* has been critical for settlement efforts, particularly at the national and international political levels. The Swiss and Serbian Chairpersonships of 2014 and 2015 had prepared the groundwork before Germany put Transnistria high on the agenda, for example, at the 2016 OSCE Ministerial Council in Hamburg. The German Chairperson's efforts were then picked up by the 2017 Austrian and 2018 Italian Chairpersonships.[25]

One important tool for the Chairpersonship is the *Special Representative of the OSCE Chairperson-in-Office for the Transnistrian Settlement Process,* who can ensure permanent engagement. For Germany in 2016, Ambassador Cord Meier-Klodt made seven trips to the region, preparing the ground for reinvigorated talks.[26] Italian politician Franco Frattini was Special Representative in 2018 and 2019. He was succeeded by Albania and Sweden's appointee for 2020 and 2021, Austrian diplomat Ambassador Thomas Mayr-Harting, who is considered very active and thus an important contributor to efforts toward a settlement in Transnistria.[27]

The *"5+2"* has become the OSCE's most prevalent format within the Transnistria settlement process and comprises Moldova, the OSCE, Russia, Ukraine, and Transnistria plus the EU and the US. The 5+2 was formed in 2005 and has entailed meetings of these parties – convened by the OSCE Chairpersonship or the Mission to Moldova – at various levels in most years since then.

*Other OSCE institutions* have limited roles to play in the context. The High Commissioner of National Minorities (HCNM) has been instrumental – in cooperation with the Mission to Moldova – in dealing with the issue of Latin-script schools in Transnistria, while the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) is relevant with regard to human rights violations in Transnistria.[28] Further, the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly has encouraged the demilitarization of Transnistria and the granting of unimpeded access to international human rights monitoring missions.[29] Notably, and unlike in Ukraine, the OSCE has not set up a peacekeeping capacity around Transnistria.

## Past Conflict Resolution Efforts

The OSCE Mission to Moldova already drafted a framework for an autonomous status of Transnistria within Moldova in the early 1990s, based on the autonomous status of certain entities in Western states, such as South Tyrol. Despite backing by the Moldovan, Transnistrian, and Russian leaderships to design such a special status, no progress or agreement was made. In 1994, Moldova and Russia agreed on the withdrawal of Russian troops, but Russia's parliament never ratified the agreement.[30] Russian troops – by now mostly comprising locals with Russian uniforms[31] – have remained in Transnistria. They engage in joint peacekeeping patrols with their Moldovan and Transnistrian counterparts, coordinated by the Joint Control Commission, which includes the OSCE Mission.[32]

2003 saw the biggest push to date for a political settlement of the Transnistrian issue. The Netherlands declared Transnistria a priority of their 2003 OSCE Chairpersonship, the OSCE Mission opened its field office in Bender, and Moldovan president Vladimir Voronin asked for more Russian involvement.[33] Moscow appointed a special representative, Dmitriy Kozak, whose proposal suggested that Transnistria could become part of a federalized Moldova, retaining most of its independence but increasing its stakes in Moldova. This far-reaching "Kozak Memorandum" ended up being rejected by the Moldovan president, after mass protests, and the Transnistrian authorities, who insisted on independence.[34] This underscored that the proposal was essentially a unilateral Rus-

23 OSCE, *OSCE Mission to Moldova,* osce.org, 2021.

24 Vera Axyanova / Andrea Gawrich, "Regional Organizations and Secessionist Entities: Analysing Practices of the EU and the OSCE in Post-Soviet Protracted Conflict Areas," *Ethnopolitics* 17:4 (2018), p. 415.

25 Hill, *Current Trends in Transdniestria,* p. 143f.

26 *Ibid.,* pp. 144–46.

27 See the sub-section on the coronavirus and conflict on p. 76 – 78 in Thomas Greminger's contribution to this volume.

28 Neukirch, *Frozen Human Rights,* p. 197.

29 *Ibid.,* p. 198.

30 Günter Joetze, "The OSCE Mission to Moldova," in: S. Neil MacFarlane / Oliver Thränert (eds.), *Balancing Hegemony: The OSCE in the CIS* (Kingston: Centre for International Relations, 1997), p. 139.

31 De Waal, *Uncertain Ground,* p. 36.

32 Axyanova/Gawrich, Regi*onal Organizations and Secessionist Entities,* p. 415.

33 Adrian Rogstad, "The Next Crimea? Getting Russia's Transnistria Policy Right," *Problems of Post-Communism* 65:1 (2018), p. 57.

34 William H. Hill, "Unrecognized Actors from Unrecognized States: Moscow's Puppets or Inevitable Interlocutors," *European Leadership Network,* November 2017, p. 4.

sian move that was not coordinated with other actors or at the OSCE.

After these failed efforts in 2003, the 5+2 eventually became the prevalent format for all major stakeholders. However, a period of discontinuity continued until 2011, when Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov called for a resumption of the 5+2 talks and for a special status for Transnistria based on Moldova's territorial integrity. Transnistrian authorities again rejected this proposal. Moldova has expressed its readiness to grant some special status and autonomy to Transnistria, and to respect Russian property rights in the territory while asking for the agreed withdrawal of Russian troops. However, Tiraspol has not compromised.[35] Furthermore, many actors in Moldova – particularly ones favoring closer ties to the EU and Romania – have expressed their skepticism about incorporating a Russia-leaning Transnistrian population into Moldova.

## Results-based Approach: 5+2 Equals Package of 8

In 2016, as a result of this stalemate on a political solution of the Transnistrian case, efforts within the 5+2 under German foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier shifted focus toward pragmatic small steps. He also put a stronger emphasis on the neglected economic dimension at the OSCE, which was in line with Transnistrian priorities.[36]

More arithmetic was added to the process: The "package of eight" priorities, or "Berlin+ Protocol," were declared and implemented as part of a new "results-based" approach focusing on "specific and attainable goals."[37] The package of eight entail the recognition of Tiraspol-issued educational diploma and license plates; how telecommunications in Transnistria should be licensed; environmental standards around the Dniester basin; the handling of cross-border criminal cases; the operation of Latin-script schools in Transnistria; Moldovan farmers' access to their land in Transnistria; and the freedom of movement of people and goods, particularly regarding the opening of the Gura Bicului Bridge.[38] Since 2016, parties have been working on implementing these eight trust-building measures. In 2020, the OSCE declared five of the eight had been largely attained.[39]

This represents progress on issues that had been as much a major source of disagreement between Moldova and Transnistria as an obstacle in the daily lives of Transnistrians. The prior lack of progress in these areas was less attributed to their inherent difficulty and more to general mistrust between Moldovan and Transnistrian leaders, which involved the perception that any concession to the other's position may weaken one's own.[40]

The coronavirus pandemic has partially disrupted cross-border movement between Moldova and Transnistria – particularly as Transnistria has established checkpoints[41] – and has led to a cessation of most working group and 5+2 meetings.[42] Despite these setbacks, there is a widespread consensus that the OSCE and the 5+2 process should remain the major frameworks to work toward a settlement. The latest OSCE Ministerial Council in December 2020 underlined the importance of the 5+2 to work toward a political settlement.[43] Moldovan President Maia Sandu has called for the re-invigoration of the 5+2 format[44], a sentiment the Moldovan government, Transnistria's leadership, and Russia largely support.[45]

## Shortcomings

Major criticism of international efforts to mediate in the Transnistrian context and of the OSCE's work largely revolve around three points. First, despite pragmatic steps fostering cooperation between Moldova proper and Transnistria, there is currently no plan for Transnistria's future status on the table or in the making. Moldova's territorial integrity is recognized and incompatible with Transnistria's declared goals of independence or accession to the Russian Federation. Mixed feelings toward the OSCE Mission are widespread in Moldova, as it has not produced progress toward a political settlement.[46] A "result-based approach" at the OSCE may not continue indefinitely given the absence of a political agreement on Transnistria's status. The OSCE's emphasis on Transnistria as one of the organization's few success stories and on the agreed pragmatic steps may deflect from the lack of prospect for a political solution, but this is the task for which the OSCE was predominantly mandated.

Second, and related to the first point, the status quo and the current emphasis on pragmatic steps of cooperation may disproportionately serve Transnistria. This view is particularly voiced by Western observers, as well

35 Coyle, *Russia's Border Wars,* 166f.

36 Rick Fawn / Nina Lutterjohann, "Confidence-Building Measures in Eurasian Conflicts: New Roles for the OSCE's Economic and Environmental Dimension in Easing East-West Tensions," *Global Society* 33:2 (2019), p. 272.

37 See the section p. 43–47 on The Austrian Chairpersonship under CiO Sebastian Kurz in Thomas Greminger's contribution to this volume.

38 Hill, *Current Trends in Transdniestria,* p. 145f.

39 The other three, which lack substantial progress, include telecommunications, standards around the Dniester, and the handling of criminal cases. See OSCE, *Special Representative's Visit Underlines Commitment of Albania's OSCE Chairmanship to Transdniestrian Settlement Process,* osce.org, 23.01.2020.

40 Hill, *Current Trends in Transdniestria,* p. 147.

41 Ilie Gulca, "Moldova: Pandemic Brinkmanship," ERSTE Foundation, 10.11.2020.

42 See the section p. 76–78 on the coronavirus and conflict in Thomas Greminger's contribution to this volume.

43 OSCE, *Ministerial Statement on the Negotiations on the Transdniestrian Settlement Process in the "5+2" Format*, osce.org, 04.12.2020.

44 "Moldovan President Elect Says Plans to Invigorate 5+2 Talks on Transnistrian Settlement," *TASS,* 07.12.2020.

45 Stefan Wolff, "The Prospects for a Settlement on Transnistria under a Sandu Presidency," *New Europe,* 11.12.2020.

46 Goda, *Challenges for the OSCE Mission to Moldova,* p. 205f.

as Western-leaning experts and politicians in Moldova. Vladimir Socor, for example, considers the package of eight to demand a high level of concessions from Moldova and, through recognizing Tiraspol-issued documents, to solidify Transnistria's de facto independence.[47] Even Moldova's pro-Russian former president Igor Dodon criticized the preferential treatment of Transnistria, as Transnistrian companies can trade through Moldova without paying taxes.[48] An indicator for Transnistria's privileged position is found in the OSCE's 5+2 format itself, where it acts as an equal to Moldova. The 5+2's equivalent on the Ukraine conflict, the Trilateral Contact Group, does not feature the Donbas separatists as formal participants.

Third, the status of Transnistria can be considered favorable to Russia as it maintains its presence in the separatist territory – which can serve as an additional lever to influence Moldova – while appearing as a responsible stakeholder in the peace process and endorsing Moldova's territorial integrity. Accordingly, the OSCE, whose efforts have not achieved a settlement, may be perceived as working in line with Russian interests.[49] The fact that Russian ammunition and troops from Transnistria have not been withdrawn despite agreements to that end since 1994 feeds into such criticism. In 2020 and 2021, President Sandu reiterated the demand for their withdrawal. The Transnistrian parliament in turn insists on the presence of Russian forces. Moscow contends that their withdrawal would not further the peace process and that any sudden changes to the status quo may be disruptive.[50]

## Outlook and Future Role of the OSCE

In the medium future, a perpetuation of the status quo seems likely. The OSCE will continue efforts to implement the package of eight fully and to further pragmatic steps of cooperation. It may also see room to foster cooperation in the OSCE's second dimension, on economics and the environment. Moldova and Transnistria's weak spot is the economy, which has been exacerbated by the pandemic. This may boost a desire to conclude further steps of (economic) cooperation.

The OSCE field mission will continue to serve as eyes and ears on the ground and support the OSCE's goals of cooperation across the Dniester and of conflict prevention.[51] In accordance with this, the Mission would be well advised to cooperate with local institutions pursuing similar goals in an effort to foster local ownership.[52] Given the limited means of the Mission, a relocation of staff and resources from much larger field missions in the Western Balkans may be appropriate if the opportunity arises.[53] In December 2020, Moldova's President Sandu suggested an even greater level of engagement by the OSCE by proposing that a civilian OSCE mission should replace Russian "peacekeepers" in Transnistria.[54] However, given the consensus-based nature of the OSCE, and thus a need for Russia's agreement, the deployment of such a mission currently appears unlikely. Transnistrian authorities would vehemently oppose such a move. The pandemic and a protracted structural crisis at the OSCE in general also render fundamental shifts, like a new monitoring mission, unlikely.

The package of eight and other measures are important steps to build confidence and trust and facilitate the daily lives of many people on both sides of the Dniester. However, in the long run, there must be an underlying understanding that no matter how long a chain of such pragmatic steps may be, it will not amount to a political settlement or a vision for Transnistria's status in Moldova. Transnistria's unrecognized status, the presence of foreign troops on its territory, its mounting gas debts, and the uncertainty about future developments around the conflict are unsustainable. While manageable in the medium term, these factors exacerbate economic and demographic woes in both Transnistria and Moldova.

Accordingly, the OSCE may have to uphold its presence and formats for dialogue – and continuously innovate to remain relevant – until the domestic and international context are suitable for a settlement. Political change – particularly in Transnistria, which has been hesitant to compromise – may be needed to form domestic coalitions in favor of a settlement, combined with a more favorable geopolitical environment. Were the Republic of Moldova to find lasting ways to reconcile the fact that many Moldovans favor good ties with both Russian and the West, Transnistria would be less relevant for Russia as a tool to retain a foothold. Were Russia and the West to find ways to cooperate and improve their ties, Transnistria may serve as a context in which to test better relations and to foster tangible political arrangements.

After all, the OSCE's work in general has relied on domestic actions and a favorable external context coming together. Whatever shape a reinvigorated process toward a settlement may take, the OSCE – through its field mission in Moldova, its permanent institutions in Vienna, and the repeated efforts of its Chairpersons – is positioned to be an important actor and to serve as an ideal platform toward that.

47 Vladimir Socor, "Transnistria: 'Freezing' as the Lesser Evil (Part One)," Eurasia Daily Monitor, 17.07.2019.

48 Vladimir Socor, "Moldova's President Dodon Casts 'Federalization' Aside," *Eurasia Daily Monitor,* 18.07.2019.

49 Socor, *Freezing as the Lesser Evil.*

50 "Transnistrian Parliament Says Inadmissible to Stir Up Tensions over Peacekeepers," *TASS,* 11.12.2020.

51 Goda, *Challenges for the OSCE Mission to Moldova,* p. 213.

52 *Ibid.,* p. 205f.

53 Raphaël Bez et al., "Dialogue, Consensus, Comprehensive Security, Field Action: Why the OSCE Needs a New Impetus Now," *Polis180,* 2016, p. 21.

54 "Pull Russian Troops Out of Moldova, New President Says," *The Moscow Times,* 01.12.2020.

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In times in which the European security architecture is fraying and tensions between the West and Russia have reached new heights, the value of the OSCE emerges in full light. The growing conflictuality in the broader European space has significantly complicated its workings. Yet this is precisely why the OSCE is needed more than ever. This edited volume is a must read for practitioners and scholars alike who would like to learn more about the quintessential multilateral organization, which if it did not exist, would have to be invented.
**Natalie Tocci,** ***Director of the Istituto Affari Internazionali***

Multilateralism remains one of the most intriguing though underexplored concepts in international relations theory and practices. It is easy to dwell on its apparent shortcomings and imperfections, but it is much more valuable to reflect on how multilateralism can become more efficient and more productive. The authors of this book deserve appreciation for having chosen this latter approach, which colors their review of the OSCE performance and its prospects.
**Andrey Kortunov,** ***Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council***

With contributions from veterans at the very pinnacle of their field, this small book offers large insights about European security in the first decades of the 21st century. Acute crises and violations of core principles have eroded the initial promise of the Helsinki Final Act and the Charter of Paris. Yet as the authors recount, the OSCE still plays a vital role prioritizing dialogue over coercion, even when political will from national capitals has been lacking.
**Matthew Rojansky,** ***Director of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute***

This volume is an absolute MUST read for any student of the OSCE. The main item of the book is an 60-page essay by former-secretary general of the OSCE, Thomas Greminger, that provides a critical self-assessment of the achievements and failures of his three-year term including cooperation with four OSCE Chairpersons-in-Office – Austria, Italy, Slovakia, and Albania. This piece is unmatched in terms of detail, openness, and depth of analysis. Additional essays on the broader political environment and the conflicts in Moldova and Ukraine provide a useful framing.
**Wolfgang Zellner,** ***Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg***

Since its foundation and the Cold War era, the geopolitical context in which the OSCE operates has changed. However, the strength and importance of this organisation have remained the same – especially in today's increasingly polarising environment with diverging values and interests. A dialogue-based approach to conflict management remains central. This book by Ambassador Thomas Greminger reads as a treasure trove of "lessons learned" from his three years in office as OSCE Secretary General. It clearly shows once again that peace is not God-given. I recommend it to everyone to whom peace and security in Europe likewise mean a lot.
**Federal Councillor Ignazio Cassis,** ***Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA)***