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Living Memory - 30th Anniversary of the Charter of Paris for the New Europe

Interview with Ambassador Marianne von Grünigen

We Should Have Prepared for Future Conflicts

Ambassador Marianne von Grünigen of Switzerland covered the negotiations of the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) on the Charter of Paris for a New Europe and its aftermath from 1989 to 1993. She was the first female Swiss diplomat to head the Swiss delegation to the CSCE. In this interview, concluded as a part of the project of the OSCE Documentation Centre in Prague, Ambassador von Grünigen reflects on the significance of the CSCE process that began with the negotiation of the Helsinki Final Act signed at the Summit Meeting on August 1st, 1975, the drafting of the 1990 Paris Charter and its legacy for the present day. She spoke with Ida Manton, alumna of the OSCE Researcher-in-Residence programme and an expert supporting the implementation of Living Memories Project.

Ida Manton: The road from the first meeting of the CSCE in Helsinki in 1975 to the signing of the Paris Charter in 1990 was a long one. How do you see that road, how did we get to 1990 and what did it mean?

Ambassador Marianne von Grünigen: Whenever people talk about how *die Wende*[1] [English: the turn] – I must say this in German because the word has become internationalized – was able to bring about the fall of the Berlin Wall in the short period of only two years, I always remind them that the transition actually started already in 1972, when for the first time all countries from Eastern and Western Europe, and also from North America – the United States and Canada –, assembled around one table to organize talks on how to improve security and cooperation in Europe. It is important to mention that the delegations were sitting in alphabetic order and not as East and West in front of each other. That moment in Dipoli, near Helsinki, Finland, was the real beginning of the *Wende* for me.

The Helsinki Final Act was a very big step forward in European security policy. And the negotiations continued, thanks to the very good idea of holding Follow-up Meetings in different places in both, Eastern and Western Europe. Those meetings were like a thermometer that lets you see whether you have a high temperature, or your health has returned to normal. Some of these meetings were only modestly successful. Others brought some real progress. In the Soviet Union many things changed when Brezhnev died in 1982 and we had Andropov, Chernenko and then Gorbachev. When Gorbachev came into power, he launched the notions of *glasnost* and *perestroika*, which mean transparency and reform, respectively. Things then really changed for the whole of Europe. And also for the relations between the United States and the Soviet Union.

As a Swiss diplomat I served from 1982 to 1986 at the Embassy in Moscow. For Switzerland, the highlight was that in November 1985, the same year Gorbachev came to power in March, we hosted a meeting in Geneva between President Ronald Reagan and Secretary-General Michail Gorbachev,

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both with their wives. They stayed in Geneva for a few days and had various talks. I met Gorbachev when he was setting out for that meeting and I wished him success, adding that we had prepared everything as well as we could. He looked at me and said: “You Swiss have prepared everything well, I know. The question is whether we are prepared enough for this meeting”. Our Federal President at the time, Kurt Furgler, met with the two guests, and they came out of the meeting with a very good result.

In January 1986, for the first time since Khrushchev's days, Gorbachev organized a New Year's reception in the Kremlin. Most of the Western ambassadors were absent from Moscow during the public holydays. So, the *chargés d’affaires* – I was *chargée d’affaires* in the Swiss embassy – went to that reception. When Gorbachev saw me, he took me aside and said: “You know that meeting in Geneva was absolutely fantastic, and your president did such good work moderating our meeting on our future cooperation. It is due to him that we have a series of bilateral negotiations, mainly on disarmament. I would like to thank you and Switzerland for that meeting.” I was very pleased to get this compliment for my country. I very much esteemed Kurt Furgler. He was a highly intelligent person and politician.

Those were my two encounters with Gorbachev, and they remain memorable for me. In January 1987 I started my new assignment as Ambassador to Finland in Helsinki. From there we watched the dramatic changes in Russia, and one started to feel that the Soviet Union would not stay together, that something big was going to happen. Also, one felt that something was changing between East and West. And indeed, three days after I started my next assignment at the Ministry, heading the newly created Division for Peace, Security and Disarmament, including the CSCE, on 9 November 1989, the Berlin Wall fell. That was my entry into the CSCE, in the midst of *die Wende*. I had never worked for the CSCE before. But I was very happy to spend the whole night in front of the television in my hotel in Bern just after I arrived, watching what was happening in Berlin. I had lived in Berlin in 1962, the second year of the construction of the Wall, as an assistant to my university professor, Max Imboden. And there I sat now, watching its fall. This was a very important moment. But in my opinion, *die Wende* had already started in Dipoli in 1972. Because this was a gradual development, not without setbacks. It was not a straight climb up the hill, it had its ups and downs. But the result was that we reached a situation where East and West were really coming together. I think it was very wise of the CSCE to organize a negotiation where we set ourselves the goal of creating a follow-up to the Helsinki Final Act in the form of a Charter. I remember it was the German delegate who came up with the name of it: “Charter for a New Europe”. The French, President Mitterrand who took a personal interest in these negotiations, wanted the final Summit Meeting to be in Paris. It was very interesting that the French said that for the last time, ambassadors of neutral Participating States should be the moderators of the negotiation groups. Rolf Ekéus of Sweden, Markku Reimaa of Finland and myself were chosen to moderate these three groups.

Your group was working on the future of Europe. What was the task of the other groups?

Rolf Ekéus was working on the confirmation of the basic commitments, the principles of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, and their enlargement. This meant the addition of a whole list of human rights, which had not been included in the Final Act. So, his area was to define the theoretical basis of the *Wende*. My task was to determine “what does it mean practically, what can we do?” The third group was on institutionalization. That was for Markku Reimaa, the Finish colleague. And then we had the Austrian, who was the fourth neutral. We wanted him to have a job, too. Because we didn't find it right that he had no role to play. I said that he should be the “super co-ordinator”. He should see to it that these three groups come up with compatible wording for the Charter. But in fact, the three of us met once a week for lunch to inform each other of how far we were progressing in our groups. Sometimes when we were free, we also sat in the other groups to hear how things were advancing. So, we already had a harmonious text. We didn't really need the super co-ordinator. Not until the very end, when President Mitterrand himself requested that the Court of Arbitration be introduced into my chapter on the future activities. And so, we had to reopen our work three days before the summit was to take place. I said the meeting should be held under the super co-ordinator, so that he could also have a role in this negotiation. And fortunately, we were able to get all of the participants into line, so that we could resolve the problem on time.

The Charter of Paris is known as the most enthusiastic document in international law. When you read it, it seems like we have overcome all challenges and the difficulties. The document even states that the time of conflict and war is over. Do you think that it does justice to the historical context where it was created?

Well, I would like to say that during the CSCE meeting on human rights in Copenhagen in June 1990, we had a little group preparing the Charter ahead of the negotiations that were to start in July in Vienna. And there in this little group I said that when we envisage the plan of the Charter, we should never forget that we need something to prevent future conflicts. Because what was happening in Europe now could also cause new problems for some populations, for some states, and we should be ready for that. We should also not forget that conflicts could also arise in the future. And I was not followed by any other delegation.

The Charter was indeed intended to be the confirmation that the Cold War between the East and West had come to an end. And we felt this extremely strongly in the negotiations of the Charter. We even had young people in the delegations from Eastern Europe – many countries, especially Czechoslovakia and Poland, sent young diplomats that had left university not long ago – who were so enthusiastic about the changes in Europe that I sometimes felt like we were in a university seminar where we had been given the task of creating an imaginary document marking the imaginary end of the Cold War. I think it is very good that this enthusiastic spirit is reflected in the Charter, because it is an indication of what Europe could be and what Europe seemed to be in 1990. It makes you think of a new Europe and makes you want to try to avoid having conflicts sweeping over our continent again as has been the case in former centuries and in the 20th century as well. It requests that people be a bit more positive in their actions. That is why I find the Charter to be a document of its time. I was often asked afterwards, even when I retired and was chairing the Helsinki Committee of Switzerland, whether the Charter should be renegotiated and made more adaptable to realities of the time. And I was always against it. Because it documents a very important moment in European history and we should keep this moment in mind when we encounter new difficulties, in order to have an idea of how we could come back to improve the present situation in Europe. To my mind it remains a guidepost, showing us where we should go. And so I answered: “You don't change the United Nations Charter of 1945. Why should we change the CSCE’s Paris Charter?”

What was lacking in the Charter was a relevant institutionalization for implementing the commitments of the Charter. That problem was addressed again two years later at the next CSCE Summit Meeting in Helsinki. We planned for light institutionalization – allow me to perhaps repeat it quickly: it was foreseen to have a Conflict Prevention Centre in Vienna, a small Secretariat in Prague – a bit symbolic, but decentralized –, and in Warsaw an office that became very important for democracy and human rights. We had already started with missions to observe elections in the Participating States. That became very important later on, especially as Western countries also started having these observation missions to show that this was not something directed just against the East. It was something that we all really needed, to be sure that we had fair elections in our democracies. Later on, we talked about additional institutionalization. But for the moment it was really these very light institutions. In order to take care of the argument that there was a possibility of future conflicts, we created the Council of Senior Officials in Prague. The idea was that the Senior Officials could assemble if there were to be a conflict anywhere on the continent, to discuss it and to find solutions. Nobody was thinking that anyone would ever use this *ad hoc* Council of Senior Officials. Unfortunately, two years later, we started to assemble in Prague at times almost every second week, to try to pacify the Yugoslav wars, the breakup of the Soviet Union and then the conflicts over Nagorno Karabakh, in Georgia and so on. I remember how the Swiss delegation was even joking to get a house in Prague in order not to have to go to the hotel every time. We always stayed the Saturday morning after a long night session, often until 5 o'clock a.m., trying to find solutions. But it was difficult; the positions were rigid, and one felt that these were very old conflicts that were surfacing again. In this aftermath of the *Wende*, the situation celebrated in the Charter was not of very long duration, unfortunately.

When you look at the Charter now, do you consider it to be a well-crafted and successfully negotiated document or more of a miracle where synergies connected, a historical moment that is very difficult to recreate or repeat?

That's a very good question. I would say it has elements of both. When I read through the Charter, I would still say that it is a very good document with a unified structure. And it is really the blueprint for a peaceful Europe. It has many elements that can help to keep Europe peaceful if it is really used. The problem is that both in the CSCE and also today in the OSCE the commitments are political and not legal. You have a political responsibility as a state to implement these commitments, but nobody can force you to implement them. And this is the whole problem of the CSCE/OSCE that has existed from the very beginning and remains with us. We have the same problem in the General Assembly of the United Nations, the same principle of political commitments. This is sometimes difficult, but it has also made things easier. Think about it this way. It took almost three years to negotiate the Helsinki Final Act, whereas drafting the Charter of Paris took only four months, from July to November 1990. This is of course a very short time for negotiations. It was thanks to the enthusiasm that we could come to conclusions so quickly.

The French under Mitterrand really wanted this meeting. The French ambassador Pierre Morel even distributed the poem "Embassy" by W.H. Auden to the delegations which speaks about diplomats being responsible for what happens on the ground. Did you have a feeling of that shared responsibility among the other delegations?

I certainly had the impression that Ambassador Morel felt a great responsibility for having a good Charter of Paris. The comparison was very often made with the situation after Napoleon. You remember there were the Vienna negotiations (The Congress of Vienna, June 9, 1815) and afterwards the Peace of Paris on November 20, 1815[2]. And it was thought of as repeating this switch from the Habsburgs to the French, from Vienna to Paris. This certainly inspired Mitterrand, who knew that his time was coming to an end, and he was hoping to have a very positive conclusion for his time, not just for France, but also for Europe, as well as the United States and Canada. So certainly, the French wanted to have a positive document and it was Morel's responsibility to look after that.

I had many talks with him. He wanted in the last moment to introduce the Court of Arbitration, which had been a Swiss proposal at the Helsinki conference from 1972 to 1975 and which became the basis for Principle V of the Helsinki Final Act, "Peaceful Settlement of Disputes". It was never implemented. So, Mitterrand wanted also to have this included. He was in fact trying to complete this document in a way that we would have some judicial authority. We had a lot of meetings on this in the Council of Senior Officials after 1992. Every country could name judges for that court, but it has unfortunately never been applied.

Do you have a feeling that the Charter of Paris basically institutionalized the dialogue that was already happening in the CSCE? Was it a way to create a structured setting for continued discussions?

For continued discussions, yes. It was not the endpoint, even though some delegations, some Participating States assumed that, in fact, with the *Wende* the task of the CSCE had come to an end and one could finish with the Charter of Paris. But most of the delegations did not share this view. And the Charter was certainly an attempt to create a new basis for cooperation. No longer a basis for trying to overcome separation, but for cooperation after having found a way to come together, to overcome the Cold War, to be the one community Gorbachev was always talking about, the "European House" that had to be furnished. The Charter was an instrument for that. It was built by two parties with the neutrals as a go-between. Don't forget that the Warsaw Pact was dissolved shortly after the signature of the Charter, also as a consequence of this *Wende*, this end of the Cold War. The intention of the Charter was really to declare the end of the Cold War, and on this it was very clear. This is why in the first part of the Charter on the basic principles you have this sentence about the end of East-West confrontation: "The era of confrontation and division of Europe has ended". This is the thing that remains important and we should really remember the Charter as a document that offers a way out of the old models.

What was your role and what was the composition of the Swiss delegation?

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[2] the Congress of Paris, which is part of what is known as the first phase of the Concert of Europe, typically described with its beginning in 1814 with the Congress of Vienna, and ending in the early 1860s with the Prussian and Austrian invasion of Denmark. This first phase included numerous congresses, including the **Congress of Paris in 1856** which some scholars argue represented the apex of the Concert of Europe in its ending of the Crimean War.

I was the head of the Swiss delegation. This was logical, because I was the head of the Division for Peace, Security and Disarmament in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that was founded in 1989 and dealt *i.a*. with CSCE matters. This new division based on an idea of the most able Swiss diplomat Edouard Brunner, who was part of the negotiations of the Helsinki Final Act and Secretary of State until 1989, when he left as Swiss Ambassador to Washington.

The whole delegation including myself counted six members: From the Ministry of Foreign Affairs Paul Widmer, the head of the section dealing, in particular, with the CSCE in my division, and one of his collaborators, Jean-Claude Joseph, experienced in CSCE negotiations already beforehand and in particular in the CSBM negotiations, from the Swiss Embassy in Vienna. For military security matters, the head of the security division of the Ministry of Defence, Divisionär Josef Schärli, and one of his collaborators were also part of the delegation; Divisionär Schärli had participated for many years already in CSCE delegations negotiating previous documents. When my division was created in Bern, the Ministry of Defence had also created a division for security questions, of which he became the head. In Bern, we were in fact seen by some as competitors. In Vienna he had his own office. He worked on the questions concerning military security, mainly in the parallel document on Confidence and Security Building Measures (CSBM), while my collaborators were concentrated on the issues of the Charter, and my particular activity was my work as a mediator and moderator. Two years later, at the Summit Meeting in Helsinki 1992 (Helsinki II), when we had the final informal dinner within the delegation, he thanked me and said he was very happy that the cooperation with a woman was developing so well. Obviously, he had initially been critical that I as a woman was leading important diplomatic work. But fortunately, our working relations improved over time.

In Vienna, on the basis of the Helsinki Final Act, the negotiations on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures (CSBM) among all Participating States, started in 1984 at the Stockholm Conference, and on the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) between NATO and the Warsaw Pact, continued parallel to the Charter negotiations and were adopted in Paris as well. The Swiss diplomatic participation in the CSBM negotiations in Vienna was covered by Jean Claude Joseph, specially assigned to the Swiss Embassy in Vienna, being, during the Charter negotiations, included in my delegation. He had already been involved in the negotiations of the Helsinki Final Act. From there he had some experience with moderating a group, suggesting for example that it was good to first collect ideas before one started drafting a text, an advice that proved to be very useful.

Paul Widmer was my deputy. However, he was not present all the time. He sometimes went back to Bern to represent the CSCE negotiations when they were discussed in the capital. He was very active in supporting us in Vienna. Once he replaced me at a meeting in Vienna, while I was at the CSCE Ministerial Meeting in New York.

This makes me think that the negotiations in the CSCE were different from today's negotiations in the OSCE. It seems that back then meetings were convened when there was a specific topic to discuss or when an event such as a summit had to be prepared. Then all of these diplomats would come from their capitals and work together on a document until it was adopted. Nowadays the delegations are stationed in Vienna permanently and have their regular weekly meetings. At that time, this was not the practice.

The task was different. At that time in Vienna, in preparation for the summit in Paris, we had to negotiate a document with specialists present. So, it was of course very good if you could choose people who would join the negotiation from Bern. We would be together through the whole day and towards the end of the negotiations often at night sessions, depending upon each other and working together very closely. We lived in the same hotel. We could meet anytime if necessary. So, we were much closer. I had also taken my secretary with us, and she did an absolutely perfect work. She was always at our disposal and very quickly typed up anything we needed to have in writing. When I was preparing my texts for a morning meeting, she would type them before I went; I could already take them with me. We were a team from Bern that worked very well together.

I had somebody attending the group of Ambassador Reimaa on institutionalization. I had another colleague attending my group. He was also a sort of secretary for me: I couldn't take notes all the time, so he took notes. He was very reliable. It was his first post as a diplomat; he was the youngest among us. Excellent man. And then, for the security matters, Divisionär Schärli and his collaborator from the Ministry of Defence were responsible for the military aspects. Additionally, Jean-Claude Joseph went, beside the CSBMs meetings, to Ambassador Ekéus' group, where they were `discussing "principles". I sometimes went myself when I was free, because that was really the basic declaration of the end of the Cold War.

Sometimes I also went to my Finnish friend's group. Things were a bit dramatic there, because some delegations were against institutionalization. The Americans were rather hesitant. Our Swiss foreign minister was also not very happy with institutionalization. But we nonetheless did not negotiate against it, because I found that we have to implement the commitments we are creating. The Austrians wanted institutionalization to be very far-reaching, because knowing their history, they clearly saw the risks Europe was facing, for example in Yugoslavia, and were aiming at having the OSCE seat in Vienna. The discussions in the institutionalization group were very lively, but not much made it in the Charter in the end. Everybody will say they were looking to find a consensus, but in fact they mostly felt it was not necessary to have new institutions when you have NATO, when you have the Council of Europe, when you have the growing European Union. The European Union was very discrete in these discussions, because they were focusing on their own organization developing. So, there was a very strange atmosphere in this group on institutionalization.

In my group on the role of the CSCE in different fields in the new Europe, it was the contrary. It was a very open discussion, because we wanted to find a lot of venues for the CSCE to act in order to improve the situation in Europe. We had the human dimension, of course, but also economic questions, and the then new topic of environment. And we had the question of dealing with other states outside of Europe. We talked about the Southern Mediterranean states, and it was in the air that the Americans would come up with Japan. They didn't want to have only the French bringing their former colonies into the CSCE sphere, they wanted also a neighbour of theirs from the other side of the American continent. That was very interesting: for the first time we started to realize how close Asia was to the United States. Historically, we always saw the United States with its east coast being close to Europe, but the other side is even closer to Asia. And so very soon after the Mediterranean states, Japan was also brought in with the same status.

I discovered something very interesting about myself during those negotiations. I could sit for hours. Sometimes people would ask if they could go outside for a moment for a cigarette. And I would say: “Well, I feel very comfortable. You may go out if you feel like it, anybody can leave if they want.” And they, of course, did not dare to leave because they were afraid that something might be negotiated that they could not accept. So that was also quite a good method for coming to compromises.

With the war in Ukraine many people have said that the OSCE has to reinvent itself to become relevant again. There have been calls for the OSCE to go back to the way it was doing business in the CSCE, meaning the pre-institutionalized phase of the OSCE. In the constellation as things are now, do you see a role for the OSCE and how do you think it can reinvent itself?

First of all, I'm certainly not in favour of going back to the CSCE, because I think the institutions the OSCE has now are very good for the tasks it has. But the problems raised by this war in Ukraine are problems that the CSCE and the OSCE have never had to face before. We have had smaller conflicts where the majority of OSCE participating States could cooperate to confine the conflicts to a certain extent. But now for this war, any entity like the CSCE or the OSCE would be too weak with the mechanisms we have at our disposal. The OSCE can begin to function again once there is an armistice, once the Ukrainians and Putin decide to have peace negotiations. Then there would be a possibility for the OSCE to come in. But then, of course, Russia would have to be readmitted as a full participating State, and not be prevented from participating at meetings as was done by the Poles during their Chairpersonship in 2022. The most important task for the OSCE now is to do whatever is in its capacity to confine this conflict. And as soon as the two parties agree to have negotiations, it could come in again with its own mechanisms. But as things stand now, I see that again we have the situation we had at the Helsinki II summit in 1992. The OSCE has not the means for playing a role in a real war between Russia and another country in Europe, with heavy weapons. I don't see what it can do in that specific context. It can continue its work in the rest of Europe and North America. But I don't see a role for it in the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, as long as the present war goes on.

When the Charter of Paris was signed, we actually had the opposite situation of what we're witnessing today. How will we, after the war in Ukraine, eventually be able to return to a point in history where we can be enthusiastic about the future? Do you think that there were things that should have been discussed in the negotiations for the Charter of Paris that delegations neglected in that moment of enthusiasm, perhaps because they were not ready to talk about them yet? More importantly, can we learn from this episode in the past how to pave a shortcut in the future and save 45 years which were needed to get to Paris?

When I recall the climate during the negotiations of the Paris Charter, I have the feeling that we were really very moved by the developments, in particular in Central and Eastern Europe, by the position of the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union didn’t collapse until the end of 1991, and we were still in 1990. We were very enthusiastic about Gorbachev’s talk of one common European house. The fall of the Berlin Wall was of course the symbol of the end of the Cold War and the negotiations in Vienna can be seen as the diplomatic effort to conclude the historical era of this strong opposition between Eastern and Western Europe. We lived in one, united Europe. That was really what people believed. The reunification of the two Germanies was also a very important step that for decades had sort of guided our ambitions to change Europe. And here it was. So, the enthusiasm was not artificial. The enthusiasm was real.

It was only that we should have made a reservation in the sense that participating states should be prepared that new conflicts may come up and should have means to stop them before they develop, to find peaceful solutions together. What happened with the annexation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 is that there was not enough of a reaction, also because there were no OSCE mechanisms to prevent or stop this violation of international law. Many European countries did not realize the significance of this event for the future, that this was really a first step of a strategic plan to change the position of Ukraine and thus the power system in Europe. In addition, Russia occupied Donbas and Luhansk in the East of Ukraine, but this time, OSCE, on request of the Ukrainian Government, became active and established, upon a consensus decision of the participating states, the Special Monitoring Mission (SMM) that started on 21.03.2014 and discontinued on 31.03.2022, after the Russian invasion in the Ukraine. The task of the SMM was to observe the situation and facilitate the dialogue among the parties to the conflict. There were many armistices, broken regularly, until Russia started the war and thus created a different situation. This is what we forget sometimes: that the OSCE immediately sent a mission to these areas. They couldn't go to Crimea, that was annexed. But to Donbas and Luhansk, the OSCE sent a mission.

Allow me to go back to the negotiations in Vienna. How was the Charter received politically in the various parts of Europe? What did it mean for Switzerland?

For Switzerland it was a big success. Switzerland was very satisfied that we had achieved this end of the Cold War because that was what we had been aiming for, also throughout our negotiations in the CSCE, starting from 1972. That's why we were there. The other question, of course, was to see if we still needed the same defence policies, the same policy of neutrality. Back in Switzerland there was a discussion about whether neutrality was still necessary. We came to the conclusion that we should not give up neutrality, that it was very important for Switzerland to remain neutral and to continue to play its role, also in the case of new conflicts coming up. We did not believe that the Paris Charter meant there would be no conflicts at all in the future. We didn't believe in that because we knew from world history that humankind will always create some conflict somewhere. That is why we were fighting in the Charter of Paris to have a conference on national minorities in Geneva in 1991. We argued that all this separation of countries, the foreseeable dissolution of the Soviet Union, the slow beginning of problems in Yugoslavia, all of that could create problems with minorities. New borders would be constructed and then you would have people who in fact belonged together living on either side, and this can always be a ground of conflict.

So, what we thought really was that we had to be ready to face new conflicts. That is also why we were thinking in a more global context – not just in the context of the CSCE or OSCE. We were thinking that we have to be ready to co-operate with others if new conflicts come up, that we are not strong enough just to stay at our border and fight off anyone trying to invade our country, that this time is over. That is why we discussed neutrality in 1991 and 1992: whether the reasons for neutrality remained the same or whether we had to change our policy. The fact is that there is a legal base of neutrality, according to the Hague Convention we have signed 1907, as some other governments have done in those days.

The policy of neutrality enabling a neutral county to apply the law of neutrality if needed can change according to the world situation and the situation of your own country. And this was something we had the courage to discuss in 1991/92. And we really discussed these problems in various political and scientific groups, also within the administration. In addition, we were open for Europe. Switzerland participated intensively in the negotiations on the European Economic Area (EEA). The government wanted in the end also to join the European Union. Contrary to this, the majority of the people were not in favour of membership of the EU and even refused to join the European Economic Area (EEA) in a vote in 1992. Unfortunately, two ministers had already handed in a request for admission to the European Union before the vote on EEA. The request was only taken back a few years ago. In following years, we became much more sceptical about changing the political principles. Today, the bilateral relations of Switzerland with the EU, and a modern form of neutrality, are again discussed, against an important group who wants to keep things as they are. The people will have to vote again on these questions.

What was your country's main contribution to the institutionalization and development of the OSCE?

We were a little bit discreet about institutionalization because our foreign minister, was not very enthusiastic about it. So, we couldn't advance too much, even though we would have wanted to. But we were very happy that our old proposal for a Court of Arbitration was again introduced. And we also found it very good that we had this Prague mechanism of Senior Officials, because we saw a world full of potential crises that could break out. Even though there was unity now and an end to the Cold War, it was good just to be reassured that the CSCE in such cases could do its job and at least have regular meetings in Prague. We very much liked the Conflict Prevention Centre that they started to build up in Vienna, the Office for democracy (later for democratic institutions and human rights) in Warsaw and the office in Prague, even though they all needed also to be extended and elaborated further. Most important were annual Ministerial Meetings and every second year a Summit Meeting. So, institutionalization was not the chapter where we were most active in the whole Charter of Paris. We were more engaged in the substance of activities of the CSCE.

How do you see the role that the neutral and the non-aligned countries played in the whole Helsinki process leading up to Paris and beyond? Would you say they were there to reconcile the two worlds, to find wording sometimes when the others were incapable of finding the right words?

That’s right. That was what I was referring to in the beginning, this art of finding compromises.
And this is what the neutral and non-aligned countries did a lot, certainly for negotiating the Helsinki Final Act in Geneva and Helsinki, a little bit less for the Charter of Paris. The three of us, coming from neutral states, directing the three groups, as the French wanted, were very close and it worked out well, I think. Among the non-aligned countries, I must give credit to the Yugoslav delegation. The ambassador and his people helped me a lot in my group. They really tried in the old tradition, working together with the neutrals and especially with Switzerland, to support me. I felt only sometimes that we had a different background in the way of thinking and in the way of using principles. Not the principles of Helsinki, but principles of law, for instance, or politics. They were really very helpful, and they wanted the cooperation among the neutral and the non-aligned (N+N) to continue. I think it was

a bit because they felt that something was going in a wrong direction at home, a situation that could cause a breakdown of the whole of Yugoslavia. And they wanted to still play their role in Vienna, to contribute. Whereas others from this group, like Cyprus, were relatively quiet during the whole process of negotiation.

It is exactly at this time that the direct negotiations between the NATO countries and the Warsaw Pact countries intensified. Do you think that this is what made the role of the neutral and non-aligned less important?

This contributed to it. I had the impression that for the French, the neutrals were those who could negotiate because they had neutral positions, they were not one-sided, they tried to get to solutions. And that was really true with the three of us who had this habit of wanting to find compromises.
I can give you an example from Helsinki II (1992) of a problem that arose during the negotiations for the summit document. There was a group on the human dimension that had to negotiate, among other things, about how to admit non-governmental organizations into the CSCE process. You had very extreme positions on both sides. There were two young co-ordinators who had to lead this group and they just couldn't succeed in finding compromises. It was the only group that had not concluded its work. The Finns asked me if I would take over, because we had to come to an end, we had to finish that document. I came to that group, which was really a bit in disorder, and I decided on a very harsh procedure. We would proceed along the document, looking at where they already had consensus, and then when we came to a point that was still open, I would try to find a solution within the discussions. But when I saw that after half an hour or an hour we were not advancing, I would say: “We have no time to spend half a day negotiating. The meeting will take place whether we have a result or not; we have to find a solution. I suggest that the two parties who are in disagreement, now leave the room and discuss this outside. Come back when you have a solution.” Fortunately, I knew that there was an American diplomat present who was an excellent negotiator, and he always went out with them. Also, there was a young Polish diplomat, and he would say: “I also disagree, I also have to go outside.” This was only because he so much enjoyed these discussions when they were fighting with each other. I then said, “We continue,” and by the time we came to the next point of contention they had come back and they had a solution. And then the next pair of disagreeing parties would go out to discuss with the American, who tried to find a bilateral solution between the two. With the Pole following, because he was always disagreeing in order to be present there as well. I loved him for that. We used to say that he looked like an angry cat when he was saying he also had to go out. That is how we concluded the work of the groups just on time.

Fortunately, in my group in Vienna I never had this kind of situation, because I started earlier to find compromises. I had no leading role in Helsinki, but was working like the other heads of delegation in the group elaborating the main declaration of the Helsinki II Document. But in Vienna, I sensed much earlier where the points were on which we would have to fight for an agreement. I would host a lunch for five people, sometimes for five delegations disagreeing on specific points, or we would go to a restaurant and discuss this very specific topic until we came to an agreement.

While the negotiations for the Paris Charter were happening, the enthusiasm on all sides was high. And yet very soon after that, there was a war in Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union came to its dissolution, even Czechoslovakia broke apart, though through a velvet divorce, not by a brutal war. Do you think

that there was something that was omitted in the negotiations in Paris that failed to predict that these kinds of conflicts were looming around the first corner?

There were two aspects. The joy and satisfaction about the end of the Cold War was enormous. In general, one did not want to think about possibilities of new wars. On the other hand, new wars could not be excluded in the future. But for this, NATO (and in the beginning the Warsaw Pact) should be the organisations to prevent and manage new wars. That is why they had parallel negotiations. I think we all knew that the CSCE would not be strong enough for such eventualities. It had no structure that was strong enough for such a challenge. When I told my Yugoslav colleague that we were regretting the end of autonomy of Kosovo, Sanjak and Vojvodina, he told me he agreed that this autonomy should not have been abolished, but he warned us to be careful, because something terrible would happen to Yugoslavia. So, I knew that they were threatened. I was reporting this information to Bern, but nobody wanted to believe it because not much was visible yet to the outside world. It was a process that started from the inside. Slovenia was the first one to separate from Yugoslavia, without any great war because they were a relatively homogeneous population. It was not a mixture like in Bosnia where you have all three ethnicities and religions living side by side. But we didn't expect that this would go so far, even though Sarajevo was always a hot spot, I think.

I had very fond memories of Croatia, where I travelled when I was 19 years old for our school graduation trip. I wrote in my diary: “The people are friendly and had a great sense of humor; they are like the Italians, only not so loud”. We liked Yugoslavia and we were very sad about what happened. It was hard to imagine that there would be an armed conflict. There was also some outside influence, I think. It was a country that was perhaps under some permanent tension, so that a conflict once started would not finish easily. I think this was a little bit the fear we had.

Moreover, we observed that the Soviet Union was in great danger to collapse. I had watched the situation, being posted to Helsinki from 1986-1989, where we were geographically very close to the Soviet Union. Previously I had been stationed in Moscow and I sometimes travelled back there to see old friends. I was personally quite aware that this was a dangerous situation. Especially when Gorbachev found the Soviet Union to be in a state that he had underestimated himself. He was very strictly educated in this Soviet system. So, at first, he did not realize in what bad shape the country was. His policy with *glasnost* and *perestroika* was a great success towards the outside, also his idea of the “European House”. But the reforms he started inside the country were not really effective. When the first uprising in Lithuania started and military units were sent to stop it, he gave order to take the units back and declared that never in the future he would use armed forces against their own people. However, the opposition, mainly under Boris Yeltsin, was growing, and the end of the Soviet Union became reality by the end of 1991.

These elementary changes were in the air, but somehow one hoped that this new unification of Europe, this end of the Cold War, could help so that these conflicts would not break out to the extent they did afterwards. And also that when they did, these conflicts could be diminished by the new mechanisms created. But these mechanisms and the CSCE as institution were not strong enough for what was needed. NATO was not the right organisation in this context either. As you know from history, fortunately NATO is very cautious. They know what consequences it can have if they fully enter a war. But at the time there were discussions about what kind of cooperation neutral states could have with NATO. Switzerland didn’t think of joining NATO, but we were considering what kind of cooperation we could have. Finally, Switzerland joined the Partnership for Peace created for non-members of NATO. Ever since, some of these non-members have become members of NATO. A big step in this direction did of course Finland and Sweden joining lately, after the war started by Russia against Ukraine.

In Paris the hope was that we were all coming together, but now we have Russia on one side and even those that were neutral fearing for their own existence, joining the NATO alliance. The neutral and non-aligned countries, the ones who used to facilitate the dialogue, no longer have that role. In such a polarized world, who can guide us towards peace?

The situation is totally different now because in those days you had on one side NATO and on the other the Warsaw Pact; the group of neutral and non-aligned states (N+N) stood in between and often served as a “go between” for finding compromises in negotiations. The Warsaw Pact does not exist anymore. After the end of the Cold War, NATO created 1994 Partnership for Peace (PfP) as an instrument for cooperation between NATO and its partner countries. Some of the partner countries later joined NATO. Switzerland is a member of PfP. For a short period of time, Europe believed in peaceful cooperation in the future. But soon small conflicts started in various regions. Since the Russian aggression to Ukraine in February 2022, you have one state in opposition to the rest. Nowadays, I think neutrality does not have the same significance internationally. Finland and Sweden have abandoned it by joining NATO, Austria and Switzerland maintain it. But also in Switzerland, its significance in the modern world is an issue. It is no longer a question of whether you are neutral or not, it's a question of who is good, who is qualified for the work to bring the parties together and to create a real, lasting peace. And this is less dependent upon a position of neutrality, in my opinion, than upon the position in relation to the two parties and the willingness to be outside of the conflict and to bring them together. And this does not necessarily have to be a neutral state. This can be a state which is in the right position to do that.

From Paris onwards that CSCE/OSCE has developed mechanisms for conflict prevention and also for mediation. Do you think these have been developed enough for the supranational bodies to take over in cases where you have countries that are aggressors and are not fulfilling their obligations?

I think everything in these documents should remain unchanged, but you have somehow to build upon these documents to develop further mechanisms that work for the current time, the time you live in. They cannot be there forever without any changes. And we have big changes. You discover it with a young generation that has a different kind of feeling and judgment. There are changes in the national platforms, too, because the world is changing and the mentality, the questions, the subjects and the objects are changing. So, I do not quite believe that the existing mechanisms are sufficient for the main problems we have to face now. We didn't really think in the CSCE and later in the OSCE that we would ever face such a war in Europe. We thought that wars were something for other regions of the world, but not for Europe. It's a new situation and I suspect the mechanisms are too weak for the present situation.

We would perhaps have to invent a new round of the OSCE to create measures adapted to the new problems. I left the OSCE 22 years ago, so, of course, I don't quite know all the mechanisms that have been developed in the meantime. But those that I remember from the Charter of Paris and from the Helsinki Document of 1992, those are not strong enough. I will give you an example. The Court of Arbitration in Geneva has never been used. One of the problems, a reason why it has never been used, is that delegations did not want to have the big problems included in the list of topics on which the Court could be appealed to. And that is why the Court of Arbitration is not an instrument for finding a solution for such a war. There might be other tribunals or platforms for peace negotiations, perhaps within the United Nations. But even there the Security Council would not be able to help in this situation, where one of the five permanent members, Russia, is involved. So, it is difficult to find a mechanism. Russia is not so present in the OSCE at the moment, as I hear. So, it is really difficult for me to tell you what body could help to find a peaceful solution to that conflict.

When you see the situation from today's perspective, obviously having in mind what is happening in Ukraine, what do you think should have been done better or more intensely? What worked and what did not?

In the beginning of the 1990-ies, we were very much worried about what was happening with the growing number of national minorities due to the breakup of the Soviet Union, and of Yugoslavia. We saw that across borders more national minorities were created in almost all states. So that was one of the major points we were fighting for in the Charter of Paris. We wanted a better protection of national minorities and proposed, as a first step, a conference on national minorities to be held in 1991 in Geneva. We succeeded. We organised this conference. One of the important aims was the introduction of mechanisms in order to better protect national minorities. One mechanism that had already started was missions with mandates to work together with the people concerned. CSCE missions to countries. I always believed, coming from a direct democracy, that you have to start at the grassroots to help people. We very much contributed to missions of the OSCE – or the CSCE at the time – that would go to a country and together build up a better system where democracy would work and minorities also would be included in the processes. That was very dear to us because we have a country that is composed of different cultural entities. We have German, French, Italian and Romansh speaking parts and we have to organize ourselves to be able to live together. So, we saw that as a very good approach to avoid conflicts because of the new groupings in different states.

The war in Ukraine is a topic of concern in all the national politics. It's being discussed in international fora and is a huge challenge to multilateral negotiations and diplomacy. Because if there are members of either the Security Council or the OSCE that decide to abandon everything that we have agreed to, we need to figure out what will be the rule book to follow in such cases. How do we work with those countries? Obviously, this creates a huge challenge to multilateral diplomacy, but there are not many other options out there. People are talking about minilateralism, suggesting that there would be different poles of power and these would somehow figure out different ways of co-operating when needed. But this challenges the concept of co-operative security the OSCE has developed, a concept that entails work in all dimensions. Because we are aware that even environmental issues cause conflict. So, in this sense, it is very hard for the young generation to find any hope that there is a charted path that they can follow for what is coming ahead.

You have been working with youth almost all of your life. How can we educate young people in Europe and beyond and what kind of recommendations or lessons do we have for them?

First of all, we have to explain to them that the world will never be only peaceful, that we live in a world that will always have conflicts that affect us. But we can do our best to keep them small and to work so they do not proliferate too much. And then we can show them what mechanisms exist. We also have to tell them that one has to be awake, that each conflict has a different character and each conflict needs different measures. We have to find for each conflict the solution that fits best. When you look at Ukraine, most probably we have to further develop our military strategies. Because if one party is not willing to refrain from military action except if the other is ready to let go of certain arguments, it is understandable that the occupied country will want to get rid of its occupier before being ready to talk about peace-making or peacekeeping. So, I think in these big conflicts we need new ways to negotiate. It is not possible with the mechanisms we have now. They are really for smaller conflicts.

Look at Nagorno Karabakh. This was a very small conflict compared with what is happening in Ukraine. But also there, you cannot just use some OSCE mechanisms to make peace, and you have people emigrating to their own country. This is a drama, too, and you have basically no means to find a solution. So, I think the mechanisms we have are in fact very often for conflicts that are not "hot" conflicts, but are still in a phase of differences of opinions that you can talk about. When weapons are in play, it is a different matter. The League of Nations was not able to prevent the Second World War. Multilateral diplomacy can work and should always be present as it can make pressure, but it is not necessarily a forum for making peace when the arms are not at rest.

I want to talk a little bit more about the role that youth can play in their societies, not just in light of the war in Ukraine. Do you think that the OSCE has done enough outreach to promote its achievements? Has the general population been informed and do they understand what was achieved in Helsinki, Paris, Copenhagen, in Istanbul?

Interesting that you mention Istanbul. The Platform for Co-operative Security adopted at the Istanbul Summit in 1999 as part of the Charter for European Security used in Kosovo. You know, that was one of my big desires when we discussed these matters in Copenhagen many years ago. I said we should not discuss which organization takes over, but each organization should have its own character and when we have a conflict, we should all sit together and see what can be done by which organization. For me, the Kosovo Force (KFOR) is a clear practical example where different organizations have worked together to get Kosovo out of the crisis. This co-operation for me is very important.

I would also add that our main duty is to tell young people that they have to be engaged in public affairs and they have to try to play a role when they get older. I have always told them: "you are not the future, you are the present. You have to play your role as young people, learn what exists, how countries can resolve problems, not only conflicts". We have problems with the environment and many other matters that require joint action. One should teach young people from very early on what can and should be done to create a better world and that they have a right and even a duty - the older they get - to participate in these processes. Not only through demonstrations, but through action. Concrete action. They need to learn they can do a lot in the societies in which they live. They also need to be given the tools to do it, to build groups among themselves where they can manage their contribution to certain matters. On the social level, they can also help, let's say with poor people, older people. You have to create an engagement in society and an engagement in democracy. These are very important things, I feel. For this, they have to be taught the real rules of real democracy.

There are many cases when young people who have learned about supranational structures like the OSCE or the United Nations, become interested in participating politically, but don't know the mechanisms for how to really change something in their country. This a challenge in many OSCE participating States even now, because even when we have some young people who have the energy and who want to bring about change in line with the commitments that our countries have signed up to, they get reminded that these are just aspirational and not legally binding commitments. That doesn't always give support to those democratic liberal streams in society.

Indeed, that does not give support to those democratic streams in society. We now have elections in Switzerland for the Federal Parliament [22 October 2023]. Almost every party has young candidates. It is very important that young people learn from an early age what democracy is, how they can get engaged and get access to the table where discussions happen. My history teacher was a woman. She said we had to know the constitution of the country and she taught it to us. We were divided into groups and every group had a cluster of articles of the constitution that we had to present and discuss with the class. It was not interesting for everybody, especially the girls who did not even have the right to vote, but it was a fantastic activity. In Switzerland, schools, even secondary schools, have stopped providing lessons in political education. I am not talking about political education for a certain political party of our political regime. I mean political education that informs young people what the constitution is, what our rights and duties are in a functioning democracy. Otherwise, they enter into their various other professions, and they never learn. We are in a situation here in Switzerland now that mothers say they cannot vote because they have children. As if they could not look into an electoral pamphlet while the children sleep. It's ridiculous, but they have no background in civic and political participation. You have to start very early to tell young people what it means to live in this state and what duties you have when you become a citizen. My father took me with him when he went to vote. He took me by the hand to the place where he had to deposit his answer to the question being voted on. And that was at a time when women were not voting. I was born in 1936 and this was perhaps in the late 1940s.

In your lifetime, you have seen the change from not being able to vote to becoming the second ambassador of the Swiss diplomatic service. Tell us more.

We were somehow privileged because we had the will and I don't even say the courage because for me it was not courage that let me be the second woman ambassador. There were female diplomats between my boss, Francoise Pometa, who entered the diplomatic service ten years earlier and became the first female ambassador, and myself. Two of them wanted to get married and they had to leave because it was not permitted for a woman diplomat to have a family. One left because she thought she was not really gifted to become a diplomat; she went to another ministry, the Ministry of Justice and Police. One – she was accepted one year before me – left because she thought she didn't really want a diplomatic career. She was very much interested in culture and politics was less of her interest. So, she was wise enough to leave. She became a journalist. Everybody has their own path. So, I was second because there were a few female diplomats who looked for different solutions, mainly because they got married. Only two out of six chose to become ambassadors.

The new generations are growing up with a different mindset. And I think they have more opportunities, especially with this idea of dividing your work into percentages, so that you can maybe do 40 per cent of your work from home. Perhaps I am old-fashioned, but when I think of a posting like the one I had in Cairo, I would not consider working from home to be a good idea. Who knows what may happen at the embassy when you are not present. If you have some strange people coming into the embassy and nobody knows what to do with them, then you as the ambassador have to be there to be able to say who does what and how. So, you cannot just be sitting nicely in your home office or looking after your children.

Conditions are much better today, of course. Things are easier. We even have quite a few couples in the diplomatic corps. They can share a job at the embassy or after they become ambassadors they can be posted in the same city. In Paris, one of them can work at the embassy and the other at UNESCO, or in New York you have the United Nations and the Consulate General. You can find solutions. But then, of course, those who are not married argue that it is unfair that they cannot go to Paris or New York, for instance, because these postings are occupied by couples. You always have to be very circumspect when organizing these things.

When I was in the United States for diplomatic training, I had a Danish friend who did the introduction programme with me at Princeton University before we went off to our respective universities – it was a two-month programme funded by the Ford Foundation. She went to Chicago University and got to know a man who became a professor and they got married. That was allowed in Denmark, of course – they are much more progressive than the Swiss are. They always found a solution for both. She was, for instance, working in a consulate (for a diplomat it is not much fun to be at the consulate) so he could be at Berkeley or one of the big universities. Then they were both in Brussels. They were always changing. But she made some sacrifices for it to work.

No matter how progressive we have become, the practical difficulties of doing diplomatic work as a woman are still there, maybe even more so in the OSCE, especially in the field operations, where you have unconventional working conditions. Do you think that we are ready for accommodating qualified women who want to participate fully in public life?

Well, I think there is a lot to be done, but we should be very cautious. I am absolutely for equality, for equal positions. I chaired the Committee of Admission of Young diplomats for ten years. We usually admitted three women and four men or something similar. It was always very close. Only once we had more women than men. But the most important thing is whether someone is capable of doing this job, suitable for this career, be it a woman or a man. Currently, if we have two candidates who are totally equal, we have a tendency to take the woman because we need more women in our diplomatic service. But the most important thing is the capacity of the person for this career. I am for equality between men and women, but not for just taking women because we want to have more women. We had a female foreign minister when I was just retiring. She said: “We need more women, but you should not overdo it so that in the end women dominate everything and take on the role men played in the past.”

Even though we are talking a lot about increasing the number of female negotiators and mediators, we still have only three per cent of peace agreements being signed by women. So, we're still lacking women at the table to bring in the female perspective.

I fully agree with you, but I do not think you should take a woman just because she is a woman. You should take her because she is capable of doing the job. In conflict management, I fully agree with you, it is crucial to hear female voices, too. They bring a different point of view. It's not always easy.

I was very often asked in the past what is the difference between a man and a woman. I think that men are quicker to follow the voice of the majority. Women, if they are persuaded by something, they fight much more for it. I realized this at our weekly meetings at the ministry, which either the minister or the state secretary had with the so-called chief diplomats. Often before the meeting we would agree on the points we had to fight for. Whenever our male colleagues felt that our proposal was not in the spirit of the minister, they gave in. And the women – my boss, myself and two or three others – we were the ones to insist and fight. That didn't always earn us credit points. But we felt that if were persuaded that something was right, we should also have the courage to fight for it. I think it's very important to have women bring forward certain things, because they will fight for it. But it needs courage sometimes.

Francoise Pometa once encouraged me before a meeting by telling me: "We have to get our point across at the session you are going to, Marianne. Our point is under number two. Please say it. Clearly!"

Field operations are the OSCE's eyes and the ears on the ground, one of its main tools for receiving information and gaining awareness of potential situations that could escalate and even turn into open conflicts. What do you think of the work that the OSCE has done in the field?

The missions have been one of the very positive results of CSCE/OSCE. The first mission, in Yugoslavia, was directed by Thomas Fleiner, a Swiss professor for public international law. Its goal was to examine the situation and find out what had to be done in this country to prevent future outbreaks. That very first mission lasted hardly more than a few days. It triggered the idea that you should have missions of long duration in countries of potential conflict, for conflict prevention and for conflict solution. This was something that in Switzerland we very much believed in, that the essential thing was to work together with the population, not only with the government. Of course, a government had to agree to having such a mission on its territory. One of the first long-term missions was a rather small one in Croatia. Then, in Bosnia you had the first big mission of 300 people. It was under the first Swiss Chairmanship that they built up this big mission. This, of course, took a long time because the conflict in Bosnia and Herzegovina was longer than other conflicts and because the country has different ethnic and religious groups that have to live together.

I personally find the field operations to be a very good approach because you can have individual solutions and can be very flexible. But that also means that you have to observe the work of the missions, how they function. It is important to choose excellent people to be in these missions.

And we should be careful that we don't maintain missions that don't really work actively anymore, in order to just have some presence. They were intended to work together with the population. With the government also, of course, but I think for me the important thing was always this grassroots cooperation. That is why you go into a country. With the government you can also work from Vienna, but with the people you cannot work from Vienna.

The OSCE has the missions and other mechanisms for early warning. But have we been lacking early action to prevent conflicts at the table before they escalate on the ground?

I don't know what it is, but certain participating States hesitate to bring their problems into the arena of the OSCE, I suppose. They prefer other means to regulate their problems on the ground or with their neighbours and try first to find different solutions. The OSCE has not been united in the view that every problem that comes up somewhere should be brought to the OSCE arena to be treated there. Indeed, it is true that one can also try to solve certain problems on a smaller scale, if they are not big problems. And even with all of the OSCE mechanisms that now exist, you will never prevent an outbreak like the one we have in Ukraine with the aggression of Russia. Because there are other forces at work that a peace-making organization like the OSCE is simply too weak to counteract. Its construction is different.

As somebody who has a lot of experience in mediation and conflict resolution, what do you think could be done in the future? How can we reorganize the space for mediation?

I don't think that you necessarily have to reorganize because it has always been the nature of the CSCE/OSCE to improve the mechanisms based on what is there already. You should not start eliminating things. It is much better to adapt to new times. But what I feel is that mediation support could come from an entity that might be promising but does not necessarily need to be an entity of the OSCE. I think this should still be possible. There is a world outside of the OSCE, but the OSCE can encourage and support an initiative that comes from elsewhere.

The field of international conflict resolution has become very complex in the last thirty, forty years, and in the literature, one often comes across mention of "herding cats" or of creating a "symphonic orchestra" out of competing entities. I am glad to hear that you believe the OSCE can have more of a co-ordinating role.

It can if there is willingness, though the consensus rule will always make things difficult. That is why, perhaps, an initiative sometimes has to come from outside. We cannot always wait until consensus is achieved, especially if one or more of the participating States is involved in the conflict.
It is difficult then to find consensus. You have different possibilities and I think the many possibilities the OSCE has created should remain. We should also be able, as we suggested in Istanbul, to make use of the Platform for Co-operative Security, so that if a conflict arises the existing organizations come together and see who can do what. It is important that there be co-ordination of roles and not a competition about who is doing a better job. I have developed as a diplomat with the CSCE, watching it grow since 1972, and I very much believe in the OSCE. But I see it as one of several multilateral organisms – I am not saying organizations. They each have excellent possibilities, but also their limits in the capacities they can use.

I would say, let us please be very careful and try to maintain the OSCE. It is a very valuable body in Europe, even though it is not at a high point at the moment. We should concentrate on fixing the gaps we have created ourselves. There should be a new Chair[3], and it should be one of the small states, but with a solid government. We should also take care of the existing institutions, so that they are not just abolished by default. This is the task that the participating States should fulfil, and with good leadership this should be possible. Also, it should be possible to animate participating States to be more active.

To conclude, I would like to ask you if you have a message for young people. If you had one message, from all the experience you have had working with youth, what would it be?

That's a lovely question. I am not somebody who feels I have a message to give to humanity. But what I would like really is to encourage young people to be involved as soon as possible in processes of democratic rule and international relations. I find it extremely important that from an early age young people get to know others coming from different countries, especially from conflicting countries. It is important to bring young people together, give them the opportunity to get to know each other, as human beings. So that they know they are all just people with aspirations for the future, and feel that if they work together, they can make a better world. Without fanatism. That, I feel, is a very important basis for more peaceful times. To learn that what is most important is not power or money but living together. Helping each other to build the structures for a good life for citizens and for a creative life in civil society, within our various states and together with different states.
Teaching is very important, and I hope people can say one day that we have seen how we can aspire to make the world a better place and to create better perspective and that is a path worth taking. People like you make me very much believe in this future. Thank you very much for coming to Bern to be my guest, but also for teaching in the OSCE region, the many Model OSCE you have conducted and in particular for reaching out to collect and document our memories from the history of the OSCE.

This interview is part of the oral history project "Living Memory - 30th Anniversary of the Charter of Paris for the New Europe", an extra-budgetary project conducted by the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)'s Documentation Centre in Prague headed by Ambassador Irena Krasnicka. The project envisages intergenerational dialogue based on memories of diplomats who attended the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE)'s Paris Summit in November 1990. The interview was conducted in Basel, Switzerland in October 2023 by Ida Manton, expert supporting the implementation of the Living Memory project.

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[3] The interview was conducted before the Ministerial Council held in December of 2023 in Skopje, where Malta was officially announced as a Chairpersonship for the next year, 2024, starting in less than a month.