

Security in Eurasia: A View from the OSCE

For forthcoming publication with Foreign Policy (Turkey)

The Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) provides a useful vantage point from which to observe trends in relations among its fifty six participating States and, more widely, to examine security developments in Eurasia. With participants stretching from North America through Europe to Central Asia, the OSCE might rightfully be seen to embody the notion of ‘Eurasia’ in all of its diversity. The OSCE participating States are a diverse bunch, featuring rich historical experiences and varied cultural and social compositions, as well as different political structures. Nonetheless, despite these differences, all of these States continue to work together within the OSCE framework, based on a shared vision of how to build comprehensive security through permanent political dialogue and joint action. This is no mean feat, and it is worth examining more closely.

The argument in this paper addresses two points. The first concerns the link between the evolution of key security trends in Eurasia and the development of the OSCE itself. This evolution highlights the adaptability of the OSCE as a project for Eurasian security and hence the enduring relevance of the Organization. The second explores some of the security challenges that are arising from *beyond* the OSCE area in terms of the dilemmas that these pose for the participating States and the OSCE approach.

*

The evolution of key security trends in Eurasia has been, indeed, remarkably in line with the CSCE/OSCE approach as it has itself developed over the years. This approach, initiated in Helsinki, has been to build co-operative security through a cross-dimensional prism. Put simply, the idea has been that security can only be built if it is addressed in all of its dimensions. The Helsinki Final Act was innovative precisely for this cross-dimensional concept, which set out the idea that that the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms, healthy economic and environmental governance and political-military co-operation between states were essential, mutually reinforcing pillars of a single, comprehensive concept of security.

Launched in 1975, the CSCE project reflected the needs as well as the mood of the day. Given the nature of security during the Cold War, the focus then fell mostly – if not exclusively – on developing a framework for arms control and confidence and security building measures (CSBMs). Over time, what seemed like painstakingly slow work in this area came to provide the foundation for the rapid advances that occurred during and after the end of the Cold War. A reliable framework of arms control and CSBMs allowed for an orderly and deep reduction of the stockpiles of weapons inherited from the Cold War. In addition, the freeing of alliance systems and opening of co-operative security frameworks made it possible for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the European Union (EU) to incorporate new member states and help many other states to consolidate themselves on a path of stability and democracy. On this basis also, key Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian states were able to develop a solid practice of co-operation, which helped to contain enduring points of unresolved tension and conflict.

In 1990, the Paris Charter, signed by all OSCE participating States, did not mince words in declaring that “We undertake to build, consolidate and strengthen democracy as the only system of government of our nations.” The Charter also covered the protection of national minorities and the promotion of freedom of the media. The perspective of an orderly transition towards democracy was adopted as a common template by all. Thus, the 1990s saw a period of a unique consensus between the participating States about how to take forward the connected concept of security developed in the Helsinki Final Act. As always, Turkey was a very active partner in the development of the OSCE throughout that period.

Some eighteen years later, the ambitious vision developed in the Paris Charter -- to build a community of democratic states, on the basis of human rights, the rule of law and open economic systems -- remains as relevant as ever before. The words of the EU High Representative, Javier Solana, are worth citing in this respect: “The founding treaties of the Council of Europe and the OSCE define what it means to be European. It is difficult to imagine building a new European security order on a different platform.”¹ The evolving CSCE and OSCE projects are woven now into the very identity of Europe.

¹ Javier Solana, Speech delivered to the 44rd Munich Conference on Security Policy (February 10, 2008)

The process has not advanced without moments of crisis, witnessed most sharply during the wars that accompanied dissolution of Yugoslavia. Despite these challenges, however, the OSCE project has shown itself to be remarkably resilient, and it has achieved tangible results in transforming the continent into the open, vibrant and dynamic area that we now know. True, the OSCE did not develop into the central security institution wished for by some of its participating States. Indeed, the Organisation developed more as a forum for permanent security dialogue, which acts to support participating States in implementing the commitments they have undertaken across a broad spectrum of security areas. The OSCE message proved contagious, and a comprehensive approach to security has been adopted by many other international organisations, such as the Council of Europe, NATO, and the EU.

This does not make the work of the OSCE any easier. Indeed, one of the lessons of current times is the need for patience and sustained engagement to build stability and co-operative security based on shared values. For democratic values to take root in societies experiencing transition, time, patience and persistence are required. In open societies, information and behaviour spread and develop quickly, yet generational and structural changes must occur before new patterns are established firmly. Clearly, patience and continuity of purpose are required to bring to fruition the ambitious elements of the OSCE *acquis*. This is especially true for societies that have had little past experience of democratic practice, where democracy is a constant project that encounters new challenges as societies progress in complexity and diversity. The OSCE is not alone in seeking to build inclusive and broad frameworks for societal development. Indeed, the Organisation works very closely in this endeavour with the Council of Europe and the EU, namely through its accession process and its Neighbourhood Policy, as well as with NATO.

Currently, the principles and guidelines developed since 1975 are being questioned by some States in Eurasia, partly because they are perceived to be discriminatory. Even as other organizations, such as the EU and NATO, have moved closer to the OSCE's comprehensive, multi-dimensional approach to security, the states outside of these organizations (and their enlargement mechanisms) have grown increasingly sensitive about accepting norms and standards that seem to be "imposed" by others. In this respect, some of the concerns of earlier periods of the CSCE/OSCE

have returned to the forefront of security thinking today. This situation raises a difficult question: Given the increasing diversity that characterises the OSCE participating States, will it prove possible to maintain common frameworks for the promotion of what seem to be an increasingly frayed consensus on shared values?

In 2008, the OSCE has become once again a forum where differences between key actors across a wide spectrum of issues, ranging from democratic transformation to arms control, find open expression. The rise of tensions inside the OSCE is nothing more than an accurate reflection of those occurring outside the Organization across Eurasia. Real frictions have arisen – because major states are pushing back against the framework of shared values and concomitant commitments that was built within the OSCE framework, and because these commitments are increasingly being promoted by multinational and supra-national frameworks that share the OSCE’s commitment to democratic values, but lack its inclusivity. Distancing themselves from the “universal” democratic principles of the 1990s, these states are instead proposing unique national, or ‘sovereign,’ approaches to democracy and the rule of law, and have become resistant to the more intrusive aspects of OSCE commitments.

In addition, the framework for Eurasian arms control that was created after 1990 is under challenge. The implications of this trend are not yet clear, but this may herald the return of political-military questions to Eurasian security thinking. At the very least, opacity may increase in military developments across Eurasia. At most, new arms races – if not among Eurasia’s major powers, then among smaller parties to sub-regional conflicts – may no longer be inconceivable.

Building peace across Eurasia is unfinished business. Parts of the Western Balkans remain caught in the throes of a difficult and tense post-conflict process. The unresolved conflicts in the former Soviet Union remain entrenched and volatile. The situation is complicated by the unpredictable ramifications of the evolving fate of Kosovo. Real differences have emerged between States on how to settle these conflicts.

The result is a complex picture. First, it should be clear that the common project of strengthening democracy is incomplete. Some states are running into real difficulties (and sometimes losing the requisite political will) in consolidating legitimate institutions and the rule of law and crafting a culture of democracy, inclusion and reconciliation. State-building processes also remain incomplete in parts of the Western Balkans,

Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus. Many states across Eurasia remain weak and face real problems of governance and institutions.

As a result, the framework for political dialogue and joint action that the OSCE provides for security in Eurasia is under increasing pressure from several directions at once. The foundations and mechanisms of co-operation set up in the 1990s are being challenged as never before -- even as the need for them increases. The OSCE role in this context of uncertainty and difficulty is vital, not least because it is the only security organization in which all Euro-Atlantic and Eurasian States participate as equals within a framework of shared and agreed values. However, taking forward the achievements of the past into new contexts will require sustained efforts from all participating States.

*

The external context surrounding the OSCE is also challenging. The importance of security challenges arising from outside the OSCE's geographic area has never been as sharp as it is today for the OSCE participating States. In some respects, this reflects a fundamental reversal of the sources of insecurity from the Cold War period, when the dyadic relationship of adversaries and their allies mattered most. Turkey is central for finding solutions for many of these challenges, because of its geographic position, its **unique** expertise and its vital role in building any coordinated international policy.

New challenges range from trafficking in human beings and the rise of various forms of extremism to uncontrolled migration flows and environmental degradation. These risks are often driven by non-state actors, such as terrorist and criminal networks. They are also increasingly cross-boundary in nature and impact. On the whole, state weakness lies at the source of many of these challenges, as does the instability of societies on the periphery of the OSCE, many of which are experiencing demographic booms. In addition, energy has returned to the forefront of security thinking, with a different spin than it had in the 1970s but no less complexity.

What's more, the ideological dimension of international relations has returned. Culture, intolerance and discrimination, lack of respect and recognition – such intangibles matter intensely for today's relations between states and peoples, as well as for development within our countries. Culture has become a security issue. We have not

yet grasped the ramifications of this trend on the delicate, internal workings of our states, nor do we understand yet how to handle ‘culture’ as an international issue.

These challenges pose dilemmas for the OSCE and its participating States. How can we best respond to such a complex array of challenges? How can the OSCE experience and toolbox be useful for the participating States themselves and for their neighbours?

In many respects, the OSCE is already answering these questions. The Organization has developed innovative forms of co-operation to fight against trafficking and international terrorism. It is working to bolster existing state capacity and democratic institutions in the field of policing and border security and management, and to foster new ones. The OSCE is also active on the front of enhancing healthy economic and environmental governance. More traditionally, but no less importantly, the Organization continues its multi-dimensional work to promote freedom of the media and to ensure the rights of minorities. The OSCE has long been at the forefront of international efforts to raise awareness on questions linked to building tolerance and non-discrimination, and works today in tandem with the UN-led Alliance of Civilizations initiative.

Nonetheless, many questions remain, and these are all the more difficult to address, because they are being raised in a context where traditional forms of power in international relations may be changing. The limits to the utility of some forms of hard power have been demonstrated in Afghanistan, Iraq and Lebanon. At the same time, new forms of soft power must be developed and older forms consolidated. Current security challenges place a premium on deepening co-operation between existing international organizations and maintaining the cross-dimensional security approach the OSCE has pioneered and progressively implemented through its field operations and institutions.

In November 2007, at the Madrid Ministerial Council, the participating States took two important steps in the direction of broadening the OSCE approach to complex cross-border issues. First, the participating States welcomed the offer of Kazakhstan to chair the Organization in 2010, a gesture that shifts the focus of the OSCE, perhaps even its centre of gravity, towards Central Asia. In addition, the Ministers decided to deepen OSCE engagement with Afghanistan. This decision

specifically identified a promising area of OSCE engagement in 'border security and management, policing and the fight against drug trafficking.' This stands to reason, as the OSCE has long and strong experience in these areas, having trained some 7000 police in Kosovo and 1100 border officials in Georgia. This will prove a major project for the OSCE as well as a test for the Eurasian community's ability to develop new forms of co-operation with its neighbours.

Beyond its area, CSCE/OSCE experience for responding to complex challenges should best be seen not as a model to be replicated, but more as a constantly evolving toolbox that has proven its utility over time for a diverse group of states. The principles of inclusion and consensus that lie at the heart of the OSCE have been a source of strength since 1975.

*

On the whole, a cross-dimensional approach to security, founded on shared values, has been the foundation on which the OSCE has worked to build co-operative security throughout Eurasia. If participating States remain committed to this approach, the example of an inclusive, values-based Organisation working through co-operation and peer pressure will continue to be powerful -- whatever difficulties it may face in the present and the near future.

Security in Eurasia will ultimately depend on the will of our states and societies to find effective answers to the questions being raised inside and outside the OSCE area. The OSCE remains an indispensable forum to facilitate this effort, a laboratory where new approaches can be tested and developed as well as an innovative actor working on the ground. Turkey has always been a vital part of this process. In the end, the OSCE will be as good as the participating States want it to be. Strong Turkish support and leadership is of paramount importance.

*Marc Perrin de Brichambaut
OSCE Secretary General
March 2008*